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Pacific
Journalism Review

PRESS
The journalists of Gaza have changed the World with their blood, truth and love

GAZA, GENOCIDE AND MEDIA
Will journalism survive?

EDITED BY DAVID ROBIE AND PHILIP CASS

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30 years of PJR
SPECIAL DOUBLE EDITION

Pacific
Journalism Review

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30 Years
and going strong!

Congratulations to the Pacific Journalism Review on its 30th anniversary!

USP Journalism is proud to celebrate this milestone with a journal that has been a beacon of media excellence and a crucial partner in fostering journalistic integrity in the Pacific.

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EDITORIAL: Will journalism survive?

W HEN current editor Philip Cass and I, as founding editor, started planning for this 30th anniversary edition of *Pacific Journalism Review*, we wanted a theme that would fit such an important milestone. At the time when we celebrated the second decade of the journal's critical inquiry at Auckland University of Technology with a conference in 2014, our theme was 'Political journalism in the Asia Pacific', and our mood about the mediascape in the region was far more positive than it is today (Duffield, 2015). Three years later, we marked the 10th anniversary of the Pacific Media Centre, with a conference and a rather gloomier 'Journalism under duress' slogan. The *PJR* cover then featured a gruesome corpse at the height of Rodrigo Duterte's callous and bloodthirsty 'war on drugs'—and on media—in the Philippines. Three years later again, the PMC itself had been closed in spite of its success.

In the middle of last year when we settled on a call for papers for *PJR* with the theme 'Will journalism survive?' we seemed to be on the right track given the post-COVID-19 pandemic surge of conspiracy theories and disinformation, Trumpian fake news, assault on democracy, and a disturbing global decline in public confidence and trust in mainstream media. The profession of journalism was and remains under grave threat.

However, little did we reckon on 7 October 2023 and the fact that the world would be thrown into such a dystopian upheaval as a result of a surprise and extraordinarily daring attack on Israel by Hamas resistance fighters breaking out of Gaza, the world's 'largest open-air prison' (War Child, n.d.). Prior to this attack, the 2.3 million Palestinians—two thirds of them younger than 25—living in the besieged 365 square kilometre strip had been subjected to four wars in 10 years since Hamas had won the elections in 2006.

As the latest, and by far the most devastating, Israeli war on Gaza entered its ninth month as we went to press, the verification of information about casualties had 'slowed to a crawl', lamented the New York-based media watchdog Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). An unprecedented number of deaths, with more than 108 Palestinian journalists killed by Israeli forces (Al Jazeera states 147 dead) since the start of the war, displacement, and censorship are all making it 'exponentially harder to confirm information about the conflict's devastating impact on Gaza's media community—and, by extension, about the broader impact of the war' (CPJ, 2024; Robie, 2024).

'At the start of the war it would take us a day or two to verify information about a journalist who had been killed or injured,' said CPJ programme director Carlos Martínez de la Serna. 'Collecting and vetting this information is now taking us weeks or months, and in some cases won't be possible at all.'

As the placard on our cover photo declares, 'the journalists of Gaza have

changed the world with their blood, truth and love'. The courageous local Palestinian journalists reporting truth to power were rewarded by being named the winners of the 2024 UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize as they became the 'eyes and ears' of the Gaza Strip when Israel barred foreign media. Chief judge Mauricio Weibel said:

> In these times of darkness and hopelessness, we wish to share a strong message of solidarity and recognition to those Palestinian journalists who are covering this crisis in such dramatic circumstances. As humanity, we have a huge debt to their courage and commitment to freedom of expression. (The Wire, 2024)

There appeared to be prospect for a permanent ceasefire after the US-brokered a nearly unanimous UN Security Council resolution for a three-stage peace plan ((Russia abstained)) to put a halt to the never-ending bloodbath. It seemed to be a desperate bid by beleaguered US President Joe Biden trying to shore up his weakening presidential re-election prospects in November. But his claims that Israel was on side lacked credibility after Hamas agreed to 'negotiate' while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu continued to insist that the war would continue until Palestinian resistance was totally crushed (Will Israel accept the new UN Gaza ceasefire resolution?, 2024).

The day before the UN vote, on 8 June 2024, the Israeli military slaughtered at least 274 Palestinians and wounded about 700 in a savage raid on the Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza Strip—the latest Israeli 'massacre of civilians'. Global condemnation followed the brutal attack on civilians while Israel celebrated the rescue of four Israeli hostages held captive in family homes (three other hostages were reportedly killed, according to Gazan sources).

'The rescue,' noted Al Jazeera columnist Belén Fernández, 'sent Israeli social media into a jubilant tizzy of self-congratulation and genocidal fanfare. The internet is awash with sensational accounts of the rescue and the captives' weepy reunification with loved ones—and never mind all those dead Palestinians.'

In the context of a war that has killed more than 37,000 people in Gaza—mostly women and children—in just over eight months, such 'collateral damage' may not seem all that shocking, but the cost of 53 civilian lives for each rescued captive is totally unacceptable to humanity. Fernández coined the phrase 'collateral genocide' to describe the depravity.

Gaza has become not just a metaphor for a terrible state of dystopia in parts of in the world, it has also become an existential test for journalists—do we stand up for peace and justice and the right of a people to survive under the threat of ethnic cleansing and against genocide, or do we do nothing and remain silent in the face of genocide being carried out with impunity in front of our very eyes? The answer is simple surely.

As journalist and poet Caitlin Johnston says: 'Saving Gaza is more than saving Gaza. It's also about saving ourselves . . . Saving ourselves as a society . . . Saving ourselves from what the sociopaths who rule over us are trying to turn us into. Saving ourselves from the way propagandists are trying to twist and train our minds' (Johnstone, 2024).

And it is about saving journalism, our credibility and our humanity as journalists.

In response to a global crackdown on truthsayers, whether they be students protesting on campuses, or journalists exposing the media manipulation, columnist Gideon Levy of the liberal Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* and author of the forthcoming book *The Killing of Gaza* remarked in an X post: 'I was in the cafe in the Tel Aviv museum . . . a woman came to me and said only one word . . . "traitor". This is the atmosphere [in Israel] right now. Saying the truth is treason. Feeling empathy towards the Palestinians is treason. Showing the suffering in Gaza is treason' (Levy, 2024).

OPENING this edition of *Pacific Journalism Review*, is **Jonathan Cook**, an independent UK journalist and author who is expert on Middle East affairs, with a themed essay outlining two critical court hearings in February 2024. One was a week-long hearing in The Hague over a UN General Assembly request for an advisory opinion by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) over Israel's illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories, and the other was a last-ditch appeal of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange against efforts by the United States to extradite him so that he can be locked away for the rest of his life. Both cases posed globe-spanning threats to our most basic freedoms. Had they been properly reported, argues Cook, the US 'rules-based order' would have been exposed as a hollow sham and world leaders would have dared not 'arm a genocide such as Gaza', and dared not 'conspire in the starvation of two million people'.

New Zealand writer **Jeremy Rose** offers a 'Kiwi journalist's response' to Israel's war on journalism, noting that while global reports have tended to focus on the 'horrendous and rapid' climb of civilian casualties, especially women and children, Gaza has also claimed the 'worst death rate of journalists' in any war.

He is followed by independent journalist **Mick Hall** with a compelling research indictment of the role of Western legacy media institutions, arguing that they too are in the metaphorical dock along with Israel in South Africa's genocide case in the ICJ. In the wider Oceania region, both public broadcasters, the ABC, in Australia, and RNZ in Aotearoa New Zealand, have fallen short of their editorial responsibilities by alleged omission, story framing, inaccuracies, passive editorial stances, 'including a refusal to adjudicate contentious claims when the evidence was available'.

Following our themed section, **Alexandra Nicole Wake** and her RMIT colleagues lead the Articles section with a research report based on a UNESCO and World Journalism Education Council roundtable addressing the hot topic of fact-checking and verification. They argue that fact-checking is a vital part of the training tool box.

Peter Chen, John Cokley and colleagues continue a longitudinal national study of journalism employment in Australia and contribute to new understandings of journalism employment in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. They conclude that there is a trend to stronger centralised editorial control at the corporate level, urbanisation and homogenisation of media producers and product, and reduced opportunities for creative entry-level roles.

Jane Stevens and **Helen Stallman** explore how a consumer-centred coping approach to suicide prevention would augment existing media guidelines to influence community attitudes and behaviours in a way that contributes to health and wellbeing.

A team led by **Sanjoy Basak Partha** at the Bangladesh University of Professionals investigates the current state of AI usage and projecting the future in their country by evaluating professional journalists' 'Mental Readiness' across a variety of media companies.

Linda-Jean Kenix and Equadorean researcher **Jorge Bolanos** at the University of Canterbury explore the framing of electric vehicles in New Zealand and theorises the role it may have played in the uptake of EVs in the country.

Frederico Magrin examines how newsroom leaders are guided when shaping the news, posing the question: Do personal moral values play a role in Aotearoa New Zealand newsroom? **Jope Tarai** of Australian National University dissects the social media ecology of an influencer group with a case study of one of Fiji's largest and most influential online groups.

In two Commentaries, acclaimed documentary maker **Mandrika Rupa** provides an account of documentary work in Aotearoa New Zealand, with ancestral connections to Fiji, East Africa, UK, US and India, including her *Hidden Apartheid: A Report on Caste Discrimination*, while Wellington writer and publisher of *Solidarity*, **Eugene Doyle**, reflects on the assassination of Kanak independence leader Éloi Machoro in the context of the renewed pro-independence protests and riots in Kanaky New Caledonia in May 2024.

The *Frontline* section features three articles from **David Robie, Shailendra Singh** and **Geraldine Panapasa,** and **Kalinga Seneviratne**, all with University of the South Pacific connections who provide complementary perspectives on the theme of 'challenges for campus and community media in Asia-Pacific diversity': Robie, as former head of journalism at USP, provides an overview of challenges across the region and a Talanoa Journalism approach, current USP head Singh and Panapasa examine the practice of campus journalism education,

and Seneviratne questions the reportage of China and 'watchdog' journalism.

With the Photoessay, *PJR* founding editor **David Robie** and designer **Del Abcede** reflect on past image galleries and contributors as the journal and the former Pacific Media Centre evolved and feature a collection of 19 photographs of Palestinian protests against the war on Gaza in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.

Two Obituaries are dedicated to the memory of the great globetrotting investigative journalist **John Pilger**, a self-described 'maverick' who 'gave a voice to those who did not have a voice' and who has died since the last edition of *PJR* aged 84, and West Papuan cultural identity linguist, writer and activist **Arnold Clemens Ap.** Pilger is farewelled by **John Jiggins** and the 40th anniversary of the assassination of Ap by Indonesian special forces has been honoured by **Nic Maclellan.**

Although the Reviews section is slimmer than usual, *PJR* still features wide-ranging books and documentaries, including the *Reuter's Journalism, Media, and Technology Trends and Predictions 2024* ('a grim year ahead, but some cause for optimism'), reviewed by editor **Philip Cass**; a timely book on how Israel profits from exporting the 'technology of occupation and repression' around the world reviewed by **David Robie**; and **Malcolm Evans** comparing the Al Jazeera documentary *October 7* and TVNZ on the war on Gaza; and **Annie Cass** reviewing the book *Excommunicated* about life within the Exclusive Brethren.

Other titles reviewed include *Return to Volcano Town* about the 1937-43 volcanic eruptions in Rabaul, Papua New Guinea, Joseph M. Fernandez's landmark book on the age of the leak, *Journalists and Confidential Sources*; and *Come Hell or High Fever* on planning and preparing the world's megacities for disaster.

AS MENTIONED earlier in this editorial, *Pacific Journalism Review* is celebrating 30 years of publishing with this edition, a remarkable longevity record for any journalism journal when recalling the journalism survival title theme. By comparison, the *New Zealand Journalism Review*, for example, lasted nine

Figure 1: 'Kanaky and Palestine . . . same struggle': Kanak, Palestine and West Papua flags as defiant symbols of decolonisation at a London rally against the Gaza war in June 2024.

years (1988-1997) at Canterbury University. Founded at the University of Papua New Guinea in 1994, *PJR* was published there for four years and at the University of the South Pacific for a further four years, then at Auckland University of Technology for 18 years before finally being hosted since 2021 at its present home, Asia Pacific Media Network, since 2021. The journal will be celebrating its 30th birthday at the Pacific International Media Conference with USP's Professor Vijay Naidu officiating in July 2024. More about that in a future edition.

Pacific Journalism Review has received many good wishes for its birthday, some reproduced on pages in this edition. For a final message, we recall AUT's senior journalism lecturer Greg Treadwell who wrote in 2020:

> Many Aotearoa New Zealand researchers found their publishing feet because *PJR* was dedicated to the region and interested in their work. *PJR* is central to journalism studies, and so to journalism and journalism education, in this country and further abroad. Long may that continue. (Treadwell, 2020)

In answer to our editorial title: Yes, journalism *will* survive, and it will thrive through new and innovative niche forms, if democracy is to survive.

Ra whānau *Pacific Journalism Review!*

DR DAVID ROBIE
Founding Editor
Pacific Journalism Review
www.pjreview.info

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Cheers to this

MILESTONE

30 YEARS OF PUBLISHING

The **Journalism Education and Research Association of Australia** is proud to have collaborated with *Pacific Journalism Review* for three decades. JERAA's *Australian Journalism Review* inspired the birth of *PJR* at the University of Papua New Guinea in 1994.

We wish *PJR* many more decades of fruitful exploration and analysis.

JOURNALISM EDUCATION
& RESEARCH ASSOCIATION
OF AUSTRALIA

War on Palestine

How the fates of Gaza and Julian Assange are sealed together

Commentary: Were they being properly reported, two critically important court hearings in February 2024, in London and The Hague, would expose the US 'rules-based order' as a hollow sham. Both posed globe-spanning threats to our most basic freedoms. Neither received more than perfunctory coverage in Western establishment media such as the BBC. One was a week-long hearing by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) over a United Nations General Assembly request for an advisory opinion over Israel's illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories and the other was a last-ditch appeal of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange against efforts by the United States to extradite him so that he can be locked away for the rest of his life. If Assange remained free, and if the whistleblowers and people of conscience in the corridors of power felt emboldened rather than terrorised by his treatment, we might live in a society where our leaders dared not arm a genocide such as Gaza; and dared not conspire in the starvation of two million people.

JONATHAN COOK
Independent journalist, United Kingdom

TWO legal cases posing globe-spanning threats to our most basic freedoms unfolded separately in Britain and the Netherlands in February 2024. Neither received more than perfunctory coverage in Western establishment media like the BBC.

One was the last-ditch appeal of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange in London against efforts by the United States to extradite him so he can be locked away for the rest of his life (Assange went 'way beyond' journalism, 2024). Assange's crime, according to the Biden administration, is that he published leaks exposing the systematic war crimes signed off on by the US and British establishments in Iraq and Afghanistan. The British government, perhaps not surprisingly, has assented to his extradition (Grierson & Quin, 2022). In late May, after Washington refused to assure the High Court in London that Assange would receive a fair trial, it granted him the right to appeal the extradition case. However, Assange remains locked up in London's Belmarsh prison.

The other case was heard by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague. Weeks after the World Court judges deemed it plausible that Israel was carrying out genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, the US client state was back in the dock on a separate matter. The judges have been asked by the United Nations General Assembly to provide an advisory opinion on whether Israel's now-permanent occupation and colonisation of the Palestinian territories amounts to an illegal annexation of territory where it has established an apartheid regime (World Court to review 57-year Israeli occupation, 2024).

Separately, the Court ruled in late May that Israel must halt its attack on the city of Rafah, in Gaza, with the implication that its military operation there may amount to genocide. While the cases of Assange and Israel might appear to share little in common, they are, in fact, intimately connected—and in ways that have underscored the degree to which the West's so-called 'rules-based order' is being exposed as a hollow sham.

Media silence

One telling similarity is the limited media coverage each case has attracted despite the gravity of what is at stake. The BBC's main evening news dedicated mere seconds to the first day of the Assange hearing, and near the end of its running order. If the US gets its way, the courts would effectively hand the White House the power to seize any publisher who shines a light on US state crimes, and then disappear them into its draconian incarceration system.

The purpose of reclassifying investigative journalism as espionage is to further chill critical reporting and free speech. Any journalist contemplating taking on the US national security state would remember Assange's cruel fate.

But in truth, much of the establishment media appears to need no such threats, as confirmed by the many years of obedient, near-non-existent reporting on Assange's mistreatment by British and US authorities (Cook, 2022).

Meanwhile, if The Hague rules in its favour, Israel would be emboldened to accelerate its theft and colonisation of Palestinian land. The ethnic cleansing and oppression of Palestinians would deepen, with the risk that current regional tensions could further escalate into a wider war.

A win for Israel would rip up the legal framework written after the horrors of the Second World War and the Holocaust, stripping the weak and vulnerable of the protections supposed to be afforded to them by international humanitarian law. Conversely, it would signal to the strongest and most belligerent that they can do as they please. The legal clock would be set back eight decades or more.

Stinging hypocrisy

Yet strangely, both of these momentous cases—critical to the preservation of a modern liberal democratic order and the rule of law—have received barely a fraction

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Figure 1: Julian Assange has already suffered a stroke amid his persecution and the 15-year confinement imposed on him by US and UK authorities.

of the interest and media attention dedicated to the death of Alexei Navalny, a critic of Russian President Vladimir Putin (Vock, 2024). In flaunting their concerns about Navalny, the Western media have once again echoed rather than tackled the all-too-obvious hypocrisies of Western governments (Snowden, 2024).

US President Joe Biden announced sanctions on 23 February 2024 against Moscow for the targeting of the Russian political dissident (Wright & Vernon, 2024). That is the very same Biden seeking, at the same time, to lock a dissident Australian journalist, Assange, out of sight for up to 175 years for bringing to light US war crimes (Oliver, 2024).

For years, the Western media have paraded their horror over Navalny's treatment and various attempts on his life, which they always ascribe to the Kremlin. But there has been barely an eyebrow raised over reported discussions by the CIA in 2017 plotting potential ways to abduct and assassinate Assange (Borger, 2021). Few have highlighted the fact that Assange has already suffered a stroke amid his persecution and the 15-year confinement imposed on him by US and UK authorities (Al Jazeera, 2021). He was too unwell to attend the February court hearings or even to watch the proceedings via a digital link from the court.

The former UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Nils Melzer, has long warned that Assange is being slowly 'crushed' through isolation and psychological torture, with grave consequences for his health (Melzer, 2021).

Assange's lawyers have warned the High Court that there was a serious danger the US would add more charges once Assange was extradited, including

ones warranting the death penalty (Murray, 2024). This threat to the life of a Western journalist fell under the media radar. According to medical experts, and accepted by the first judge to hear the extradition case, Assange is in danger of committing suicide should he end up in the strict isolation of a US super-max prison (Sugue, 2021).

The media's tears for Navalny sting with their hypocrisy.

Blank cheque

Another revealing similarity between the Assange and Israel cases is that both are in front of the courts only because Washington has dug in its heels and refused to resolve the legal issues, despite their deeply ominous implications. Were the US to withdraw its extradition request, Assange could be set free immediately. The oppressive cloud hanging over the future of a free society, one that has the right and ability to hold its officials to account for wrongdoing, would instantly lift.

Basic freedoms, such as those enshrined in the First Amendment of the US Constitution, are being shredded only because a consensus reigns among the US political class—from Democrats to Republicans—to snuff out such rights. Similarly, were the US to insist that the mass slaughter of children in Gaza stop – more than 12,000 have died so far – Israel's guns would fall silent immediately (Amer & Mali, 2024).

Were the US to demand that Israel bring to an end its occupation of the Palestinian territories and 17-year siege of Gaza, and were the US to take a genuinely even-handed approach to peace talks, the World Court could set aside its hearings against Israel (Gaza siege, 2024). Its opinion would be superfluous. Washington, whatever its protestations, has such power. It is the US and its allies supplying Israel with bombs and ammunition (US plans to send weapons, 2024). It is the US and its allies providing the military aid and diplomatic cover that allows Israel to act as an attack dog in the oil-rich Middle East.

Israel's intransigence, its hunger for others' land, its dehumanisation of the Palestinian people, and its constant resort to military options would have to be abandoned, however unwillingly, were it not being written a blank cheque by the US. Instead, the US cast a veto on 21 February 2024, its third such veto since 7 October 2023, at the Security Council, blocking efforts to impose a ceasefire to end the genocide (*Middle East Eye*, 2024). The UK abstained.

Also, US officials told the World Court's judges they should not call for Israel to end its occupation anytime soon. In Orwellian fashion, decades of violent oppression by Israel and the illegal settlement of Palestinian land were characterised by the US as "Israel's very real security needs" (Borger, 2024).

Intimidation campaign

The cases are connected in yet another way. In the Assange case, the US demands an absolute global legal jurisdiction to hound critics, those who wish to pull away the veil of secrecy that shields Western officials from accountability for their crimes. It wishes to silence those who would expose its lies, deceptions and hypocrisies. It hopes to be able to disappear into its prison system those seeking to enforce the West's self-professed commitment to a democratic order and lawful behaviour.

In parallel, and for similar reasons, Washington demands the opposite for itself and client states such as Israel. It insists on absolute global legal immunity, whatever they do. Its veto at the Security Council is wielded to that effect, and so is its campaign of intimidation against judicial authorities who entertain the fanciful notion that the same international law used to rein in enemies might constrain Washington and its allies.

When the ICJ's sister court at The Hague, the International Criminal Court, sought to properly investigate the US for war crimes in Afghanistan, and Israel for atrocities in the occupied Palestinian territories, Washington went on a rampage. It placed financial sanctions on leading figures of the ICC and blocked entry to its investigators so they could not carry out their duties (US sanctions on the International Criminal Court, 2020). Israel has similarly barred a series of UN special rapporteurs from entering the occupied Palestinian territories to report on human rights abuses there (UN rapporteur, 2024).

Just as the persecution of Assange is meant to terrorise other journalists from considering holding US officials to account for their crimes, the bullying of the highest legal authorities on the planet is intended to send a clear message to national court systems. Certainly, that message appears to have been loudly received in London.

Information void

Another connection is perhaps the most significant. Assange once observed: 'Nearly every war that has started in the past 50 years has been a result of media lies' (Rattansi, 2024). It is only because of a void of real information—whether omitted by journalists for fear of upsetting powerful actors, or shielded from view by those same powerful actors' self-serving secrecy policies—that states can persuade their publics to get behind wars and violent resource grabs. The only people to gain from these wars are a tiny, wealthy elite at the top of society. All too often it is ordinary people who pay the price: either with their lives or through damage to the parts of the economy on which the public depends.

The continuing proxy war in Ukraine—a Nato-funded and armed war with Russia, using Ukraine as the battlefield—is a perfect illustration. It is ordinary Ukrainians and Russians who are dying. Despite the West spurring on the bloodshed, European

'Don't Shoot the messenger-Hands off Assange', a protest bag at a pro-Palestine demonstration in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, on 2 June 2024.

economies have been wrecked and further deindustrialised, while as a direct result of the fighting, yet another surge in consumer prices has hit the most vulnerable. But a few—including major energy corporations and arms manufacturers, as well as their shareholders—have reaped a large windfall from the war (Sweney, 2024; Jolley, 2024). It has been precisely the same game plan in Gaza.

It is the job of the media to connect the dots for Western publics by serving as a watchdog on power. But once again, they have failed in this, their most important professional and moral duty. The villains have yet again gotten away with their crimes.

It is the war criminals and genocide enablers in Washington who are free, while Assange is locked up in a dungeon and the people of Gaza are slowly being starved to death. Assange's project was designed to reverse all that. It was about bringing the war criminals in Western capitals to book through truth-telling and transparency. It was about pulling back the veil.

If Assange remained free, and if the whistleblowers and people of conscience in the corridors of power felt emboldened rather than terrorised by his treatment, we might live in a society where our leaders dared not arm a genocide such as Gaza; and dared not conspire in the starvation of two million people.

This is why the fates of the people of Gaza and Julian Assange are so tightly sealed together.

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Jonathan Cook is an award-winning British journalist. He was based in Nazareth, Israel, for 20 years. He returned to the UK in 2021. He is the author of three books on the Israel-Palestine conflict: Blood and Religion: The Unmasking of the Jewish State (2006), Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East (2008), *and* Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair (2008). *He has also contributed chapters and essays to several edited volumes on Israel-Palestine. An earlier version of this article was published in the* Middle East Eye *on 23 February 2024.*
jonkcook12@gmai.com

Israel's war on journalism
A Kiwi journalist's response

Abstract: Whether it is termed as 'self-defence' or 'mowing the lawn', the Israel Defence Force (IDF) has common phrases to describe its ongoing attacks on the besieged Palestine enclave of Gaza. The phrases obscure the devastation of death and disaster in the 2023/24 genocidal war on Gaza. While global reports have tended to focus on the horrendous and rapid climb of civilian casualties, especially women and children, Gaza has also claimed the worst ever death of journalists, many apparently targeted by the IDF because of their profession. Journalists in this article argue that it is time to 'call these [Israeli state] terrorists by their true name: enablers of genocide.'

Keywords: Al Jazeera, civilian casualties, ethnic cleansing, Gaza, genocide, human rights, investigative journalism, Israel, killing of journalists, Palestine, war correspondence

JEREMY ROSE
Independent Journalist, Wellington

P ALESTINIAN journalist Ahmed Alnaouq's first published story dealt with what he described as Israel's murder of his brother Ayman in 2014 (Alnaouq, n.d.). The Israeli Defence Force (IDF) would call it 'self-defence' or 'mowing the lawn'—a common phrase in Israel for the periodic attacks on Gaza aimed at depleting Hamas's military capacity.

The essay—published on the *We Are Not Numbers* website—describes Ayman coming home, in the early 2000s, after five of his primary school mates had been killed by Israeli soldiers, and another 12 injured while playing.

By the time Israel invaded Gaza in what it dubbed Operation Cast Lead, in 2008, Ayman was in secondary school and once again he saw friends being killed. Operation Cast Lead left 1,400 Palestinians dead, 46,000 homes destroyed and more than 100,000 homeless. Thirteen Israeli soldiers died during the invasion.

The blockade that followed the war left Ayman and Ahmed's disabled, taxi driver father unemployed as the supply of petrol dried up. As the eldest son, Ayman took on the role of breadwinner.

Then in 2012 Israel again 'mowed the lawn' in Operation Pillar of Defence—and once again hundreds were killed and thousands left homeless. Ahmed wrote: 'When this war was over, Ayman was not the same.'

His older brother joined the Hamas' armed resistance force—the Al Qassam Brigades. It was a decision that would cost him his life. In 2014, Israel yet again

invaded Gaza and Ayman was killed by a missile fired from an F16 as he made his way to battle the IDF.

The world is divided on what to call the likes of Ayman. To Palestinians he is a martyr, a freedom fighter, and a patriot - to Israelis he is a 'terrorist'. Some will praise him for his decision to join the armed struggle. Others will condemn him.

Ahmed chose another form of resistance: journalism. In 2014, he helped set up *We Are Not Numbers*, a website that provides a platform for young Gazans to share their stories, in English, with the outside world. Then in 2019 he teamed up with Israeli journalist Yuval Abraham to bring the stories to an Israeli audience in Hebrew in a project called *We Beyond the Fence*.

On 21 October 2023, Israel dropped a bomb on Ahmed's family home killing 21 members of his family—including 14 of his nieces and nephews all under the age of 13. The house was in the south of Gaza in an area Israel had declared a safe zone.

Ahmed heard of the massacre in the UK where he is on a scholarship. He has been tirelessly telling people the stories behind the numbers ever since. But as we enter the seventh month of what leading Holocaust scholar, Hebrew University professor Amos Goldberg, declared in April 2024 to be a genocide, the numbers tell other important and horrific stories (Goldberg, 2024).

The media has been updating the death count daily—at the time of preparing for publication it was more than 37,000, the vast majority women, children and civilian men—but there are other numbers that are less well known.

About 100 journalists—10 percent of Gaza's journalists have been killed to date. It is by far the most deadly war for journalists in the 21st century (Robie, 2024). The reason I have fudged the numbers is twofold: firstly, whatever figure I use is likely to be out of date by the time this article goes to print; and, secondly there is a discrepancy between the figures given by the Committee to Protect Journalists which reports that 92 Palestinian, three Lebanese and two Israeli journalists have died since the Hamas' October 7 attack and the Gaza media office which claims more than 140 journalists have been killed.

The Palestinian Journalist Syndicate reports that 84 media offices have been bombed—including the *We Are Not Numbers* offices.

Professor Goldberg includes the targeting of journalists in his carefully argued case for declaring the assault of Gaza to be genocidal.

> What is happening in Gaza is genocide because the level and pace of indiscriminate killing, destruction, mass expulsions, displacement, famine, executions, the wiping out of cultural and religious institutions, the crushing of elites (including the killing of journalists), and the sweeping dehumanisation of the Palestinians—create an overall picture of genocide, of a deliberate conscious crushing of Palestinian existence in Gaza. (Goldberg, 2024)

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) filed a complaint with the International Criminal Court (ICC) on 31 October 2023, asking for an investigation into the targeting of journalists by Israel which it believed constituted war crimes (RSF, 2023). In February 2024, a group of UN experts, including four special rapporteurs, issued a statement calling on the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the ICC to look into the targeted killing of journalists in Gaza. A spokesperson said:

> We have received disturbing reports that, despite being clearly identifiable in jackets and helmets marked 'press' or travelling in well-marked press vehicles, journalists have come under attack, which would seem to indicate that the killings, injury, and detention are a deliberate strategy by Israeli forces to obstruct the media and silence critical reporting. (RSF, 2023)

Ahmed Alnaouq is far from alone among Gaza's journalists in having multiple family members murdered. In April 2024, he tweeted: 'Israel killed my sister and all her children while sheltering in my home in October. Today they have bombed her husband's home. This home sheltered over 70 people. 7 flats.'

Al-Jazeera's bureau chief Wael Al Dahdouh—probably Gaza's best known journalist—lost his wife, son, daughter and grandchild, when an Israeli airstrike hit their home in the Nuseirat refugee camp on 25 October 2023. On January 7 his son, Hamza Al Dahdouh, a journalist, was killed by an Israeli airstrike while travelling in a car, marked press, along with a colleague.

It is an open question whether Israel is targeting not just journalists but their families. As well. What is certain is that Israel has a terrifyingly high threshold for the number of civilian deaths resulting from its targeted killing.

Yuval Abraham—who worked with Ahmed on the We Beyond the Fence project—published an investigation on the progressive +972 website which revealed an AI programme called Lavender that identified 37,000 suspected militants in the first weeks of the war (Abraham, 2024). The article, based on interviews with six IDF intelligence officers, claimed Israel systematically targeted those on the kill list while they were home, usually at night.

Another automated system called Where's Daddy? was developed to identify when suspected militants arrived home. Two of those interviewed claimed that in the early weeks of the war it was permissible for 15 to 20 civilians to be killed for every militant targeted.

The Committee to Protect Journalists issued a statement in December saying it was alarmed by journalists in Gaza reporting death threats and subsequently their family members being killed. CPJ Middle East and North Africa programme coordinator Sherif Mansour said:

> The killing of the family members of journalists in Gaza is making it almost impossible for the journalists to continue reporting, as the risk now extends beyond them also to include their beloved ones.

On 5 May 2024, Israel closed Al Jazeera's office in occupied East Jerusalem, confiscating broadcast equipment and taking the channel off air (Al Jazeera, 2024). The move came almost exactly two years after an IDF soldier shot and killed the American-Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh while covering a raid on the Jenin refugee camp in the Israeli-occupied West Bank for Al Jazeera.

At first, Israel claimed Abu Akleh, who was wearing a blue vest identifying her as media, had been shot by a Palestinian militant. When that story became untenable, due to video evidence, the IDF launched its own investigation which declared there was a high probability that the Al Jazeera journalist had been accidentally hit by an IDF bullet and there would be no further criminal investigation.

Israel's targeting of journalists and their families, the closure of Al Jazeera's Jerusalem office, the imprisonment and alleged torture of journalists, and the refusal to let foreign journalists enter Gaza amounts to a war on journalism.

Ahmed Alnaouq remains committed to the craft of journalism but he is critical of much of the mainstream coverage of Israel's assault of Gaza. 'The Western media played a pivotal role in the murder of 21 members of my family, including my parents, siblings, nieces, and nephews,' he tweeted on X.

> Yes, Israel executed the attack and the US supplied the weaponry, BUT the Western media provided cover. I hold every propagandist for Israel and every Western journalist who repeated the narrative of 'Israel's right to self-defence' against the civilian population of Gaza, including children and women, accountable. The era of diplomacy is past. It's time to call these terrorists by their true name: enablers of genocide. I refuse to tolerate Israeli propaganda any longer. I refuse to be intimidated any longer, and neither should anyone else."

With leading Holocaust scholars like Amos Goldberg declaring Israel guilty of genocide it is time for media outlets to ask themselves whether Ahmed Alnaouq has a point.

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Jeremy Rose is a Wellington journalist and sometimes media commentator. He was founding member of Alternative Jewish Voices. An earlier version of this article was published by Solidarity : A Public Policy and Analysis Space. https://www.solidarity.co.nz/international-stories/israels-war-on-journalism-by-jeremy-rose
jeremyrosenz@icloud.com

Legacy media outlets also stand in dock over Gaza

How RNZ, ABC and other Western media failed to challenge Israeli war narratives

Abstract: As Israel faces charges at the International Court of Justice in The Hague of breaching the 1948 Genocide Convention, for many people Western media institutions also stand in the dock. Critics have pointed to a media failure to effectively challenge a narrative that framed Israel's actions in terms of an erroneous claim to Israeli 'self-defence', a de facto diplomatic cover for war crimes, ethnic cleansing and probable acts of genocide. In the Pacific, news leaders at Radio New Zealand (RNZ) and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), by alleged omission, story framing, inaccuracies, passive editorial stances, including a refusal to adjudicate contentious claims when the evidence is available, fall into the category. Such failures call into question claims of due impartiality, a fundamental tenet media outlets use to anchor their credibility as trusted sources of news. Failure to adequately create awareness of Israeli crimes also raises questions over whether state-funded public broadcasters are fulfilling the informational needs of democratic citizenship and serving the public interest, or whether they are serving the interests of a Western power elite.

MICK HALL
Independent journalist

Introduction

A S ISRAEL stands accused at the United Nation's highest judicial court of breaching the 1948 Genocide Convention, it could be argued Western media institutions stand in the dock too. On 26 January 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at The Hague determined Israel had a 'plausible' case to answer (ICJ, 2024, paras. 31-32, p. 4) and issued six interim orders, including taking measures to prevent acts of genocide and punishing those who incited it. This followed an 84-page writ by South Africa, filed on 29 December 2023. In a Summary of the Order of January 26, ICJ judges said: 'At least

some of the acts and omissions alleged by South Africa to have been committed by Israel in Gaza appear to be capable of falling within the provisions of the [Genocide] Convention' (Para. 30, p. 4).

At the time of writing, nearly 35,000 Palestinians were registered by the Palestinian Health Authority in Gaza as having been killed during Israel's military operation in the besieged coastal strip, in response to the Hamas attack on October 7 2023. The dead were mostly women and children.

As the catastrophe continued to unfold after the ICJ orders, the US and its Western allies, including New Zealand and Australia, suspended vital aid to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), a body serving the needs of Palestinian refugees displaced by Israel, including 87 percent of people living in Gaza (Guterres, 2024; Kraus, 2024). The decision was based on allegations by Israel that six of its staff could be linked to the October 7 attack.

At the time of writing an estimated 1.3 million residents remained corralled against the Egyptian border inside Rafah, waiting for an Israeli ground offensive As UN Secretary-General António Guterres stated on February 10, residents had nowhere to go. A leaked military 'concept' document (Teibel, 2023) pointed to Egypt's Sinai Peninsula being Israel's preference for mass expulsion of Gazans. Israel has created conditions, the logic of which dictate Palestinians must leave Gaza, even touting 'voluntary settlement' initiatives to other destinations, including the Congo (Yerushalmi, 2024). Much of the means of sustaining human life in Gaza has been destroyed.

The ICJ summary noted that: 'Palestinians in the Gaza Strip have been deprived access to water, food, fuel, electricity and other essentials of life, as well as to medical care and supplies.' At the time of writing, starvation loomed for a substantial portion of Gaza's 2.3 million residents as Israeli settlers blocked routes for aid trucks (Jamal, Quillen & Najjar, 2024) and with entry points at Rafah, Erez and Kerem Shalom controlled by Israel. The ICJ summary said recent information indicated more than 360,000 housing units had been destroyed or damaged and approximately 1.7 million people had been internally displaced. The United Nations Satellite Centre (UNOSAT) announced on February 2 that it had found 30 percent of Gaza's total structures either totally destroyed or damaged after assessing high-resolution imagery collected on January 6 and 7 (UNOSAT, 2024).

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) estimated on February 2 that at least 17,000 children had been left unaccompanied or separated from parents after four months of Israeli bombardment.

In arguing that Israel's actions were genocidal in character, intended to bring about the destruction of a substantial part of the Palestinians in Gaza, the South African legal paper listed dozens of statements by senior government and military figures it said had expressed genocidal intent, covering eight pages

(Application Instituting Proceedings, 2023, p. 59-67). The sum in meaning of all these statements may be best represented by Israel's President Isaac Herzog's assertion shortly after the Hamas attack of October 7. He said: 'It is an entire nation out there that is responsible. It is not true this rhetoric about civilians not being aware, not involved.' (McGreal, 2023) On the back of such statements and after a total siege of Gaza was announced on 9 October 2023 by Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, UN rapporteurs had warned repeatedly Gazans were facing a genocide.

Taking these details into account, if the ICJ in due course should find Israel guilty of committing acts of genocide, where does that leave legacy media?

Genocide, ethnic cleansing and mainstream media

Israeli statements of genocidal intent and the observable dynamics of violence correlating to these statements, as argued by South Africa's lawyers, strikingly contradict the core contention of Western leaders and the media framing of Israel's onslaught—that this was primarily a war against non-state actor Hamas. In New Zealand and Australia, the majority of mainstream media uncritically carried the message of political leaders that Israel's response to the Hamas attack was justifiable by reference to a right of self-defence. Why was it not rigorously challenged in light of the siege, clear statements of genocidal intent and given Israel's long history of ethnic cleansing of Palestinians on land it occupies?

It appears the concept of due impartiality has been used by newsroom leaders to justify their approach. It is a fundamental tenet that media outlets adhere to, creating a standard to which their credibility as trusted sources of news can be measured (Figure 1). The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) calls it its 'fundamental standard' (ABC Editorial Policy).

The ABC and News Zealand's state-funded broadcaster Radio New Zealand (RNZ) are two cases in point.

There have been high-profile staff departures at the ABC, with journalists pointing to major inadequacies in reporting on Gaza. Former Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) presenter Mary Kostakidis said the ABC's Gaza coverage reflected a refusal of news leaders to challenge official narratives by Israel and Western states over the attack on Gaza (Kostakidis, 2024).

What was instead being challenged was the professional integrity of news staff battling to do their jobs properly, a trend evident across Australian's media landscape, she added. Kostakidis made her comments amid the backdrop of an open and escalating conflict over the reporting on Gaza, with one high-profile ABC employee fired in late December (ABC sacks journalist, 2024), prompting the threat of industrial action by staff.

Presenter Antoinette Lattouf was fired on December 20 after management accused her of breaching its code of practice on maintaining impartiality as an

SOURCE: @MaryKostakidis
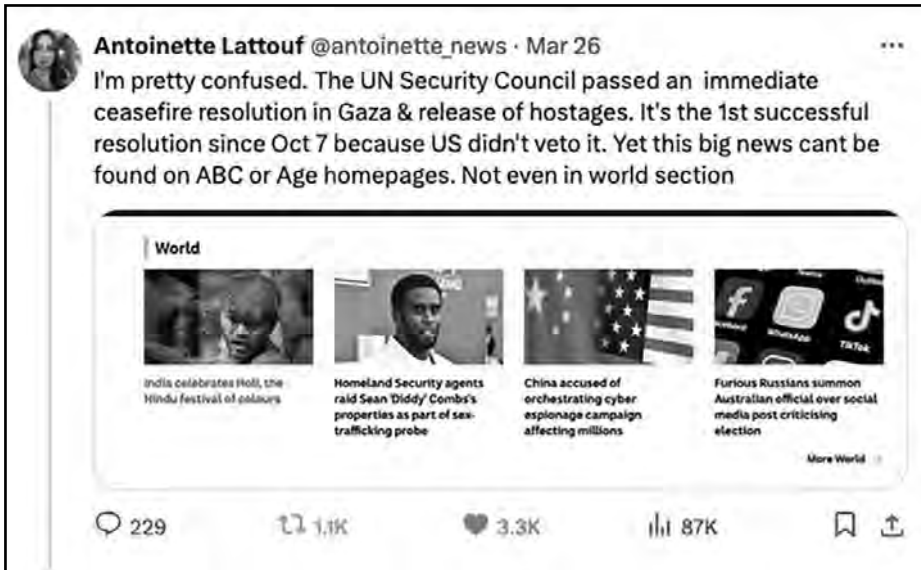
Figure 1: Big news: Successful UNSC ceasefire resolution that US did not veto, yet missing from the ABC news website.

employee. She had been contracted as a casual presenter for five shifts in December 2023 (Bucci, 2024). The Lebanese-Australian journalist had posted a Human Rights Watch link on Instagram that stated Israel was 'using starvation of civilians as a weapon of war in Gaza'. The previous day Lattouf had been warned by management to stay away from 'controversial issues' after an article she co-wrote for the independent website Crikey pointed out that viral footage that appeared to show Palestinian solidarity protesters in Sydney on 9 October 2023 chanting 'gas the Jews' could not actually be verified (Lattouf & Wilson, 2023). On February 2, New South Wales police announced an independent inquiry had confirmed no evidence that the chant was ever used (Wilson, 2024).

The ABC's decision to sack Lattouf was based on a view she had breached impartiality. Impartiality, according to Kostakidis, is 'the biggest joke in journalism', one used to rationalise a passive editorial stance in the face of powerful interests (Figure 2). She said:

> The word is trotted out like the greatest badge of honour for a journalist when it is a dunce's hat. If the Fourth Estate's role is enabling citizens to reach an informed decision, it fails them by resiling from hard truths in order to role play at impartiality. (Kostakidis, 2024)

Before her departure from the ABC, Lattouf had been subject to a co-ordinated campaign that included pro-Israel lawyers emailing ABC's chairperson Ita Buttrose and managing director David Anderson, suggesting legal action and lobbying of politicians was imminent over Lattouf's role at the national broadcaster

(Bachelard, Jaspan 2024). When that news broke, Australia's journalists' union, the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) demanded an urgent meeting with staff to 'address growing concerns about outside interference, culturally unsafe management practices and to stand up for journalism without fear or favour' (MEAA, 2024). MEAA union representative Mark Philips said its ABC members had been holding meetings over concerns about how management deals with external pressure from lobby groups, politicians and big business over the reporting of its journalists. 'Management should be supporting staff when they come under external attack or criticism to ensure that the public's trust in the ABC to report without fear or favour can be maintained,' he said (MEAA, 2024).

Lattouf continued to legally challenge ABC's decision (Courty, 2024). Kostakidis said giving into political pressure to lack Lattouf would invariably make other employees more amenable to the type of self-censorship expected by ABC management, least they also come under fire from the Israel lobby. Other ABC staff members have left of their own accord. Senior political reporter Nour Haydar resigned in early January, citing the broadcaster's Gaza coverage and treatment of staff (Jaspan, 2024). News presenter Helen Tzarimas also resigned, stating on Twitter on January 16 that she 'did the right thing' (Tzarimas, 2024).

The ABC's board rejected a union vote of no confidence in Anderson over his handling of the Lattouf incident, with Buttrose calling the vote 'abhorrent and incorrect'. (Jaspan, Bachelard, 2024) Unrest at the broadcaster began to surface in early November, when nearly 200 staff held a meeting to discuss the broadcaster's coverage of Israel and Gaza (Faruqi, 2024), leading to an advisory panel to look at criticisms arising from it. Journalists believed Israeli violence was being mis-framed, with coverage failing to critically engage with Israeli claims and accurately report on events.

Rejecting the criticisms, Anderson said the ABC was

SOURCE: @antoinette_news

Figure 2: Australian journalist and political commentator Mary Kostakidis challenges ABC managing director David Anderson over the Fair Work Commission case brought by Antoinette Lattouf.

upholding professional standards, according to its charter. He said terms like 'apartheid' and 'genocide' would not be used by the ABC, but reported as allegations of 'crimes' like others (Jaspan, 2024). He told Radio 774, ABC's local radio station in Melbourne: 'Genocide is a claim that's being made. It's a serious crime. It's an allegation of a crime. The IDF [Israeli Defence Force] and Israel reject that. Same with apartheid. We'll report other people's use of that. We won't use it ourselves' (Jaspan, 2024).

It should be noted here that Anderson's position is troublesome from a public interest journalism perspective. If media's epistemological foundations only rested on what was determined in courts of law, many forms of investigative journalism would be redundant. Journalists must take cognizance of the judicial laws when reporting, to avoid contempt of court or defamation for example, but nowhere does it say journalists cannot infer facts or make their own determinations independent from the judicial system, so long as the evidence and public interest justifies it.

Investigative work by *The Washington Post* journalists Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein uncovered a series of political crimes connected to the Watergate burglary arrests in June 1972, which they traced back to the White House. Their stories led to the indictments of 40 administration officials and the eventual resignation of US President Richard Nixon (Glass, 2018). Nixon had denied involvement in the planning and cover-up of a break-in and attempted bugging of the Democratic National Committee's headquarters in the Watergate complex (Glass, 2018). This did not compel editors at the *Post* to run stories giving equal weight to Nixon's claims or stop the publication of stories challenging his denials.

Adjudicating contentious claims involves degrees of risk for newsroom leaders and they weigh up the benefits of doing so, particularly when a lack of resources restricts an ability to carrying out this task. Prudence often wins the day. But in no way should this be conflated with an approach that breaches the barrier between news and opinion, or is seen to do so. On the contrary, taking this approach avoids false balance while better meeting the informational needs of the public.

A study from Exeter University in the UK also found journalists providing 'one-sided' evidence, that is, information from experts supporting a particular position, had a bigger impact over people's factual beliefs than their partisan or ideological attachments (the positions of parties they voted for). It found this journalistic approach did not create a perception of perceived bias on the part of the journalist and also helped the public form rational, factual opinions (Lyons, 2018).

In my experience, some editorial leaders see adjudication of contested versions of truth and falsity as not only inappropriate, but possibly futile. When issues in dispute are inherently subjective in nature, this may be the right position to take. But when a contested position rests on verifiable facts, journalists can and should

add information to help people decide which claims to believe. The contested status of a proposition should not in itself preclude publication or broadcast. Conscientious journalists view a failure to do so as an abrogation of professional responsibility, especially if it is a matter of public interest.

In the case of genocide, it may have been inappropriate, particularly in the early stages of Israel's operation, for the ABC to state outright acts of genocide were being committed. But the argument used by apologists for passivity—that genocide is a crime needing to be established in a court of law before any editorial position can be taken on the accusation—lacks both civil and professional responsibility. The ICJ could take several months or years to rule definitively on the matter. Given that the Genocide Convention 1951 compels states to stop genocide from taking place, an international legal instrument New Zealand and Australia have signed up to, surely the spirit of the binding international law extends to public interest media.

The broadcaster could have and ought to have framed its coverage around the very apparent dangers of it taking place, in light of statements of genocidal intent, the growing evidence available and given Israel's history of colonial domination. ABC declined to take this approach, yet this obligation seems to lie at the core of public interest journalism that seeks to hold power to account.

One major exception was ABC's *Four Corners* investigative TV report ˈThe Forever War', which at least asked searching questions and confronted Israeli figures on the Gaza onslaught, in stark contrast to the ABC's day-to-day news coverage (Lyons, 2024).

It could be argued there is even less of a need for this type of passive editorial positioning over the use of the term apartheid, as the term is factual. Human rights organisations like Amnesty International use the descriptor because Israel's discriminatory laws, making Palestinians in the occupied territories second-class citizens to maintain Jewish hegemony, align closely with the system of racial separation in South Africa that ended in 1994. There is ample evidence for this characterisation. A growing list of former Israeli officials also agree, including ex-Mossad boss Tamir Pardo (Goldenberg, 2023).

Anderson also said in his 774 Radio interview: 'We don't make rash assumptions around allegations of war crimes. But what we do is we test and challenge what those allegations are.' The ABC, like many other Western media have failed to use the term 'war crime', even though an inference is straightforward based on the basic evidence available, making it far from a 'rash assumption'. Israel's imposition of a total siege on Gaza clearly constituted collective punishment of a civilian population, a war crime as defined under the Fourth Geneva Convention. This crime was compounded by mass, indiscriminate bombing.

ABC's editorial policies, when defining due impartiality and how balance is achieved by weighing evidence on contentious issues when gathering and pre-

senting news, states: 'In rare and usually obvious cases the balance of evidence is so overwhelming that contrary interpretations of the evidence and facts should not be included' (ABC Editorial Policy, 2023). Verifiable evidence of Israel's collective punishment means a journalist should be able to reasonably infer the regime is committing a war crime. Not doing so and merely reporting accusations of war crimes and Israel's denials gives Israeli claims 'a respectability or parity with proven facts' (ABC Editorial Policy, 2023), which is not being impartial. It is clearly presenting false balance, a breach of ABC's own editorial standards.

Using these terms could have helped inform the public in a way that translated into political pressure on government to change foreign policy settings and withdraw any diplomatic approval of Israel's actions in Gaza. Declining to adjudicate appropriately between competing claims lowered the standard of news, failed to adequately meet the informational needs of democratic citizenship and could be characterised as a moral failure, given the consequences of allowing Israel and its allies at home to obfuscate the nature of its military operation, helping to prolong it.

Discontent and pushback from journalists

Discontent widened after Anderson's remarks, with hundreds of journalists from both the ABC and other corporate media outfits signing an open letter demanding reporters be allowed to hold power to account and that newsrooms approach Israel's claims in Gaza critically, given a history of Israeli government lies and propaganda (Letter from journalists, 2023). The letter, dated November 24, warned legacy media risked losing credibility by not doing its job properly. It stated:

> It is our duty as journalists to hold the powerful to account, to deliver truth and full context to our audiences, and to do so courageously without fear of political intimidation … We risk losing the trust of our audiences if we fail to apply the most stringent journalistic principles and cover this conflict in full. (Letter from journalists, 2023).

The letter appealed to managers' instincts for self-preservation, pointing to the threat posed by social media as an alternative source of news sans curation by newsrooms. Viral raw video footage has shown fragments of a harrowing reality of hospitals and medical centres being bombed, civilian convoys heading to designated 'safe zones' attacked and children horrifically injured.

South Africa's legal representative, Blinne Ní Ghrálaigh, KC, made reference to this, telling judges at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague on 11 January 2024 that this was 'the first genocide in history where its victims are broadcasting their own destruction in real time in the desperate, so far vain hope that the world might do something' (Lawyer's closing statement, 2024).

Pieced together, these fragments may indeed be leading significant numbers of people to question the veracity of legacy media's story framing. The journalists' letter also called for an end to false balance as a hindrance to reporting the truth. It also urged the humanisation of Palestinian victims, adequate coverage to credible allegations of war crimes, genocide, ethnic cleansing and apartheid, and the inclusion of historical context.

More than 340 journalists signed the letter, including those at *The Guardian Australia, ABC, The Sydney Morning Herald, The Conversation*, Schwartz Media and *The Age* (Muller, 2024). ABC's director Justin Stephens issued an all-staff internal memo urging employees not to sign the letter. Journalists employed by Nine at *The Herald* and *The Age* who did sign were banned from carrying out any role covering the conflict, because they could not be trusted by management to remain 'impartial'. This can only be characterised one way—censorship.

'This is just the public reaction—I understand some threats made privately have been far more direct—editors do not appreciate having their biases and loyalties revealed,' said Peter Cronau, a former senior producer on ABC's *Four Corners* investigative programme (Cronau, 2024). The policies of companies like Rupert Murdoch's News Corp and Sky News remain unclear. However, Cronau expressed a view there was palpable fear among staffers across all media platforms, over being accused of partiality:

> It is a remarkable moment in Australian journalism when Australian journalists feel compelled to call on their newsroom editors 'to hold the powerful to account, to deliver truth and full context to our audiences, and to do so courageously without fear of political intimidation'...
>
> The pressure on the media from powerful elites to unquestioningly support the Western 'consensus', to not step out of line, to adhere to a warped sense of national 'loyalty', is the very pressure that must be resisted and revealed by journalists and others, if our media is to function as a bolster to our democracy. (Cronau, 2024)

Kostakidis is in no doubt that the role media played in facilitating an unfolding genocide matched that of Western leaders who proclaimed Israel's right to defend itself and in effect offered diplomatic cover Israel's actions. She said:

> It's a betrayal of the role of journalism in democracy and their professional obligation. Media managers are either disingenuous or genuinely believe that impartiality ends where our own national interests begin, or the interests of the empire we're subservient to.
>
> Israel is strategically very important to the US and that relationship is vital for Israel. The Israeli lobby is powerful here as elsewhere. As a result, the dispossession and killing of Palestinians is conveyed as normal, and the media has not exposed the public to the full horror of the violence and state terrorism that constitutes their daily lives.

> Israel has gotten away with it for decades and has become embold-ened to move to a final solution for Palestinians. There have been a substantial number of Israeli officials who have been transparent about their objectives, yet there is little reporting of this. The media bear substantial responsibility for the calamity that has been unleashed on Palestinian people.' (Kostakidis, 2024)

Kostakidis said stories in Australia were written from a distinctly Anglo-American worldview and that her experience at SBS demonstrated how news bosses viewed the Israeli position throug-h a sympathetic colonial lens. She recounted a time she had asked a chief producer to contact a Palestinian spokesperson for counter balancing comments instead of relying on Israel's Australian spokesman Mark Regev for news updates.

'He replied: "Why? They're all mad." He had not long returned from the requisite Israeli junket for voluntary brainwashing.'

Journalists involved in the open letter pushed back on accusations of partiality by pointing out newsroom junkets to Israel have been widespread in Australia, as in other countries, and that it should be transparent who has taken part in them. The independent website *Crikey* publishes an updating list of journalists (and politicians) that have been on 'organised tours' to the Middle East—'many of them sponsored by pro-Israel lobby groups and interest organisations' (Saeed, 2023). No equivalent list has been published in New Zealand media (Figure 3).

For Kostakidis, a glib claim to impartiality as one of 'not taking sides' is nonsense, whereas objectivity and a fidelity to truth is and ought to be the bedrock of authentic journalistic endeavour. However, what militated against this was careerism and the fact bad journalism was institutionally rewarded, she added.

> When you have approached a matter objectively—taking into account context, history and evidence—you have an obligation to reveal the truth.
>
> That sometimes challenges your own personal biases when the process leads to a conclusion that surprises you. It's about having an open and inquiring mind and the integrity to face inconvenient truths.
>
> But how many outlets and individual journalists working in the mainstream media report the war in Ukraine impartially? How impartial have reports on leaders the West needs demonised like Putin, Saddam Hussein, Gaddafi and countless others been? It is a form of delusion that delivers a career pathway, so there is a vested interest in portraying the delusion as impartiality. (Kostakidis, 2024)

Likewise, Pulitzer Prize winner and former war correspondent Chris Hedges calls the type of impartiality Anderson subscribes to 'a fiction', a sophisticated device used to mask implicit biases and agendas (Hedges, 2024). He said:

Figure 3: A group of journalists on an Israeli tour organised to 'enhance Kiwi understanding' by the Israel-Australia-Oceania Chambers of Commerce in November 2019. The independent website *Crikey* has publicly listed Australian journalists who have been on funded tours.

> The media is not impartial. I was a newspaper reporter for many decades and what we do is manipulate facts. That's what I'm trained to do. I can take a set of facts and spin it in any way you want. It's not wrong, but a good reporter has a covenant with the reader or the viewer and that is to tell the truth.
>
> However, there are moments when telling the truth, as in the case of Israel's genocide against Gaza, is not good for your career.
>
> The lie in the media is usually the lie of omission. So, for example, they won't use the word 'apartheid'. They won't use the word 'genocide'. They will continue over 100 days after the event, to dredge up stories on October 7, of the suffering, which at this point doesn't begin to compare to what's happening in Gaza. (Hedges, 2024)

The other issue Hedges points out is Israel's blocking of foreign reporters from entering Gaza. At the time of writing, more than 122 journalists and media workers had been killed in Gaza and many more injured. (UN, 2024) One of the most high-profile killings has been that of Hamza Dahdoud, 27, the eldest son of Al Jazeera Gaza bureau chief Wael Dahdouh, which prompted calls for journalists in the West to speak up on behalf of their Gazan colleagues (Robie, 2024). Hedges said:

> They have been killed, many of them have clearly been targeted. So, most of the foreign press is in Jerusalem being fed stuff by the Israelis. I've covered conflict, so I can tell you that a huge percentage of those journalists, they don't even want to go to Gaza because it's dangerous.

> So, they're quite happy with the arrangements that have been made for them. I mean, for instance, I covered the first Gulf War and I didn't abide by the so called 'pool system'. I went out on my own, which essentially exposed most of the rest of the press that was sitting in a hotel being fed by pool reports. The fact is everywhere I've covered most, the majority, of the media don't want to go out. They are poseurs.
>
> It's a combination of factors. To write or broadcast honestly about what's happening in Gaza is to have the wrath of, not just the Israel lobby, but the corporations that run these large entities, as well as governmental entities. Everybody's going to come down on you. You're going to become a target and most journalists are good careerists, so they don't want to do it. But the whole thing of impartiality is a fiction. (Hedges, 2024)

Hedges received a written warning accused of partiality and compromising the trust of *The New York Times* readers after speaking out against the invasion of Iraq in 2003. He had been in the Middle East for seven years and had acted as bureau chief for the newspaper. Hedges points to a double standard. 'I wasn't the only one to speak about the war. John Burns [of *The Times*] and other reporters were quite public in their support for the invasion of Iraq, and yet Burns wasn't reprimanded because he was spitting back the dominant narrative,' Hedges said.

> So, it's not that I was speaking about the war. And I had a lot more experience in the Middle East than John Burns did. It was that I was not reinforcing the dominant narrative.
>
> Most of the reporters that I worked with in the Middle East, their opinion was no different from mine. They thought that this was insanity to invade Iraq, but they were smart enough to keep their mouth shut. (Hedges, 2024)

External political pressure

In a statement, the ABC denied it acted upon outside political pressure when reporting news or making editorial decisions and that it expected its staff 'to carry out their duties properly as public-interest journalists' (Hall, 2024). It said the ABC did not have 'a position on this conflict in favour of any group' and said it 'did not adopt the preferred language of one side or another in this conflict'.

'We opt for neutral, factual descriptors at all times. We will always be impartial and understand that impartiality does not mean false balance. We do not publish or broadcast information we know to be inaccurate in an attempt to "balance" a different perspective.'

Yet, it could be argued ABC has featured inaccurate and unbalanced stories, regardless of intent. The assertion by Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese that 'Israel has a right to defend itself' (Australian ex-PMs condemn Hamas, 2023) in Gaza has been reported uncritically. UN Special Rapporteur for

Gaza Francesca Albanese has pointed out that under international law Israel has no such right of self-defence as an occupying force in Gaza, whereas Palestinians had a right to resist as an occupied people (UN Special Rapporteur, 2023).

Balancing comment by such experts has rarely, if at all, accompanied the reporting of this 'right to defend itself' mantra. The ABC, like RNZ and other Western media, has framed Israel's military operation as Israel has presented it—as an Israeli-Hamas war, whereas Palestinians and many international media such as Al Jazeera see it as a war on Gaza and its residents. It could be argued by doing so that the ABC is in breach of its 'do not unduly favour one perspective over another' impartiality precept.

Equally, using language like 'terrorist' or 'militant' to describe Hamas cannot be viewed as neutral. Hamas is registered as a terror group by the US and its allies, but according to international law, Palestinians have a right to armed resistance against occupation (Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions,1949). In contrast, language often used by Al Jazeera, for example, describes Hamas and Islamic Jihad as 'Palestinian armed resistance groups' (Al Tahhan, 2023).

A sentence such as, 'Hamas, an armed Palestinian resistance group designated a terrorist organisation by the United States and its allies, operates across the Palestinian occupied territories,' would be a fair and accurately written sentence, free of bias. Yet a formula of words like this is rarely used in Western media. Indeed, a high-profile audit in June 2023 by RNZ into the subediting of international wires copy found such descriptors, alongside other editing of international wires copy, 'inappropriate' (Independent External Review, 2023).

RNZ has had its own share of controversy since October 7. But whereas the position of editorial leaders has created a structural cleavage at the ABC, with news staff and managers at loggerheads, tensions within RNZ have not manifested publicly to any significant degree. Reasons for this may be complex and many, including cultural and attitudes to authority. There is a possibility of there being a larger number of North African and Middle Eastern ethnicities in Australia newsrooms, making more staff better informed and more willing to push back against management.

A 2021 census in Australia showed the number of ancestry responses categorised within such groups as a proportion of the total population amounted to 3.2 percent, whereas in New Zealand, figures from a 2008 census showed Middle Eastern, Latin American and African made up 1.5 percent of the population.

In one of the most egregious incidents of its reporting, RNZ ran a news bulletin on January 29 that falsely stated the ICJ had found Israel 'not guilty of genocide'. In reply to a listener's complaint the broadcaster said it upheld the complaint 'despite' acting quickly to address it (RNZ response to complainant, 2024). The letter noted the introductory sentence to the item read: 'A law professor says the ruling of the Court of International Justice that found Israel not

guilty of genocide still holds the country accountable for civilian lives.' It said instead of containing the phrase '…that found Israel not guilty of genocide' it should have read '… that had not found Israel guilty of genocide'.

It more sensibly added the error was corrected in a later bulletin with the wording: 'Earlier today, RNZ reported Israel had been found not guilty of genocide. However, the court did not make a specific ruling on whether genocide had occurred, but it did say there was a plausible case under the Genocide Convention' (RNZ response to complainant, 2024).

Days later an internal memo by RNZ chief news officer Mark Stevens was leaked. He reminded staff to exercise care when dealing with stories on the conflict, 'particularly around the language we use, and balance'. (RNZ internal memo, 2024) 'Contested definitions, for example, around genocide and the processes to determining that, warrant particular attention.' he said. He told staff that the company's international newswire copy partners (BBC and Reuters) could 'often' be relied upon, 'but in the event of any questions, doubts or concerns, please refer up'.

In another incident, RNZ justified removing references to 'genocide' unfolding in Gaza made by a Palestinian guest on a podcast, saying it would have otherwise 'stolen valuable time' (Hall, 2023). The national broadcaster's *In Detail* podcast 'Fear and trauma from a world away' featured interviews with Palestinian-New Zealander Tameem Shaltoni, who has relatives in Gaza, and Ben Kepes, a New Zealand tech businessman and son of Holocaust survivors from Eastern Europe. The podcast, published on November 7, explored how the 'Israel-Hamas war' had affected him, as well as their respective views on catastrophic events in Palestine and Israel October 7.

After the RNZ podcast and accompanying website story were published on November 9, Shaltoni took to X, formerly Twitter, to voice his concern that his repeated references to 'genocide' being committed in Gaza had been removed. He subsequently deleted the tweet, but repeated his concerns on weekly political podcast 1 of 200, stating his view that media did not want to countenance the idea of genocide because it contradicted the Western narrative that Israel's military action was a war between Israel and non-state actor Hamas. Shaltoni said he had been told by the podcast journalist his interview would be subject to RNZ media policy guidelines and that this would be reflected in the editing process.

Activist platform Aotearoa Liberation League contacted RNZ to ask what broadcasting guideline had been used to remove references to the term. In a reply, RNZ head of content Megan Whelan said its guidelines were publicly available to read and that claims of genocide were simply 'outside the ambit' of the podcast in question. 'For this podcast, the purpose, which was shared in advance with all participants, was to provide a New Zealand audience with an insight into what it is like living in New Zealand while there is a war in your

homeland,' she said (Reply to Aotearoa Liberation League, 2023).

'This podcast's focus was therefore on personal, first-hand experiences. It was also made clear to all participants that podcasts are edited and curated pieces.' Whelan went on to suggest airing references to genocide would have been editorially troublesome.

'To have included the claims of genocide would have stolen valuable time away from the guests as it would have meant defining genocide, providing context for the listener and offering a right of reply' (Reply to Aotearoa Liberation League, 2023).

The podcast however, displayed the type of double standard other Western media outlets have often been criticised for. Guest Kepes, who described himself as an ethnic, non-religious Jew, was allowed to introduce highly-contested Israeli talking points and make accusations about those who attended Palestinian solidarity rallies in New Zealand, without evidence or context added. Kepes claimed protesters had chanted 'gas the Jews' as they marched in Christchurch, a strikingly similar accusation to the one levelled against Sydney Palestinian rally attendees that Lattouf had helped debunk.

Kepes said he knew people who were 'almost housebound with fear' in New Zealand because they did not want to be identified as a Jew. He also claimed Iran was the regional 'puppet master' who had 'engineered this war', implying that it bore responsibility for the current crisis. RNZ did not add balancing context or gave a 'right of reply' to Kepes' comments. The emotive statements, presented without evidence, contrasted starkly with solemn references to genocide that Shaltoni had made, which the ICJ subsequently found plausible and UN rapporteurs and high-profile legal experts had been warning about in the weeks before and after the podcast (Segal, October 2024).

Whelan said RNZ took 'no editorial stand in its news or factual output' and pointed to three Reuters stories on its website she said dealt with genocide claims. She added that views were reported according to their 'news worthiness and significance'.

Conclusion

For Hedges, RNZ's reasons for removing the genocide references do not stack up. 'It's a very lame excuse for censorship,' he said. 'You have all these "humanitarian interventions", the likes of Samantha Power [US Agency for International Development] and political figures like Barack Obama and Tony Blair and they're quick to claim genocide in Libya or Darfur [Sudan] and nobody would do this to them.

> But when you challenge Israel and the Zionist lobby you are stepping outside of the dominant narrative, which is always contentious. When you are attempting to explain what's happening to the Palestinians, who

in the world order are largely friendless and powerless, they will always think of some excuse, essentially to cover up censorship, but that's what it is. And it's something that those of us who have been speaking about the Palestinians for many years have encountered over and over.

They are, of course, not going to admit to the fact that this censorship is something they practise. I mean, how can you describe Israel any other way than an apartheid state and yet how many mainstream media organisations will use that word, much less genocide. (Hedges, 2023)

RNZ's claim to impartiality is fundamentally vitiated by such incidents, made worse by management justifications. Both ABC's and RNZ's omissions, story framing and refusal to adjudicate between contentious claims despite evidence being available to do so, bring into serious doubt management commitment to public-interest media as an institutional bulwark against disinformation and a way to inform societal participation in the democratic process. It must be asked whether an institutional bias operates at both broadcasters, imposing structural constraints on news staff committed to public interest reporting on the Middle East and international news generally.

RNZ's international news coverage relies on extensive use of wire copy, due to resourcing. But given serious and well-understood concerns raised by BBC staff about pro-Israel bias by their broadcaster (Cook, 2024). RNZ's continued editorial policy of republishing BBC international wires without changes, other than style points, suggests its management is either unaware or unconcerned about the threat of carrying inaccurate or imbalanced reporting as result from the BBC's own institutional bias. The two broadcasters are also funded by states attached to the Five Eyes Western intelligence apparatus. RNZ's use of wire copy by international news organisations based in other Five Eyes nations, the BBC (UK) and Reuters (Canada); and ABC's use of AP (United States), layers heterogenous Anglophile perspectives on geopolitical events presented on their news platforms.

All Five Eyes countries refused to support South Africa's application to the ICJ, with the US, UK and Canada publicly stating a view the case brought was unfounded. The US and UK are supporting Israel's case at The Hague. At the time of writing, the diplomatic positions of each individual state have effectively formed a pan-Five Eyes front in rejecting calls to intercede and support South Africa's application.

It was notable that public broadcasters ABC, BBC, CBC and RNZ declined to livestream the South African legal team's opening address to the ICJ on January 11, even though the event was historic and possibly a defining moment in the rule of international law, as well as contemporary world history. RNZ also failed to run a written story on its website reporting on South Africa's lawyers' dramatic testimony to the 15-member court.

Whether this shows the publicly-funded broadcasters acted in a co-ordinated manner, or simply operated what Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky called the 'propaganda model' (Chomsky, Herman, 1988) is an open question and one meriting further investigation. The scholars posited that there were 'filters' determining international news output and framing, including fear of external pressure that 'disciplines' the media, a reliance on information officially provided by government, corporates and 'experts', as well as the ideological environment in which the journalists operate and the orthodox opinions and debate of political elites. The ABC's sacking of Lattouf following pressure from Lawyers for Israel and the wider Zionist lobby certainly can be inferred as an example of news managers fearing flak and allowing political influence to dictate editorial policy.

On the question of genocide carried out in Gaza, news coverage by both public broadcasters has been passive and largely reflective of entrenched positions of their governments. This should raise serious concerns about whether entrenched political, cultural and institutional bias makes these organisations compliant and hypocritical instruments of power, instead of news sources of capable of doggedly reporting the type of evidence now before the ICJ. For the public, it should also beg the question, what else are they not telling us.

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Mick Hall is an independent journalist based in New Zealand. He is a former digital journalist at Radio New Zealand (RNZ) and former Australian Associated Press (AAP) staffer, having also written investigative articles for various publications, including The New Zealand Herald *and* Consortium News.
mickhall5446@gmail.com

ARTICLES
Fact check
Still not core journalism curriculum

Abstract: Fact-checking has become a global industry, with more than 417 fact-checking outlets in 100 countries operating in 69 languages (Stencel, Ryan & Luther, 2023). According to the Duke Reporters' Lab, half of the world's fact checkers are associated with media outlets, but there are also 24 affiliated with academic institutions. Although the work is time consuming and resource intensive, fact-checking has increasingly been introduced to journalism programmes at universities and in professional settings. This expert article brings together some insights from a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) World Journalism Education Council (WJEC) roundtable event 'Fact-Check and Verification as Core Journalism Curriculum' hosted by RMIT University in Australia in 2021, alongside relevant literature exploring the nature and presence of fact-check based education approaches at that time. It concludes that while fact-checking and verification are important skills for student journalists, fact checkers do not necessarily need to be journalists, nor indeed have journalistic training. However, more students are needed who are excellent journalists and the authors argue that fact-checking is just part of that training.

Keywords: Asia Pacific, Australia, education, fact-check, fake news, journalism education, verification, WJEC

ALEXANDRA NICOLE WAKE
GORDON FARRER
SONNY THOMAS
RMIT University, Melbourne

Introduction

ALTHOUGH there is nothing new about facts, nor the desire for journalists to impart them, the sub-discipline of fact-checking—as a specific practice that goes beyond the basic act of confirming information when researching a news story in a 'post-truth' world—is only slowly being embraced by journalism educators. This article sets out to capture information about how fact-checking was being taught within universities in 2021, with a particular emphasis on fact-checking in Australia and the Asia-Pacific. It further sought to determine what fact checking skills and knowledge were considered most important for educators to impart to journalism majors.

This article draws upon a curated discussion focussed on the Asia Pacific region organised for a World Journalism Education Congress roundtable. The focus of the roundtable was journalism education within universities. The speakers included educators, researchers, and one employer identified by the host (co-author Alexandra Wake). Wake explained that RMIT University has a strong interest in fact-checking and verification, mandating a course, Fact Checking and Verification, for all students majoring in journalism. The subject was also an open elective to anyone within the university. Further RMIT students were able to intern at the RMIT ABC Fact Check Unit[1] or its affiliate RMIT FactLab to further sharpen their skills.

Participant presentations

Australian researcher Tanya Notley outlined her team's work around Young People and Adult Media Literacy in Australia (2020). She asked, how do we ensure that citizens are not being manipulated by misinformation actors? How do we ensure that they are asking critical questions about information and sources? Saffron Howden, spoke to the theme of teaching children to be information detectives from her 2021 book Kid Reporter as 'News Detective' Skills. Howden argued that the traditional journalism skills of curiosity and scepticism, asking lots of questions and striving for accuracy, were great tools for teaching young people to verify information themselves and to improve their media literacy. Jay Daniel Thompson, spoke about his 2022 book co-authored (with Rob Cover and Ashleigh Haw) book Fake News in Digital Cultures and asked what ethical online communication might look like in an era of digital hostility and network disinformation. He said the greatest challenge was how to verify the information produced and disseminated by certain movements as ethically as possible.

Kieran McGuinness, from the News and Media Research Centre at the University of Canberra, spoke about verification behaviours and how to solve the problem of passive engagement with news. He drew on a series of Digital News Reports done by the University of Canberra to discuss verification behaviour by journalists as well as concerns about trust and misinformation and verification from Australian audiences. Jane A. Wardell, the global desk editor at Reuters, spoke for the industry about the importance of instilling fact-checking and verification skills in student journalists, and veteran journalists, saying it was absolutely critical in the current environment. Wardell argued that fact-checking needed to be considered a key skill, and near the top of any curriculum list, undertaken by journalism students.

Journalism educator Masato Kajimoto, from the University of Hong Kong, spoke about his work teaching fact-checking at his university and specifically the Annie Lab, a student driven fact-checking project. He said his course was essentially a half fact-checking, and half news literacy class. He said he did not

approach his classes as vocational training courses. He said he was trying to train the future news audience rather than just future journalists in logical reasoning, analytical skills and effective writing. Anne Kruger, from First Draft [2], spoke about delivering professional practitioner-level verification courses to university students. First Draft is a not-for-profit organisation based in New York, focused on the communities that have been targeted by misinformation and disinformation. In Australia, First Draft has a large focus on the diverse and ethnic communities that have been targeted by disinformation campaigns. Her work was centred on trying to protect the communities and empower the communities from dangerous narratives. Sushi Das, from RMIT ABC Fact Check Unit, spoke about the unit's collaboration by RMIT University and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Das discussed a fact check micro credential (online course) she created for RMIT students regardless of their disciplinary background. Her essential fact-checking 101 course took 90-minutes online and gives the students a digital badge that they can attach to their social media accounts so that prospective employers know that they have practical fact-checking skills gained at a university with the endorsement of the national broadcaster. Das argued that employers, not just employers in journalism, wanted to hire people with fact-checking skills who could navigate the internet, particularly social media, and be able to distinguish between reliable, accurate sources of information and harmful misleading false information—an important life skill for everyone.

Syed Nazakat, from DataLEADS, discussed best approaches and practices in teaching fact-checking in India to health professionals. Nazakat spoke about his training work with doctors, helping them to work with journalists to fact-check and correct health information during the COVID-19 pandemic. Eoghan Sweeney, founder of OSINT Essentials, spoke about embedding the essential skills of fact checking and verification with journalists and media organisations. Eoghan said newsrooms needed to clearly appreciate that their work stood not only on the quality of their reporting, but also on the ability of their audience to properly understand it. It was not patronising or elitist to acknowledge that large sections of the public had been significantly manipulated and undermined. Gordon Farrer, who established the Fact Checking and Verification course at RMIT University, spoke about the importance of creative thinking in fact checking and verification. He argued fact-checking and verification required not only observation, organisation, and persistence, but imagination, left-field and creative thinking.

Ash Rahmani, from the Cal State University system in the US spoke about the politics of fact-checking using examples from US-based Spanish language mis-information). He noted that little attention had been paid to misinformation in languages other than English and in the US, after English, Spanish was the most used language on social media.

The roundtable event finished with a provocation from Tito Ambyo, from

RMIT University, who spoke about Otherness and challenged the audience to consider, what is meant when we say 'facts'? He argued that academics need to train students to ask the question, 'whose fact is this'? Where is it coming from? And who produced this fact? In a complex society, he argued, a three-year undergraduate degree made sense, because students needed to have the time to be able to think about these critical issues.

Questions

Three questions were posed: what are universities already doing in the fact-checking and verification space? What are the issues surrounding fact-checking and verification not currently captured within curriculum? What do employers want graduates in the Asia Pacific to know about fact-checking and verification?

What is Fact-Checking?

It was important to start with a clear definition for 'fact-checking'. Graves (2018) argues there is an important difference between the process of checking one's facts, that is, to eliminate errors from a story, and the rise of 'fact-checking' as a distinct mode of journalism. Graves notes there is some dispute over the contemporary meaning of fact-checking but points to the following (abbreviated) definition from Elizabeth (2014, n.p.) as a guide: 'Fact checkers and fact checking organisations aim to increase knowledge by re-reporting and researching the purported facts'. The important distinction here relates to the re-examination of existing purported facts as opposed to the process of verifying new information. Bruns (2018, p. 356) notes that the rise of fact checking can best be understood as a response to an 'authority crisis' where the vast quantities of information available on the internet—especially user-generated content lacking the journalistic vigour of verification—has bypassed the traditional role of the media as a gatekeeper of information. In addition, the vast quantities of online misinformation and disinformation have led to what is termed by some as the 'post-truth' era where the very nature of truth is under question. To combat this uncertainty and the many challenges it poses to democracy, an organised community of fact-checkers came together and sought to develop common standards and practices in an attempt to regain journalistic authority. In this context, fact-checking can be understood as a distinct discipline with its own cultures of practice responding to the specific threat of the post-truth era (Graves, 2018). Thus, these distinctions from other forms of journalism call for students to be educated with a specific skill set related to fact-checking.

Farrer (2017) argues there are also philosophical and epistemological dimensions to fact checking that demand the specific focus of journalism educators. The practice of fact-checking necessarily requires the journalist to reach a 'conclusion about truth' (n. p.). This is not meant to imply fact-checking journalists take a

position on an issue (ie, that they are supporting a political/moral position) but rather that they assume for themselves a role of investigator and judge of the accuracy/correctness of a statement that makes a claim about a factual component of an issue. Fact-checking organisations such as RMIT ABC Fact Check adjudicate on the correctness of a public figure's statement using a range of rulings, from (for example, 'checks out', 'In the ballpark', 'Incorrect').

In journalism classes, students have traditionally been encouraged to not take a position on an issue. Rather, they are taught to summarise opposing viewpoints, giving equal weight to contesting ideas to create 'balance'. But Farrer says this approach is problematic and can lend a false sense of legitimacy to mistruths if taken at face value. While taking a position in journalism is not unique to the practice of fact-checking (for example opinion pieces or investigative reports that reveal/conclude that corruption or malpractice has taken place) it does serve as an important vector for journalism educators to consider the practices of journalism more broadly. This section does not suggest that adjudicating on accuracy/correctness of claims by a fact-checker requires disclosing a position on the issue at hand (as in support for/opposition to it) or adopting it as their 'subjective possession'. There is as little 'self' in political fact-checking practice as in other objective/balanced forms of news/political journalisms. In fact, there is probably less, given the transparency of investigative methodology and sources used required of accredited (by the IFCN) fact-checking practice.

Fact-checking does more than make available a new approach to verification in journalism. Moreover, from a practical perspective, fact-checking is an identified in-demand skillset sought by employers (Das, 2021; Wardell, 2021). To meet this demand and best prepare students to enter the workforce, there is a clear rationale to educate students with specific and identifiable skills in the processes of fact-checking. Interestingly, despite the prevalence of fact-checking in the news media mix and the demand from employers, fact-checking-specific courses appear to be relatively rare. There are several compelling examples across the world of how fact-checking is being taught in schools, universities and the professional context. However, for the most part, the courses appear to be rare and concentrated in certain areas and institutions. There are some notable limitations in this assessment—namely that a lack of literature relating to fact checking specific university courses may not necessarily signal its absence within programmes. Furthermore, it is not clear to what degree these skills may be embedded into more generalised courses, whether the conception of 'fact checking' includes verification and/or debunking, or what specific skills are being taught.

Fact-checking within universities

University journalism educators are constantly adapting course content to prepare students for success in a rapidly evolving digital and often challenging

environment (Callaghan & McManus, 2010). The emergence of dedicated fact checking courses within universities is the latest in those curriculum adaptations.

In Hong Kong, one of the earliest examples referenced in the literature is at the University of Hong Kong. In a paper titled: '*Ahead of the e-Curve in Fact-Checking and Verification Education: The University of Hong Kong's Cyber News Verification Lab Leads Verification Education in Asia*', Kruger (2016) discussed the curriculum design of a project designed to develop undergraduate journalism students' skills in online verification and fact-checking. The objective of the Lab was twofold, firstly to teach students to 'identify, analyse and deconstruct real-life case studies emanating in real-time from online sources' and secondly to 'evaluate and report on their findings in a journalistic manner' (n. p). According to Kruger, the project sought to educate students through 'experiential learning' (n. p.) as defined by Kolb (1984, p. 41) as 'the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience'. Experiential learning focuses on the development of real-world practical skills, in this case, several assignments utilising a software platform called 'the Check', developed by Meedan. Following classes and lectures relating to news literacy, online verification and fact checking, students were able to apply this knowledge by collectively uploading content sourced from social media and other news sources to the platform, outlining the steps they took to verify the information present (Kruger, 2016).

One of the ideas explored in the paper is the development of a scale to measure the outcomes of students' learning. Kruger (2016) notes that media literacy is a well-established area of research but identifies a need for a scale that accounts for 'news literacy competencies and critical thinking skills in a digital native, participatory, "post-truth" era' (n.p). Following consultation with media experts, a 'verification measurement scale' (n. p.) from 0-4 was developed. The scale evaluated five key areas including technical skills, observation skills, the student's ability to question the motive behind sources, the extent to which secondary 'crosscheck' sources were used and whether contact was made with the original publisher of the information. At the end of the semester, students were asked to list steps they would have undertaken to verify an online source before and after the coursework. A content analysis of the student's responses was then conducted, and the verification measurement scale was applied by the instructor. Through these findings, Kruger concluded there had been a significant improvement in the quality of verification techniques and critical thinking actions by students because of the project.

Following the Cyber News Verification Lab project, a subsequent student-led fact-checking lab was established at the University of Hong Kong. Speaking at the UNESCO WJEC roundtable event, Associate Professor Masato Kajimoto (2021) explained that the 'Annie Lab' offered students a hands-on

learning experience in a newsroom environment. For some students, this is offered through an undergraduate capstone subject, while others are offered paid summer internships. The lab functions as a newsroom throughout the week and publishes regular student-produced fact-checking content on its website. This practical learning is delivered alongside two classroom-based optional elective fact-checking subjects. The undergraduate subject is offered to all students and the graduate subject is offered to journalism students only.

One of the important themes raised in Kajimoto's discussion were some of the regionally specific challenges that exist in teaching fact checking and journalism more broadly. Despite strong demand to teach fact-checking in some regions of South-East Asia where the democratic model is either failing or absent, university educators must account for differences in the way syllabi are designed. For example, terminology such as 'democracy' or 'citizenship' that may be ubiquitously found in Western journalism course content may not be appropriate. In countries which are outside the liberal democratic tradition, the existence of fact-checking, and verification courses raises the question of their purpose or motivation. Is the intention to spread democratic ideals though the practice of fact-checking to 'hold power to account' or is it for another reason. This could be a useful question for academic inquiry.

Furthermore, Kajimoto noted the challenges associated with the proliferation of misinformation on regionally and language-specific social media platforms. He argued, this presented opportunities for the Annie Lab and international universities more broadly. With access to significant numbers of bilingual students trained in the skills of fact-checking, the lab is uniquely placed to translate content efficiently and reliably in a way that most newsrooms would not have the capacity for. These factors demonstrate that there are both challenges and opportunities present in regional differences and emphasises the important role of international dialogue and cooperation between journalism university educators.

In Australia, where this article has been developed, there is little evidence in the form of literature to suggest that fact-checking is being taught at the 28 universities which offer journalism programmes. However, at the Royal Melbourne Institute for Technology (RMIT) a strong focus has been placed on developing the skills of fact-checking in the journalism cohort. In 2016, fact-checking skills were introduced as a four-week module within a larger course, Journalism Technologies, with an assignment called, Fact Check Your Mother, established by lecturer Tito Ambyo (Little, 2017). In 2018, RMIT introduced Fact-Checking & Verification, an innovative subject dedicated to introducing students to issues around misinformation and disinformation, and to teaching the fact-checking and verification skills to deal with them. The subject, developed and led by Farrer, is taught in the first year of RMIT's Bachelor of Communication (Journalism) programme and, unlike the University of Hong Kong's elective coursework, it is

compulsory for all journalism students. Farrer (2021) told the UNESCO round table event; his course has a strong focus on the technical skills of verification using open-source intelligence (OSINT). In essence, this involves using publicly available information (for example google maps, databases, or reverse images searches) to either verify or debunk claims and user-generated content (such as images and video) shared on social media. Farrer argued OSINT is one of the most powerful investigative tools available to fact-checkers and journalists more broadly and represents the 'future of journalism'. He also stressed that the constantly evolving nature of these tools means the most important educational outcome of OSINT-focused education is not the knowledge of a particular system or method, rather it is a student's ability to think creatively about the meaning of information and to strategise an investigative approach accordingly.

RMIT also offers internships to students at the RMIT ABC Fact Check, a newsroom embedded in RMIT's School of Media and Communication. Fact Check is a joint publishing venture between RMIT and the national publicly funded broadcaster the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). Fact Check publishes its work via the ABC's digital news platform and as a result makes a significant contribution towards political discourse in Australia via its large national audience. As an IFCN-accredited fact-checking unit, the relationship between RMIT and the ABC is unique in the Australian context (Das 2021). It also offers valuable insights into the potential benefits afforded by such a close working relationship between educational institutions and media organisations. The benefits offered to students in this relationship are clear. As established by Kruger (2016), experiential learning offers students hands-on experience increasing their chances of employability following graduation. There are also significant benefits for the media organisation itself, as such partnerships that help to provide the significant resources required to successfully run a fact-check unit, a common challenge faced by fact checking organisations.

A search of the scant academic literature uncovered a controversial fact checking teaching project in Spain, detailed in the paper 'Fact-Checking Skills and Project-Based Learning About Infodemic and Disinformation' (Pérez-Escolara, Ordóñez-Olmedoa & Alcaide-Pulidob, 2021). The project sought to: 'rais[e] awareness of the risks of disinformation and infodemic, as well as identify the main social competencies and skills related to fact-checking that students should acquire' (n. p.). The authors emphasised the importance of teaching fact-checking as a process that begins with the preemptive stages of monitoring and spotting misinformation. Like other approaches referenced earlier, the researchers promote a practical approach to students learning. In this case, a 'Project Based Learning' (PBL) and 'thematic-experiential classes' (n. p.) approach is described by the author. In practice, this involved presenting a lecture to communications students in two Spanish universities which contained false

information about COVID-19. Students were unaware that this was occurring and were later asked to write an essay summarising the information from the lecture. After reviewing the essays, the researchers concluded that only about 14 percent of students identified the information as false and corrected it in their essays. They were also able to determine that certain types of mistruths were more readily accepted by the students. For example, students were much more likely to accept mistruths about the impact of coronavirus as opposed to misinformation around COVID-19 remedies. The study notes the project did receive ethics approval and was conducted in a controlled environment (a university). However, there are some questions raised by this approach. While the study rightfully highlights the need for students to approach sources with a critical mindset—it is unclear whether there could be risks associated with the practice of intentionally circulating misinformation, even if it is later corrected. Furthermore, prominent fact-checking methodologies, such as the one referenced within the study developed by Mantzarlis (2018), emphasise the importance of relying on trusted sources as the basis for fact-checking. In the context of the 'post-truth' information overload, it's unclear whether such an experiment could have the unintended consequence of eroding trust within students from trusted sources, in this case, their university. With these questions in mind, there is a clear rationale to develop best practice international guidelines on fact check education to alleviate any perceived or actual concerns.

Other fact-checking education

Fact-checking education does occur in a variety of ways outside of the journalism curriculum, such as internships or via short courses attached to the multiple fact-check units and journalism education providers such as the Poynter Institute.

In the United States, for example, students in general civics courses are introduced to the idea of 'lateral reading'. Brodsky et al., (2021, n. p.) offer the following definition:

> Lateral reading offers a way for students to act on awareness and scepticism fostered through media and news literacy interventions by leaving the original messages in order to investigate sources and verify claims. (Brodsky et al., 2021)

In their paper titled 'Improving college students' fact checking strategies through lateral reading instruction in a general education civics course', the authors outline a process taught to students to improve their ability to critically analyse online sources (Brodsky et al., 2021). This process is derived from Caulfield's (2017) book Web Literacy for Student Fact Checkers. This process, alongside other material, was integrated into the curriculum of first-year general education civics courses across several US universities. To evaluate students' progress,

several assignments and questionnaires were conducted before and after the content was delivered, alongside a control group who completed regular course-work. The authors concluded that students who were taught fact-checking skills were 'more likely to read laterally and accurately assess the trustworthiness of online content' than their peers in the control group.

In Australia, skills in fact-checking are also being taught outside of the context of journalism. At RMIT, this content is offered to all enrolled students regardless of their degree in the format of a short online 'micro-credential', which covers the basics of fact-checking. The course is available to all students free of cost as an optional extra. Completion of the course earns students a digital badge which can be added to resumes and shown to future prospective employers. According to Sushi Das, chief-of-staff at RMIT ABC Fact Check and developer of the credential, the course is aimed at all students in recognition of fact-checking and online verification being an in-demand skillset across many industries beyond the realm of journalism. It also accounts for the importance of news literacy, that is, an aptitude for the critical consumption of news, as compared to its production (Das, 2021).

In Hong Kong, this philosophy of teaching fact-checking outside of the journalistic context can also be found at the University of Hong Kong where Kajimoto teaches a university-wide undergraduate elective course combining news literacy and fact-checking skills. Speaking at the roundtable event, Kajimoto (2021) noted: 'What we are trying to do is to train the future news audience rather than future journalists in logical reasoning and analytical skills and effective writing . . . this is a skill that everybody should learn'. These examples demonstrate the transferability of fact-checking skills across a wide spectrum of industries and their desirability from the perspective of educators and employers alike.

Professional development

Fact-checking is being introduced to newsrooms around the world, but research has found that few journalists feel confident in their skills. When asked by First Draft, a not-for-profit research organisation focused on combatting misinformation, if they had adequate training and support to deal with misinformation and disinformation campaigns, just 14.1 percent of surveyed journalists answered 'yes'. Similar results were recorded in New Zealand and the Pacific region (Kruger, 2021). Speaking at the roundtable event, Kruger identified a particular need for ongoing support and training for journalists in this space. In response, First Draft has developed several initiatives that provide support to journalists to continuously expand their fact-checking skillset. One example is 'cross-check' a collaborative information-sharing programme bringing together 110 journalists from a range of media organisations. Journalists are provided ongoing training on how to report on misinformation effectively and ethically by First Draft's

researchers and are also invited to participate in virtual misinformation crisis simulations and information sharing on an ongoing basis via Slack—an online messaging service. Regular research output from First Draft is also disseminated through these channels. Kruger notes that it is in the absence of proper and reliable information that false narratives often flourish. This factor is most apparent in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic where rapid developments and a lack of scientific research can leave an information gap that is instead filled with misinformation. Thus, Kruger argues that fact-checkers and journalists more broadly must take on a pre-emptive role in identifying where information gaps may be forming and filling this reputable information. By identifying, sharing, and centralising information sources across journalist networks, First Draft aims to provide journalists with greater support and training in this practice.

Google News Initiative training (Google, 2022) is also very active globally, not only offering online content but in-person workshops on request to students and working journalists in local newsrooms, large and small. Such training includes, but is not limited to, advanced search skills and use of Google maps/earth platforms. These sessions focus on Google tools, although not exclusively, are vital to OSINT AND FCnV journalism. A focus on collaboration is also present in the work of Data Leads, a digital media and information initiative based in India. Presenting at the UNESCO roundtable event, Nazakat (2021) identified the problem of misinformation to be particularly acute in India where media literacy is typically low but access to the internet is rapidly expanding. In the face of this challenge, Nazakat emphasised the importance of collaboration not just among journalists—but also across experts in other professions. In 2015, Data Leads held boot camp training sessions hosting both journalists and doctors to collaboratively design more effective strategies of fact-checking and addressing medical misinformation. This project has since evolved to encompass a network of doctors spanning 30 countries and has played an important role in addressing COVID-19 related misinformation across Asia. According to Nazakat, this experience demonstrated the need for a broader and more effective fact-checking and training network in India. Supported by the Google News Initiative, the India Training Network was established in 2018 and has since trained over 1300 newsrooms and 700 universities in fact checking. Since 2018, fact checking has flourished in India going from about five fact-check organisations to many hundreds in the present day. The sheer scale of the Indian experience illustrates the huge challenges of tackling misinformation on the Asian continent but also shows how innovative professional training partnerships can provide some solutions.

In a post truth world

There's a need to address the challenge that the audience for information is

increasingly divided between those who respect and seek out fact and expertise in order to make informed decisions, and those for whom emotion is the driving force behind decision and opinion-making and their understanding of the world (particularly in the US where communities are fundamentally epistemologically different—they don't operate with a common set of facts) (Martel, Pennycook, & Rand, 2020; Ecker, Lewandowsky, Cook, et al, 2020).

Journalism—that is, 'quality' journalism that makes claims to trustworthiness based on its adherence to fact, impartiality, and transparency—is not an effective counter to emotion. (To deliberately misquote Ben Shapiro (2019): 'Feelings don't care about your facts'.) That is, the critical thinking skills and tools identified here as crucial to good journalism practice—those skills and tools argued here as essential to journalism education—must also be foundational to all education programmes delivered to all students at all levels.

Conclusion

The dangers associated with misinformation and its corrosive impact on democracy are well documented, discussed and researched. Yet, a review of the relevant literature suggests these skills are rarely specifically taught in educational facilities, and media professionals feel unprepared to deal with the challenge. Where these skills are being taught clear and tangible benefits can be identified. For students of journalism, it provides the relevant skills to prepare them to produce the in-demand product of fact-checks. For university students more broadly, it can promote the widely applicable skills of critical analysis and creative thinking. There is also evidence that innovative partnerships between big tech, universities and media organisations can provide an avenue to support the struggling news media industry.

Note

1. While this article was in review the ABC announced a plan to end its seven-year partnership with RMIT University, known as ABC RMIT Fact Check, and replace it with an in-house unit called ABC News Verify in June 2024. The announcement came after a sustained attack on the RMIT Fact Lab from sections of the conservative press in Australia over fact-checking done during the referendum on the inclusion of Indigenous people in the Australian constitution.
2. First Draft closed in 2022 and staff went to the newly formed Information Futures Lab at Brown University in the US. The APAC staff have retained the name CrossCheck (named after the collaborative programmes First Draft ran) and are affiliated with the Information Futures Lab.

Resource

RMIT's Gordon Farrer has prepared the following primer for students in his Fact Checking and Verification course. It is a work in progress that he is happy to share| Tw: @ post_fact RMIT Resource: Getting into Open Source Intelligence (OSINT)

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Alexandra Nicole Wake is an associate professor in journalism at RMIT University and the elected president of the Journalism Education and Research Association of Australia. (JERAA). She is an active leader, educator, and researcher in journalism. Dr Wake's research, teaching and practice sits at the nexus of journalism practice, journalism education, equality, diversity, and mental health. Dr Wake has taught journalism at RMIT, Deakin University, Dubai Women's College, and was a trainer on international aid projects including at the South African Broadcasting Corporation.
alex.wake@rmit.edu.au

Sonny Thomas was, at the time of writing, a researcher and reporter with RMIT ABC Fact Check focusing on the political fact-checking of Australian politics. He is also undertaking a PhD at RMIT University in conjunction with an Australian Research Council funded project assessing the extent to which election pledges are upheld and assisting in the creation of an election promise tracker covering the upcoming Australian federal political term. He now works at The Guardian.

Gordon Farrer is a lecturer at RMIT University and was the founder of the Fact Checking and Verification Course in the journalism programme. He moved from industry to the academy after more than 25 years as a journalist at a variety of organisations, including News Corp and Fairfax, where he held various editorial roles. He is an international educator and practitioner and researcher in fact-checking and verification, OSINT (Open Source Intelligence) skills.

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After the killing fields
Post-pandemic changes in journalism employment in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand

Abstract: This article continues a longitudinal national study of journalism employment in Australia and contributes to new understandings of journalism employment in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand. Results suggest a shift in the organisational landscape of the media in Australia, with an expansion of large organisations at the 'top,' and a considerable loss of small micro-ventures (largely based online) at the 'bottom.' Implications include stronger centralised editorial control at the corporate level, urbanisation and homogenisation of media producers and product, and reduced opportunities for creative entry-level roles.

Keywords: Australia, employment, journalism; journalism education, labour, media companies, New Zealand, regionalism

JOHN COKLEY
Griffith University, Queensland
PETER JOHN CHEN
University of Sydney
JOANNA BERESFORD
Central Queensland University
ALEXIS BUNDY
University of Sydney

Introduction

THIS RESEARCH extends studies undertaken in 2007 and 2013 that explored the number and concentration of journalism jobs in Australia. Written during the peak of a transition to digital production and distribution, they identified alterations for employment and the development of a long tail (Anderson, 2006) in the media landscape, tracing the rise of small and micro-media organisations employing a majority of reporters, producers and editors. This challenged a focus on big media organisations as the primary employment destination for journalism students, highlighting a break with an identity associated with a singular and ongoing employer. Under this new entrepreneurial mode, journalists have been encouraged to adopt a market-oriented identity

and expected to act like a 'company of one' (Cohen, 2015, p. 527).

This study provides a breakdown of journalism employment in Australia and introduces Aotearoa/New Zealand data from 2021. While considerable attention in recent years has focused on the loss of newspaper mastheads and employment, this analysis suggests that, in addition to these losses, other sectors have had considerably deeper contractions.

This article begins with an overview of literature about journalism employment in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand, and reflections on their implications for media workers, consumers and educators. Following a review of method, we provide an overview of the state of editorial jobs in the media marketplaces. This includes a review of media organisations and employment of editorial workers, as well as spatial, organisational, and sub-sector comparisons. The study introduces comparative figures for the Aotearoa/New Zealand market for the first time, establishing a baseline for that country.

Changes in journalism employment

There has been considerable interest in changes in journalism employment over the past 15 years. Our 2007 study identified 2,770 journalism enterprises in Australia employing 7,969 editorial staff (Cokley & Ranke, 2011) while O'Regan and Young reported the number of editorial and journalism jobs in Australia five years later, in 2011, at about 16,000 (2019). The Department of Employment projected employment growth through to 2018 (in 2014, cited in O'Donnell, 2017b) and this was partly supported by our second longitudinal study in 2013, which reported 3,346 enterprises and 11,635 editorial jobs (Cokley et al., 2015). The O'Regan and Young study included self-identified journalists or editors in paid employment in newspapers and periodicals, as well as those publishing online and in broadcasting. However, that growth seems to have generated mainly hot-house flowers. The Australian journalists' union reported that the number of journalism jobs in print and broadcasting reportedly dropped by 3,000 places between 2012 and 2017 (Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, 2018, p. 4), with around 30 percent estimated to be employed part-time, a figure mirrored globally (O'Donnell, 2017a).

O'Regan and Young produced their estimate of Australians employed in journalism through an analysis of Australian Bureau of Statistics census data, adjusting to exclude people working in related areas not involved in the direct creation of journalistic content. Their analysis (Figure 1), which includes total employment and employment as a percentage of the overall labour market, suggests that while there was an expansionist tendency late in the 20th century, there was a flattening and decline early in the 21st. Since that study, the Public Interest Journalism Initiative identified a spike in newspaper rationalisation in 2020 with the loss of print editions, closures of newsrooms and considerable service reductions, followed by another set of closures
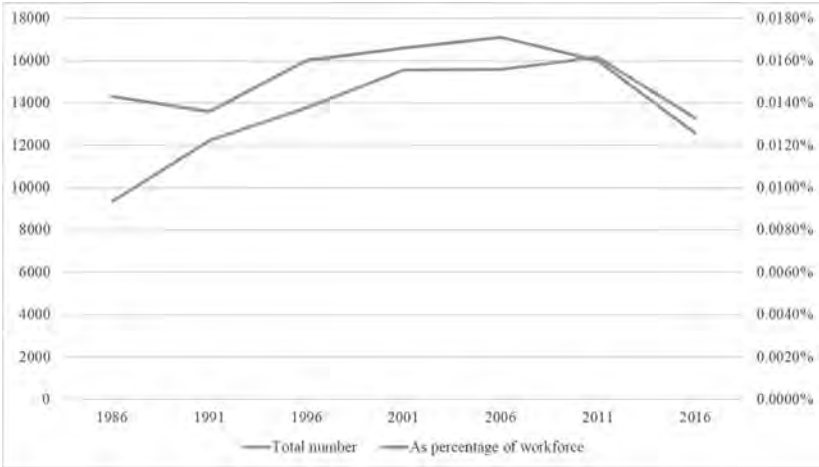
Note: Adjusted figures compiled from (O'Regan & Young, 2019)

amid the pandemic in 2021 (Dickson, 2021).

Importantly, this contains a shift in the type of work done in media organisations. O'Regan and Young conclude that the 2011-2016 loss of print journalists has not seen a direct transfer to similar types of roles in electronic media, but a shift from journalism activities into professions that employ similar skills, but which are not involved in the direct creation of news content (2019, p. 31).

The Aotearoa/New Zealand experience has similarities and differences to that of Australia. While Aotearoa/New Zealand experienced an influx of some editorial jobs with the relocation of Australian production activities in 2014 (Knight, 2013), the country followed general trends towards consolidation in the face of revenue losses associated with internet-enabled competition and the introduction of digital intermediators.

Further, trans-Tasman ownership of media organisations facilitated rationalisation through syndication. Myllylahti and Baker (2019) identified 2019 as a key year for the Aotearoa/New Zealand media landscape, with changes in ownership of commercial television and within public broadcasting, reporting in 2020 the loss of 637 media jobs (Myllylahti, 2020, p. 23). The pandemic placed considerable pressure on Aotearoa/New Zealand media organisations, including considerable rationalisations of employment in newspapers and the withdrawal of Bauer Media NZ from the magazine market (Treadwell, 2020, p. 34). This marked a low point for editorial employment in that country, presenting the loss of many hundreds of workers in the print sector at a time when public interest journalism was critical. During the pandemic the national government introduced a NZ$50 million temporary direct industry support package, as well as providing

media workers access to the generalised employment subsidy scheme (Hope, 2020). These temporary interventions led to some employment creation in 2021 (Hope et al., 2021). Further, a number of Bauer titles were acquired by an Australian investment company and spared the axe, and Stuff (the publisher of both significant online and paper news) was acquired by its CEO from its Australian owner Nine, returning the company to domestic ownership (Robie, 2024).

Trends in employment and practice

An important trend has been the creation of a youthful workforce that increasingly works freelance (O'Donnell, 2017a). According to Molloy and Bromley (2009, p. 79) this has been associated with digital industry restructuring. As 'digital first' has now become the standard production process for most media organisations, this reflects a change in the logic of production and the type of skillset valued by employers (O'Donnell, 2017b).

While this talks of a vibrant workforce with new opportunities, O'Donnell describes many of these jobs as 'less than ideal,' noting Australian industry surveys 'identify recurring concerns about lower-paid, non-union younger journalists displacing older, higher-paid journalists' (2017a). A 2015 Aotearoa/New Zealand study associated the digital transition with positive impacts on skilling, but also increased time pressures and long hours, with concerns about professional standards (Hollings et al., 2016). This shift in employment affects informal power over editorial processes (Neilson, 2020, pp. 126-7). The loss of continuing and full-time employment in journalism has seen a corresponding shift to insecure and freelance work, which O'Donnell sees as associated with 'little bargaining power to negotiate with employers on working conditions or workplace change' (2018, p. 26; see also Brady, 2022).

Yet optimism continues. Following the 2013 study, Cokley et al. identified the persistence of a long tail in Australian media production organisations: a head comprised of a small number of quite large organisations and a big group of quite small organisations (under ten editorial staff) representing most media organisations and employment. These were mainly magazines and regional newspapers in 2007, but the 2013 study showed a considerable rationalisation of magazines and a ten-fold expansion of online-only publications.

This reflects the development of 'entrepreneurial journalism' (Cohen, 2015) that has relied on low-cost distribution, aimed at producing sustainable, focused ventures. On one hand, this type of 'venture labour' (Neff, 2012) permits a greater diversity of voices, news agendas and market segments to be serviced (Kailahi, 2009), but alternatively increases the exposure of editorial practices to market demands and spreads precarity (Cokley, 2019).

Implications for democratic practices

The nature of the media industry in a political jurisdiction gives rise to functionalist considerations of the degree of public service the sector provides. Ownership presents a variety of implications for media diversity and representativeness, including the potential share of voice that individual media proprietors may have (either their agenda setting influence or the role that content syndication plays in message homogenisation), what parts of the community are employed and represented through the media, and concerns about foreign ownership.

In some ways, the two nations have a considerably different pattern of ownership of media organisations. Australia has maintained a media policy which notionally aims to keep the industry 'distinctly Australian' (O'Donnell, 2017b), with new transparency requirements developed in 2018 including a register of foreign ownership. This policy preference aside, the dominance of News Corporation in the Australian market illustrates how powerful media actors can work around these types of rules (Papandrea & Tiffen, 2016). Both nations have seen deregulation policies that have been associated with industry consolidation. While Australia is remarkable for the degree of ownership concentration that has developed, Aotearoa/New Zealand retains considerable independent media. However, the practical impact of this is modest in areas of key media policy interest, such as news and current affairs distribution. Australia is dominated by News Corporation and the Nine group (with the public broadcaster, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, significant in the share of voice online and in radio). Aotearoa New Zealand is dominated by two companies (Stuff and NZME; Loan et al., 2021), with the public broadcasters (Radio NZ and TVNZ) similarly significant in news and current affairs in that country (with the 2020 proposed merger of these organisations called off in early 2023). As Loan et al. observe, Aotearoa/New Zealand has three overlapping 'near duopolies' in print, radio and television, with a paid television monopoly (p. 65). Overall, this produces a type of ownership concentration that Gaber and Tiffen identify as extreme, describing Australia's media system as more like China or Egypt than most democratic nations (2018, p. 34).

Agenda concentration is not simply an ownership issue, but can be found in concerns about lack of descriptive representation of the extent to which the population of journalists and editors looks like the markets they service—and the loss of context relevant to the two nations' comparatively sparsely populated regional areas. The physically large landmass of Australia means ownership concentration is also associated with geographical concentration. As a result, 'Sydney is the undisputed "news capital" of Australia.' (O'Donnell, 2017b). Wholesale closure of local newspapers, and increased syndication of content feeds concerns about the urbanisation of production, however the city focus of journalism might begin before this, with journalism training dominated by urban institutions.

Empirically, this loss of local news directly fails to meet the preferences of Australian news consumers, who rate local news as one of the most important (Watkins et al., 2017, p.9). As Park et al. found in their 2020 survey of Australian media consumers, local news sources are preferred for information about local events (p. 10) —a finding that recognises the importance of local knowledge and engagement in accurately reporting local stories. In Aotearoa New Zealand, de Bonnaire et al. report strong public support for local reporting (2019, pp. 64-5). Further, Bowd has argued that local media organisations are important in fostering social capital—valuable community connection that builds resilience—and regional identity (2011). Writing about hyperlocal journalism in Aotearoa New Zealand, Downman and Murray identify the importance of local journalism in bonding rural and urban communities (2020, p. 255).

Locality is not the only representation issue facing journalism. *The Who Gets to Tell Australian Stories?* report provides a stark picture of the under-representation of cultural diversity in television news and current affairs in Australia today. Examining presenters, commentators and reporters on free-to-air television, the researchers note that only six per cent had either an Indigenous or non-European background, lagging considerably behind the social diversity of the society for which they speak. This problem is accentuated when looking at editorial decision makers in these institutions, with the report identifying no women or people from non-Anglo-Celtic backgrounds in these roles in free-to-air television national news (Arvanitakis et al., 2020). After the publication of the report, in 2020 the public broadcaster SBS appointed a woman as director news and current affairs.

Similar issues have been identified in the New Zealand context, with writers like Kailahi (2009), Robie (2009) and Rahman (2022) highlighting the needs of emerging communities to fund representation and presence in the New Zealand media ecosystem. On this front, Loan et al. (2021) have stated that 'There is a lack of diversity within newsrooms, particularly with respect to Māori, Pasifika and Asian journalists' (p.8).

Research method

We employed content analysis. Content analysis represents a range of approaches, with our application focused on the 'objective, systematic and quantitative description of manifest content' (Berelson, 1952, p. 18). The 2007 data set was produced from entries contained within that year's edition of the Margaret Gee's *Australian Media Guide*. The 2013 data set was drawn from the then last quarter edition of that year's guide. The current dataset, representing 2021, was drawn from the 118th print edition of the guide, produced in April, with the unit of analysis being media enterprises.

Margaret Gee's is produced in print and online. In production for over 33

years, it is a popular reference used by advertising and public relations practitioners (Sullivan, 2011, p. 22). As such, it remains the best indicator of the media business in Australia, listing virtually all newspapers, magazines, broadcasters, agencies, speciality publications and online media in Australia (Baverstock & Bowen, 2019, p. 252). In most cases it provides a list of journalists, producers and other staff at each enterprise, making it a very useful tool in tracking changes in employment within the media sector. Significantly, it subclassifies organisations into a range of industry segments divided by media form and genre, which permits a level of analysis that is denied us in census-based studies of individuals. Recently, the Guide included Aotearoa/New Zealand, providing an opportunity for comparative analysis for the first time.

A weakness of the use of the Guide compared with census-based studies, however, is its focus on formal employment, with freelancers and unlisted micro ventures generally not included. These limitations aside, it remains a useful object of study, being recently employed in studies of medical and health journalists (Furlan, 2016) and sports journalists (English, 2019).

To capture data from the Guide, two coders worked to systematically digitise all entries. Each entry included the publication name, website address, frequency of publication, classification category, head office location, as well as the names, titles and contact information for editorial and other staff, such as management and advertising contacts. This process extended beyond simply the digitisation of information contained within the *Guide*, as individual staff entries were assessed to determine whether they could be classified as content producers. This was defined in the study codebook, but expansively included all those staff engaged in the production of content, such as conventional journalists, but also other writers, photographers and videographers, and editorial workers. These are referred to using the nomenclature of 'editorial staff'. Thus, while a degree of interpretation was required, the approach remains strongly within the basic content analysis approach (Drisko & Maschi, 2015). Each organisation was assigned, at minimum, one editorial staff member.

Following data entry, four coders cross-coded 238 entries to ascertain Intercoder Reliability Measures. 95.8 percent of categorical data was entered correctly. The editorial staff interval data demonstrated a 0.929 Krippendorff's alpha, a high degree of agreement in the coding of the primary unit of interest: editorial staff engaged in non-advertising content production.

Findings

The analysis provides overall figures for the number of media organisations and their editorial employees in Australia (2,299 organisations with 13,356 editorial staff) and Aotearoa/New Zealand (326 and 1,703). There has been a considerable rationalisation in Australia which has seen the number of unique organisations (rising 20 percent

during 2007-2013) contracting considerably during the period 2013-2021 (contracting by 31 percent) with almost one in three media organisations closing or consolidated. While total employment grew in our analysis during this period, it is likely that the gap in data collection excludes an actual peak between 2013-2016, given the analysis of O'Regan and Young. In 2013-2021, the areas of major organisational contraction have been multicultural press (see below), news agencies (contracting 40 percent) and magazines (contracting 39 percent). Organisations that survived this period have become larger employers on average, indicating a mix of consolidation and market expansion. To provide an estimate of total employment, factoring in that freelancers represent 25 percent of jobs, editorial workers are approximately 16,695 in Australia at the end of 2021 (2,129 for Aotearoa/New Zealand). Note that table results are presented against the data captured from the Guide only.

Geographical distribution of media jobs

Given concerns about urbanisation because of consolidation, the disproportionate loss of regional newspapers and descriptive representation of content producers in the media, location data contained within the Guide permits an understanding of the spatial distribution of media organisations and editorial workers.

Using a spatial analysis focusing on 'remoteness' (Table 1, Australia) and 'urban accessibility' (Table 2, Aotearoa/New Zealand) we provide a breakdown of both organisational and editorial staff numbers against the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) five remoteness bands and Statistics New Zealand Urban Accessibility Indicator. These concepts reflect access to services and the lived experiences of residents. In the tables, we can see how organisations and editorial staff are disproportionately located in dense urban areas, while smaller urban and rural hinterlands are underrepresented by media organisations and workers

Table 1: Number of unique organisation entries in Australia							
	Organisations	Orgs. %	Editorial staff	Editorial staff %	Population %	Orgs. diff.	Editorial staff diff.
Major Cities	1,566	68.414	10,964	82.263	72.035	-3.621	10.228
Inner Regional	286	12.495	994	7.458	17.787	-5.292	-10.329
Outer Regional	308	13.456	991	7.435	8.212	5.244	-0.776
Remote	68	2.971	176	1.321	1.165	1.806	0.155
Very Remote	61	2.665	203	1.523	0.802	1.863	0.721
Total	2,289	100	13,328	100	100		

Note: By ABS measure of remoteness.

Table 2: Number of unique organisation entries in Aotearoa NZ							
	Organi-sations	Orgs. %	Editorial staff	Editorial staff %	Popula-tion %	Orgs. diff.	Editorial staff diff.
Major urban area	175	55.031	995	59.121	51.393	3.638	7.727
Large urban area	88	27.673	492	29.234	13.996	13.677	15.238
Medium urban area	4	1.258	12	0.713	8.520	-7.262	-7.807
High urban accessibility	0	0.000	0	0.000	4.172	-4.172	-4.172
Medium urban accessibility	8	2.516	22	1.307	7.881	-5.365	-6.574
Low urban accessibility	36	11.321	138	8.200	9.519	1.801	-1.320
Remote	3	0.943	11	0.654	3.776	-2.833	-3.123
Very remote	1	0.314	1	0.059	0.732	-0.417	-0.672
Inland water	0	0.000	0	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Inlet	3	0.943	12	0.713	0.009	0.934	0.704
Oceanic	0	0.000	0	0.000	0.001	-0.001	-0.001
Total	318	100	1683	100	100		

Note: By Statistics NZ Urban.

on a per capita basis. This might reflect the way that media organisations see inner rural and urban hinterlands as 'accessible' to larger city-based journalists.

In Australia, newspaper and radio organisations run counter to the tendency towards urbanisation when looking at mastheads. Again, however, regional organisations in this category are smaller in terms of employees comparatively. Other media forms are concentrated in major Australian cities. Focusing on newspapers, their low employee numbers likely reflect the retention of online only regional mastheads during the considerable rationalisation by News Limited in 2020.

Organisational characteristics

The dataset allows the comparative size of organisations to be identified where we can see that the larger country has larger media organisations overall (maximum size 330 editorial staff compared with 172 in Aotearoa New Zealand), but that the average size of media organisations in both nations is comparatively the same (mean of 5.8 in Australia compared with 5.2 in Aotearoa New Zealand). This talks to the established 'long tail' effect with about 90 percent of organisations in both

Table 3: Australian edditorial staff						
	2007 study	2013 study	2007-2013 growth %	2021 study	2021 total %	2012-2021 growth%
Total media outlets	2,770	3,346	20.794	2299	100.000	-31.291
Outlets employing >/=10 editorial staff	99	175	76.767	245	10.657	40.000
Outlets employing <10 editorial staff	2,357	3,171	34.535	2054	89.343	-35.225
Outlets classed as micro (1 or 2)	N.R.	2,454	NA	1127	49.021	-54.075
Smaller excluding micro	N.R.	717	NA	927	40.322	29.289
Staff in larger news-rooms (>10)	3,407	5,531	62.342	8869	66.405	60.351
Staff in smaller newsroom (<10)	4,560	6,104	33.859	4487	33.595	-26.491
Staff in micro news-rooms	N.R.	2,981	NA	1127	8.438	-62.194
Smaller excluding micro	N.R.	3123	NA	3360	25.157	7.589
Total editorial staff	7,967	11,635	46.039	13356	100.000	14.792

Note: By organisational size (with comparisons) N.R. = not recorded.

jurisdictions having fewer than 10 editorial workers. In Australia, between 2013 and 2021, the number of organisations with 10 or more editorial workers doubled. As illustrated in Table 3, this area of the media sector is the only one that has demonstrated growth, with small and micro organisations (those with only one or two employees) in decline. Significantly given the interest in entrepreneurial journalism, the loss of micro-ventures is a significant finding and shows where the considerable loss of employment has occurred amidst the general reporting focus that has tended to emphasise cuts within the largest media organisations. Table 4 provides an Aotearoa/New Zealand comparator with the 2021 Australian figures, lacking data from previous years, but the distribution of organisation size is remarkably similar in the two nations.

Big media
Media organisations in Australia that have 50 or more editorial staff have grown considerably over the past eight years, with 41 of these, up from 25. Notable entries are Australian Associated Press news bureau service (relaunched with a new ownership structure in 2020), *The Guardian Australia* (established in 2013), and the *Daily Mail Australia* (2013). Demonstrating consolidation among

Table 4: Aotearoa/New Zealand edditorial staff 2021			
	2021 Study	Total %	Comparison with Australia
Total media outlets	326	100.000	
Outlets employing >10 editorial staff	33	10.123	-0.534
Outlets employing <10 editorial staff	293	89.877	0.534
Outlets classed as micro (1 or 2)	163	50.000	0.979
Smaller excluding micro	130	39.877	-0.445
Staff in larger newsrooms (>10)	1140	66.941	0.536
Staff in smaller newsrooms (<10)	563	33.059	-0.536
Staff in micro newsrooms	163	9.571	1.133
Smaller excluding micro	400	23.488	-1.669
Total editorial staff	1703	100.000	

Note: By organisational size.

domestic organisations (Table 5), those that were also listed in 2013 have grown by 30 editorial staff on average over the preceding analysis.

Aotearoa/New Zealand has comparatively fewer big media organisations with 50 or more editorial staff (five, in descending order: *New Zealand Herald,* RNZ National, TVNZ, Stuff and Newshub), with the public broadcasters making up most employment.

Multicultural media

Since the last study there has been a considerable loss of media organisations that service multi-cultural communities in Australia. Of those identified in 2013, only half the number remained in 2021. Only Arabic reading communities saw an increase during the past eight years. Aotearoa New Zealand lacks an Arabic press, which might have helped with representation of Muslim communities in the Aotearoa/New Zealand media, both before and after the Christchurch Mosque terror attack in 2019 (Rahman, 2022).

In 2016, 1.4 percent of the Australian population used a language other than English at home. Consolidation has occurred in the Chinese newspaper marketplace, and has lost longstanding mastheads, such as the *Sing Tao Daily* in 2020 (established 1982). The Chinese newspaper industry in Australia is particularly interesting, given concerns about influence from the Chinese Government over local media outlets, and reports that Australian Chinese-language outlets critical of

Table 5: Australian big media workplaces 2013 & 2021						
Rank	2013 Rank	Move- ment	Organisation	2013 staff	New in list	2021 staff
1	5	4	The Sydney Morning Herald	167		330
2	4	2	The Australian	191		259
3	1	-2	The Age	292		247
4	13	9	Channel 9	77		239
5			ABC News		Yes	230
6			ABC TV		Yes	220
7			Channel 7		Yes	211
8			ABC		Yes	180
9	12	3	ABC Radio National	87		179
10	7	-3	Australian Financial Review	135		154
11	3	-8	Herald Sun	194		136
12			Channel 10		Yes	129
13	9	-4	The Daily Telegraph	112		121
14	25	11	The Advertiser	50		113
15	10	-5	The West Australian	105		109
16			Sky News Australia		Yes	106
17			The Guardian Australia		Yes	93
18	6	-12	The Courier-Mail	136		91
19	15	-4	SBS TV	67		90
19			2GB		Yes	90
20			news.com.au		Yes	84
21	16	-6	3AW	64		83
22			ABC Radio Sydney		Yes	78
23			Channel 9 - Sydney News		Yes	78
24			ABC Radio Melbourne		Yes	76
25			Fox Sports		Yes	71
26			The Sun-Herald		Yes	67
27			SBS Radio Sydney		Yes	65
28	23	-6	The Canberra Times	52		64
29			Australian Associated Press		Yes	63
30			ABC News Melbourne		Yes	61
31			Channel 9 - Brisbane News		Yes	60
32			triple j		Yes	59
33			The Sunday Age		Yes	58
34			Daily Mail Australia		Yes	57
35			ABC News Brisbane		Yes	54
36			Newcastle Herald		Yes	53
36			SBS Radio Melbourne		Yes	53
37	22	-16	Channel 9 - Melbourne News	52		52
38			ABC Regional Radio Network		Yes	51
39	17	-23	Channel 7 - Brisbane News	58		50

Note: With 50 or more editorial employees.

the Chinese Communist Party have been starved of advertising revenue. (Joske et al., 2020, p. 19). As Chinese dialects are the most spoken non-English community languages, a larger Chinese language market could be expected in Australia. While diasporic communities are increasingly able to access media from their country of origin online (Goirizelaia & Berriochoa, 2019, pp. 109-15), these sources do not provide information of relevance to migrant communities such as local political news or emergency information.

Discussion

Since the previous iteration of this study, the media sector in Australia appears to have expanded to a peak and now begun a process of contraction. This is felt at the organisational level, with fewer organisations recorded compared with employment. This demonstrates both consolidation among larger media ventures, but also the loss of micro-ventures. As comparative data for Aotearoa/New Zealand is not available, it is uncertain whether this specific tendency has occurred there, but that market has seen consolidation over the past decade to some degree and some of the structural drivers around revenue are the same.

The loss of large numbers of micro-ventures since 2013 is of particular importance, not only in the loss of absolute numbers of workers, but also in the way the finding informs public policy. During 2020-2021 debates about the Australian News Media Bargaining Code—a set of laws that facilitated news organisations gaining compensation for the loss of revenue to digital platforms—focused on questions about sustainability and the relative power of media organisations in relation to media platform providers. The aftermath of the temporary refusal to supply by Facebook saw major news organisations striking profit-sharing arrangements with the technology companies; however, small ventures have been excluded. Policy makers will need to consider how mechanisms such as the bargaining code can be practically refined to ensure the sustainability of these ventures, given they tend to be purely online-only and lack capacity for direct negotiations with platform providers.

To some extent, this might also address issues associated with the under-supply of media servicing ethnic and linguistic minorities. On the one hand, the contraction of multi-cultural presses appears to be a function of the accessibility of home-nation media to diaspora communities, and this appears to be disproportionally affecting established communities who are likely to have better access to English language news than religious, national and linguistic communities that are now more highly represented in migration numbers and likely to benefit from specialised local language media in the processes of acclimatisation and adjustment. The loss of established multicultural media organisations present concerns, however, in terms of descriptive representational characteristics of the media system overall.

Conclusion

Over the past decade, considerable concerns have been expressed for the state of journalism in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand, with interrelated pressures from online media, as well as rationalisation and consolidation within media organisations seen as having a considerable downward pressure on employment opportunities.

Since the previous study, the journalism employment market in Australia has contracted, with the loss of many mastheads and media organisations. Where employment in major outlets has risen over the previous study, we estimate a decline of a peak between studies. Further, there are questions about the quality of personnel and skills, and trends have been uneven across the sector. Small operations remain under pressure; magazines and multicultural presses are the most likely to have shut. Centrally, this article reports that there has been a shift in the organisational landscape of the media in Australia, with the expansion of large organisations at the top and a considerable loss of micro-ventures. This has exacerbated tendencies in the media landscape: strong centralised editorial control at the corporate level; urbanisation and homogenisation of media producers and product; and reduced opportunities for creative entry-level roles, worker autonomy, and the industrial capacity of media workers. Thus, while a long tail continues to exist, it is shortening. The analysis concludes that the long-predicted consolidation in the media sector has continued. It would require new interventions by policy makers and tertiary educators to make a change by supporting innovative, smaller media ventures and equipping their employees and graduates better to exploit all opportunities.

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Dr John Cokley is an adjunct associate professor in the School of Humanities, Languages and Social Science, Griffith University, and in the Griffith Business School. His latest work, published in 2024 in the Handbook of Applied Journalism: Theory and Practice *from Spring* Nature*, proposes a radical new theory of journalism.*
j.cokley@griffith.edu.au

Dr Peter John Chen is a senior lecturer in the Discipline of Government and International Relations at the University of Sydney.
peter.chen@sydney.edu.au

Joanna Beresford is currently a PhD candidate and research assistant at Central Queensland University School of Education and The Arts.
joanna.beresford@cqumail.com

Alexis Bundy is a prize-winning graduate of the University of Sydney, holding a Bachelor of Arts with majors in Politics and American Studies. She has participated in journalism programmes such as the School of the New York Times.
abun7694@uni.sydney.edu.au

When safe is not enough
An exploration of improving guidelines on reporting mental illness and suicide

Abstract: Mental illness, coping, and suicide-related stigma are influenced by social discourse. Legacy, digital and social media create and amplify existing attitudes and contribute to mindsets and behaviour, including suicidality. While there have been guidelines for reporting suicide and related constructs internationally for several decades, the focus has been on safe language and word choices that highlight problems. However, these guidelines have not prevented deaths by suicide and have contributed to conflating the prevalence of catastrophising normal unpleasant emotions and social problems as mental illness. With calls in government reviews and by consumers for a greater focus on consumer-centred suicide prevention and COVID-19 highlighting the importance of biopsychosocial stressors to feelings, consideration of other approaches to and inclusions in media guidelines are timely and prudent. In this paper, we explored how a consumer-centred coping approach would augment existing media guidelines to influence community attitudes and behaviours in a way that contributes to health and wellbeing, as well as suicide prevention. Thirteen guidelines are provided with examples for each to guide changes in practice. By adopting these guidelines, journalistic outputs are more likely to be consistent with contemporary understandings of health and wellbeing.

Keywords: Australia, health reporting, media, mental illness, suicide, mental health, New Zealand

JANE STEPHENS
University of the Sunshine Coast
HELEN STALLMAN
Clinical psychologist

WORDS affect how people feel, think, and behave. There is a bidirectional relationship between language and the brain, whereby the brain produces language, and words are perceived and processed by the brain to be understood (Perlovsky & Sakai, 2014). Behaviour is subsequently governed by thinking and emotions (Beck, 1975). News media—legacy, digital, and social—reflect and influence thinking and behaviour around mental illness and suicide. An in-depth analysis of 163 studies of coverage of suicide in Australia found a strong relationship between news media and subsequent suicidal

behaviour that was greater for newspaper coverage than television news (Pirkis, et. al., 2018). This article will explore psychological concepts and contemporary science to provide a rationale and suggestions for media guidelines to guide accurate, non-stigmatising and helpful reporting around mental illness and suicidality.

There have been concerted efforts in Western cultures throughout the 21st century to normalise psychopathology to improve the experience and care of people with mental illnesses. In parallel with community change, media language has changed over time to reflect social agendas and sometimes science (Herring, 2003). The names of mental illnesses, for example, Major Depressive Disorder and Generalised Anxiety Disorder, have been replaced in the media with generic terms anxiety and depression—words that mean emotion and mood—to represent mental illness or coping (see examples under Practice Guidelines section). Similarly, the term mental illness has been replaced with its antonym 'mental health' or the generic 'mental health problems' or the oxymoron mental ill-health (Rizmal, 2022) with the breadth of meaning so broad—encompassing everything from unpleasant emotions, distress, overwhelming distress, and mental illness—as to become meaningless. Similarly, over several decades the perception of the word suicide and the communication of suicide has changed from immorality (suicide as a sin) and a criminal concept (e.g., committed suicide) towards a cause of death. In addition, word choices and media coverage internationally has been a focus for change that would be the catalyst for a reduction in lives lost (Everymind, 2022).

News media link to public attitudes and behaviour

Media reporting of suicide is broadly believed to increase the rate of suicidal behaviour in people who have suicidal thoughts or are bereaved after the death of someone by suicide if details of the death are published. Additionally, media reporting of deaths by suicide can also raise awareness of suicide methods which vulnerable people might not previously have considered. This is more problematic if coverage is extensive, prominent, sensationalist and/or explicitly describes the method or location of death (Niederkrotenthaler, et. al., 2020; Pirkis, Burgess & Francis, 2007; Niederkrotenthaler, et. al., 2012). The negative impact of certain reporting on suicide also appears to be pronounced in teenagers and young adults, a group that may be more susceptible to social learning (Shoval, et. al., 2005; Gould, et. al., 2014).

Social media, and the internet generally, is an under-researched area in its influence on suicidal ideation and behaviour. This is despite its broad reach and essentially unregulated content and the explicit and directive nature of the accessible material. Early studies suggested social media has a complex and multifaceted relationship with suicide behaviour (Luxton, June & Fairall, 2012). Social networking sites are a frequent source of information about suicide and

some discussion fora appear to be associated with increases in suicidal ideation (Dunlop, More & Romer, 2011). Although there have been some suggestions in the media of a link between social networking and clusters of deaths by suicide, further research is needed to confirm a causative link to clusters of deaths by suicide in youths (Pirkis, et. al., 2009; Robertson, et. al., 2012). Meta-analytic reviews on the effects of reporting of suicide generally are lacking, with most focused on reporting deaths by suicide of celebrities. These studies typically use broad search terms to identify media reports (e.g., 'suicide' or various suicide methods) and correlate time frames of deaths (Niederkrotenthaler, et. al., 2020). Several studies have found suicide reporting in news media has a greater impact on subsequent deaths by suicide in the general population for deaths by celebrities (Ueda, Mori & Matsubarashi, 2014; Schäfer & Quiring, 2015; Suh, Chang & Kim, 2015, Niederkrotenthaler, et. al., 2020; Niederkrotenthaler, et. al., 2012). It was noted that when actor Robin Williams died by suicide in 2014 for example and news media in the United States reported the method used, suicide-related deaths in the ensuing four months in the US increased by 9.85 percent (Fink, Santaelle-Tenorio & Keys, 2018). The increase was greatest among men aged 30-44. Similar findings have been noted elsewhere (Lee, et. al., 2014; Tousignant, et. al., 2005; Yip, et. al., 2006; (Niederkrotenthaler, et. al., 2020).

Guidance for journalists and communications experts

The impact of reporting on subsequent suicidal behaviour provided a catalyst for the development of reporting guidelines that protect the public from harm (Mindframe, 2022b). Existing guidelines have been developed internationally including by Mindframe in Australia (Mindframe 2022a), Reporting on Suicide in the US (Reporting on Suicide, 2020), the government guide on reporting suicide (NZMoH, 2011) and the Coroners Act (Coroners Act 2006 (NZ) s. 71) in New Zealand and the Samaritans in the United Kingdom (Samaritans, 2020). Advice common to all these guidelines includes avoiding inadvertently glorifying suicide, providing information about where to get support, and avoiding detailed descriptions of suicide methodology and repetition. They advocate that reporting should not sensationalise, glamourise or trivialise suicide, that deaths by suicide should only be included when they are in the public interest, the family has consented to the disclosure and details of the specific method of suicide and location of the death are omitted. Stories about a death by suicide should not be placed on the front page, nor should the word 'suicide' appear in the headline. Photographs or dramatic visuals should not be used, and particular care should be taken when reporting deaths by suicide by celebrities. Suicide and/or mental illness can be communicated and stigmatised by the media even when it is not mentioned. This occurs when the cause of death is omitted when it would be expected by the reader and when suicide support helplines are listed

at the end of the article or in a side panel.

Australian youth mental health researchers and advocates Orygen released world-first guidelines in 2018—developed using the expert consensus methodology Delphi technique—that were aimed to help young people communicate safely online about suicide (Robinson, et. al., 2018). The guidelines have since been adapted and translated into 11 languages.

In 2018, a comprehensive review of 168 studies of news media found presentations of suicide in news and information media could influence copycat acts in particular circumstances (Pirkis, et. al., 2018). The review considered the association of media coverage of suicide with a contemporaneous increase or decrease in deaths by suicide including the dose-response effect.

Despite the longevity of the societal focus on suicide prevention, the involvement of authorities in guideline development and shifts in media approaches, there is no evidence that specifically worded media reporting contributes to fewer deaths by suicide (Mindframe, 2022b). In Australia, for example, where there have been media guidelines for 25 years, the suicide rate has remained mostly within the 95 percent confidence interval of the mean for the past 100 years ($M = 12.42$, $SD = 1.83$ per 100,000 people; ABS data), showing no impact of population safe reporting practices. We suggest, therefore, that there is an opportunity for further change and that a broader understanding of suicidality and mental illness may better inform healthy media communication.

Words and the appetite for change

Media has an important role in educating the public about health and social issues, raising awareness about illness and unhealthy coping—including suicidality—and providing information about treatment providers. The propensity in the media to use words that indicate emotion as an illness can confuse and dilute understanding (Stallman, 2018). When a diagnosed illness is involved, media's simplification affects readers' understanding of illness and can feed public misunderstanding. One study highlights this point. A text analysis of news reports in Australian newspapers and their associated websites over 12 months found the term 'depression' was used 10,851 times, but 'Major Depressive Disorder' was used only 238 times. 'Anxiety' appeared 18,860 times but the correct term 'Generalised Anxiety Disorder' appeared 56 times. Medical associations (e.g., Royal Australians and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists) have also expressed the need for words to be considered and empowering (RANZCP, 2021).

Understanding unpleasant emotions, coping and mental illness

For words to be chosen with consideration, a shared understanding of meaning is a pre-requisite. In this section we will discuss the meaning of common words used in the reporting of mental illness and suicide.

Despite the widespread use of the terms 'mental health' and 'mental health problems' in the media and the general population, 'mental health' is not separate from the health of the rest of the body. There is no mind/body dichotomy. Mind functioning (i.e., emotions, thoughts, initiation of behaviour) is a combination of biology, functioning of the whole body, health behaviours (e.g., sleep, nutrition, physical activity), and social and physical environments (Table 1).

Emotions—how we feel—are normal and important human experiences that contribute to survival. Some are pleasant (e.g., happy, excited, love): people enjoy them and try to maintain them. Others are unpleasant (e.g., frustration, anger, fear): people usually want to reduce those as soon as possible. Unpleasant emotions, however, are the most helpful to humans because they alert us to potential harm and guide behaviour to avert harm and ensure survival. Worry, for example, helps us plan and act to minimise risks in the future. Guilt tells us we have harmed someone, guiding us to make amends. Sadness tells us we have lost something important to us. Experiencing unpleasant emotions is not synonymous with illness. Unpleasant emotions can be caused by problems in one or more domains of health and wellbeing.

Coping refers to any strategy used to reduce unpleasant emotions because, although normal, they are unwanted (Stallman, 2020). All coping strategies effectively reduce distress in the short term; however, strategies can be categorised as healthy or unhealthy depending on the likelihood of additional adverse consequences for the self and/or others. The categories of healthy and unhealthy coping strategies are shown in Figure 1. Coping strategies are used from low intensity (self-soothing) through to high intensity (professional help-seeking) and low harm (e.g., negative self-talk) to high harm (suicidality) (Stallman & Allen,

Table 1: Domains and componenets of health and wellbeing	
Domains	Components
Healthy environments	Physical, social, cultural, economic
Developmental competencies	Healthy identity, emotional and behavioural regulation, interpersonal skills, problem-solving skills
Sense of belonging	Valued, respected, needed
Health behaviours	Sleep, nutrition, exercise
Coping	Adequate social, and professional support to supplement personal healthy coping strategies
Resilience	Perception of innate resilience
Treatment of illness	Early, effective treatment of illness.

Source: Stallman, 2018; 2020

2021). Unhealthy coping strategies are used when healthy coping strategies are overwhelmed and inadequate to reduce distress, rather than in the absence of healthy coping strategies (Stallman, et. al., 2021). While some unhealthy coping strategies can be symptoms of mental illnesses, they alone do not indicate mental illness, but rather overwhelming distress. Domestic violence, for example, can result in chronic hypervigilance, worry and sadness with the resultant use of unhealthy coping strategies (e.g., emotional eating, alcohol, suicidality). However, the cause is not a psychiatric illness, but a normal response to an unhealthy social environment, which requires a social intervention to provide support and safety rather than psychotherapy or pharmacotherapy. A psychiatric illness cannot be inferred from behaviour, but is diagnosed using a psychological assessment of thoughts, feelings and behaviour and the biopsychosocial determinants of health and wellbeing. During COVID-19 we have seen an increase in calls for mental health support, but little demand to attend to arguably more difficult interventions needed for the biopsychosocial needs that are always prevalent in our community but were highlighted during COVID-19 (e.g., employment, housing, safe home environments, social connectedness).

Mental or psychiatric illness refers to any condition that has one or more problems in cognition, overwhelming emotions, harmful behaviour, and/or impaired functioning (APA, 2022 #14). Mental illnesses can only be diagnosed by a health professional with training and experience in mental illness, and symptoms are defined separately by the World Health Organization in the International Classification of Diseases (2019) and the American Psychiatric Society in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (2022). As established earlier, emotions and coping can easily be misinterpreted as a mental illness by the general population or the media or by using brief self-reporting measures of emotions or coping behaviours. As proper nouns, the names of mental illnesses

Figure 1: Coping continuum (Stallman, 2018)
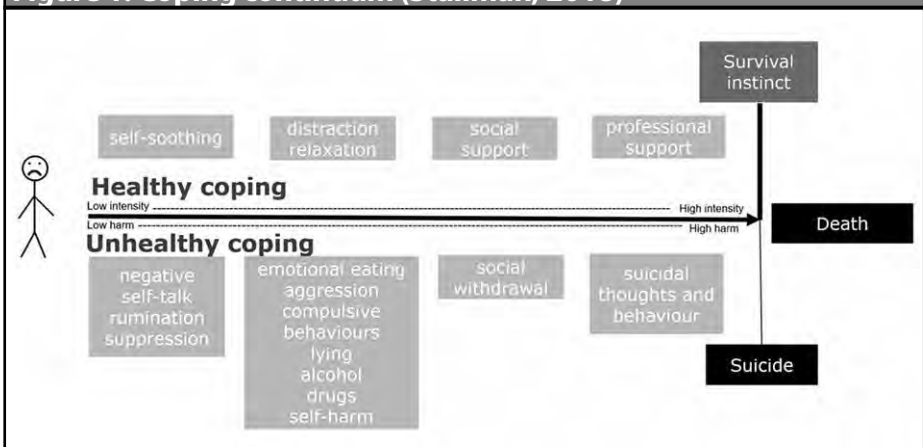
are distinguished from emotions in writing by having capital letters.

Care Collaborate Connect is a framework to think about the needs of people who are distressed, without assuming the cause of distress (Stallman, 2018; 2019). People need to be cared about, have collaborative care to cope and be connected with additional support whenever they are overwhelmed so they do not need to use unhealthy coping strategies to feel better. Care Collaborate Connect directs the helper (family, friends, colleagues, strangers, counsellors, health professionals) to meet the person's immediate needs for support rather than inferring illness. This framework provides words for reporting needs for distress and service provision in the community.

Postvention is a term used to mean interventions for people bereaved after someone dies by suicide. This stigmatises those bereaved after a death by suicide as being different to all other bereaved people (Stallman, Hutchinson & Ohan, 2020). It stigmatises the cause of death, which is the focus, rather than focusing on the needs of the person bereaved; that is, coping with the loss of someone they loved. Bereavement support is a precise non-stigmatising term.

Practice guidelines

Building on a knowledge of the precise meanings of health and wellbeing terminology and considered wording, news media—legacy, digital and social—can significantly contribute to improving community health and wellbeing literacy and reduce misinformation and stigma. Understanding emotions, coping and illness makes it possible to use language accurately in the media and in a way that does not stigmatise mental illness by sensationalising it as different from illnesses in other parts of the body, or erroneously concluding unpleasant emotions indicate illness.

Aligning psychological language with other medical language (e.g., heart attack, stroke) provides a handy guide for a reporter to check the validity of their writing. For example, a cause of death by a heart attack or stroke is not necessarily newsworthy and hence a death by suicide also does not mean a story is newsworthy. Loss of balance is a symptom of a stroke; still, a layperson would not infer and report illness or stroke on this indicator alone, instead referring to and waiting for a health professional to diagnose the illness. Similarly, unhealthy coping strategies (including death by suicide) should not be referred to as mental illness, but as coping strategies or just behaviour if they were not used to reduce distress, e.g., drunkenness.

This section identifies recommendations for additions to current reporting guidelines to mitigate possible harm.

1. What is the purpose of the story?

Mental illness and death by suicide can be included in a story sensationally to

increase readership. These should only be included when they are the topic of the story or pertinent to the story. If it was a different illness (e.g. pancreatitis) or a different cause of death (e.g. heart attack), would it be a story and would the information be relevant to this story? Where, if anywhere, would these facts be included?

Here is an example:

x How a mental health break delivered a young Raider his second chance (NRL, 2022)

✓Young Raider fit to return after recovery from mental illness

2. Privacy and respect

Wherever possible, provide the same privacy and respect to people with mental illness or who have died by suicide as people with any other illnesses or causes of death. Seek consent before disclosing personal health information. Do not stigmatise mental illnesses by labelling them as a separate group of illnesses from the rest of the body.

Example:

x Will Pucovski to take indefinite break from cricket for mental health reasons (WWOS, 2022)

✓ Will Pucovski sidelined indefinitely by illness

3. Do not confuse distress with illness

Distress is not automatically a symptom of illness. In a recent survey the two were conflated in reporting findings of a survey on distress. The rate of mental illness was inferred from the self-report questionnaires, despite negative symptom measures having an initial elevation bias (Shrout, et. al., 2017) and potentially poor test-retest reliability in this age group (Stallman, 2019).

Example:

x About 40 per cent of young Australians have experienced mental illness— and it's high time we do something about it (McGorry, 2022)

✓ About 40% of young Australians experienced psychological distress

4. Use wellbeing

Use the term wellbeing to denote an overall sense of being well, and health and wellbeing when health is relevant. This avoids the inaccurate term "mental health".

Examples:

x The drugs don't work (and other mental health myths) (Robson, 2022)

✓ The drugs don't work (and other mental illness myths)

 x How athletes can protect their mental health at the Commonwealth Games and beyond (Shalala, 2022)

✓ How athlete can protect their health and wellbeing at the Commonwealth Games and beyond

5. Use the word illness
To avoid stigma and preserve medical privacy, use the word 'illness' to describe any physical or mental illness where the actual illness is not the topic of the conversation. For unpleasant emotions, use non-pathologising words (e.g., sad, worried, scared, disappointed) when the person has not been diagnosed with an illness. Consider the word 'distress' for generic distress.

6. Name mental illnesses
Where the person provides permission for the name of their illness be shared, use the name of the actual name of the illness, for example, Major Depressive Disorder, not depression. Where possible respect the medical privacy of the person if they do not want an illness disclosed.

7. Avoid 'suicidal' to describe a person
Use had/has thoughts of suicide or attempted suicide to accurately convey behaviour rather than using suicidal as an adjective to describe a person. Where possible, contextualise suicidality within the totality of coping strategies e.g., 'I used self-soothing, relaxation, social support, alcohol and suicidality to feel better'. This requires the reporter to ask what other coping strategies the person used to feel better.

8. Cause of death
Use the phrase died by suicide rather than turning the cause of death into a verb, for example, suicided or adding stigmatising verbs to it, for example, committed suicide. The story below included specific details about the method used and the place of death, which should be avoided.

Example:

x   Ryan's story: A hard-charging California firefighter loses his last battle to suicide (Cart, 2022)

✓Ryan's story: A hard-charging California firefighter dies by suicide

9. Bereavement
Bereavement is about the loss of a loved one—not how the person died. Stories about people bereaved should focus on their loss and how they are coping.

Example:

x Liberals promise more funds for ACT suicide postvention services (News-time media, 2022)

✓Liberals promise more funds for bereavement after suicide services

10. Focus on coping
When the intention is to add supports for readers, use strength-focused resources that support coping. Order resources from low intensity to high intensity to rein-

force healthy coping. Provide a guide for what the reader can expect from each support. Limit the number so as not to overwhelm vulnerable people.

Example:

My Coping Plan app to create your own plan to manage distress

Lifeline, for anonymous telephone or chat support 24/7

Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800 support for 5–25-year-olds

Your GP, for support and referrals

Dial 000 (or 0800 543 354 in New Zealand) if suicidal thoughts are overwhelming you

11. Crazy, monster, mentally ill

Avoid pejorative terms when describing a person who has committed a crime or done something unconscionable to avoid stigmatising people with mental illness. People with mental illness are more likely to be the victims of violence than perpetrators (Thornicroft, 2006).

Examples:

x Texas Governor blames 'mental health' for mass shooting (Reuters, AFP and SBS, 2022)

✓Texas Governor deflects question on gun control after mass shooting, blames poor health services

x Nick Kyrgios applies to have assault charge dismissed on mental health grounds (Reuters, 2022)

✓Nick Kyrgios applies to have assault charges dismissed

12. Shared not opened up

'Open up about' assumes a former state of being closed or even keeping a secret from the audience. This is potentially harmful before it gives the perception that the audience has a right to an individual's thoughts, history or medical information, all of which are personal and private unless the individual chooses to share them. When and with whom things are shared is a decision each person can make. Media can convey both rights of the individual to the audience and freedom of choice by using the word 'share' instead of opened up.

Example:

x 'Remember I'll always love you': Police sergeant opens up about losing her dad to suicide (O'Leary, 2022)

✓'Remember I'll always love you': Police sergeant talks about losing her dad to suicide

13. Service provision

When people die by suicide after asking for professional help, the focus should be on the adequacy of services for people who are distressed. This communicates that suicide prevention is on the coping continuum, supporting people when they are distressed, rather than a single point when something needs to be

done. Case should not be used to describe a person.

    Example:

    x Pathetic: Heartbroken family say response to suicide case not good enough (Lang & Cameron, 2021)

    ✓ Pathetic: Heartbroken family slam inadequate support before a death by suicide

Conclusion

While journalists in legacy, digital and social media play an important role in affecting community thoughts and actions, to date media guidelines for the reporting of mental illness and suicide have not reduced the prevalence of either. This article highlighted how understanding the precise use of terminology, including emotions, coping, illness, can shape the way stories are told and contribute positively to the health and wellbeing of the communities they serve. The 13 practice recommendations outlined with examples in this paper can supplement existing media guidelines internationally to provide a framework for journalists to refine their writing. Science and person-centred reporting can potentially improve coping and professional help-seeking when needed and reduce the prevalence of suicide. Further research is needed to evaluate the effects of these additional guidelines.

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Dr Elizabeth (Jane) Stephens lectures in journalism in the School of Business and Creative Industries at the University of the Sunshine Coast.
efynes@usc.edu.au

Dr Helen Stallman is a clinical psychologist. She was formerly Professor of Suicide Prevention at the University of the Sunshine Coast.
psychology@carecollaborateconnect.org

Artificial intelligence (AI) and future newsrooms

A study on journalists of Bangladesh

Abstract: Many Western and economically developed countries have already incorporated Artificial Intelligence (AI) into their newsrooms. As the media industry is constantly addressing new technological advancements, media scholars are highly confident about the combination of AI and the newsroom. This research investigates AI as a new prospect in the Bangladeshi journalism arena, focusing on the current state of AI usage and projecting the future by evaluating professional journalists' 'Mental Readiness' across a variety of media companies. In the first phase, from the survey of 107 working journalists from 20 different news organisations, this study finds that journalists possess a mostly positive attitude towards AI and are willing to incorporate current technologies in their newsrooms. The majority of journalists are informed, yet many of them lack sufficient AI literacy. In the second part, in-depth interviews with five newsroom editors reveal that it is difficult for Bangladesh to make a significant transformation within a short period. Most of them believe that providing AI-enabled newsrooms in a developing country like Bangladesh is still a long shot, owing to economic and technological constraints.

Keywords: AI literacy, artificial intelligence, Bangladesh, journalists, newsrooms, technology

SANJOY BASAK PARTHA
MALIHA TABASSUM
MD ASHRAFUL GONI
PRIYANKA KUNDU
Bangladesh University of Professionals, Dhaka

Introduction

ARTIFICIAL intelligence (AI) has become a critical component of human life. No one can deny how indispensable AI has become in almost all sectors. The influence of AI technology on numerous sectors is already proven and has the potential to have a wide-ranging and profound impact on the journalism sector. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a broad term that refers to the different possibilities made available by recent technological breakthroughs (Beckett, 2019). From machine learning to natural language processing, news

organisations are using AI to automate a variety of tasks in the journalism production process, including data detection, extraction, verification, story writing, and more. AI systems can assist journalists through event notifications, accelerating the execution of complicated operations based on vast volumes of data and covering previously untouched areas.

The *New York Times, Forbes, The Washington Post*, and ProPublica are just a few examples of newsrooms using AI. The Heliograf, the *Washington Post's* 'in-house automated storytelling tool', is just one of several examples of how newsrooms are employing AI to improve sports coverage (Hall, 2018, cited by Young & Stroud, 2020). The Associated Press, the industry's pioneer in AI, began using Automated Insights' Wordsmith technology to automatically generate corporate earnings reports in 2014, growing its coverage from 300 to 4,000 companies in a single year (Young & Stroud, 2020).

According to Knowhere News, a software start-up formed in 2015, AI may eradicate the bias that many people identify with a lack of trust. After detecting current topics on the web, Knowhere News' AI system collects data from thousands of news articles from various leanings and perspectives to produce an 'impartial' news article in under 60 seconds (DeGeurin, 2018).

In discussing technology, we still use the term 'world' to refer to advanced or first-world countries, anticipating that underdeveloped countries will catch up or follow a trend. We frequently notice that developing countries are slow to adopt new cultures or technology and this is especially true in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, the use of AI in journalism is insufficient. Dataful, a non-profit organisation, has hosted training events for Bangladeshi journalists and students (Dataful offers, 2020) and other organisations are holding different seminars and workshops. Bangladeshi newsrooms might have to embrace new journalistic arenas such as digital journalism and data journalism in order to survive. The information ecology has been revolutionised by technology, which has displaced media and journalists from their traditional duties. (Kothari & Cruikshank, 2022). The local journalism industry would be harmed if Bangladesh struggled to catch up with its automated contemporaries.

According to Biswal and Gouda (2020), most people are dubious about AI's usage in journalism due to its perceived lack of credibility. Several scholars and practitioners believe that AI will never be able to replace human credibility, originality, or wit (Beckett, 2019). Some are concerned about technical difficulties, while others fear losing their jobs. New methods of cyber assault can be developed to exploit specific flaws in the system (The Cyber Security Battlefield, 2019). How much a machine can maintain the ethical standard has also become a debatable issue in this sector. Moreover, some think that the incorporation of AI will give the platform companies more power over the news industry which will affect the freedom and strength of media (Brennen et al., 2019; Kothari &

Cruikshank, 2022; Simon, 2022).

This study attempts to produce a key finding on Bangladeshi journalists' perceptions and expertise of AI in journalism to understand the present and detect the future of AI in Bangladeshi newsrooms. The research focuses on professional journalists' 'Mental Readiness' rather than infrastructure issues. So, the prime research question is, what is the present state of AI use in Bangladeshi newsrooms, and what is its future? The following sub-questions will be answered to meet the objectives of the study:

1. Do journalists have enough AI literacy?
2. What are the challenges and ethical dilemmas of using AI in newsrooms?
3. How do journalists envision AI in future newsrooms?
4. Are journalists mentally ready to accept and embrace AI as a journalistic tool?

Literature review

According to a survey of 71 media organisations from 32 countries, AI can help fight economic challenges as well as fortify misinformation and disinformation (Beckett, 2019). Some researchers (Dörr & Hollnbuchner, 2017; Simon, 2022; Anderson, 2013) have referred to AI in journalism as 'Algorithmic Journalism', in which structured data is turned into texts via Natural Language Generation (NLG). Despite some technology restrictions, Dirican (2015) found AI had a significant economic advantage and the production cost was substantially lower than that of a human journalist.

The benefits and future of AI have also been extolled in some literature also. For example, in the book *Tech Giants, Artificial Intelligence, and the Future of Journalism*, author Jason Whittaker (2019) discussed the five largest tech giants (Amazon, Apple, Facebook, Google, and Microsoft) that are heavily experimenting with artificial intelligence and, as a result, have a significant impact on the future of journalism. According to him, these companies are constructing a digital eco-system in which the public sphere emerges with the help of social machines and gains social computational strength (Whittaker, 2019, p. 5). He argued that artificial intelligence has altered consumers' perceptions of journalism and media, as well as their consumption behaviour. The change in automation, particularly through the use of artificial intelligence, has prompted major technology companies to think more about these changing trends. He anticipated an even brighter future for AI in journalism practice, in which AI will not only aid in profit generation but will also aid humans in understanding and altering the world.

Ali and Hassoun (2019) discussed AI's potential as 'Automated Journalism', dismissing any potential threats or dilemmas. The authors conclude that artificial intelligence technologies add value to journalism across the digital world, particularly in terms of their ability to overcome the core problems that early modern journalism faces, such as countering fake news, news scripting

based on editorial lines, and information collection. Artificial intelligence would supplement rather than replace journalistic jobs and poses no threat to professional journalism.

The term 'Chatbot Journalism' was coined by certain academics to convey automation in both news creation and reaching big crowds (Shin, Al-Imanmy & Hwang, 2022, Veglis & Maniou, 2019; Jones & Jones, 2019). Chatbot journalism proposes more interactive news formats with a more conversational tone and personalised style of addressing as part of a customisation attempt. Veglis and Maniou (2019) investigate the role and characteristics of chatbots. They discovered that this new journalistic robot might provide a realistic and viable solution to the challenges that reporters face in the age of big data.

But what are the challenges it possesses? Monti (2019) investigated the ethical and legal challenges of automated journalism, with a particular emphasis on information freedom, liability, and duty. Unlike Ali and Hassoun (2019), he believes that AI will never be able to replace journalists. And says humans will continue to play a role in journalism since the type of critical thinking required to read the facts presently cannot be performed by a machine. According to the author: 'No robotic reporter can be a defender of democracy and human rights.'

The drawbacks of AI literacy have been addressed by several scholars (Tejedor & Vila, 2021; Jamil, 2021; Shin, Al-Imanmy & Hwang, 2022). Jamil (2021) focuses on Pakistan, identifying limitations and investigating prospects for the application of artificial intelligence in Pakistan's major news media. He discovered that most professionals, academics, and students had a low rate of AI literacy. He found many barriers, including technological limits, distrust of machines, a lack of training, and a widening digital divide.

Stray (2019) looks at some of the disadvantages from a different angle. He emphasised the fact that much of the material required to present a story is not open to the public and is controlled by governments and private companies. To avoid the possibility of libel, he believes that extensive human inspection or journalistic inference is required for a high level of accuracy. As the factors that determine whether a set of facts is 'newsworthy' are fundamentally social, they are difficult to encode computationally.

In the case of Bangladesh, few studies have been conducted in this relatively new sector. Khan and Shnaider (2021) discussed the automation of classic journalistic tools to allow journalists to swiftly distribute news, receive audience comments, and have two-way engagement with readers. According to them, automation has resulted in the creation of thousands of new employments for aspiring journalists, particularly in the field of digital journalism. Goni and Tabassum (2020) researched the mental readiness of potential Bangladeshi journalists who have enrolled in this discipline at several institutions to pursue a career in journalism. They discovered that Bangladeshi students are mentally prepared to

understand and accept AI as a revolutionary technology with limitless personal and professional benefits.

Reviewing the current literature, it is possible to conclude that the majority of these studies have talked about the challenges and opportunities. In general, opportunities and problems, as well as ethical and intuitive dilemmas, were identified. However, no one has undertaken a qualitative study on journalists' psychological readiness to accept such disputed technologies in their professional lives, especially in the context of Bangladesh.

Methodology and sampling

Our study adopted two methods—survey and in-depth interviews. The survey helped to pinpoint a generalisation on how media professionals perceive AI in Bangladeshi newsrooms. In-depth interviews allowed us to learn more about how they evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of AI in the news industry.

The survey included 107 journalists from 20 various media outlets in Bangladesh (print, broadcast, and online) where the sampling method was purposive. Since not every journalist is interested and informed about the idea of AI, the researchers sampled and surveyed only those journalists who have some idea about AI in news practice. The findings of Beckett (2019) done by the Google News Initiative and POLIS Thinktank at LSE were adapted with small contextualisations in creating the survey questionnaire of the study. The abovementioned survey was a baseline study that effectively mapped out the perception regarding AI of journalists from 71 media houses from 32 countries by asking questions such as journalists' views on the risks and potentials of AI, its ethical and editorial relevance of it, and how it can be used in newsrooms.

In the second phase, five newsroom heads from different media outlets were interviewed to gain a better insight into the current situation and to make accurate predictions about the deployment of AI in newsrooms. These respondents were chosen using the convenience sampling approach. A semi-structured questionnaire based on significant survey findings was created for interviewing them.

There were 86 male journalists and 21 female journalists among the 107 responders. This survey includes more men than women to represent the lower female-male ratio in the Bangladeshi media business. We believe that the sample is representative since it includes a varied range of participants with diverse journalism experience, various media types, ages, and employment responsibilities (Tables 1 & 2).

The sample for this study was drawn from a wide range of job experience variances. There were journalists with less than a year of experience and journalists with more than 30 years of experience. This study also gathered information from 10 different media outlets.

Table 1: Age representation in the Bangladesh AI sample		
Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
18-23 years	6	5.6
24-28 yeaars	24	22.4
29-34 years	46	43.0
35-40 years	23	21.5
41-50 yeaars	7	6.5
More than 50 years	1	.9
Total	107	100.0

Human-Machine Communication as theoretical framework

Since the inception of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), scholars have explored a newer framework that defies the conventional concept of viewing communication as a process possible only among humans. However, the introduction of the Human-Machine Communication (HMC) framework introduced a fresh conceptual framework.

Table 2: Media representation in the Bangladesh AI sample		
Name of the media house	Frequency	Percentage
Prothom Alo	10	9.3
Daily Star	11	10.3
UNB	10	9.3
BBC Bangla	10	9.3
bdnews24.com	11	10.3
Jagonews24.com	11	10.3
Jamuna TV	13	12.1
DBC	10	9.3
Some TV	10	9.3
Independent TV	11	10.3
Total	107	100.0

HMC accentuates the notion of communication which is done through the interaction between humans and technology (Guzman, 2018). Continuous studies on Human-Robot Interaction (HRI) and Human-Agent Interaction (HAI) paved the way for the HMC framework (Spence, 2019). There remains a significant distinction in the scope of study among HRI, HAI, and HMC, as the latter sees technology as the role of the communicator (Guzman, 2018). The traditional outlook of communication focuses on the question of 'who is a person interacting with?' whereas the HMC study alters the question with 'what are people communicating with?' (Gunkel, 2012, p. 1-2). Previously, communication studies used to label humans as 'communicators' and machines as 'facilitators', which is now challenged as Lewis et al. (2019) explain:

> Within HMC, the definition of communication is not tied to an ontological understanding of communicators. Rather, communication is conceptualized generally as the "creation of meaning", and human communication and human-machine communication are each a type of communication.

In another study, Guzman (2018, p. 1) elongates HMC as:

> HMC research focuses on the process of communication between humans and machines and the implications of encounters between people and technology for individuals, society, and humanity.

Emerging technological advancements have now opened the gate to applying sophisticated software in more autonomic and human forms of communication. Machines are no longer used only as a facilitator during the communication process; rather some technologies are functioning as lone communicators, such as AI chatbots (Mou & Xu, 2017).

However, journalism scholars remain sceptical about the deployment of AI in the newsroom, as journalism still counts on human brains to use and interpret data meaningfully (Linden, 2017). As Jung et al. (2017) and Jamil (2021) opine, to properly comprehend the possible impact of HMC on journalism, it is necessary to assess the mental and cultural attitude of working journalists in accepting machines as communicators, and the socio-political context of the particular society, especially in developing countries.

As a whole, the HMC framework is effective as it narrates how machines can also act as communicators along with humans, and how much people are prepared to perceive these types of roles of machines. This framework is particularly fitting to this study, as it shows the view of Bangladeshi journalists regarding the role of technology as a communicator, their willingness to comply with this new role, and their readiness to embrace this new shift in the field of journalism. Another significant point that makes the HMC framework relatable

in this study is that newsrooms of developed countries like the USA, UK, and China are closely linked with AI, whereas newsrooms of developing countries like Bangladesh are still far away from implementing this. The HMC framework, therefore, helps to identify any potential barriers that may be restricting the use of AI in this region of the world and forecasts sustainability shortly.

Research findings from the survey

Prior experience in Interacting with AI
Respondents were asked: 'Have you ever interacted with Artificial Intelligence technology?'

Only 43 percent of respondents said they had never interacted with Artificial Intelligence technology, while 67 percent had already communicated with AI. To obtain a clearer understanding of what kind of AI technology participants had recently used, another question was asked: 'Which of the following technologies have you used or encountered in the previous year?'

More than 75 percent or respondents said they had used Facebook-recommended news, but only 1 percent had interacted with AI for fake news identification. This was is significant finding since it meant professionals are using an AI application connected to journalism. More than 62 percent received online purchasing recommendations from AI, while 51 percent of them used email spam filters.

AI literacy
Almost 90 percent of professionals said they knew about AI and understood the fundamentals. According to the findings of this survey, most journalists lacked solid technical understanding. Fewer than one or two out of 100 had had prior training or self-training in AI, and the others were relatively inexperienced.

Preference in AI usage
A total of 59 percent of respondents preferred social media-based AI, particularly online chatbots, but 31 percent preferred to speak with a person when seeking services. Respondents favoured contact channels where AI could be used. They would rather talk to a chatbot than a human representative.

Impact of AI on global journalism
A sizable proportion of respondents (almost 62 percent) were aware of the impact of AI on global journalism, while only slightly more than 38 percent were uninformed about the possible impact of AI on future media. The study also asked the respondents where we can use AI most effectively.

According to the research, AI would have a virtually identical influence on the three primary sectors of journalism: newsgathering, news production, and news distribution. The majority of respondents (41 percent) believed that AI in

journalism may be best used in the news distribution process. About 33 percent of respondents chose news gathering and 26 percent chose news production as areas where AI might be used to its greatest capacity.

Output quality of AI

According to 56 percent of professionals, the impact of AI on the news manufacturing process is enormous. These figures appeared to be a little lower when compared with their positive view toward the influence of AI. A total of 44 percent foresaw less output, thus demonstrating a lack of confidence in AI among professionals. They believe that traditional journalism is still superior in Bangladesh.

AI and journalism ethics

Exploring present regulatory approaches, a plethora of unexpected ethical difficulties have emerged for those already grappling with the complex relationships between human journalists and algorithmic work. When it comes to integrating automated storytelling into newsrooms, journalists were asked about how to keep and encourage accuracy and impartiality and thus maintain journalistic ethics. The divide between the two responses was razor-thin. A total of 51 percent of journalists believed AI could follow ethical principles, or that it could be built in such a way that it does. However, 49 percent were sceptical about a machine's ability to have morals. Almost half of the professionals believe the ethical standards of AI journalists should be monitored regularly to retain the trust of the public.

The attitude of journalists towards the AI revolution

According to our findings, professional attitudes toward the spread of AI are mixed. Most journalists believe that AI will never be able to replace humans, but that it may play a significant role in data journalism. Most of them believed AI would be used to improve their work efficiency rather than to degrade their positions or make them unemployed. This attitude was quite positive, indicating professionals' mental preparedness to accept technology. On the other hand, 65 percent believed AI would not be able to replace humans. A total of 14 percent believed it was conceivable, while 21 percent were unsure. Another observation reflected a positive approach. When asked if they were concerned about the possibility of robot interference in their newsroom 74 percent said they were not afraid. Most of them believed AI could do basic tasks such as data analysis, text translation and meaning decoding. Since the robot could not write creatively, cover unique news, or investigate things except data analysis, so, a place for humans would remain.

The survey outcomes suggests that most of the journalists have a basic AI literacy, yet they stated their technological understanding was not so firm. Although journalists knew what AI was and how it worked in newsrooms, they still lacked confidence it could benefit the newsroom. A major portion of the

respondents did not think AI was capable of maintaining ethical standards. A significant number of journalists said AI was not going to replace humans, but could be used as a supporting technology for data collection, distribution, and audience interaction.

Findings from in-depth Interviews

Along with the survey, the study conducted in-depth interviews with a total of five editorial-level personnel who talked about their perception of AI. All of them acknowledged the fact that AI could seriously affect the quality of journalism. However, they remained sceptical about the immediate implication of AI in Bangladeshi newsrooms. 'Indeed, AI has a future, but not too soon,' SK Tanvir Mahmud, newsroom editor of an online news portal said. 'We need more time to see any future of Bangladesh. It is a far cry.' AI has been introduced so far in only a handful of newsrooms in Bangladesh in a very limited scope. Some of the online news portals (e.g., Jago News, *Dhaka Post*.com, etc.) are using AI to interact with their readers. When a reader expresses their wish to come across specific news or beat-based news, the AI-run chatbot sends them instant replies and shares their desired news links. But other activities, like news gathering and news production, are still to be achieved. Regarding future journalistic contributions, Mahfuzer Rahman Sarkar, head of the online daily Kaler Kontho, said: 'Journalistic automation can and will create a great difference in our field. No matter what observations come from ethical perspectives, automation is a must to ensure quality production.' Regarding the use of AI for online media, the editor of the *Dhakar Post*, Mahiduddin Sarkar, acknowledged its usefulness and said the use of AI would become popular in Bangladesh due to the requirement of the medium.

When asked if AI could produce a piece of news while maintaining its sensitivity and ethical standards, all the experts expressed their concerns regarding this. As news-making requires the highest level of sensitivity and a considerable amount of creativity, they were extremely unsure about the effectiveness of AI. in this regard. Lipi Rani, senior sub-editor of *Daily Prothom Alo* (the most circulated Bangla newspaper) said: 'If the news is produced with the help of AI, the final gatekeeping must be done by the human brain, as a slight mistake or insensitivity can cause unrest among the audience.' For the same reasons, Abdul Kalam Azad, head of online for popular English daily newspaper *The Business Standard*, ruled out the possibility of AI replacing the human brain in newsrooms.

Rather, they wanted to see AI as a helping hand for working journalists. For instance, they said AI could be used to gather information from the internet and could be used in content uploading and sharing, so that manual uploading of news is no longer needed. That would allow newsrooms to use the staff previously assigned to these tasks on other jobs. For instance, even five years ago, almost every newspaper organisation had a proofreading team, but software

was now used for proofreading. However, as media operators of a developing country, costs were a key concern. Budget constraints would make it difficult to train journalists and it would be hard to make a profit while producing produce high quality content.

The in-depth interviews suggested newsroom heads did not foresee AI having an effect in Bangladeshi newsrooms soon. According to them, although AI had a future in local newsrooms, it would take time for this to happen. The interviewees said AI would never replace humans because technology did not have the sophisticated intellect to interpret a critical social phenomenon. However, like the survey result, the in-depth interview responses suggested AI can be used as a helping hand. So, right at this moment, Bangladeshi media houses are not willing to take the risk of introducing new technology on a larger scale when it is still not fully used worldwide.

Analysing the results from both methods using the HMC framework, three basic findings appear. Firstly, in the journalism practice of Bangladesh, AI has been used in a limited version and has a future in the newsroom. Secondly, regarding ethics and performances, media professionals are not quite confident that AI would be entirely ethical in news writing and be able to give better output than journalists. The third finding is that AI is not going to take over the driving seat in the newsroom. These findings correspond with the theory that in HMC, a machine (AI) can be used as a supporting component in the communication (journalism) process. It cannot be fully relied on, but can play a role as a subsidiary instrument in human-machine communication.

Discussion and conclusion

This study found that the mental readiness of the journalists to accept AI in regular news practice is still low in Bangladesh since they are ready to use AL as a supporting tool in the newsroom, but do not trust it unconditionally. The survey revealed that about 90 percent of the professionals have a basic understanding of AI, but very few of them have ever engaged with AI or used it in their profession. On the other hand, according to 44 percent of respondents, AI will always produce less output than them, because a robot can never be better than a human and will be incapable of producing high-quality material. This study reveals a lack of trust in AI's practical application and output among newsroom editors. The findings of the study have some kinds of similarities and contrasts with the situation of other countries.

As previously stated, several news organisations throughout the world are attempting to include AI-based journalism in their news production. This new trend is undeniably positive and beneficial. However, it is uncertain whether today's journalists are sufficiently educated and equipped to deal with this new trend. Making newsrooms sufficiently equipped is also a significant challenge in the

context of Bangladesh. Some journalists have mentioned a lack of technical skills in this subject, as well as the performance of AI. The findings are consistent with Jamil's (2021) research, which discovered lower AI literacy, inadequate training, and a lack of technical expertise among journalists in developing countries.

Journalists and editorial practitioners did not identify issues such as 'extracting and processing huge data' 'identifying false news' and so on, even though Ali and Hassoun (2019) and Veglis and Maniou (2019) listed these as important challenges. Aside from these challenges, ethical dilemmas have also been addressed by both journalists and newsroom personnel. This is also a challenge to journalistic norms. The possibility of a computer having morality is still viewed with skepticism by respondents. This result is nearly like Montil (2019) who has expressed doubts about the robot's liabilities while carrying out professional duties. To overcome this ethical challenge, almost half of professionals believe that the ethical standards of these AI journalists should be monitored regularly to achieve and maintain public trust. Newsroom personnel also argued that the ultimate gatekeeper was the human brain, as a minor error may trigger dissatisfaction and unrest. Stray (2019) has also conveyed the same concerns and suggested extensive human inspection to achieve accuracy.

The findings suggested that AI has potential and could be used in three key sectors: news dissemination, newsgathering, and news production. According to most respondents (41 percent), AI in journalism may indeed be best used in the news dissemination process. Editors are likewise optimistic about an AI-enabled future newsroom because to them AI will allow newsrooms to save time, money and labour. This finding is similar to that of Dörr and Hollnbuchner (2017) who examined how AI-based algorithmic journalism could manage big data and thus lower the production cost and required time. However, our study also revealed that AI deployment in Bangladeshi newsrooms will never be able to compete with human intelligence and creativity, and so will never be able to replace humans. Ali and Hassoun (2019) also reject the concerns regarding AI replacing humans in their study.

The fourth question is crucial when it comes to anticipating the future. The question is whether the journalists are mentally prepared to welcome AI as a journalistic tool or not. A total of 48 percent of the survey respondents said they were not fully comfortable with the idea of accommodating AI technology in their traditional working method. A total of 29 percent said they were not bothered about it, and 21 percent said they would welcome the incorporation of new technology wholeheartedly. As Jung et al. (2017) and Jamil (2021) suggested taking the mental and cultural readiness of the local journalists into account in their studies, the current scenario does not look like Bangladeshi newsrooms will be able to implement AI on a large scale in the near future. One of the newsroom editors even opined confidently that he did not see AI flourishing in

the Bangladeshi journalism industry in the next five to 10 years. This finding contradicts Goni and Tabassum's (2020) finding that journalism students were mentally prepared to embrace and employ AI on a professional level.

Regarding the final goal, projecting the future of AI in Bangladeshi newsrooms, it can be asserted that Bangladeshi journalism still has a long way to go before successfully implementing AI. This study discovered that Bangladeshi professionals are not completely psychologically prepared to embrace AI in newsrooms, although they have an open mind towards it. The use of AI might require staff training and assistance in the office.

Therefore, the traditional concept of seeing communication only as an activity among humans is being superseded by the advancement of technology. Machines are now capable of acting as communicators rather than only as facilitators in the communication process. The Human-Machine Communication framework has suggested a radical shift, which states that AI-based technologies are now ready to act as communicators alongside humans, if not replacing them. This transition in the communication process has started to affect the media industry as well. However, the situation has not advanced that far in less economically developed countries like Bangladesh. Most media organisations have not acquainted themselves with AI yet, mostly due to a lack of confidence in AI performance, ethical dilemmas, skilled manpower and budgetary constraints. Some of them have started their journey with AI recently, mostly in the news dissemination process. However. the bigger prospect of AI is yet to be unleashed in Bangladeshi newsrooms.

As media scholars hope that AI will shake up future journalism, it is necessary to conduct further academic research from a Bangladeshi perspective. This study recommends that further work can be done on prospects for AI-based communication in journalistic practice, the skillsets needed for journalists to cope with new technology, whether AI is likely to improve the overall quality of news content, and how ethics and accuracy can be ensured through the use of Human-Machine Communication.

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Sanjoy Basak Partha is a lecturer in the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism (MC&J) at Bangladesh University of Professionals. His research interests include multimedia journalism and digital storytelling.
sanjoy.partha@bup.edu.bd

Maliha Tabassum is a lecturer in the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism at Bangladesh University of Professionals. Her research interests include communication arena, media, films, and culture.

MD Ashraful Goni is an assistant professor in the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism the Bangladesh University of Professionals. He is a PhD student in the College of Media and Communication, Texas Tech University. He has a particular interest in artificial intelligence (AI) and media.

Priyanka Kundu is a lecturer in the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism (MC&J) at Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP). She is a PhD student at the University of Illinois. Her research interest includes press freedom and digital media.

A (non) agenda-setting study

The framing of electric vehicles in the news of Aotearoa New Zealand and its (non) role in their use

Abstract: This article explores the news media framing of electric vehicles (EVs) in New Zealand and theorises the role it may have played in the uptake of EVs in the country. The results were unexpected as they did not reflect previous research. The positive valence of EVs, battery life, carbon emissions, the environment, range, public or personal costs, positive public opinion, positive evaluative language and battery reusage were not emphasised at all in the coverage sampled. Instead, the results showed there was a significant focus only on EVs' technological features, such as smart technology. However, despite the lacklustre media coverage of EVs in New Zealand, the sales of EVs went up. This disconnection between previous research detailing the importance of positive media framing and subsequent behaviour has implications for further research examining media effects.

Keywords: agenda setting, climate change, content analysis, EV, electric cars, environment, media framing, newspapers, New Zealand.

LINDA-JEAN KENIX
University of Canterbury

JORGE BOLANOS
Universidad ECOTEC, Equador

Introduction

AS THE climate change discussion has intensified, different markets have upgraded their products and services to emphasise features that claim to minimise their impact on the environment. In the transport field, the importance of eco-innovation has arisen with a focus on fossil fuels (Hussain, 2021). Many globalised economies are being challenged to decrease their energy consumption and update technologically outdated equipment (Yang, Jahanger, & Ali, 2021). In this regard, the automotive industry has, in recent years, given more attention to the development of vehicles fuelled by electricity

rather than fossil fuels. However, the increase in the uptake of electric vehicles (EVs) seems to rely on several factors, including cost and EV infrastructure.

EV infrastructure is an potential constraint on EV purchases as potential buyers must be reassured that owning an EV does not provide larger constraints than owning a petrol vehicle. The main areas of concern, in terms of infrastructure are the number of charging stations, the time it takes to fully charge an EV and how difficult it is to locate spare parts if needed (Elkind, 2012).

The cost of EVs is another significant factor that affects the public's perception of such vehicles, and therefore the likelihood of their purchase (Broadbent, Wiedmann, & Metternicht, 2021). The prices of EVs are higher than for petrol cars. To mitigate many of these up-front costs, some governments have enacted policies to encourage the purchase of EVs. For instance, in New Zealand, one proposed policy was for high emissions petrol vehicles to pay additional costs over those driving an EV (Gleisner & Weaver, 2006). The New Zealand government has offered a financial rebate to those who purchase an EV. With similar policies in other regions, there has been a consistent increase worldwide in recent years of EV purchases. For example, from 2019 to 2022, the number of EV car registrations in China went from around 5 percent to just over 25 percent of the market share (THINK, 2023). Similarly, Europe registered 261,000 EV sales in 2021 and the United States 149,000, which was a much higher number than the 194,000 and 122,000 in 2018, respectively (Kopestinsky, 2021).

In New Zealand, the trend is similar with a double increase in the same period, from 6,929 EVs sold in 2018 to 12,744 in 2019 (Ministry of Transport, 2022). Furthermore, according to the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority (EECA), in June 2021 it was estimated that from a total of 3.3 million light vehicles, around 27,925 were EVs. By comparison, the Ministry of Transport's statistics for the same year show that there has been a total of 34,123 EV car registrations, along with an increase in the total number of the EV fleet to 37,161 in December 2021. (The total number of the fleet refers to the total number of new and used EV cars located in New Zealand.) This increase is notable given that this was during the COVID-19 pandemic when overall car purchase trends were declining compared to previous years (Energy Efficiency & Conservation Authority, 2021).

Additionally, public opinion data run by local media outlets in recent years has suggested a growing interest in EV vehicles. The intention to buy EVs increased from 2017 to 2019 (1 News, 2019). This positive attitude towards the purchase of EVs was accompanied by support for policies that encouraged their use, such as tax deductions for low-emission vehicles and subsidies aimed at lowering their price (Newshub, 2018, 2019; Stuff, 2019). The uptake of EVs has been noted to require education of car buyers, economic incentives and the creation of sufficient electric car infrastructure—all of which need to be com-

municated to the public through the media. (Elkind, 2012). Specifically, research has demonstrated that the education of car buyers on the benefits of EVs is likely to increase the uptake of EVs that also includes information on incentive programmes and EV infrastructure (Elkind, 2012).

This research examines news reports on EVs from the four highest circulating newspapers in New Zealand in an attempt to identify how EVs are portrayed in New Zealand news. Specifically, this analysis aims to tease out whether there are signs of agenda-setting on this topic, that is, positive coverage of EVs leading to increased purchases of EVs. The results of this analysis will then contribute to the literature on framing and agenda setting. In addition, this research will attempt to uncover the role that news reporting may have had in the use of EVs in New Zealand.

Media framing and agenda setting

Through a content analysis of EV reporting in New Zealand media, this study has attempted to explore how media framed the topic of EVs and whether there is an agenda-setting effect between the media framing of EVs and purchases of EVs in Aotearoa.

Media have the ability to frame information in ways that convey vastly different meanings. Frames are 'organising principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world' (Reese, Gandy Jr., & Grant, 2001, p. 11). Frames implicitly hold evidentiary information that determines what is 'relevant' (Hertog & McLeod, 1995, p. 4) and suggest 'what the issue is' (Tankard Jr., et. al., 1991). Those who create media content 'select some aspect of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described' (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Framing can be harmful, especially when presentations distort an issue or fail to provide solutions to those affected (Kensicki, 2004). That distortion can be manifested through presentations of the cause, effect or responsibility of an issue (Entman & Rojecki, 1993).

There has been a wealth of compelling findings suggesting news messages have a profound influence on how people thinks about issues. Media representations can define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments and suggest remedies. This process occurs through media frames, 'which are manifested by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments' (Entman, 1993, p. 52).

Media frames, over time, construct much of what is perceived as reality (Gamson, et. al., 1992) and their importance lies in their ability to create a specific narrative and build a 'mediated reality' (Entman, 2004). Here, it is worth

acknowledging that 'mediated reality' comes to reflect systemic power, which means that the lack of media representation can be considered a lack of power (Ferree, et. al., 2002). This means that when the reporting successfully portrays the purchase of EVs as a positive act—whether for climate change or for care for the environment—it provides a power to those purchasing EVs, which then can further increase interest in these vehicles (Love, et. al., 2018).

McCombs and Shaw (1972) first connected media frames to the salience of an issue in the public agenda and titled this process, agenda-setting. Later, McCombs defined agenda setting as 'a theory about the transfer of salience of elements in the mass media's pictures of the world to the elements in the pictures in our heads'. In other words, agenda setting as a theory, becomes apparent when media frames align with the public's perception on a certain issue. As people often rely on the news to shape their ideas on a specific topic, the media's function can be seen as the framework under which citizens build their ideas about a determined topic, such as EVs. Mainstream media play a pivotal role in setting up the topics of discussion for the public and how an issue then is framed, which can then influence public opinion (Ilona Grzywińska & Borden, 2012, p. 16).

The connection between climate change and EV reporting

EV vehicles do not produce emissions, and therefore, one would expect to see reporting that is connected to climate change. The media's framing on climate change can have a degree of influence on how the public perceives EV vehicles, playing a role in their increase on the road (Broadbent et al., 2021). The connection between EV vehicles and climate change can provide the news media an opportunity to portray specific actions that can be taken to mitigate climate change, creating a positive effect on the readers' subsequent actions (Broadbent et al., 2021). In this regard, even though research supports the supposition that scientific analysis builds trust and reduces uncertainty amongst prospective buyers of EVs (Love et al., 2018), previous research has found that most of the reporting on EV vehicles did not historically cover aspects usually seen in the reporting of petrol cars, such as safety or performance (Pollak & Zint, 2006). Instead, EV reporting focused more on technological features of EVs and not the connection between EV purchases and environmental improvement.

This connection between EVs and the science of climate change has not been found in research in other countries either. Focus groups with residents of urban and rural areas in the UK found there was little connection in their minds between EVs and climate change (Esmene, Taylor, & Leyshon, 2020). Additionally, other research has found the public is unlikely to see how general climate change messages may affect their lives and their means of transportation (Moser, 2016).

In New Zealand, previous research on climate change reporting has found that most of the news reports on climate change focus on a political perspective,

giving less prominence to scientific perspectives (Hopkins, et. al., 2015). This has meant that climate change has historically been considered more of a political issue rather than a scientific issue.

Previous research on the reporting of EVs in New Zealand found that print media was the main channel through which potential EV buyers would get information about EVs (Lemon & Miller, 2013). Potential EV buyers also use print media to get information about EV-related topics, such as policies to promote the uptake of EV cars and their environmental impact. However, the most significant message that readers receive in regards to EVs is generally focussed on their high costs (Broadbent et al., 2021). High costs are considered to be a factor that may be working against the uptake of EVs as readers may regard them as too expensive (Broadbent et al., 2021).

In New Zealand, there are several initiatives aimed at increasing the number of EVs in the country. For example, the Better NZ Trust is a community organisation that often holds EV showcasing events, that may be covered by the news media. Better NZ Trust holds these events in an attempt to increase the awareness of EVs and incentivise their purchase (Love et al., 2018). Additionally, in 2021, the New Zealand government also put in place financial incentives to support the use of electric cars. Through a clean car rebate, electric car buyers could get a rebate of up to $7,500, which was expected to accelerate the increase of low and no-emissions vehicles in the country.

Methodology

This study carried out a quantitative content analysis of the New Zealand's newspaper reporting of EVs in an attempt to identify how EVs are portrayed to the public and explore whether this coverage correlated with EV purchases. By using this method, it was possible to identify trends in the reporting during a specific timeframe and examine the extent to which the reporting related to the number of EVs being purchased. Specifically, this research aimed to find reporting patterns in framing by answering the following questions:

RQ1: Does the framing of EVs become more positive or negative between 2017 and 2021?

RQ2: Does the prevalence of any EV frames concomitantly increase or concomitantly decrease over the period sampled?

RQ3: If an EV story is framed as environmental (rather than political, economic, or technological development), are the benefits of EVs discussed?

RQ4: Is there an agenda-setting association between the valence of EV coverage and the purchase of EV vehicles?

To answer these research questions, this study gathered news texts on electric cars in New Zealand from 2017, the year when electric vehicles were officially introduced in the New Zealand market, until July 2021. The highest-circulation newspapers in New Zealand were included for study. Additionally, the study purposely included the main city hubs in the country, as these were the places where the number of electric cars was likely to be higher (Agility PR Solutions, 2017; IPFS, 2018; Statista, 2018). This process resulted in focusing on newspapers that were predominantly circulated in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin. The final selected newspapers were *The New Zealand Herald, Dominion Post, The Press* and *The Otago Daily Times*.

The research relied upon Factiva and filtered the search for data under the keywords electric vehicle*, electric vehicle*, electric car* and EV car*. Additionally, the search narrowed the appearance of data to these keywords being located only in the news texts' headlines, sub-headlines or lead paragraphs as these stories would likely be more relevant to the reader and could 'affect what existing knowledge can be activated in the audience' (Konnikova, 2014).

The process of ascertaining repeating patterns or themes from each source was guided by thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which used the research questions as a guide to then develop selection criteria of codes that were used for the quantitative content analysis. Definitions of essential terms and their importance to this study then emerged. An initial identification of themes was made first when examining the entire dataset and then those themes were continually refined after closer readings of the text. During this process, principal themes, that could not have been uncovered through segmented or cursory readings, began to emerge. The final 11 coding categories of media frames were determined from an exhaustive thematic analysis guided by the research questions: reference of EVs in the article, overall frame, overall valence of EVs, battery reuse, presence of evaluative language, presence of public opinion, personal cost, range, environment, carbon emissions and battery life.

As is the case with any study examining frames that are categorical by nature, there is nothing 'normal' about the data collected—meaning the coded media frames did not fall on a normally distributed curve and are not assumed to be representative of a larger population of frames. The frames found were representative only of the newspaper sampled, and not of any other newspapers that exist. A quantitative, non-parametric chi-square test was therefore utilised. Percentages, frequencies, chi-square correlations, observed counts, expected counts, and adjusted residual values, were all used to answer the research questions. No one measure itself provided strong evidence of a particular finding, but when taking cohesively, there could be a suggestion of associate

Two coders were used throughout this study to ensure inter-coder reliability. The Cohen's Kappa inter-observer reliability coefficient was used to indicate the

coding scheme's reliability. Ten percent of the total media sample was coded by another coder to determine intercoder reliability measures. Cohen's Kappa was used to determine intercoder reliability, which ranged from 89.16 percent to 95.18 percent for all of the coded variables. The overall intercoder Cohen's Kappa was 92.31percent, suggesting a highly robust coding scheme.

Results

In total, 1,409 articles were examined: 460 in *The New Zealand Herald*, 407 in *The Dominion Post*, 389 in *The Press* and 153 in *The Otago Daily Times*. These articles were examined against a range of variables detailed in the coding sheet.

RQ1

The first research question asked: Does the coverage of EVs become more positive or negative between 2017 and 2021? Two variables were examined for this question: the overall valence of EVs and the positive evaluative language of EVs. Valence refers to the degree to which the articles are critical or complimentary of EV vehicles. Similarly, evaluative language is the amount of positive, negative, or neutral terms used by texts on a certain topic. Overall, 1,009 (71.6 percent) of 1,409 articles were found to have a positive valence toward EVs. Only 341 (24.2 percent) articles demonstrated neutral valence toward EVs. Positive evaluative language was highlighted in 661 news articles (46.9 percent), whereas negative evaluative language was found to be prevalent in only 92 news texts (6.5 percent). The relationship between the overall valence toward EVs and the year of publication was not found to be significant (x^2 = 18.068, df = 16, p = .320). However, there were 40 percent of cells with expected counts less than 5 meaning that a basic assumption of the chi-square test has been violated. Turning to another aspect of the data, the likelihood ratio (x^2 = 16.072, df = 16, p = .405) suggesting this relationship was insignificant. The directional measure (eta squared) between the year of publication and the overall valence toward EVs as a dependent variable shows that this is an inconsequential relationship. Eta squared (η^2), which measures effect size, shows how much variation is explained in the dependent variable (overall valence of EVs) by variation in the independent variable (year). In this case, η^2 = .004489. A popular guideline for η^2 is that a value of .02 (2 percent) is small effect size, .13 (13 percent) is medium effect size, and .26 (26 percent) is large effect size. The effect of time on the overall valence toward EVs was very small and the relationship not significant. The relationship between the positive evaluative language of EVs and the year of publication was found to be significant (x^2 = 16.515, df = 4, p = .002). Yet, the directional measure was again, very small (η^2 = .01164). Thus, this research found that the coverage of EVs has neither become more positive over time nor more negative over time.

RQ2

The second research question asked: Does the prevalence of any EV frames concomitantly increase or concomitantly decrease over the period sampled? Overall, the frames of technological development, economic positive, and political neutrality were the most used frames, with 743 (52.7 percent), 168 (11.9 percent) and 131 (9.3 percent) respectively. In terms of technological development, the most popular feature in this frame addressed smart technology systems in EVs, such as the EVs' ability to link with the user's smartphones. When the economy was emphasised, the government's rebate scheme for EVs purchases was the prevailing topic. The political neutrality frame occurred where there was subsequent political debate on the scheme. A total of 10 of the 13 variables measured showed no statistically significant relationship with time of publication. However, the positive evaluative language used ($x^2 = 16.515$, df = 4, p = .002), the mention of carbon emissions ($x^2 = 50.078$, df = 24, p = <.001), and the frame used ($x^2 = 37.630$, df = 12, p = <.001), were all found to have a significant relationship with time.

While findings were not significant for all variables, general trends, such as the reference to visibility over time, demonstrated that the prominence of EVs as a story has been steadily decreasing since 2019 (Figure 1) as is the positive valence towards EVs (Figure 2) and also the negative valence, but to a lesser degree. Indeed, discussion of battery life, carbon emissions, the environment, range, personal or public costs and battery reusability all declined after 2019.

The significant relationship between the year and the positive language used was more than would be expected by chance alone (adjusted residual = 2.8) in 2020 and positive language was used less than would be expected by chance

Figure 1: Reference as visibility, 2017-2019
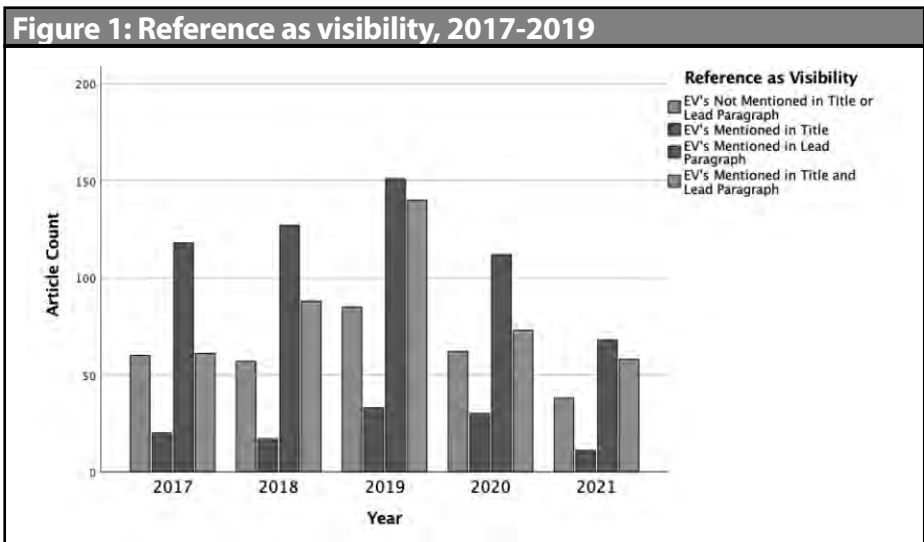
alone (adjusted residual = -2.1) in 2021. Yet, the directional measures demonstrating a concomitant decrease or increase over the entire five year period were very small (η^2 = .01164).

The significant relationship between the year and the use of carbon emissions in the text was more than would be expected by chance alone (adjusted residual = 3.5) in 2021. Yet, the directional measures demonstrating a concomitant decrease or increase over the entire five year period were again very small (η^2 = .0064). The significant relationship between the year and the frame used in the text demonstrated that economics (adjusted residual = 2.3) and politics (adjusted residual = 2.4) were more than one would expect on chance alone in 2021 and technological development was used as a frame in media text less than would be expected by chance (adjusted residual = -4.7). Yet, again, the directional measures demonstrating a concomitant decrease or increase over the entire five year period were very small (η^2 = .011236).

These findings suggest that while a significant relationship was found, in each case it was uneven and not found to be consistently linear over time. Thus, it was concluded that none of the 13 measures of how EVs were framed in media coverage, concomitantly increased or concomitantly decreased over the period sampled.

RQ3

The third research question asked: If an EV story is framed as environmental (rather than political, economic, or technological development), are the benefits of EVs discussed? Again, the frame of the article, the valence of EVs, battery life, carbon emissions, range, public or personal costs, positive public opinion, positive evaluative language, and battery reusage could all be considered

Figure 2: Overall valence towards EVs in New Zealand
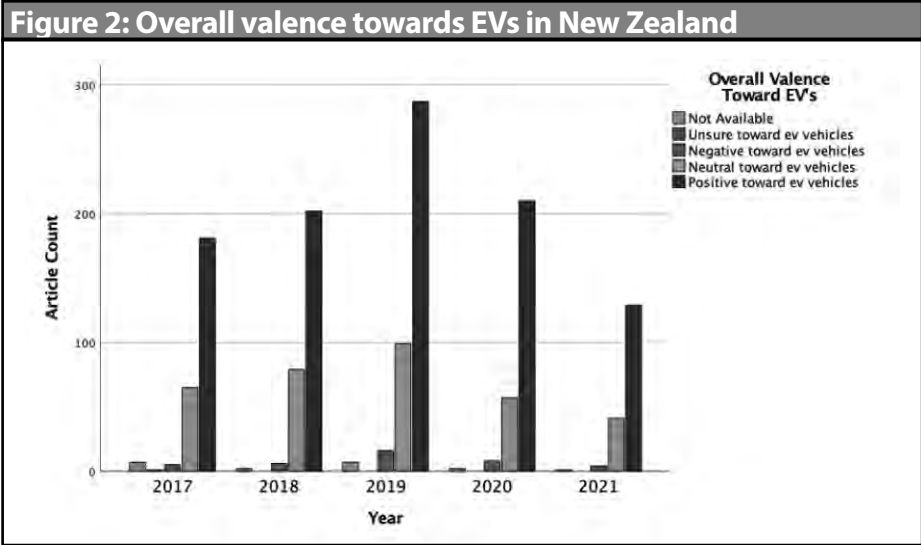
positive benefits of EVs if addressed positively, or if at all, in coverage. None of the relationships was found to be significant. However, in each case, there were 25 percent to 82.1 percent of cells with expected counts less than five, meaning that a basic assumption of the chi-square test had been violated. Turning to another aspect of the data, the likelihood ratio was also insignificant in all of the possible relationships suggesting that all were insignificant. This is not surprising given the weight of frequency is measured. For instance, only 1 percent of articles mentioned that there was a high cost to the environment, 11 percent stated that there was a low cost to the environment and .3 percent suggested that there was both a high cost and a low cost to the environment. However, the near totality of the content did not mention the environment at all. Indeed, 1,234 articles or 87.6 percent did not mention the environment in news content. Therefore, almost no variation can be explained in any of these variables by variation in the independent variable (mention of the environment). It needs to be noted that the data was so lopsided that significant likelihood ratios were not able to be achieved.

RQ4

Lastly, the fourth research question asked: Is there an agenda-setting association between the valence of EV coverage and the purchase of EV vehicles? As has been detailed, the positive coverage of EVs actually decreased over the last two years after a high point in 2019. Conversely, the purchase of EVs has continued to rise year on year (Ministry of Transport, 2022) (Figure 3).

According to early statistics, in the first year since the clean car rebate started, the uptake of EVs increased by 56 percent, making up 20 percent of the total vehicle purchases (Woods & Shaw, 2022). Thus, it can be suggested that there is no indication of an agenda-setting association between the valence of EV coverage and the purchase of EV vehicles.

Discussion and conclusion

This study examined the reporting of EV vehicles in four major New Zealand newspapers: The New Zealand Herald, Dominion Post, The Press and Otago Daily Times. The study was theoretically based on a range of literature on media framing (Entman, 2004) and agenda setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This research examined the framing of EV reporting in order to discover if there was any relationship between their use in New Zealand (Energy Efficiency & Conservation Authority, 2021; Kopestinsky, 2021; Ministry of Transport, 2022) and media coverage.

The results of this research demonstrated a surprising and dominant absence of information in news articles that were otherwise expected as purchases of EVs increased. The 1,409 news articles examined in this study showed very little framing of costs, carbon emissions, environment, or range in relation to EVs. Instead, the framing in this reporting featured the presence of technological features and
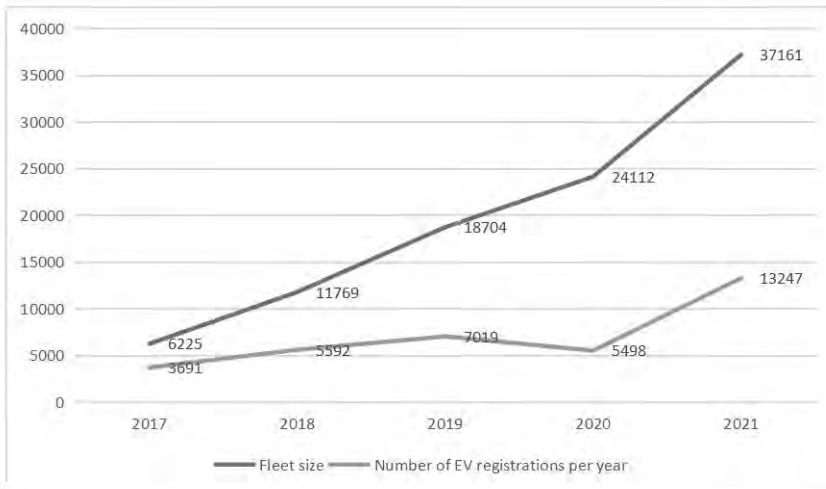
Source: NZ Ministry of Transport, 2022

high-end designs. Specifically, news articles that covered the launch of new EV models generally highlighted their built-in operating systems, speed capabilities, and luxury accessories, such as leather seats and interiors.

Rather, on the whole, there was a lack of connection between EVs and combating climate change or care for the environment. This is a significant finding as previous research found that if readers do not see the connection between EVs and positive factors, such as the improvement of the environment, they are less likely to attempt to purchase EVs (Konnikova, 2014). The rapid increase in the purchase of EVs, suggests that the purchasing of EVs in New Zealand may not be connected to environmental reasons. In fact, the reporting seems to reflect previous research, which reported that EV coverage remained focused on a consumerist perspective (Esmene et al., 2020).

One reason for the disconnection between media coverage and non-consumerist environmental benefits may be that potential buyers were already aware of these benefits. This could suggest that newspaper coverage may not play a significant role in any decision-making processes surrounding EV purchases. However, if the connection between the environment and the purchase of EVs is indeed strong in the public, then a shift in the coverage of EVs would be key for continued growth. It is important to note that the purchase of EVs may have been even higher if media coverage was positive and more connected to the environment. It is impossible to know that from this content analysis, but given the previous research in this area, that eventuality cannot be discounted.

Another possible conclusion to draw from these findings is that if the public

feels strongly enough about a specific issue, it simply does not matter how the media frames that issue. Therefore, the media may lose some of their agenda-setting power in such cases. For example, a recent study found that issue exposure (amount and emphasis of coverage) and news factor exposure (content of coverage that provides newsworthiness reasons) stimulate individual-level agenda-setting effects (Geiß, 2022). News consumers consider both amount and content of coverage to appraise and update issue salience. So, even if coverage was generally neutral or negative, the amount of coverage may have had a stronger agenda-setting effect than the coverage itself. This may be an effect even more pronounced when a consumer feels particularly strong about a purchase decision.

These findings open the discussion of what other factors may play a role in the uptake of EV vehicles, and to what extent New Zealand reporting plays a role in the number of EV vehicles being purchased. The lack of positive media EV coverage seems to confirm previous claims that motoring newsrooms continue to rely on traditional coverage that privileges petrol cars. It may be that the concept of climate change is challenging to communicate in a way that audiences can see its role in their daily lives (Moser, 2016; Pollak & Zint, 2006) or it may be that advertising dollars from petrol car companies still predominate over newsroom decisions. The only way to disentangle these possibilities is to conduct in-depth interviews with reporters. However, if negative coverage of EVs continues to predominate, then sellers of EVs in New Zealand will become even more important for the continued growth in the sector by promoting their cars to the news media, whether through free test drives or free informational sessions available to news reporters. The input from EV sellers may help shift reporters' perspectives toward EVs and give more salience to environment-related features of EVs, such as lower carbon emissions and sustainability. Furthermore, traditional viewpoints of reporters who cover cars in the news could be addressed through promotion, such as free test drives or free informational sessions.

Future research could directly compare media coverage of EVs as well as petrol cars in an attempt to investigate direct disparities in coverage. While the framing of EVs found minimal presence of cost, carbon emissions, environment, or range in relation to EVs, it is not known what perceived benefits of petrol cars are or are not emphasised. For example, does news media coverage of petrol cars emphasise cost or gas mileage in terms of range? Does news coverage address low carbon emissions of newer models? How are the benefits of petrol cars framed in the news media?

Future studies may also wish to explore if potential buyers get their information about EVs from newspaper media or another source. It may be particularly enlightening to explore whether EV purchasers use different media than petrol car purchasers. It may be that other communicative platforms, such as social media, are far more important for potential buyers to solidify the connection between

climate change and the purchase of EVs. The dominant age group for EVS in the United States is 25-54 years old (Fuels Institute, 2021) and social media is skewed to younger age groups (Perrin & Monica, 2019). So, it simply may be that potential EV purchasers are not attending to newspaper media coverage, but rather other social media platforms. If so, the comparison conducted here is not applicable in determining future EV purchasing intentions or behaviour.

This research leads to several different future directions for scholarship. What remains clear from this research is that the New Zealand newspaper media have not emphasised the benefits of EVs since 2017, but EV purchases have continued to grow. This presents interesting challenges to previous agenda-setting research and demands closer scrutiny from scholars who are interested in the continued growth of the EV sector.

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Linda Jean Kenix is head of the School of Language, Social, and Political Sciences and professor at the University of Canterbury. Her research specialities include the visual and textual media representation of marginalised groups. Linda Jean has been a visiting research fellow at Oxford University, the University of Cambridge, Monash University and the University of Valencia.
lindajean.kenix@canterbury.ac.nz

Jorge Bolanos Lopez was awarded his PhD by the University of Canterbury. His research interests include media discourse, journalism ethics and practices. Jorge has published several articles on media discourse and journalism practices. He has also been a lecturer of communication and film studies at universities in Ecuador and New Zealand.
jorge.bolanos.L@gmail.com

The morals that shape the news

A study of Aotearoa New Zealand's newsrooms

Abstract: This article explores the personal interpretation of the moral world Aotearoa New Zealand newsroom leaders are guided by when shaping the news, or, in other words, it poses the question: Do personal moral values play a role in Aotearoa New Zealand newsroom? This study examines whether newsroom leaders view morals as a driver in news-shaping, or whether the news values of objectivity, accuracy and fairness prevail over personal morals when it comes to informing the news. The research was conducted by interviewing six newsroom leaders from different media companies in Aotearoa New Zealand and the interview data were analysed within a theoretical and philosophical framework adopted from Lakoff (2002). The research suggests that working professionals in the media industry were not able to discern where their morals ended and where professional news values started. Interviewees affiliated with public service media said that upholding moral values would not have a financial impact on the news media organisation, whereas those affiliated with private media responded that it would.

Keywords: code of ethics, balance, fairness, journalism, journalistic field, liberal political philosophy, moral values, newsroom leader, New Zealand, objectivity

FEDERICO MAGRIN
Journalist, Stuff

Introduction

THIS RESEARCH posits that newsroom leaders hold personal moral values while being professional journalists. In this study, we employ an idiosyncratic definition of moral values, as interpretations of the subjective power of judgment that have their origin in the individual passions and sentiments of the authentic personality, as well as empirical, material creations of the principles of external education. Therefore, it is argued that subjective moral values have the power to cloud the striving for objectivity, as the illusion of participating in objectivity is designed by the individual self, which seeks to validate its aims. (Kant, 1788/2001, 1790/2000; Nietzsche, 1887/1974, 1901/1968).

Hence, as people who carry moral values, journalists have 'second-order-de-sires' or 'desires of the second order'—which means that they perform 'reflec-tive self-evaluation' and limit the power of the will (Frankfurt, 1971, pp. 6-7). They desire what they want to desire. These moral actions, performed by the power to desire, can either obstruct the path to objectivity—a professional aim within journalism (Schudson, 2001, 2018)—or pave it. Morals, modes of rea-son and systems of meaning inform the decision-making process of journalists. Paraphrasing the distinction Kant made between the private and the public[1] use of reason (Donald, 2003), it could be said that journalists try to avoid applying personal values while shaping the news, because they are within their profes-sional space. In order to maintain a professional habitus (Schultz, 2007; Vos, 2016), the personal upbringing and the moral values newsroom leaders bring to the newsrooms have to be harnessed in a professional way. Notwithstanding this noble intention, editors, heads of news, and CEOs might still apply their own moral values when in a work environment.

This study seeks to assess whether in Aotearoa New Zealand journalists from traditional media organisations have a moral position in the journalistic field (Bourdieu, 2005; Burgess & Hurcombe, 2019); whether they express their beliefs in a professional environment; and whether subjective moral propositions determine and inform their journalistic practices.

The research follows an approach based on Bourdieu's topological interpreta-tion of the field theory (Chew & Tandoc Jr, 2022); his conceptualisation of doxa, which will be understood as implicit and explicit rules assumed by actors within the journalistic field (Vos, 2016, p. 386); and his conclusion that the moral position in the field determines and informs expressions of belief and moral propositions (Bourdieu, 1988). We will also use research by scholars pointing out how objectiv-ity remains one of the most valued journalistic epistemologies; the epistemology interpreting objectivity as a journalistic claim; that there is an 'objective truth' and that one 'can and should separate facts from values' (Hanitzsch et al., 2011, p. 276).

Methodology

Following the methodological steps of Rupar (2020), this article will examine whether heads of news and executive managers in six newsrooms in Aotearoa New Zealand perceive the newsroom as a moral space. It investigates the ex-perience of seasoned journalists within a professional space and asks them to look into the deep structure of morality. The study is based on interviews with six newsroom leaders of news media organisations in Aotearoa New Zea-land: Stuff, NZME, MediaWorks, *The Platform*, Radio NZ and *Te Ao Māori News*. Participants were identified via social media network according to their job title (LinkedIn), contacted on their professional email addresses and then interviewed online. In a small country such as Aotearoa, the selection was by

necessity both random (decided by the participants' willingness to answer), as well as designed—both by accident and by design. The mix of mainstream legacy media, indigenous public broadcaster and small start-up, conservative and liberal news outlets was used to portray the diversified and changing media landscape in the country.

The interviewing approach echoes previously established conventions (Usher, 2017). The interviews were recorded and processed using an Artificial Intelligence software widespread among journalists: otter.ai (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2023). The software produced transcripts of the interviews, which were then verified for accuracy against the audio recordings.

Participants were asked to respond to a questionnaire, which helped to clarify the terminology, understand motivations and expectations, explore moral perceptions and identify how journalists engaged with moral values in the newsroom. In order to introduce the participants to a map of moral values, they were asked to list how important the following moral values were in the line of their work: equality, discipline, freedom, fairness, virtue, individual responsibility, authority and justice. The morals for the list had previously been selected from philosophical and sociological literature (Fukuyama, 1992; Lakoff, 2002; Perry, 2011; Rawls, 2001). The interviews were interpreted within the political-theoretical framework developed by Lakoff (2002).

After elaborating and analysing the contents of the interviews, several themes were identified and reviewed. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) principles of Thematic Analysis, recurring themes were used to group information and present data. Four separate themes were identified: newsrooms as moral spaces; two interpretations of fairness; freedom of speech and individual responsibility; and the (perceived) financial outcomes of having personal, moral values.

This research project has received the approval of Massey University Human Ethics Committee.

Newsrooms as moral spaces

The Colombian philosopher Gómez Dávila (1977/2020) described moral conscience as a faculty whose active decisions solely operated at a subaltern level. Decisions taken consciously, as a result, did not appear to count on a moral level—or at least did not seem to count on a macro-moral level. However, subconscious decisions, or choices made by the deep structure of morality, operate on a macro-level. The deep structure of morality is a byproduct of the freedom of the will, acting merely on its own freedom, and of the moral upbringing received by the ethos of the family, small sub-societal groups and society.

Newsroom leaders across different companies pointed out how the workplace could be represented as a moral space; because, within the professional environment, what they called a shared morality would require a certain set of

behaviours, conventional language choices and moral bounds. As Lakoff (2002) observed, 'word choice and discourse forms' (p. 28) could be formulated as a result of moral concepts and ideals, working on a sub-linguistic level. Besides the role played by commercial codes of ethics (MacNamara, 2016) and shared news values (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017; Ross, 2019; Schudson, 2013), linguistic automatisms established by these professional values censored the interviewees and their moral practice.

The NZME newsroom leader argued that there were two different systems of morality at play in a newsroom: a system of 'shared morality', that would serve the audience; and personal views. The shared morality was a hybrid mix of journalistic news values and the company's code of ethics. Every journalist, they said, should be 'partaking in the wider morality of an organisation.' They spoke about occasional clashes between these two different sets of values, where the personal values could conflict with the professional ones—although that has never occurred to them. These instances were described as 'an occasion where I would feel that something was wrong, but I had to do it anyway.' Donald (2003) defined a private, or 'corporate' sphere, as a place 'where enforced conformity is not only legitimate but beneficial' (p. 51). Therefore, if newsroom leaders were to abide by professional values, they would benefit from obeying. A concept that the newsroom leader from RNZ reinforced by saying that journalists did not consciously think about morality or morals in their everyday life. The allegiance to professional values acted on a subconscious level, triggering moral acts: 'I just do what I feel I need to do to get the job done' (Newsroom leader, RNZ).

The newsroom leaders across different companies thought that a personal sense of morality (Guyer, 2006), a view on what was right and what was wrong, played a role in the decision-making process. The discrepancy between the personal moral values and the ethical values of the journalistic field—called professional, organisational, or journalistic values—would often see the latter prevail over the former. Thus, journalistic actors have embraced 'the assumptions of the [journalistic] field'—the newsroom leaders have assumed what Bourdieu and others call doxa (Vos, 2016, p. 386). Belonging to a specific field as an active member results in the adoption of a whole 'system of presuppositions' (Bourdieu, 2005). In the case of the journalistic field, these were the news values.

Nonetheless, the newsroom leader from Stuff affirmed that it was 'important that journalists and newsroom leaders have a strong set of principles and values that they use'. They said both these moral systems—professional and personal—would play a role in shaping the news, but at times journalists were unable to distinguish what was appropriate according to the standard codes of ethics (journalistic values) and their own sense of morality: 'I would also like to think they [journalistic values] are my own personal values, but which ones influence which?' (Newsroom leader, Stuff).

After establishing a career in journalism, journalists might end up binding together professional ethical values and subjective moral values, or even incorporating the former into their own moral understanding. Somehow, this feature would be a bridging point between Western journalism and Talanoa journalism (Robie, 2019). While Pacific journalism and a Pacific approach to journalism will not be discussed per se, it is worth mentioning that when journalists start incorporating subjective moral values into their professional practice, journalism might have the potential to become a more reflexive and nuanced field—where a commitment to the ideal freedom of the media could mix with community ethics and social responsibility, where recognition of cultural values could espouse normative ethical codes.

During the interviews, a number of moral values were named as being relevant, or of paramount importance, to the job of a newsroom leader: honesty, fairness, freedom, individual responsibility and truth. Before the moral values can be examined and distinguished according to the individual position of the interviewees in relation to their individual moral system, a distinction between two different definitions of fairness must be put forward.

Justice as fairness versus fairness as neutrality

Fairness as a news value is one of the most common professional values among journalists and it is thought to be a requirement to attain neutrality, objectivity and credibility (Deuze, 2005). This news value suggests that the 'strict adherence to impartiality and neutrality belong to the highly esteemed professional standards of journalism', according to Hanitzsch at al. (2011, pp. 286-87). On the other hand, fairness is at the centre of a liberal political philosophy formulated in 1971 (Rawls, 2005). Rawls (2001) has put the moral concept at the very centre of his pluralist interpretation of liberalism—and he has been defined as one of the major exponents of political liberalism (Lakoff, 2002). The Rawlsian interpretation of fairness is at the core of an extensive system of political philosophy that values equality of opportunities above anything else.

Fairness as a requirement to attain neutrality in reporting shares the same inclination towards equality. Most of the newsroom leaders defined equality, or fairness, as the most important morals for them. The RNZ newsroom leader defined fairness as the only lens that was applicable in the process of news-shaping and the only value that would not compromise journalists' integrity—because 'everything else flows from fairness'. They expanded their view by saying morals in journalism should not be performative, which translates into a mere constative interpretation of journalism. Constative journalism is 'a sentiment expressed by public service journalists' (Harrison, 2019, p. 4). According to Hanitzsch et al. (2011), detachment, as a means to attain neutrality, was one of the most esteemed 'traditional Western' ideals among journalists (p. 280).

Although different, the two meanings of fairness share some similarities. In reporting, fairness is often used as a synonym for objectivity (Deuze, 2005) and it is used in news reporting to balance the presented views. This usually means offering the public an equal possibility to hear from diverging views or giving dissimilar opinions an equal opportunity to be represented. Therefore, fairness in reporting is imbued with the concept of equality. During the interview with the NZME newsroom leader, this confusion between the two differing meanings of the moral concept was formulated as follows: people might join a news media organisation because they abide by professional ethical values, before joining the industry. Moreover, they praised journalists as they have no hidden agenda and because they are 'truthful and fair': 'I think they [journalists] are some of the most ethical people that you can work with' (newsroom leader, NZME).

The fine line that separates personal from professional values was usually thinned by a career: if a person was motivated by their morals to pursue a profession and join the news media industry, then, after a career in journalism, the codes of ethics would have replaced those moral values. This shared perspective among the newsroom leaders on the slight distinction between news values and moral values would often lead journalists to understand fairness as a professional value, even though it was morally charged. The newsroom leader from Stuff defined the company's code of ethics as the 'moral values' of the news media organisation:

> [The code of ethics] is almost like an organisation's expression of our collective moral values, you know, the ones that we think are fundamentals. If I think about the opposite, if I think about companies that I think do not have moral values—the ones that come to my mind, like Facebook, for example, which I would describe as morally bankrupt, because they, over many years, have become a platform where massacres can be live streamed, where hate speech can flourish, where vicious attacks can be plotted and planned, where people can be, you know, brainwashed by deliberate disinformation, you know, people are allowed to use the platform for really malign purposes—it's interesting to think that having that approach has obviously helped build them into a super successful financial company. (Newsroom leader, Stuff)

Across the legacy media industry (Lotz, 2018) in Aotearoa New Zealand, fairness was deemed a universal value by the newsroom leaders. Two newsroom leaders pointed out that the 'epitome of fairness' was represented by the 10 Commandments (Exodus 20:2-17) and also quoted the Gospel injunction: 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.' (Matthew 7:12) These two newsroom leaders highlighted how their Catholic upbringing had underpinned the moral values they would have as adults. Although different interpretations

of the same moral values might exist, they believed every human being had the same set of moral values. Regardless of their religious affiliation or personal credo, the Judaeo-Christian morals were deemed to be shared universally.

As shown by Hanitzsch et al. (2011), Western journalists are often under the illusion of strictly adhering to universal ethical principles and rules. The belief in some sort of universalism was part of the liberal modern state and reinforced by the liberal media actors' doxa. But its roots were planted in a religious creed. The belief in the universality of a moral value found its roots within Judaeo-Christian morality. The liberal premise of universalism flourished when Christianity attempted to establish a common, universal human history and was only then reinforced by liberal democracies (Fukuyama, 1992).

Religious upbringing might have played a part in creating the belief in universalistic features of moral values and perhaps even in the 'cross-over' between moral values and professional standards. A common, universal moral ground was thought to be shared by every human being. This universalism would entail a common understanding of professional standards. The differing interpretations of a moral value such as freedom, the Stuff newsroom leader said, would not translate into the abandonment of the value.

Freedom of speech and individual responsibility

When asked about the most important moral value, the newsroom leader from The Platform said freedom came to the very fore, if compared with equality or fairness. Freedom was a condition for fairness. The principle of freedom of speech and expression would let people who had been criticised have a right to reply, which was what fairness in reporting entailed. Freedom was to be interpreted as a contestatory, or an oppositional right, which is a value that would let citizens contest and resist authorities (Pettit, 1999).

As part of the latest World Values Survey (Perry 2011; Perry & Yeung, 2021), a survey on values carried out between different countries over several decades using questionnaires, freedom and equality were measured against each other, and the respondents were asked whether they favoured freedom over equality, or vice versa. Following the theoretical framework provided by Lakoff (2002), equality is placed inside a liberal system of morality, and freedom in a conservative one.

The contrast between the two moral values was mentioned during the interviews with newsroom leaders and most of them ended up stressing more the concept of equality rather than freedom. The newsroom leader from Stuff highlighted the relevance of freedom, but said freedom of expression and fairness—'the very core basics' of journalism—should not be swayed by 'strong' personal interpretations: 'the objectivity of journalism' must not be tainted by personal bias. The newsroom leader from Stuff referred to people who advocated for non-interference from the government, specifically in terms of safety policies relating

to the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., governmental mandates). People who believe in what Pettit (2014) called a republican conception of freedom, that is freedom as non-domination, or freedom as non-interference, might then be perceived as a menace. This liberal interpretation of freedom is a legacy of the Lockean idea that everyone should be tolerated but the intolerants; a concept that was summarised by Gómez Dávila (1977/2020, p. 121): 'We must avoid the bigotry of respecting inconsiderate opinions.'[2] The reactionary thinker would affirm that concrete freedom rather than abstract freedom should be defended from the despotism of ideology (Gómez Dávila, 1986/2022).

On the other hand, the newsroom leader from The Platform stressed the perilous consequences of abandoning a staunch defence of freedom of expression and speech, tout-court. Since the legacy media organisations were dismissing these 'fundamentals', the 'idea of a democratic free society' was at stake. Traditional media organisations were causing a 'lack of diversity' and a 'lack of tolerance', and creating a 'sameness' in the news:

> [News media] is creating, in some ways, a sameness and a lack of diversity in its views, and in the views, it's prepared to entertain. [And] a lack of tolerance. (Newsroom leader, *The Platform*)

Following Lakoff's (2002) theoretical framework, this idea was interpreted as supporting a conservative interpretation of morals. Behind word choice and discourse preferences, a sense of morality is laid. Matheson (2005, p. 27) stated that 'words mean much more than dictionaries have tended to suggest, bringing with them quite specific cultural knowledge and expectations along with the conditions of their use.' Language is practical not because it conveys moral acts, but in the sense that linguistic acts show conducts of life and morals. Therefore, language has to be interpreted in relation to a moral system.

According to the newsroom leader from *Te Ao Māori News*, when not embracing individual responsibility, media actors will not reach the necessary threshold to practise other moral values. Then, individual responsibility is to be preserved within Aotearoa New Zealand media landscape, as non-Māori need to be held accountable for the misrepresentations and errors of the past. As a result of a convention in the dominant Pākehā group, the newsroom leader from *Te Ao Māori News* said Māori media had to apply an equity lens when shaping the news. This was an active practice that counterbalanced 'the function of mainstream media', which in the past had dismissed Māori concerns (Hodgetts et al., 2005, p. 193). Thus, Māori media represented a significant alternative to previous media coverage that focused on the interest of the dominant group—the Pākehā perspective. Archie (2019) claimed this position in Māori reporting was inclusive journalism:

> Otherwise, you are regurgitating what non-Māori media present to the world. Sometimes I see our role as balancing what Pākehā media will present. (Newsroom leader, *Te Ao Māori News*)

As an organisation, Te Ao Māori News has a moral obligation to present the Māori perspective and correct unbalanced representation of Māori people. The self-representation of a minority, indigenous group could increase the presence of a marginalised group and community in mainstream media (Hodgetts et al., 2005). *The Te Ao Māori News* newsroom leader felt a duty to represent the interests of a minority audience, which is a prominent feature of public service news media (Cushion, 2012). The role of the Fourth Estate in disclosing the invisible, which was not previously seen or heard, played a major role in a news media organisation focused on a 'tribal, regional and indigenous viewpoint.' Or, as the newsroom leader from *Te Ao Māori News* puts it: Māori media espoused different values and assumed a cultural viewpoint that would then influence the collection, presentation and distribution of news. However, this raised the question of whether espousing a cause or favouring a specific cultural milieu could have a financial cost for news media organisations.

Having moral values: a (perceived) financial outcome

The old saying goes 'everything comes at a price', but would upholding moral values have a financial cost too? Could personal moral values be an economic burden for news media organisations? Could morals benefit media actors?

Instructed to rely exclusively on their perception, the interviewees were asked whether upholding a certain personal moral perspective could have a financial outcome for their company. Most of the newsroom leaders highlighted how they were free from any ties from the commercial, advertising or marketing departments. The sense of autonomy was justified by the audience being their primary asset. According to Cushion (2012), editorial autonomy is a requisite for the pluralist media landscape. The perception of autonomy is widespread among commercial media and public service media (Harrison, 2019). Public service journalism, the newsroom leader from RNZ said, was independent and as such would not 'have to worry about keeping clients happy.' The newsroom leader from MediaWorks pointed out that even though having a 'moral backbone' could have a cost in terms of audiences, it was nonetheless vital for the news media industry:

> Having a moral- and value-based backbone is not just critical for driving advertising revenue, it's critical for the survival of the industry. I don't think it would survive otherwise. (Newsroom leader, MediaWorks)

Others perceived that having a moral perspective came with a financial cost. The *Te Ao Māori News* newsroom leader portrayed a financial situation where

there was a lack of investment in Māori-speaking journalists and technology experts, as well as an inequity in the distribution of governmental funding. Māori-focused news media were perceived to be disadvantaged as the field was not level.

Hence, the newsroom leaders from different media organisations stated that their role as media organisations was more important than whatever financial outcome upholding moral values could trigger. Whether it was pursuing the representation of the interests of a minority, or defending an idea of society, moral values were put first and financial considerations always came second.

Conclusion

Moral values play an important role in newsrooms, whether they are professional codes of ethics, moral products of a personal upbringing, or shared morality systems. Newsroom leaders across Aotearoa New Zealand identified the challenge of distinguishing their own morals from the professional codes of conduct—at times, they were unable to distinguish where one ended and the other began, as borders between morality systems became blurred.

Shared morality, a system of principles and behaviours shared within the corporate space, was also the focus of journalists who had been in the media industry for a long time. The allegiance to corporate values was thought to be ethical and morality was not a major concern when 'on the job.' Paraphrasing a distinction made between the public and the private use of reason (Donald, 2003), newsroom leaders put into practice a private use of morals in the corporate space—and obedience to the company's code of ethics was deemed beneficial.

Media agents occupied a moral position within the journalistic field and these 'position-takings' were either conservative or transformative of the field (Bourdieu, 2005). Newsroom leaders from liberal or public service media organisations tended to espouse and defend equality and fairness; whereas conservative agents were more inclined to denounce the decline in freedom of speech and expression. As freedom, equality and fairness are all news values, that is to say, professional values—it could be inferred that news-values are the doxa of the journalistic field.

Finally, the interviewees perceived that upholding moral values might or might not have an impact on the financial side of the news media organisations. Public service journalists were not inclined to perceive morals as having a role in the financial gain or loss of the company, whereas the private media ones highlighted their commitment to having a 'moral backbone'. The respondents always stated their moral values came first when compared with the financial benefit of the company. On one occasion, the newsroom leader pointed out how representing the interests of a minority (Māori) took a financial toll on their company.

The findings of this study pointed out that newsroom leaders in Aotearoa New

Zealand act within the journalistic field upholding personal moral values. The persistence of morals and their application while on the job was present beyond the need to feel the representation of an issue, or 'the commitments to agreed-upon codes of ethics and editorial guidelines' (Hanitzsch et al., 2011, p. 276).

This research encountered several limitations. Prospective participants were easy to reach, but at times reluctant to undergo the interviewing or unwilling to answer to a request to participate. The qualitative collection of data did not allow the author to amass interviews with many participants, although the quality of the interviews with the six recruited participants allowed for rich and intelligible data.

Future research should extend the pool of interviewees; not only to better portray a more comprehensive picture of Aotearoa New Zealand's newsrooms by extending the qualitatively collected data, but also to depict a more pluralistic account of the many news outlets of the country: the emerging online-only websites as much as the old-fashioned community newspapers. Furthermore, according to the author's experience, in the future, where practicable, interviews should be carried over several encounters face-to-face with the interviewees in their workplace. Finally, the research into the role of moral values should be further extended into new media. Online platform leaders involved in sharing the news (Google, Facebook, Microsoft) might have their groundworks investigated, as they are responsible for the sharing of information to a wider public.

Notes

1. Following Habermas' concept of public sphere: a personal opinion was vented freely only in the public sphere, where the social, governmental and professional constraints do not apply (Habermas, 1964).
2. Translation provided by the author.

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Federico Magrin is an Italian-born journalist, essayist and philosopher, currently working in Aotearoa New Zealand.
magrinfederico93@gmail.com

Social media ecology in an influencer group
A closer look at Chat (Fiji) as a case study

Abstract: Social media use in Fiji has expanded in recent years and has become a ubiquitous feature in wider society. Social media ecology focuses and examines the dimensions of an online environment and its interplay with human experiences in user engagement. These dimensions with human experiences in user engagement can provide an insight into how influential social media groups can become in shaping discourses and views. To examine and discuss the social media ecology of an influencer group, the article details one of Fiji's largest and most influential online groups. To do this, the paper uses digital ethnography, supplemented with social media analytics. This study provides key findings in the social media ecology of influencer groups and online behavior. These findings may have implications for further research in media, citizen journalism, viral content creation and online political campaigning.

Keywords: case studies, citizen journalism, Fiji, digital ethnography, influencer groups, media, media analytics, social media, social media ecology

JOPE TARAI
Australian National University, Canberra

Introduction

THE USE of social media in Fiji continues to rise due to the deregulated telecommunications market, expansion of undersea internet cables and the increasing affordability of digital devices and data plans (Cave, 2012; Minges & Stork, 2015; Watson, 2021). Active mobile devices with cellular subscriptions is estimated to be more than a million, in a country recently estimated to have a population of 864,132 (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2021; Kemp, 2023). There are literally more mobile devices in Fiji than Fijians themselves. This makes the majority of Fijians' engagement and interaction with and around technology, digital devices and online presence inevitable. Related studies in the Pacific have examined the use of mobile phones and its moral economy, underlying the relationship between digital devices and human experiences (Foster & Horst, 2018; Watson, 2011). Apart from this, other studies have moved into social media use and practice, examining political communications, campaigning, advocacy, religion and

regulation (Cave, 2012; Ryle & Tarai, 2020; Tarai, 2018a, 2018b, 2019, 2023; Tarai et al., 2015a, 2015b, Tarai & Eliki, 2018). These interconnected studies have laid foundations in social media and related media research, but have yet to broach social media ecology and the related influencer culture.

The expansion of social media use has also been underpinned by the controls and restrictions placed on the traditional media landscape, largely due to the legacy of the Bainimarama coup era (Robie, 2014; Singh, 2015, 2021; Tarai, 2020, 2022a). These include the recently repealed *Media Industry Development Act* (MIDA, 2010), which cast a cloud of fear over journalists in Fiji because of the heavy penalties it carried (Krishant & Narayan, 2023; Robie, 2014; Singh, 2015, 2021). The restrictive conditions facilitated by draconian laws, provided conducive conditions for Fijians to drift onto social media to engage in wide ranging debates and access information (Tarai, 2018a, 2019, Tarai et al., 2015a, 2015b).

Social media ecology is an examination and detailing of an online space or environment, where users exhibit varieties of experiences, engagement and interactions within the technology and outside of it (Poell, 2014; Zhao, Lampe & Ellison, 2016). These experiences are informed by the users' offline lived realities, such as socio-economic conditions, culture, religious, political beliefs, education and psychological predisposition (Fuchs, 2021). Within the technology and more specifically online groups, the clash and coalescing of these experiences and engagements can be amplified into creating influence. Influencer groups then exhibit the ability to shape discourses and views within social media (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2017; Zhou, et. al., 2021).

In this article, social media ecology of an influencer group focusses on detailing the dimensions of the online group and its interplay with the human experiences in user engagement. As such, this article seeks to detail and discuss the magnitude, composition and activity of an influencer group in Fiji's digital landscape. To do this, the research uses digital ethnography, complemented with social media analytics, focusing on one of Fiji's largest social media groups.

This social media group is a Facebook group called Chat (fiji). Chat (fiji) is one of the largest hyperactive social media groups in Fiji. It accommodates over a quarter of a million online users majority of whom are based in Fiji. This social media group has generated enough attention and focus that it has been at the centre of controversy and concern over time (Bolatiki, 2018; Radinibaravi, 2023; Tarai, & Eliki, 2018). It has demonstrated its ability to generate viral content, which has subsequently shaped and influenced online and offline discourses and views.

Methodology

Digital ethnography encompasses the observation and examination of lived realities, instances and events in digital spaces, over an extended period of time

(Kaur-Gill & Dutta, 2017). This approach may involve participant observations in a mediated form of contact, while at the same time recognizing the researcher's role in the context and space being observed (Horst, et. al., 2015; Kaur-Gill & Dutta, 2017).

For this research, digital ethnographic qualitative observations have been ongoing since 2018. This involved a regular review of the social media group's discussions and confidential informant interviews were conducted over the years with administrators and moderators. This has been supplemented through quantitative social media analytics data. The analytics data was derived from Facebook Audience Insights covering early 2024 and late 2018. Social media analytics data covered the period from 17 October 2018 to 12 November 2018. The mixed method approach used under digital ethnography has provided rich and insightful data in examining the social media ecology of an influencer group like Chat (fiji).

Dominant social media platform in Fiji

Internet use in 2023 was estimated at 87.7 percent of the 864,132 total Fiji population (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2021; Kemp, 2023). In the lead up to the 2022 national elections, the estimated total social media users were 649,000, with around 556,000 users on Facebook (Tarai, 2023). Facebook as a platform continues to be the most dominant social networking site (Tarai, 2019, 2023; Tarai et al., 2015b). As seen in Figure 1 (StatCounter, 2024), Fiji's social media use

Figure 1: Social media statistics of Fiji, 2009-2024
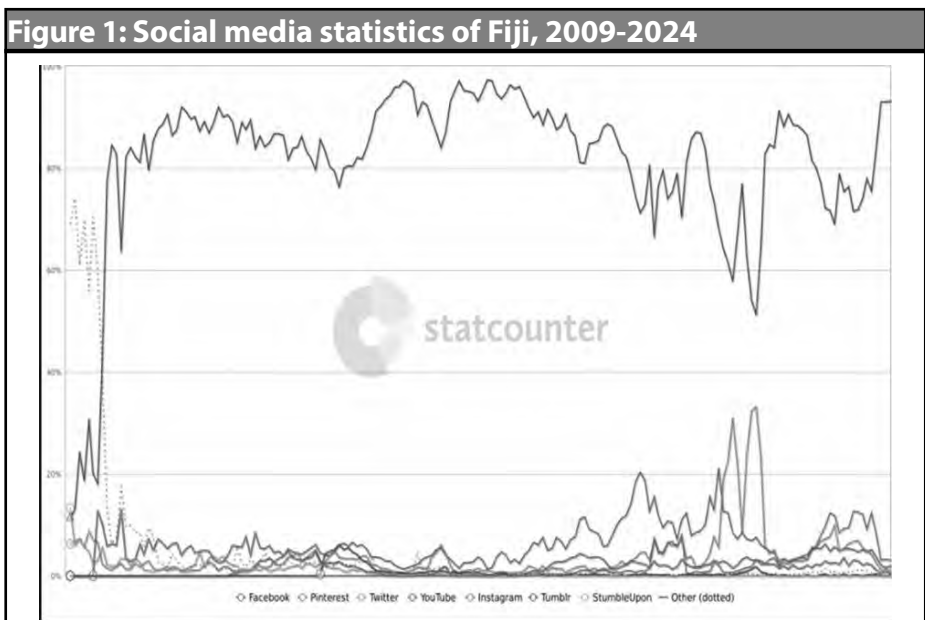
Source: StatCounter Global Statistics - Dark blue line indicates Facebook's larger audience engagement compared to other platforms

may vary among platforms but Facebook continues to be the highest and most consistently engaged platform since 2009.

However, it is instructive to note that during the COVID-19 global pandemic, especially in 2021 Facebook declined in audience engagement, while Twitter/X (now referred to as X) activity and engagement increased slightly. This was due to the news and government informational content which was easily made available at the time. In addition, seasoned journalists and development actors began hosting a new Twitter feature at the time, called 'Twitter space'. Since most people were under lockdown, Twitter spaces brought more Fijians closer together through enabling them to verbally address one another and discuss the pandemic related challenges. Post-COVID-19, Twitter/X audience engagement declined, while Facebook audience engagement began to rise once again and stabilise. Twitter/X audience is estimated to be more than 30,000 active Fiji users, which is the second most active platform for political discussions and debates(Kemp, 2024). Apart from Facebook and Twitter, Instagram is the other platform that constitutes over 200,000 active users (Kemp, 2024). However, Instagram's platform engagement is not as political or interactive as Facebook and Twitter in Fiji.

Facebook in Fiji

Analytics data in 2024 indicate that out of the more than 550,000 active Facebook accounts, women identified accounts stand at around 52.4 percent, with men at 47.6 percent (See Figure 2). This marks an interesting shift from the previous years in the lead up to COVID 19, where male identified accounts dominated Fiji's social media landscape (Tarai, 2019; Tarai et al., 2015b). This creates a number of interesting questions for further research such as: where have all the men gone? Can Fiji's social media landscape be akin to a matriarchal digital society? What can this mean for political social media campaigning in Fiji? The largest age cohort includes those aged 25-34, with an estimated 28.8 percent of the total recorded users, while those in the 65 and over cohort constitute the lowest membership with around 4.5 percent (see Figure 2). Given Fiji's legislated youth age of 15-35 (Fiji Government, 2011, 2023), the 18-35 age group is estimated to be at least 58 percent of the total Facebook audience (Meta Insights, 2024).

The majority of this engagement is centered around the urban centers such as the capital city of Suva, and the towns of Nausori, Nadi and Lautoka in the Western Division and Labasa town in the Northern division (Meta Insights, 2024). Five out of the ten most publicly engaged Facebook pages in Fiji, including mainstream media pages, indicated the high online traffic for news and media generated insights (Meta Insights, 2024; Tarai, 2022b, 2023).

Fiji's most representative social media landscape's stakeholders at present,
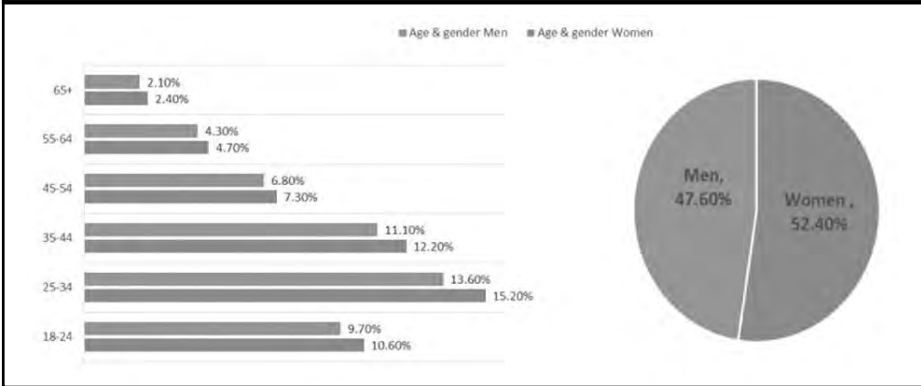
Source: Chat (Fiji) Audience Insights

are women and the youth. The top consistently engaged social media pages have been the news media organisations online, which indicates the emergent intersection between traditional media and the social media landscape.

Chat (fiji)—what makes it an influencer group?

Chat (fiji) as a group and its ability to create viral content was largely premised on its magnitude and its representative ratio within Fiji's wider social media landscape. As such, it will be instructive to review the group's dimensions coupled with an online viral incident, to discuss its social media ecology.

The viral incident

In 2018, a weekend road accident in early August, with graphic images of the dead victims was circulated on social media, specifically through Chat (fiji). Some users publicised the incident as a form of citizen journalism, attempting to break the news first through the social media group. It gained so much traction that a prominent traditional print media organisation had to follow the story through the online conversations. This culminated in a traditional print media capturing and publicising a video of the family of a dead victim, receiving the news of the road accident and loss. The media organisation came under intense criticism from the then Media Industry Development Authority (MIDA), for publicising the grief-stricken victims' emotional and sorrowful videos (Kumar, 2018). The media organisation defended their coverage by claiming that it had received permission from the family to publicise the ordeal. The print media organisation argued that despite the concerns, the decision was made purely as a 'news judgement' (Kumar, 2018). The then Prime Minister, Voreqe Bainimarama, called attention to where the issue surfaced, which was the social media posts that he described as 'sickening' (Bolatiki, 2018).

Within a span of a week, a series of viral social media posts led a media organisation into publicising grief and questioning its ethical codes of practice. The initial social media posts appeared to be a form of citizen journalism, as online users drew attention to the risks of reckless driving. However, the social media content became quite morbid with the publication of lifeless bodies and carnage. The social media posts would not have gone viral without Chat (fiji) as an influencer group. Chat (fiji) effectively amplified the posts and related issues around reckless driving, grief, sorrow and loss. It is instructive to note that citizen journalism in the Pacific has been documented by Singh (2017), as an emerging social media trend. However, the distinction remains that mainstream media journalists are held to higher codes of media practice, protocols and editorial checks and balances. While citizen journalism provides journalistic potential in the form of news leads or tips for the media, it also can be problematic and disruptive for democracy. Mainstream media and journalism become caught in the legislative cross hairs that at times target social media related citizen journalism (Singh, 2017).

Group dimensions—Chat (fiji) 2018

Chat (fiji) as a Facebook group was created in 2010 by a Fijian social media administrator. The original intention behind the social media group was to create an online space where Fijian users could discuss, debate and mostly laugh about a variety of issues. It was established at a time when Fiji's traditional media landscape was surveilled and restricted but social media was not seen as having an impact on public discourse and engagement. However, by 2018, the social media group's online activity and Fiji's wider social media use was referenced for generating what then Prime Minister Bainimarama had criticised (Bolatiki, 2018; Tarai & Eliki, 2018).

During this period, Chat (fiji) had more than 238,000 listed Facebook accounts as a group. The daily active Facebooks accounts ranged from 50,000 to over 64,000 accounts (Meta Insights, 2018). This meant that on a daily basis, around 50,000-60,000 users pre-dominantly in Fiji were actively consuming information from Chat (fiji) and engaging in various discussions.

Gender distribution—Chat (fiji) 2018

There was an estimated 238,584 Facebook users in Chat (fiji) during the previously mentioned analytics data period (Meta Insights, 2018). Male identified accounts were the majority at around 53 percent, with female identified accounts at around 46 percent (Meta Insights, 2018). Considering the diversity of gender identity, around 135 Chat (fiji) users identified themselves within the broad spectrum of gender (Table 1). This marks a very insightful representation of the gender minority community in one of Fiji's largest social media groups.

Table 1: Fiji Facebook gender distribution, 2018		
Gender	Distribution	Percentage
Women	111,263	46.63%
Men	127,186	53.31%
Custom gender	135	0.06%
Total	238,584	

Country distribution—Chat (fiji) 2018

As detailed in Table 2, Fiji based user accounts comprise over 78 percent of Chat (fiji) membership, followed by Papua New Guinea and Australia (Meta Insights, 2018. These are the top ten out of 99 listed countries which constitute the Chat (fiji) membership. The wide expanse of membership distribution underlies the expanding number of Fijians residing in overseas, who actively engage in the group from time to time. The group administrators screen membership requests and often ensure that the group is strictly limited to Fijian citizens to avoid fake accounts.

Table 2: Country distribution, Chat (Fiji) 2018		
Top 10 countries	Distribution %	Sum of members
Fiji	78.49%	186,874
Papua New Guinea	3.76%	8,949
Australia	2.74%	6,524
New Zealand	2.00%	4,753
India	1.82%	4,343
United States	1.24%	2,959
Nigeria	0.90%	2,142
Vanuatu	0.84%	2,000
Philippines	0.76%	1,818
United Kingdom	0.76%	1,814
Top 10 countries out of 99listed countries of chat (fiji) membership		

Daily 'Posts, comments and reactions' distribution—Chat (fiji) 2018

The cumulative total posts, comments and reactions for a week was around 441,597 (Figure 3), with the most active or popular day being Wednesday (Meta Insights, 2018). It was estimated that Wednesday accumulated over 79,000 posts, comments and reactions. The most ideal time frames for online activity included 8-10pm Fiji Time, with the lowest being 1-6 am Fiji Time (Meta Insights, 2018). It is instructive to note that due to the global membership of the group, online activity is active throughout a 24 hour period. Therefore, Chat (fiji) discussions tend to be more hyper active than most other online groups in Fiji's digital landscape.

Figure 3: Post, comments and reactions percentage by day
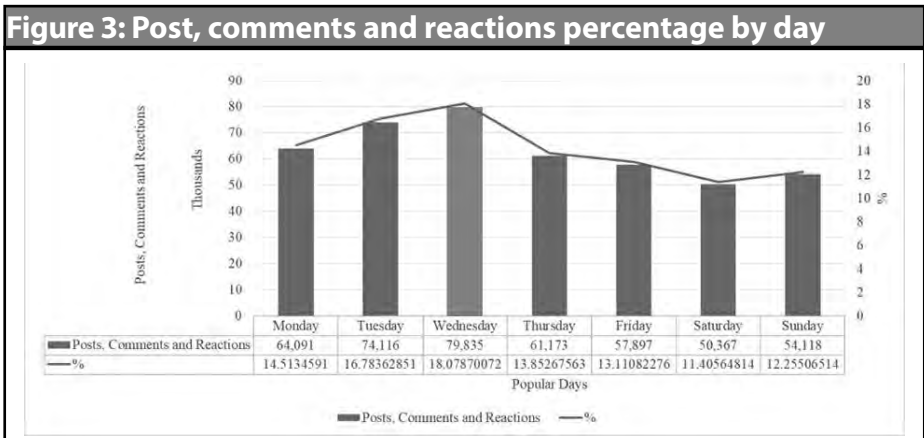
Source: Chat (Fiji) Audience Insights, 2018

Social media ecology of Chat (fiji)

In 2018 the estimated total Facebook population in Fiji stood at around 534,000 (Tarai, 2019). At present in 2024, there are now estimated be around 544,000 active Facebook users in Fiji (Kemp, 2024). Chat (fiji)'s estimated total of 238,584 users, accounts for around 45 percent of Fiji's total estimated online population. At any given point in the day, there were around 50,000-60,000 active accounts engaging online because of the widely dispersed membership of the group across the world. As seen in Table 2, there were active accounts as far as the United Kingdom, Nigeria, India and the Philippines. Other distant countries not in the top ten, included: Netherlands, Spain, South Korea, Cyprus and Bahrain. This highlights the widely dispersed populations of Fijians living around the globe in various lines of work, who actively follow and engage in the Chat (fiji) discussions. The gendered distribution of the group was typically male dominated at the time, with a minority of gender diverse groups. It is instructive to note that the gendered minority groups constitute some of the popular and outspoken personalities in Fiji's social media landscape. These personalities have been from within the Transgender community, specifically the openly identified Transwomen online accounts.

The **r**oad accident mentioned earlier generated significant online traffic because it was actively shared and repeated in early August 2018. Chat (fiji) promoted more than 80 posts, one of which generated more than 5000 reactions, with more than 300 comments in a day. These did not include other posts or tribute videos that even complete strangers to the deceased, began making and posting repeatedly in the group. Other related posts included news clippings, video footage and images which all focused emotive attention on the discussions.

The social media group's sheer size relative to the wider digital and Fijian population has created an amplifying capability and power. With the round the clock online activity of at least 50,000 users, Chat (fiji) has shown its ability to harness collective focus, attention and reaction as a form of influence. This influence is subsequently a form of power in creating the ability to amplify an issue of focus, to the extent that it was able to dominate the traditional media and draw the attention of the then Prime Minister. In this regard, Chat (fiji) and broadly social media activity, influenced and shaped public discourse and views.

The human experiences of horror, sorrow, anger and sympathy (however so superficial at times) formed an emotional cognitive capture, which coalesced with the magnitude of the active online environment. Thus the nexus between human experiences in online user engagement, coupled with the sheer magnitude of Chat (fiji), demonstrates a powerful social media ecology within Fiji.

Conclusion

Fiji's social media landscape since 2018 has increased in size and shifted in terms of the typical male gender dominance. In early 2024, there were more female identified accounts, but the dominating and influential social media ecology of Chat (fiji) remains consistent. Chat (fiji) has the ability to concentrate and amplify varying human experiences, which often becomes a form of emotional cognitive capture. This ability is underpinned by the magnitude and online hyperactivity of the group. The combination of an emotionally charged issue, being repeated in varying perspectives through the hyperactive online audience, generates viral content and expressive online behavior. Inevitably, this repetition of perspectives and emotions begins shaping discourses and wider views. As such, the influential capability of a social media group and its ecology, depends on the nature of the issue, the magnitude and activity of the audience and the context within which these discussions are unfolding.

In the 2018 Chat (fiji) viral incident, citizen journalism materialised in publicising the story and subsequently taking a lead, ahead of traditional media. However, the vulnerability of citizen journalism in lacking safe and ethical boundaries became apparent, with the publication of traumatic content. The media was caught in the escalation of the story when it attempted to capitalise on the wave of emotions, which was led through the influential social media ecology of Chat (fiji).

Citizen journalism proved to embody the uneasy intersection between traditional media and social media. As stated by Singh (2017), citizen journalism has emerged as a social media trend which has impacted the media landscape as a double edged sword. Legislative pressures are impacting on traditional media, while responding to unmoderated online forms of citizen journalism (Singh, 2017).

The practice of safer and more responsible citizen journalism, is an area that will warrant closer advocacy from authorities, such as the Fiji Online Safety Commission (OSC)**.** Despite, it's politically controversial inception (Tarai, 2018b), the (OSC) can collaborate with Fiji's media industry in promoting, safer and responsible citizen journalism.

Viral content creation in Fiji's digital landscape requires an emotionally charged issue to be repeatedly circulated within a representatively large and hyperactive social media group or ecosystem. The social media ecology of Chat (fiji) as an influencer group demonstrates its ability to motivate online and offline behaviour. This may have significant implications and potential for the future of social media political campaigning in Fiji. However, it will require further deepened and embedded digital ethnographic research.

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Jope Tarai is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Pacific Affairs, Australian National University. He is also an academic staff member of the School of Social Sciences and Law, University of the South Pacific and an adjunct research fellow at the Centre for Human Security and Social Change, La Trobe University Melbourne. jope.tarai@anu.edu.au

Documenting hidden apartheid in the Indian diaspora

Abstract: This article provides an account of an independent filmmaker's work in documenting some of the stories from the global Indian diaspora. Based in Aotearoa New Zealand, with ancestral connections to Fiji, East Africa, UK, US and India, and using documentary making with both its journalistic and artistic purposes, the author firstly refers to the literatures that identifies documentary-making as journalism, diaspora, and the caste system. She then situates herself within the South Pacific Indian diaspora, before describing her experience in the making of the documentary entitled *Hidden Apartheid: A Report on Caste Discrimination*. The article concludes by reflecting on her role and the role of documenting hidden discrimination where it exists throughout Indian communities of the diaspora.

Keywords: apartheid, caste system, diaspora, discrimination, documentary, Fiji, filmmaking, India, journalism, New Zealand, South Pacific.

MANDRIKA RUPA
Tara Arts International

Introduction

ACCORDING to Canella (2023) 'documentary film which comprises audio and visual elements is rarely discussed among journalism scholars' although photojournalism has long been accepted as journalism. Back in 1939, Greron (cited in Canella) viewed documentary 'as a collaborative social process that promotes political education and civic engagement'. Although documentary or cinematic journalism has been identified relatively recently, this is becoming more popular as its use surges among news outlets (Canella 2023). Vohra (2011, p. 43) argues that documentaries that foreground the political activism of the filmmaker will incorporate a subjective voice, but 'can be far more politically charged than earlier documentary approaches'. For Ibarra (2023) documentaries 'can return agency to individuals silenced by their legal, economic and cultural marginalisation'. People in the global diaspora who belong to more than one nation or culture, according to Scafirimuto (2020, p.1 07)

writing for the Journal of Global Diaspora and Media, are searching for identity, and documentary storytelling provides a space for diasporic subjects to negotiate their identity through the 'subjective enunciation'.

Diaspora and caste

The term 'diaspora' has evolved to include those who 'have moved voluntarily but who are linked to a homeland through a nation that transcends sovereign borders' (Friesen 2014, p. 122) or 'any group of people who migrate from the centre (homeland) to the periphery' (Dwivedi, 2014). About 1879, there was a proliferation of Indians leaving India to work in many countries around the world. At this time the Indentured labour system brought many broken people to the South Pacific. These clans had experienced centuries of oppression through the colonisation by Brahmanical Hinduism and Indentured labour seemed a better option than remaining in India. They were forced out of India by the conditions of the caste hierarchy: poverty, denial of education, lack of self agency. Bondage in other lands was preferable to what they had previously endured. These were subaltern self-exiles migrating for religious freedom. The more recent 'voluntary' or 'economic' migration started taking place during the 1950s when the new states of India and Pakistan were suffering from fragile economies (Hussain, 2010, p. 189). However, while India became independent and 'enshrined in social equality in its constitution, the caste system remains deeply embedded in its social fabric.' As *Time Out* (n.d.) stated 'its most benighted victims are more than 166 million Dalits or Untouchables, whose lot is even worse than that endured by blacks in apartheid-era South Africa'.

There has been agreement among scholars that the Hindu caste system is very complex, with many layers. The four main castes are the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas ,and the Sudras or Dalits known as the 'untouchables'. Hinduism has become to be defined by Brahmanism, and as Hussain (2010, p. 202) stated, whereas Hinduism itself might be a tolerant religion, 'Brahminism

Figure 1: *Hidden Apartheid*: **'I had seen discrimination and misogyny and I wanted to find others who would witness these issues.'**

is never tolerant', and is the foundation of the Hindutva ideology that has a benign face of consent and a malignant, dangerous face of coercion. Hussain goes further and claims that 'the ideology of Hindutva was alien to Hinduism. It is a political fascist ideology which had no roots within traditional Hinduism'.

Being part of the Indian Diaspora in the South Pacific

As an independent filmmaker for more than 30 years, I have been filming issues related to the international Indian diaspora. Being part of the Indian diaspora of Aotearoa New Zealand and the South Pacific, I have sought to understand how hierarchy, misogyny, and caste

Figure 2: The documentary poster.

discrimination have accompanied Indian migrants to other countries. My 2010 documentary *Hidden Apartheid: A Report on Caste Discrimination* (Figures 1, 2) illustrates how casteism originated in Indian society and how caste segregation remains active, even in political democracies with human rights legislation protecting equality.

Growing up in New Zealand, my parents embraced other traditions and cultures, my ancestors had a particular closeness with, and were adopted by the tangata whenua. However, I became aware that the Indian community operated differently to that of most of our peers. Originally steeped in the Ayurvedic artisan culture of an Indian village, my mother's ancestors left India in the late 1800s, immigrating to East Africa, then East London. My mother was betrothed and came to New Zealand. My father's family left India 120 years ago, and came to New Zealand via Fiji, as free labourers. My family has been in the South Pacific and New Zealand for more than 100 years. I was born in India, yet as a young child growing up in New Zealand from 1960, I was under the surveillance of the Indian community. It seemed that the late 1960s pop culture messages meant to me that one had one's own autonomy and sovereignty, except it did not apply to

Indian girls. Indian girls were monitored, not allowed to ignore religious codes, not allowed to cut our hair or wear it down, or wear make-up or jeans. For most Indian girls, Western films were strictly out-of-bounds (I was fortunate that my parents were more liberal than some, and I grew to study European films). However, the fear of arranged/forced marriage still permeated Indian culture in New Zealand.

By my teens I was really clear that I was not going to allow the Indian community to control me. Already I felt secure in my own path. As a consequence, I was ostracised and alienated from this community. There was no clear pathway forward, but new gateways opened as I worked in feminist media. As part of my social work degree I did a placement at a women's refuge in London. I found that the situation for Indian women was much worse than what I had experienced in New Zealand, including forced marriage with under age brides, dowry abuse, and male honour-based violence. BBC documentaries exposed issues of bounty hunters who were commissioned to search out girls who had run away from home, to avoid forced marriages. These young girls would be punished, tortured, with their arms and legs broken (see for example BBC, 2004; BritAsia TV). Documentaries revealed today on TED Talks and podcasts that some of those victims who are now in their 1950s are telling their stories of forced marriages, honour killings, and the shame of being a woman (see, for example, BBC, 2017; Aouilk, 2021). Some girls in the strictest communities were not even allowed to get an education, or go to school.

Graded inequality of the hierarchical caste system, with 'Brahmans' at the top and 'untouchables' at the bottom, was increasing in Britain, far away from India. Those who had sought to escape to a place where their caste did not define them, found that it existed wherever Indians migrated. The practice of untouchability was common, even by so-called low caste shopkeepers, who would not touch the money placed on the counter by those they considered to be of an inferior caste, once again documented by BBC screening in the 1980s.

The making of *Hidden Apartheid*

This knowledge of what was happening on the other side of the world impacted me on my return to Aotearoa, and I felt that the voices of the people who were disempowered needed to be recorded. As part of the Indian diaspora, with an understanding of some of the cultural and traditional histories, I felt it was urgent to address this, somehow. I had seen discrimination and misogyny and I wanted to find others who would witness these issues. I returned to the UK several times to research and document those who would give voice and visibility. Some of the areas of London where Indians had settled were deeply divided. In one area there were more than twelve different places of worship on one road, for members of different castes. There was deep sadness, mistrust and fear, for those in particular

from so-called lower castes, who were made to feel ashamed and humiliated.

It was a slow process to build trusting relationships and seek out people who were unafraid to express their opinions. I encountered some who rejected the strictures of Hinduism and had knowledge of ancient man-made laws of India. These individuals evolved a more humanitarian philosophy for the migrated clans. The power dynamics became obvious and most of the conversations were with men, without their wives present. As a woman, there was a safety factor for me; as I travelled, I made sure I was accompanied by a man, usually a cameraman of colour.

The interviews for the Hidden Apartheid film in the UK were completed over four years, including ones in the US, Australia and New Zealand. What started as a gathering of archival interviews became a full-length independent documentary. As the director I worked with three other people; we did all the research, writing, pre-production, postproduction, editing, marketing and distribution. This film was totally self-funded, a gift of love for those clans and communities who continue to excavate their heritage and seek to live apart from the religious prejudice of their original homeland.

This had begun as a personal project and morphed into a vehicle for social awareness. The documentary provided an in-depth history and analysis of caste-based discrimination showing how, since the early 1900s, Indians have migrated across the world seeking freedom from caste-based inequality, only to discover that the practices they meant to escape have resurfaced in their new destinations. Caste discrimination outside India has been reported in community centres, places of worship, workplaces, and educational institutions.

The project gained momentum once the documentary was made. Overwhelming interest from groups in the UK was evident at the premiere screening at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London. The large audience consisted of clans travelling from all over, including community leaders, anti-caste advocates, human rights organisations, and politicians who had been working on England's *Single Equality Bill* (Rae, 2010). Certain Lords and Ladies were involved in the fight to stop caste discrimination. Jeremy Corbyn (former Leader of the Labour Party) was actively supporting the Bill, from a human rights perspective.

The film was given several accolades from the caste, communities, and clans that were represented. The film was shown at private screenings, theatre releases in several countries, including at Columbia University, New York; Chicago Film School; and in New Zealand. The documentary was acquired by ProQuest for international distribution to academies. Reviews were published in *The Guardian* newspaper and *The New Zealand Herald* (Rae, 2010). A review in *Time Out* commented that the documentary, 'delivers a comprehensive survey of the history of casteism, warns that prejudices are alive and well, not just in India but in many emigrant communities' (*Time Out,* n. d.).

Conclusion: Revealing what is hidden

When I was six, I was taken to my first film. I fell in love with moving images, and later had a passion for looking at all images. I then found I could tell stories with these images. Much later I found the value of film to express the beauty of images in India, where I shot fifteen hours of footage. I absorbed the artisan culture of my family and clans, and brought the footage home to assemble. I also discovered when filming in dangerous spaces, subtle political messaging and subversion can be incorporated into a narrative, in a way that both protects those at risk and exposes those making the threats. Documentaries, while more factual, can also be layered and nuanced. Simplicity can hide subtlety. In other spaces the challenges can be made more openly. Storytelling as an art form, can be used for raising awareness, social issues can be illustrated through films, galleries, as installations or through dance and theatre.

I was born in India, the Indian community of New Zealand is one of my communities, it also includes the international diaspora. I am an insider, I am part of it, I live in it. I am also on the outside because I have other influences that shape my world. I have witnessed casteism and as a documentary maker I have seen hidden apartheid and graded inequality in this country. I've seen two women at an Indian emporium in Auckland being asked for their caste and then offered only inferior goods. I've seen Indian men and women promoted in their professions, then being disrespected and ignored by other Indian workers who consider themselves to be of a superior caste. I know of a Bollywood actress physically and verbally assaulting her 'servant' on a film set. It is about humili-ation, shame and keeping people subordinate, In New Zealand it is denied and hidden. I have reported a personal incident to the Race Relations Office, which would not investigate.

Caste-based discrimination is being challenged in Britain through legislation but has not made much progress (see for example, Purohit, 2018; Government Equalities Office, 2010). In the United States, California is attempting to bring in the first law to ban caste discrimination (NBC News, 2023). While in Australia it is unlawful to disadvantage employees based on social origin, The Guardian reported in February 2023 that caste discrimination was on the rise there (Luthria, 2023). Discussions on caste discrimination are almost invisible in New Zealand. Results of a request for information on complaints against caste discrimination received since 1993 by the Human Rights Commission that was made at the beginning of 2023 have not yet been made available (Fernandez, 2023).

Hidden Apartheid is one of the films and documentaries about the Indian diaspora. I am now working with artist Tiffany Singh and performer/filmmaker Mandi Rupa-Reid (see Rupa, Rupa-Reid, & Singh, 2023) to highlight some of these issues through art activism that includes an exhibition to be held as part of the Pacific Media Conference in Suva in July 2024. Hidden apartheid remains

evident throughout the Indian diaspora. It is a human rights issue that needs to be kept in the public eye until more is done to eliminate these remnants of domination.

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Mandrika Rupa is an Aotearoa New Zealand-based film maker and community worker who emigrated from India as a child. Her work has been recognised at Films de Femmes, Creteil, France, The London Film Festival, and the New Film Festival, New York. Her work is in the permanent collection and distributed by MoMA (Museum of Modern Art, New York).
rupamandrika@gmail.com

Media fuss over stranded tourists, but Kanaks face existential struggle

Commentary: For two weeks in May 2024, protests by pro-independence indigenous Kanaks in the French Pacific territory of New Caledonia erupted into a wave of rioting; erection of barricades; and burning of factories, shops and homes with thde deaths of seven people—five Melanesians and two gendarmes. Since the late 1980s the Kanak independence movement had been consistently engaging with the 1988 Matignon then 1998 Nouméa Accords with Paris in an evolving process as part of their struggle for self-determination. The Nouméa Accord set out a framework for transferring power to the people of New Caledonia, through a series of three referenda. However, after France moved to unilaterally break with the Accords and declare independence as being off the table that the country returned to a state of unrest. This article recalls the influence of one of the leaders of the 1980s upheaval, Éloi Machoro.

Keywords: assassination, colonialism, decolonisation, Eloi Machoro, France, Kanaky, New Caledonia, self-determination

EUGENE DOYLE
Independent Commentator, Wellington

O NLY the struggle counts . . . death is nothing.' said Éloi Machoro—'the Che Guevara of the Pacific'—shortly before he was gunned down by a French military sniper on 12 January 1985.

Machoro, one of the leaders of the newly-formed FLNKS (Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front)—today the main umbrella movement for New Caledonia's indigenous Kanak people—slowly bled to death as the gendarmes moved in. The assassination is an apt metaphor for what France is doing to the Kanak people of New Caledonia and has been doing to them for 150 years.

As the New Zealand and Australian media fussed and bothered over tourists stranded in New Caledonia over a fortnight in mid-May 2024, the Kanaks have been gripped in an existential struggle with a heavyweight European power determined to keep the archipelago firmly under the control of Paris. We need better, deeper reporting from our news media—one that provides history and context.

According to René Guiart (1991), a pro-independence writer, moments before

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Figure 1: Assassinated Kanak leader Éloi Machoro: He is carrying the infamous axe that he used minutes later to chop open a ballot box at Nakety, near Canala, and burn ballot papers in a protest against New Caledonian elections in 1984.

the sniper's bullets struck Machoro had emerged from the farmhouse where he and his comrades were surrounded. I translate:

> 'I want to speak to the Sous-Prefet! [French administrator],' Machoro shouted. 'You don't have the right to arrest us. Do you hear? Call the Sous-Prefet!' (Guiart, 1991)

The answer came in two bullets. Once dead, Machoro's comrades inside the house emerged to receive a beating from the gendarmes. Standing over Machoro's body, a member of the elite mobile tactical unit said: 'He wanted war, he got it!'

Weeks earlier, New Zealand journalist David Robie had photographed Machoro shortly before he smashed open a ballot box with an axe and burned the ballots inside. 'It was,' said Robie (interview with the author, 14 May 2024), 'symbolic of the contempt Kanaks had for what they saw as France's manipulated voting system.'

Every year on January 12, the anniversary of Machoro's assassination, people gather at his gravesite. Engraved in stone on the headstone are the words: '*On tue le révolutionnaire mais on ne tue pas ses idées.*' ('You can kill the revolutionary but you can't kill his ideas.') Why don't most Australians and New Zealanders even know his name?

Decades after his death and 17,000 km away, the French are at it again

(Doyle, 2024). Their National Assembly shattered the peace on 14 May 2024 with a unilateral move to change voting rights to enfranchise tens of thousands more recent French settlers and put an end to both consensus building and the indigenous Kanak people's struggle for self-determination and independence.

Thanks to French immigration policies, Kanaks now number about 40 percent of the registered voters. New Zealand and Australia look the other way—New Caledonia is perceived as France's 'zone of interest'.

But what's not to like about extending voting rights? Shouldn't all people who live in the territory enjoy voting rights? 'They have voting rights,' said David Robie, now editor of *Asia Pacific Report*, 'back in France.' (Interview with the author, 2024). And France, not the Kanaks, control who can enter and stay in the territory.

Back in 1972, French Prime Minister Pierre Messmer argued in a since-leaked memo that if France wanted to maintain control, flooding the territory with white settlers was the only long-term solution to the independence issue. Robie said the French machinations in Paris—changing the boundaries of citizenship and voting rights—and the ensuing violent reaction, was effectively a return to the 1980s—or worse.

The violence of the 1980s, which included massacres, led to the Matignon-Oudinot Accords of 1988 and the Nouméa Accord of 1998 which restricted the voting to only those who had lived in Kanaky prior to 1998 and their descendants. Pro-independence supporters include many young whites who see their future in the Pacific, not as a white settler colonial outpost of France. Most whites, however, fear and oppose independence and the loss of privileges it would bring.

After decades of calm and progress, albeit modest, things started to change from 2020 onwards. It was clear to Robie and others that French calculations now saw New Caledonia as too important to lose; it is a kind of giant aircraft carrier in the Pacific from which to project French power. It is also home to the world's third-largest nickel reserves.

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Figure 2: Former schoolteacher turned FLNKS 'security minister' Éloi Machoro: People gather at his grave every year to pay homage.

How have the Kanaks benefitted from being a French colony? Kanaks were given citizenship in their own country only after the Second World War, a century after Paris imposed French rule. According to historian David Chappell:

> In practice, French colonisation was one of the most extreme cases of native denigration, incarceration and dispossession in Oceania. A frontier of cattle ranches, convict camps, mines and coffee farms moved across the main island of Grande Terre, conquering indigenous resisters and confining them to reserves that amounted to less than 10 percent of the land. (Chappell, 2003)

It was a pattern of behaviour similar to France's colonies in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. Little wonder the people of Niger have recently become the latest to expel them.

Deprived of education—the first Kanak to qualify for university entrance was in the 1960s—socially and economically marginalised, subjected to what historians describe as among the most brutal colonial overlordships in the Pacific, the Kanaks have fought to maintain their languages, their cultures and their identities while the whites enjoy some of the highest standards of living in the world.

David Robie, author of *Blood on Their Banner—Nationalist Struggles in the South Pacific*, and a sequel, *Don't Spoil My Beautiful Face: Media, Mayhem and Human Rights in the Pacific,* has been warning for years that France has been pushing New Caledonia down a slippery slope that could see the country plunge back into chaos (Robie, 2019). He said:

> There was no consultation—except with the anti-independence groups. Any new constitutional arrangement needs to be based around consensus. France has now polarised the situation so much that it will be virtually impossible to get consensus. (Interview with the author, 2024)

Macron also pushed ahead with a 2021 referendum on independence versus remaining a French territory. This was in the face of pleas from the Kanak community to hold off until the covid pandemic that had killed thousands of Kanaks had passed and the traditional mourning period was over. Macron ignored the request; the Kanak population boycotted the referendum. Despite this, Macron crowed about the anti-independence vote that inevitably followed: 'Tonight, France is more beautiful because New Caledonia has decided to stay part of it.' (Royer, 2021)

Having created the problem with actions like the disputed referendum and the current law changes, Macron now condemns the current violence in New Caledonia. Éloi Machoro rebukes him from the grave: 'Where is the violence, with us or with them?" he asked weeks before his killing. 'The aim of the [law changes] is to destroy the Kanak people in their own country." That was 1985;

Figure 3: Kanaky and Palestine: 'The same struggle' against settler colonialism.

as the French say: *'Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.* The more things change, the more they stay the same (Karr, 1848).

Young people were at the forefront of opposing the latest machinations by Paris. Hundreds of activists were arrested. Seven people were killed, five of them Kanak, including two family members of Christian Karembeu, a football star who helped France win the 1998 World Cup (Briscoe, 2024). Parts of the 'White City', as Nouméa is called by marginalised Melanesians, was torched by arson fires each night with damage being estimated at 1 billion euros (about NZ$1.8 billion). At least 3,500 French security forces were rushed in (Decloitre, 2024).

Leaders who have had nothing to do with the violence have been arrested; an old colonial manoeuvre.

'What happened was clearly avoidable,' Robie said 'The thing that really stands out for me is: what happens now? It is going to be really extremely difficult to rebuild trust—and trust is needed to move forward. There has to be a consensus otherwise the only option is civil war.'

Nadia Abu-Shanab, an activist and member of the Wellington Palestinian community, sees familiar behaviour and extends her solidarity to the people of Kanaky.

> We Palestinians know what it is for people to choose to ignore the context
> that leads to our struggle. Indigenous and native people have always been
> right to challenge colonisation. We are fighting for a world free from the

racism and the theft of resources and land that have hurt and harmed too many indigenous peoples and our planet (N. Abu-Shanab, interview with the author, 24 May 2024).

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Eugene Doyle is a writer based in Wellington. He has written extensively on the Middle East, as well as peace and security issues in the Asia Pacific region. He hosts the public platform solidarity.co.nz. An earlier version of this article was first published at Solidarity *under the title 'The French are at it again: New Caledonia is kicking off'. For more about Éloi Machoro, read Dr David Robie's 20 January 1985 article in the* New Zealand Times *'Éloi Machoro knew his days were numbered'. It has been digitised at: https://davidrobie.nz/1985/01/eloi-machoro-knew-his-days-were-numbered/*

Challenges for campus and community media in Asia-Pacific diversity

Abstract: The 'watchdog' model has created a journalism culture that is too adversarial and creates conflicts rather than helping to solve today's problems/conflicts. The panellists assess new journalism paradigms in the Asia-Pacific region where the media is able to make powerful players to account for facilitating the development needs of communities, especially those in the margins of society. A challenge for contemporary journalism schools is to address such models in a global context of 'development rights' with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals as a benchmark. In the Pacific Islands context, journalists face a challenging news reporting terrain on their news beats, especially in the Melanesian countries of Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Besides dealing with political instability, coups, civilian unrest and complex developmental issues, journalists must contend with hostile governments and draconian media legislation. The talents, idealism and storytelling skills of Pacific journalists can be cultivated and strengthened to produce independent platforms and models of journalism that challenge the status quo. Examples of this campus strategy include Radio Pasifik, Wansolwara, Pacific Scoop and Asia Pacific Report.

Keywords: Australia, Fiji, journalism education, journalism models, New Zealand, Melanesia, talanoa journalism, student journalism, sustainable development goals, United Nations

DAVID ROBIE, SHAILENDRA SINGH and KALINGA SENEVIRATNE
Pacific Journalism Review and The University of the South Pacific

INTRODUCING the 'Challenges for campus and community media in Asia-Pacific' diversity panel at the Journalism Education and Research Association (JERAA) conference at the University of Technology Sydney in December 2023, was Jacqui Park, former head of network strategy and innovation for the Vienna-based IPI (International Press Institute) Global Network of editors and journalists. She is a journalist and editor with deep experience building journalism communities around press freedom and high-integrity journalism, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region.

She is senior fellow for news media innovation at the University of Technology Sydney and was founding CEO of Australia's Walkley Foundation for excellence in journalism and founding Asia-Pacific director for the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ).

Park said she was 'excited' to be chairing the session on how we should be thinking about the challenges and opportunities for journalism in the Pacific right now. She said she was excited over the discussion because of the subject matter, but also because of the people who were on the panel. She said it would contribute to thinking about what was missing in the conversation going forward about what kind of communities the Pacific was working for.

'These are some of the important questions about how do we remake journalism for the future,' said Park. 'To help us negotiate these issues, we have Dr Kalinga Seneviratne (Australia/Sri Lanka) of the University of South Pacific (USP) who is talking about a need for a new paradigm of community centred 'watchdog journalism', Associate Professor Shailendra Singh (Fiji), head of journalism at USP, who will be explaining an innovative model of student journalism in the Melanesian states, and Professor David Robie (Aotearoa New Zealand), who I have known for a long time at the Pacific Media Centre and as a former coordinator of the Journalism Programme at USP in my work at the IFJ. He will be talking about how investigative and storytelling models like Talanoa Journalism can open our eyes to the blind spots of legacy news media.'

Figure 1: The Pacific campus and community panel at JERAA 2023: (from left) Kalinga Seneviratne, David Robie, Jacqui Park, and Shailendra Singh.

Dr Kalinga Seneviratne:
Time to rethink 'Watchdog Journalism' in the Pacific

For more than five decades, 'Watchdog Journalism' has been taught as the yardstick for a free media. With the so-called 'mainstream' media becoming increasingly commercialised—both in a global scale and domestically—and with the

media being primarily owned by business conglomerates, the 'watchdog' model has created a journalism culture that is too adversarial and creates conflicts rather than helping to solve today's problems/conflicts. A new paradigm of watchdog journalism is needed where the media is able to hold powerful players to account for facilitating the development/livelihood needs of communities, especially those in the margins of society. This new paradigm of journalism needs to focus on 'development rights' rather than 'human rights' taking into account many aspects of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs should be looked at in terms of a new definition of human rights where the journalist could play a similar role to that prescribed in 'watchdog' journalism theory, but looking for solutions rather conflicts, and include a larger field of stakeholders which need to be made accountable such as governments, big business and particularly conglomerates—even NGOs and faith-based organisations. This watchdog role needs to be applied to trade agreements and other treaties, including those addressing climate change. To develop a new journalism culture to address these issues, media training programmes in the Pacific need to rethink their strategies and examine how to promote independent social media models that are economically and sustainably viable.

Associate Professor Shailendra Singh:
Nurturing resilient journalists: A Fiji case study of student news reporting in challenging Pacific environments

Pacific Island journalists face a challenging news reporting terrain on their news beats, especially in the Melanesian countries of Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Besides dealing with political instability, coups, civilian unrest and complex developmental issues, journalists must contend with hostile governments and draconian media legislation. Online harassment is also an emerging problem. Considering these situations, one issue facing Pacific journalism schools and training institutes is how best to prepare students for this environment to insulate against any shocks and build resilience before joining the job market. One strategy adopted by The University of the South Pacific Journalism Programme is emphasis on practical news reporting through student-run media, mainly *Wansolwara*, the student training newspaper, and *Wansolwara Online*. This presentation looks at student journalists' experiences in covering Fiji's 2018 general election under fairly restrictive media legislation and electoral laws—the 2022 Reporters Without Borders media freedom index branded Fiji the 'worst place in the Pacific' to be a journalist. This was due to draconian media legislation in place for nearly 13 years, before the new government repealed it during 2023. In any election, news media usually focus on the political elites and their contests and confrontations, as per the Western 'watchdog' news reporting framework, which emphasises 'impact',

'conflict' and 'prominence' as premium news values. *Wansolwara* chose to differentiate its coverage by preferencing lesser-known candidates, female contestants, and grassroots voters, which is more in line with the 'human-interest' centered news values of development journalism, constructive/solutions-orientated journalism, and peace journalism principles. The elections coverage was not just an opportunity to familiarise students with media laws and electoral procedures, but also acquaint them with development issues by engaging with everyday people and practising different approaches in news coverage. This presentation looks at how we prepared the students for the elections, the challenges encountered in the field, editorial outputs, and the learning outcomes of the exercise.

Professor David Robie:
Media plurality, independence and Talanoa: An alternative Pacific journalism education model

The shrinking mainstream media plurality in Aotearoa New Zealand provides a context for examining publication of campus-based media where student and faculty editorial staff have successfully established an independent Asia-Pacific digital and print press over the past two decades. New Zealand's largest city Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland) has the largest urban population of Pacific Islanders globally—more than 300,000 people in a total of 1.7 million (Pasifika New Zealand, n.d.), earning the moniker 'Polynesian capital of the world'. The presenter has had a pioneering role with four university-based journalism publications in the Pacific region as key adviser/publisher in Papua New Guinea (*Uni Tavur*, 1993-1998); Fiji (*Wansolwara*, 1998-2002); and Aotearoa/New Zealand (*Pacific Scoop*, 2009-2015; *Asia Pacific Report*, 2016 onwards), and also with two journalism school-based publications in Australia (*Reportage*, 1996, and *The Junction*, 2018-2020) (Robie, 2018). In early 2021, he was a co-founder of the Asia Pacific Media Network | Te Koakoa Incorporated which has emerged as a collective umbrella for academics, student journalists and independent reporters and writers producing several innovative publications, including the research journal *Pacific Journalism Review* and a strengthened *Asia Pacific Report*, which draw on a cross-disciplinary range of media contributors and scholars in other professions. These contributors are mindful of the challenges of reportage about the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This section of the panel explores an independent journalism model drawing on professional outlets especially for Asia-Pacific students and how such an investigative and storytelling model as Talanoa Journalism can be an effective bridge to alternative media careers and addressing 'blind spots' in legacy news media.

The articles in this Frontline section of *Pacific Journalism Review* based on the earlier presentations in the JERAA panel on 'Challenges for campus and

community media in Asia-Pacific' present a basis for lively debate. The section begins with David Robie's overvew of how challenges have been faced at three institutions in Papua New Guinea and Aotearoa New Zealand, followed by Shailendra Singh who is joined by former *Wansolwara* colleague Geraldine Panapasa in his case study of Fiji and two post-coup elections, and it is rounded off with Kalinga Seneviratne and a focus on China in the Pacific and the geopolitical challenges for the region and 'watchdog' journalism.

Reference
Robie, D. (2018). *Asia Pacific Report*: A New Zealand nonprofit journalism model for campus-based social justice media. *Ikat: The Indonesian Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, 2*(1), 119-146. https://doi.org/10.22146/ikat.v2i1.37395
Resource video
JERAA 2023 - Challenges for campus and community media in Asia-Pacific diversity panel https://youtu.be/7qaMbgnOKiQ

Media plurality, independence and Talanoa

An alternative Pacific journalism education model

Abstract: The shrinking mainstream media plurality in Aotearoa New Zealand provides a context for examining publication of campus-based media where student and faculty editorial staff have successfully established an independent Asia-Pacific digital and print press over the past two decades. New Zealand's largest city Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland) has the largest urban population of Pacific Islanders globally—more than 300,000 people in a total of 1.7 million (Pasifika New Zealand, n.d.), earning the moniker 'Polynesian capital of the world'. The presenter has had a pioneering role with four university-based journalism publications in the Pacific region as key adviser/publisher in Papua New Guinea (*Uni Tavur*, 1993-1998); Fiji (*Wansolwara*, 1998-2002); and Aotearoa/New Zealand (*Pacific Scoop*, 2009-2015; *Asia Pacific Report*, 2016 onwards), and also with two journalism school-based publications in Australia (*Reportage*, 1996, and *The Junction*, 2018-2020) (Robie, 2018). In early 2021, he was co-founder of the Asia Pacific Media Network which has emerged as a collective umbrella for academics, student journalists and independent reporters and writers producing several innovative publications, including the research journal *Pacific Journalism Review.* These contributors are mindful of the challenges of reportage about the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This section of the panel explores how an independent journalism model for Asia-Pacific students' storytelling 'Talanoa Journalism' can be an effective bridge to alternative media careers and addressing 'blind spots' in legacy news media.

Keywords: Fiji, independent journalism, journalism models, media plurality, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, publications, SDGs, storytelling, student journalism, Talanoa Journalism

DAVID ROBIE
Asia Pacific Media Network

Background

HOW did I come to be on this alternative trajectory in journalism and media education? After a typical Kiwi journalism formation at the School of Hard Knocks with *The Dominion* daily newspaper, and periods as a subeditor at the Melbourne Herald and editor of Gordon Barton's *Sunday Observer*, I migrated to apartheid South Africa in 1970 to prepare for an overland trip across Africa and the Sahara Desert.

I was chief subeditor of the *Rand Daily Mail*—the leading daily newspaper which was opposed to apartheid with many of its journalists 'banned' and some in jail for challenging the system's injustices. In fact, I learned far more about journalism—and justice—there than what I had learned in Australia and NZ.

Ironically, three years working for Agence France-Presse (AFP) news agency in Paris in the 1970s prepared me for global news values and also the South Pacific. I started reporting on NZ and Pacific issues such as French nuclear testing through the 'back door'—from the AFP newsroom in the Place de la Bourse rather than in Aotearoa.

Both South Africa and Paris got me questioning a lot about news values and structural hegemony. When I returned to New Zealand I was foreign editor of the *Auckland Star* for a time and then set up my own independent news agency in the early 1980s covering the South Pacific for news magazines such as *Islands Business* and later *Pacific Islands Monthly, The Dominion, New Zealand Times*, *The Australian* and global news media.

In 1994, I was appointed head of journalism at the University of Papua Guinea and I embarked on an issues and project-based journalism initiative. Already critical of some aspects of legacy journalism and especially how it tended to cover 'the other' and the Pacific, I began developing ideas and strategies around journalism that could be loosely described as the 'Pacific Way', which had parallels with 'voiceless' journalism in Asia and Africa (Dixit, 1997; Robie, 1995).

These ideas were drawn largely from the students themselves and how they interacted with major issues and crises. It was significantly different from what I had encountered with Western mainstream and more akin with what I had experienced in Kenya as features editor of the Aga Khan's *Daily Nation* and earlier in South Africa. The ideas related especially to economic and cultural development, and social justice (Dixit, 1997; Robie, 1995, 2001).

The notion of Talanoa Journalism evolved over many years. This is at the core of this article and the notion of a 'Pacific way' journalism along with a comparative matrix indicating differences of emphasis with mainstream, or Western, normative journalism are explained and examined at length in academic papers and book chapters (for example, Robie, 2014, pp. 332-333, 2019, 2024; Singh, 2020), and several of the key elements include:
- Grassroots sources

- Hard news with context, cultural explanations
- Free media balanced with social responsibility, and
- Community ethics and indigenous values. (see full matrix, Robie, 2019, p. 13)

The challenge for journalists is partially represented in a quote about the complexities by Mahina and Nabobo-Baba (2004, p. 204) who explain about 'In the Pacific, people talk of walking forward into the past and walking backward into the future, where past and future are constantly fused and diffused in the ever-changing conflicting present.' (co-authors' emphasis). Another point is that reporting truth to power also involves critically reporting on our very own institutions, whether they are media organisations or universities (for example, Johnson & Ali, 2024; MacDonald, 2024; Robie, 2023). This can be rather delicate and challenging.

In this article I will share a snapshot of the timeline of Talanoa development. The evolution started in Papua New Guinea at the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) in 1993 (Figure 1).

University of Papua New Guinea (1993-1998)

UPNG Journalism school is the oldest in the Pacific. It was founded in 1975 as an 'independence gift' for Papua New Guinea (Robie, 2004). Funded by New Zealand, it was established by television journalist Ross Stevens and journalist and historian Michael King, who had coined the term 'Ngāti Pākehā' for white New Zealanders—like myself—who did not identify as 'European'. This is where the notion of Talanoa Journalism took root with a series of reports by students embedded in local villages who wrote about facing climate change
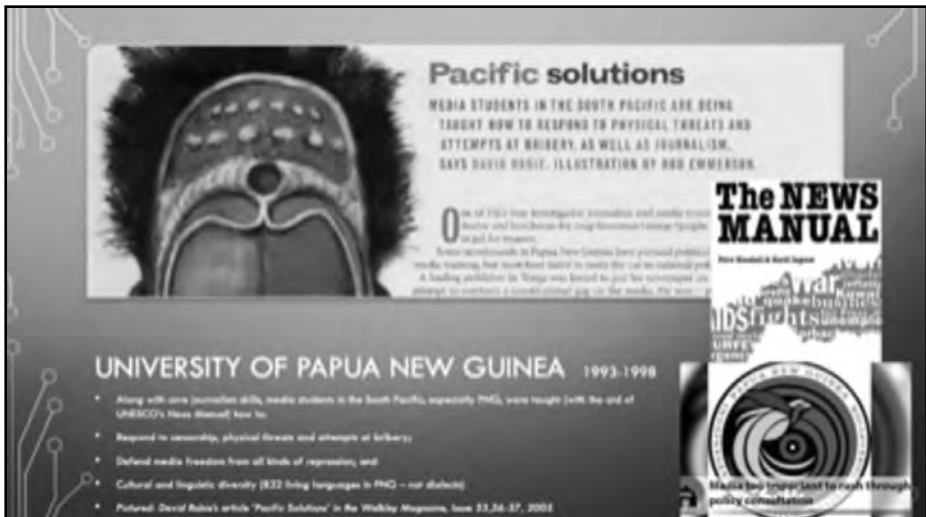
Figure 1: University of Papua New Guinea: 'Pacific solutions'.

and squatter survival and sought solutions. *Uni Tavur* was their student newspaper and it was published as a liftout section in the weekend edition of the biggest daily newspaper, the *Post-Courier*, an arrangement that I initiated with the management (Robie, 1995).

Along with core journalism skills, media students in the South Pacific, especially Papua New Guinea, were taught (with the aid of UNESCO's 1991 three volume *News Manual* created by the UPNG journalism educator team Peter Henshall and David Ingram) a range of extra skills far less common in many Western media schools, such as how to:

- Respond to censorship, physical threats and attempts at bribery;
- Defend media freedom from all kinds of repression; and
- Cultural and linguistic diversity (832 living languages in PNG—not just dialects)

Among countless examples of Papua New Guinean and other Melanesian student journalists was Campion Ohasio, who started his career as a student journalist on the BJourn programme at UPNG and also as a cartoonist (1994-96) for Uni Tavur and the *Pacific Journalism Review* which began at UPNG in 1994 (Figure 2). Today, after a stellar career as a political and social justice cartoonist, Campion is now an established artist and graphic designer in the Solomon Islands. He is also the managing director of Indigenous Media.

Another example was among the big stories covered by student journalists from *Uni Tavur* using Talanoa methodology was the 1997 Sandline Mercenary crisis in PNG. This was a political scandal that became 'one of the defining moments' in PNG history over the Bougainville war. Military commander Brigadier-General Jerry Singirok staged a revolt on the night of 16 March 1997

Figure 2: Project students: multidisciplinary talents. [Inset: Campion Ohasio].

when 44 mainly British and South African mercenaries were arrested at dawn and disarmed. Prime Minister Sir Julius Chan was forced to resign in the aftermath (Robie, 2004, p. 89).

University of the South Pacific (1998-2002)

The University of the South Pacific (USP) journalism degree programme began much later than UPNG and I was appointed head in 1998 after it had been earlier founded by French government assistance. *Wansolwara* and *Pacific Journalism Online*, were USP's journalism programme newspaper and website (I founded the student website before the three local daily newspapers had established websites of their own). Both the USP journalism newspaper (founded by lecturer Dr Philip Cass, my colleague at PJR, and a group of students led by Stan Simpson) and website are now called *Wansolwara*—literally 'One Salt Water', representing cultural and linguistic ties across Oceania (Cass, 2010).

My biggest challenge at USP was covering the 2000 George Speight (attempted) coup in which he and rebel soldiers from the Counter Revolutionary Warfare Unit seized Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry and 35 other government MPs at gunpoint in Parliament for 56 days (Cass, 2010; Ransom, 2000; Robie, 2001a & 2001b). Speight was jailed in 2002 for life for high treason. (He unsuccessfully sought a pardon in May 2023). Among others who were jailed for treason were one of Fiji's most innovative journalists and best media trainers, Jo Nata, founder of *The Weekender*. As I described him in my book *Mekim Nius*, Nata was 'arguably Fiji's finest investigative journalist before his forays into public relations and a coup, and also one of the country's two first journalism graduates' (Robie, 2004, pp. 40-41). He made the 'mistake' of becoming Speight's media adviser. Before

Figure 3: University of the South Pacific: biggest challenge.

this debacle he had played a prominent role in leading Fiji's journalism fraternity and in training younger journalists (Figure 3).

The USP students vigorously covered the attempted coup on 19 May 2000 around the clock for both their newspaper *Wansolwara* and online editions, and also Radio Pasifik, for two months. Many of the students coped with the military curfew by living in the *Wansolwara* newsroom on campus or with other students who had university flats. As the head of journalism, I had to daily brave the military curfew blockades without being arrested. As Michael Field observed in his co-authored book *Speight of Violence* (Field, Baba & Nabobo, 2005, pp. 112-3):

> For the USP journalism students under New Zealand coordinator David Robie, the coup provided a sharp training workshop. Students broke news, at times to the chagrin of other reporters, and published it on [their] website, *Pacific Journalism Online*, and the student newspaper *Wansolwara*. Robie later said the website created its own international niche market: 'In a sense, this was the Internet Coup, and the students were a vital part of it.'

Field et al. (2005) also noted a celebrated moment during the students' coverage of the coup, when one of three young women student reporters was suddenly singled out by Speight when he kissed her on the cheek, apparently thinking she was Indo-Fijian (McGowan & Ali, 2000). She was not; Noora Ali was from the Maldives, and her companions, Losana McGowan and Laufa Eli, were from Fiji and Samoa. Noora recalled in a report for *Pacific Scoop* that 'being kissed by the rebel leader was something, but being the only Indian looking person in the middle of hundreds of indigenous Fijians [in the middle of a coup] made my day' (Figure 4). Ali also wrote on her co-authored story on the USP student website *Pacific Journalism Online* that she had really wanted to witness the drama, but was aware that with 'my Indian looks crossing the line into the Parliament where the indigenous Fijians were gathering, would be kind of scary—but journalism got the better of me' (McGowan & Ali, 2000).

> We made our way to the place where a large number of people were gathered and yes, in the middle of it all, stood the rebel leader himself.
>
> George Speight was answering questions put to him by members of the crowd.
>
> When he started making his way back to the place where [there was] another large group, which consisted mainly of old people who were having a grog session, we took this opportunity to dash forward to interview him.
>
> Noora got to him first, and when he saw her, he seemed a little shocked but held out his hand to Noora for a handshake and asked: 'You're Indian and you liked me?' Noora replied, saying she was actually from the Maldives.
>
> Speight quickly leaned forward and planted a kiss on her cheek. (McGowan & Ali, 2000)

Figure 4: The Speight coup: a coupster 'kiss' and an international response. Pictured Laufa Eli, Noora Ali (centre) with George Speight.

The incident caused an international response when it was reported by global media and Noora's administrators asked questions of USP about why was a student journalist on a scholarship to Fiji 'participating in a rebellion'. (Noora Ali later became a leading official in the Maldives Information Ministry, a testament to the skills gained on her USP internship).

Sean Ransom of the International Press Institute's *Global Journalist* wrote 'Fiji's young [student] media corps had a front-row seat to a strange coup in the Pacific Islands' (Ransom, 2000, p. 26). I later provided a comprehensive and reflective account of the students' experience in 'Frontline reporters: A students' internet coup' (Robie, 2001), and former USP journalism lecturer Philip Cass interviewed several students to produce a 'Baptism of fire' paper about the Speight aftermath (Cass, 2010). Ransom cited my research indicating that Fiji journalists covering the coup had an average age of 22, and averaged only 2.5 years of experience (Ransom, 2000, p. 26; Robie, 2004a, p. 26). Ransom quoted me as saying:

> At first, some of them had trouble determining the legality of the would-be regime. A few showed a too-swift readiness to give legitimacy to, and cozy up with Speight's rebellion. Fiji's print media largely failed to give insightful and critical analysis. Even when the media performed well, mob violence forced some shops to close their doors.
> (Quoted by Ransom, p. 26)

The USP students covered the attempted coup robustly and with courage from the day it began on 19 May 2000 around the clock for both their newspaper

and online editions, and for the student radio Radio Pasifik for two months. Many of the students coped with a military curfew by living in the *Wansolwara* newsroom on the Laucala Bay campus or by sharing accommodation with other students who had university flats. As head of journalism, I had to daily brave the military blockades without being arrested (although I sometimes managed to gain a curfew pass at a police station; mostly I did not have a vehicle to get me to a station). It was a very stressful period for both students and me. I was acutely aware that it was vitally important that I kept the students safe, and although they were young and lacking experience, they were no younger than working journalists on Fiji news media organisations who mostly had no formal journalism qualifications. We also had a police inspector and a junior military officer on the journalism programme and that was a concern in itself: were they on the course to keep tabs on the journalism team, or genuine students? In the end, I was satisfied that both men had become enrolled as a sincere effort to upgrade their media expertise in the security forces. In fact, the policeman took part in coverage of the coup and reported for *Pacific Journalism Online* just like the other students.

One of the darker days on USP journalism was the sudden closure of the students' Pacific Journalism Online website without consultation on the orders of vice-chancellor Esekia Solofa, of Samoa. This coincided with the day on 29 May 2000 that the military declared martial law for 48 hours and as the university's entire official website went down, I presumed it was simply a spinoff from the martial law. It was difficult to confirm anything because the university was officially closed, the journalism programme was operating in defiance of the university shut down, and communications were erratic. It later transpired that the whole website had been shut down because senior management did not know how to 'pull the plug' on the journalism section of the website alone.

Also, the website closure followed a phone call to me by vice-chancellor Solofa one morning asking me to 'take down' an article written by one of the students, Alison Ofotalau, a Solomon Islander, about how some of Speight's followers had raided the Fiji Television headquarters on 28 May 2000 and smashed the offices in retaliation over *Close-Up* current affairs programme. The broadcast had described coup leader Speight as a 'two day wonder' (Ofotalau, 2000). One of the interviewees, human rights advocate Jone Dakuvula, had said on air:

> George Speight is a two-day wonder who had just decided to champion indigenous rights for his own personal reasons in a matter of two days . . He has no real track record of fighting for indigenous rights.
> (Quoted by Ofotalau, 2000)

My response to the vice-chancellor's instruction was a refusal, saying that it would undermine everything that we were teaching the students about accountability, credibility and the pursuit of truth without fear or favour. Solofa seemed

to think student journalists should merely be 'studying about' journalism and not actually doing it.

In his response, he appeared to have accepted my explanation, but then he arbitrarily closed down the website the next day, on May 29. Ironically, Ofotalau's report on Fiji TV was the last published on *Pacific Journalism Online* before we ourselves were closed down. Solofa also tried to censor our newspaper Wansolwara by requesting 'postponed' publication and for distribution to be stopped. Once again I refused, saying that the paper had already been published (Robie, 2001, p. 52). Our cover story for that special coup edition was 'Academics warn of Fiji disaster' (Robie, 2001, p. 50)

The closure of *Pacific Journalism Online* not only frustrated the journalism programme, it also riled academic staff because they had looked to the journalism website to keep up with news of the attempted coup and other developments important for their everyday safety. After a series of letters of protest to the university administration from groups and organisations as diverse as Reporters Sans Frontières in Paris, the Commonwealth Journalists' Association, the NZ Journalism Education Association, Queensland University's Journalism Department, PEN New Zealand and the Committee to Protect Journalists in New York (Robie, 2001b, p. 53), I was sent a letter of 'reprimand' by vice-chancellor Esekia Solofa—after *Wansolwara* had been distributed in defiance of the attempt to ban it (Solofa, 2000, p. 53). Solofa wrote:

> The decision I had taken to close down the Journalism Programme website was a straight-forward decision based entirely on one consideration: the safety and security of the property of the university and of the lives of the people engaged in it . . .
>
> Let me make an important observation which should cover the criticisms you and others have raised over the closure of the website . . .
>
> The USP Journalism Programme is not a media agency, neither is it a news/information outlet. The USP Journalism Programme is an education and training facility for future journalists and others who need journalism knowledge and skills in their work . . . The current closure of the Journalism website has clearly illustrated that our students do not need it to publicise or publish their pieces if that is what their true intention is. (Solofa, 2000)

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ, 2000) issued a statement condemning violence against journalists in Fiji—at least 15 people were killed during the coup and the aftermath—and it also criticised the closure of the USP journalism website: 'On 29 May 2000, administrators at the University of the South Pacific shut down *Pacific Journalism Online (PJO)* www.usp.ac.fj/journ/, the website of USP's journalism students. Vice-Chancellor Esekia Solofa explained the decision as a "security measure"' (CPJ, 2000).

Among global academic responses, Australian Centre for Independent Journalism (ACIJ) director Associate Professor Chris Nash at UTS said: 'The suggestion that journalism staff and students, and indeed any academics, might somehow desist from reporting, commenting and publishing on the current situation is akin to suggesting that doctors and nurses should turn their backs on wounded people in a conflict. It's unconscionable' (Nash, 2000).

Three senior USP academic staff also immediately protested and the president of the USP Staff Association, Dr Biman Prasad, now a deputy Prime Minister of Fiji, called for the letter to be withdrawn, saying it was 'unjustified' and he condemned 'self-censorship'. Dr Prasad added: 'Academic freedom is always fundamental to the survival and operation of a university, even more so when there is a crisis and threats to academic freedom' (Prasad, 2000a). He later described the incident in a paper reflecting on the 'crisis of conscience' for USP academic staff when addressing the annual conference of the New Zealand Association of University Staff (NZAUS) in Wellington:

> The staff association was vigilant and took a firm stand on issues that we felt were designed to promote self-censorship. For example, soon after the May 19 coup, the university administration in panic and unilaterally decided to close the journalism programme website. The journalism students were provided with a fabulous opportunity to practise skills in the real life situation what they were learning in theory.
>
> Their reporting on the crisis was appreciated around the world. The administration's drastic move to shut the website down was rather regrettable from the point of view of both staff and students of journalism. The Association of USP Staff protested vigorously against the closure and it was allowed to continue. (Prasad, 2000)

Responding to the closure of the website, two 'mirror' hosting sites for USP journalism were immediately established—one by an American graphics designer, Mara Fulmer, who worked with the Media Centre at USP in the mid-1990s. She hosted the students' gagged newspaper at her *Looking Glass* website in the US (Robie, 2001b, p. 52), and the other site, which had greater profile in the Pacific region, was set up by the Australian Centre for Independent Journalism at UTS (Robie, 2000): 'The site was designed and set up within hours by Fran Molloy, and with the support of ACIJ director Chris Nash and head of the journalism department Wendy Bacon, the USP journalism students were able to have their stories published shortly after they were filed.' Their reports are archived at: https://bit.ly/4aTOhe7

A footnote to the affair—and vindication—came in December 2000 when the students won six Ossie awards, including best publication, or runner-up prizes at the 2000 Journalism Education and Research Association of Australia (JERAA)

annual conference at Mooloolaba, Sunshine Coast. The accolades—the most ever won in a single year by the USP journalism programme—were recorded by Professor Mark Pearson of Bond University, writing for the PANPA Bulletin industry publication (Pearson, 2001):

> The United States has its Pulitzer prizes. Australia has the Walkleys. And journalism education in the region has the Ossies, the Journalism Education Association's awards recognising excellent journalism produced by students . . .
>
> Journalism students from the University of the South Pacific under the leadership of course coordinator David Robie won two of the major awards and were highly commended in four others for their reporting of the 2000 Fiji coup. Leading industry personnel judged the awards, and all praised the efforts of the USP students for their coverage of the coup.
>
> Category judge deputy editor of *The Age Online*, Mike van Niekirk, said the student journalists working on the [*Pacific Journalism Online*] publication rose to the challenge of providing high quality reports of a dramatic international news event on their doorstep.

Pacific Journalism Online later merged with *Wansolwara*, the print edition, to become *Wansolwara Online*.

At least 16 people died as a result of political turmoil arising from the takeover of Parliament on May 19 and culminating in the mutiny in Queen Elizabeth barracks on November 2 (Refworld, 2001). George Speight, the leader of the coup, was subsequently convicted of treason and sentenced to death (2000 Fijian coup d'état, n.d.). However, the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. Jo Nata, a prominent journalist in Fiji, was also imprisoned for life for treason over his role in the coup as media adviser for Speight. He has since been set free and he gave his reflections about the coup to *Islands Business* in a 2024 cover story (Naidu, May, 2024). Twenty one other rebels were also jailed.

Coverage of the coup by the students, their dilemmas, and how they applied the Talanoa Journalism model was analysed in two of my books, *Mekim Nius: South Pacific media, politics and education* (Robie, 2004), which was launched by Tongan publisher and media freedom advocate Kalafi Moala at JERAA in Fiji, and *Don't Spoil My Beautiful Face: Media, Mayhem and Human Rights in the Pacific* (Robie, 2014). Quoting from *Mekim Nius* (literally 'news making'): 'The news media is the watchdog of democracy. But in the South Pacific today the Fourth Estate role is under threat from governments seeking statutory regulation, diminished media credibility, dilemmas over ethics and uncertainty over professionalism and training.'

Figure 5: Pacific Media Centre: Journalism Under Duress.

AUT and the Pacific Media Centre (2002-2020)

From USP, I joined the AUT faculty and over several years initiated several Pacific projects and launched a student journalism newspaper, *Te Waha Nui,* along with colleague Alan Lee. After also developing a body of Pacific media research, I was invited by the university to establish a Pacific Media Centre, the first and only journalism unit of its kind in New Zealand. This was a pioneering step and included the establishment of New Zealand's only specialist postgraduate 'Asia Pacific Journalism Studies' paper (Robie, 2019; 2022). This was under the umbrella of the Creative Industries Research Institute (CIRI), another innovative initiative by the university in the years 2007-2016 (CIRI, n.d.). The PMC's mission declared: 'Informed journalism and media research contributes to economic, political and social development, and AUT's PMC—Te Amokura—seeks to stimulate research into contemporary Māori, Pacific and ethnic diversity media and culture production' (About the Pacific Media Centre, n.d.). Several projects were launched using Talanoa methodology (Figure 5).

A feature of the PMC's approach was creating teaching tools by students themselves as part of their coursework. An example of such a tool is a clip of the late Beirut-based British journalist Robert Fisk commenting on '50/50 Journalism', which demonstrated how skewed 'balance' often obscures 'the truth' in reportage, especially about the Middle East (Pacific Media Centre YouTube, 2008).

A major project was Pacific Media Watch (PMW) performing a watchdog, alternative news and advocacy role, adopted from USP in 2007 although it was originally founded at UPNG in Papua New Guinea and UTS in Australia (Robie, 2016). It was compiled for *Pacific Scoop* initially while based at AUT and later at *Asia Pacific Report* as a regional media freedom and educational resource by a

Figure 6: Pacific internships included the covering post-coup Fiji elections in 2014 and 2018.

network of journalists, students, stringers and academic or NGO commentators.

Closely aligned with Pacific Media Watch was a 15 minute weekly radio programme, *Southern Cross*, run by the Pacific Media Centre and hosted live on Mondays by the University of Auckland's campus radio station 95bFM, which has nurtured several leading broadcasters in the New Zealand mediascape. The programme, a mix of current affairs and interviews with Pacific innovators, was compiled and presented by the PMW media intern or editor. Cook Islands Māori student Alistar Kata (Ngāpuhi) was a pioneer of this programme and the weekly broadcasts were archived on Sound Cloud (*The Southern Cross*, 2017; Pacific Media Centre, 2016).

PMC students were also embedded with the USP newsroom in Fiji as part of their Asia Pacific Project practicum to cover issues such as the first Fiji post-coup election in 2014 and again in 2018. The articles were published by *Pacific Scoop, Asia Pacific Report* and *The Junction* (*The Junction*-AUT, 2018). Project assignments also included internships with the *China Daily, Cook Islands News, Jakarta Globe, Jakarta Post* and *Philippine Star* (Asia Pacific Journalism projects and internships, 2017). (Figure 6).

Also besides reporting from the perspective of Talanoa Journalism, the students conducted their research and coverage within a framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which include targets such as 'no poverty', 'zero hunger', 'good health and wellbeing', 'climate action', and 'peace, justice and strong institutions' (The Sustainable Development Goals, 2016). This frame is relatively rare in both New Zealand media and at journalism schools. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all UN

member states in 2015, provides a 'shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future.

> At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries—developed and developing—in a global partnership. They recognise that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth—all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests. (The Sustainable Development Goals, 2016).

One of the biggest projects at the PMC was the Bearing Witness climate crisis action programme, which combined the resources of both student journalists and documentary making students. One of the finest outcomes of this project was *Banabans of Rabi—A Story of Survival* (Bearing Witness, 2019), a short documentary produced by postgraduate Pacific student journalist Hele Ikimotu and screenwriting and production student Blessen Tom, a communication studies student from India. They made the 10 minute film while on assignment in their 2018 Bearing Witness climate change project in Fiji for the Pacific Media Centre. The documentary was accepted and screened at the 2018 Nuku'alofa Film Festival in Tonga and 2019 Māorilands and Pasifika film festivals (Robie, 2019; Robie & Marbrook, 2020).

Conclusion

Many of the students' reports and video storytelling initiatives using a Talanoa model have been featured on the Journalism Education and Research Association of Australia (JERAA)'s *Junction* cooperative website for 22 journalism schools across Australia. Staff of *The Junction* also played a key role in rescuing and hosting the entire Pacific Media Centre's archive when AUT shut down the archive in June 2023 (The Pacific archives, 2023). (The PMC was effectively closed in early 2021 shortly after I retired in 2020 (Robie, 2022). AUT changed its mind under pressure and restored an official PMC archive thanks to the intervention of the Tuwhera digital team which hosts *Pacific Journalism Review.*

All these projects to varying degrees deployed elements of Talanoa journalism. My colleague film maker and academic Jim Marbrook and I explored comparisons between Paulo Freire and his 1967 work Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Talanoa-style practice as involved in the Bearing Witness project in our joint article (Robie & Marbrook, 2020). We concluded:

> Comparing Freire's ideas on pedagogy and praxis to a 'talanoa' approach to practice invites us to reconsider some of the complexities of Pacific communities. While Freire pushes us to rethink power structures inside communities, a 'talanoa' approach (as broadly outlined in Figure 1) not only

encourages a more solution-based approach to factual storytelling but also a deeper cultural understanding of story and a 'recognition of indigenous values'. It values a Pacific-based approach to the idea of 'praxis'. (Robie & Marbrook, 2020, p. 11)

Also, it ought to be noted that although Talanoa slipped from the core Pacific journalism approaches at AUT after the closure of the Pacific Media Centre, aspects of the Talanoa approach are still very much 'alive and well' at the *University of the South Pacific*. As staff there indicate, the tradition of applied training and 'not shying away' from controversial topics still prevails at USP (Drugunalevu & Manarae, 2015; Singh & Drugunalevu, 2016). This article is a strong testimony of the benefits of practical training, 'not just for the sake of conventional training news reporting methods,' as USP's Shailendra Singh notes, 'but for the opportunities of trying alternative approaches to news reporting, addressing reporting gaps left by the commercial mainstream media, and discovering new, and perhaps even better ways to cover certain topics, and tell certain stories, that tend to fall through the cracks of conventional Western watchdog journalism criteria (S. Singh, personal communication, 27 April 2024). The greatest opportunity to innovate is at university journalism schools via practical training with the goal of producing well-rounded graduates who are critical thinkers.

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Dr David Robie has specialised as a journalist and educator in Asia-Pacific affairs since 1980. He retired in December 2020 from Auckland University of Technology where he was founding director of the Pacific Media Centre and inaugural pro-fessional of Pacific journalism and communication studies. He founded Pacific Journalism Review *in 1994, was also editor of the* Pacific Journalism Monograph *series and convened the Pacific Media Watch project. He is currently editor of* Asia Pacific Report. *In June 2024, Dr Robie was awarded Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit (MNZM) in the King's Birthday honours for his "services to journalism and Asia Pacific media education".*
davidrobie.nz@icloud.com

Nurturing resilient journalists

A Fiji case study of student news reporting in challenging Pacific environments

Abstract: This article examines the multifaceted learning experiences University of the South Pacific (USP) journalism students gain from practical training. It is the latest in a series of papers on applied learning and teaching at USP journalism. Applied training methods take into account the challenges of the Pacific news reporting terrain in which USP journalism graduates will operate once they start work. The article reiterates that the best way to condition future journalists for their work environment is to expose them to the elements. The article uses USP student journalists' coverage of the 2018 and 2022 Fiji elections as background case studies of practical experience and learning outcomes.

Keywords: case study, elections, Fiji, Fiji coups, learning outcomes, Pacific, practical training, student journalism, University of the South Pacific, Wansolwara

SHAILENDRA SINGH and GERALDINE PANAPASA
The University of the South Pacific, Suva

Introduction

JOURNALISTS in most Pacific Island countries face a challenging news reporting terrain. Besides dealing with political instability, coups, civilian unrest and complex developmental issues, journalists must contend with hostile government attitudes and draconian media legislation (Singh & Hanusch, 2021). Considering this, a key issue facing Pacific journalism schools and training institutes is how to best prepare students for the challenging environment that they will face once they become professionals. One strategy adopted by The University of the South Pacific (USP) Journalism Programme is the emphasis on practical training through the USP Journalism student press, mainly the student training newspaper, *Wansolwara*, and the online news portal, *Wansolwara Online*. This article looks at the learning outcomes of practical training through student journalists' coverage of Fiji's 2018 and 2022 general elections. Both elections were

momentous events in the coup-prone country's path to democracy, thus highly newsworthy from a journalistic standpoint.

This article is part of a series of research papers emanating from the USP Journalism Programme into applied learning and teaching (Cass, 2002; Drugunalevu & Manarae, 2015; Robie, 2000, 2001a; 2001b; 2002, 2010; 2012; Singh & Drugunalevu, 2016). Jointly owned and governed by 12 Pacific Island member countries—Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu—the USP is one of only two regional universities in the world. Over the years, USP Journalism students from the region have covered major events out of the main Laucala Campus in Suva, Fiji, including regional meetings, national elections, USP student elections, and coups, political upheavals, and civil unrest.

Regarding the 2018 and 2022 Fiji elections, the USP student press chose to differentiate its coverage from the mainstream media by preferencing a 'constructive journalism' approach, as opposed to the classical 'watchdog journalism' stance. The former is seen as less adversarial and less elitist than the latter (Lynch & McGoldriek, 2005). Student journalists focused on lesser-known candidates, female contestants, and grassroots voters, whose voices are usually drowned out, or dominated by the better-known and well-established candidates, whom the mainstream media choose to preference. The elections coverage was not just an opportunity for students to familiarise themselves with Fiji's media laws and electoral procedures, but to also become better acquainted with the challenges facing the country and the difficulties encountered by citizens. This was achieved by following the national debates, and through interviews with everyday people and political candidates.

This reflective article discusses the context that informs learning and teaching at USP Journalism, the editorial approach for the elections coverage, including pre-planning and training, and the news outputs, learning outcomes, and other insights from this exercise.

The context informing learning and teaching

The learning and teaching of journalism at USP, including practical training, is anchored to the Pacific media and political contexts. Singh (2020) has detailed the hazardous nature of the Pacific news reporting terrain via his internal and external threats typology. The major external threats include political pressure and coercion from government and other powerful elements, commercial pressure from advertisers, and more recently, pressure from foreign interests/countries attempting to influence how they are potrayed in island countries' national media (Singh, 2020).

Internal threats, which emanate from within the news media sector, are more covert and less coercive in nature, and as a result, they are not as widely known,

or as well recorded as external threats. Internal threats include uncompetitive salaries in the journalism field, attributed to small advertising markts and limited revenue, resulting in a high rate of journalist turnover due to the pursuant of better paid jobs in public relations. This high journalist attrition trend is manifest in a young, underqualified and inexperienced journalist cohort in Pacific island countries (see Singh & Hanusch, 2021). This leaves media organisations in a constant stuggle to build newsroom capacity, with a potentially negative impact on the quality of news and on journalism as a whole. This is an intractable problem that is hard to address because it is tied to the very nature and make-up of Pacific Island countries, with respect to their small economies, and small population size. The lack of critical mass and diseconomies of scale make it challenging for news media organisations to achieve and sustain healthy profits, which, in turn impact on staff retention and capital investment. The high rate of newsroom staff turnover means that a young and inexperienced journalist cohort is at the forefront of the coverage of major news events at any given time (see Singh & Hanusch, 2021). This situation underscores the importance of practical training in Pacific journalism schools to prepare graduates for the eventuality of being thrust into the forefront of reporting big events as soon as they are recruited.

With regards to external threats, Pacific Island governments habitually propose or implement stronger media legislation to address what they claim to be the lack of standards and professionalism in journalism. A good example is the former Fiji government's punitive *2010 Media Industry Development Act*, implemented in the name of improving standards. It had been in place for 13 years before it was repealed by the newly-elected Coalition goverment in April 2023. By then, Fiji had earned the reputation of being the worst Pacific Island country to be a journalist, according to the 2022 Reporters Without Borders report (Reporters Without Borders, 2020) with the media act linked to a culture of self-censorship (Singh, 2018). Fiji has proved to be a major challenge for journalists: Robie (2009, p. 86) has written how Fiji, even after four decades of independence, continued to face the 'paradox of a traditionally free press and a succession of mostly authoritarian or paternalistic governments, whether elected or installed as the result of coups'.

While Fiji had the harshest media legislation between 2010 and 2023 on top of a tricky political landscape, the media in other Pacific island countries were not free of challenges. Just when Fiji repealed its media act, PNG launched its draft media act, raising new concerns about free speech and media rights in that country (Watson & Singh, 2023).

The 2018 Pacific Islands News Association Summit discussed how media in the region continuously faced political pressure and the risk of harsher legislation for reporting long-standing problems, such as corruption, while journalists faced threats, violence and intimidation (Panapasa & Singh, 2018). The pre-existing

financial and editorial problems were exacerbated by the twin impacts of the digital disruption and the COVID-19 pandemic, as discussed in an online panel of experienced Pacific journalists. The discussion was convened by the Department of Pacific Affairs at the Australian National University in December 2021. Besides eating away the already limited advertising revenue, digital disruption and the COVID-19 pandemic saw further government crackdowns, eliciting calls for greater protection of media professionals and media businesses, as well as support for freedom of speech and media rights (Watson & Singh, 2023).

However, insofar as media rights are concerned, there is a longstanding debate in the Pacific about the most appropriate form of journalism practice in an under-developing region, with persistent questions about the extent to which the media should be free in politically and socially fragile environments. According to some arguments, a young, inexperienced, and underqualified journalist corps could exacerbate potentially volatile situations, especially in Pacific countries with ethnic tensions, such as Fiji, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands (Iroga, 2008; Rooney, Papoutsaki & Pamba, 2004; Singh, 2015). However, Hackett (2013) argues against totally discarding Western free press ideals because of their strengths, such as holding power to account, even while recognising their 'significant shortcomings' (pp. 23–34). Cass (2014) has observed what he perceives to be a unique form of journalism that has evolved in the Pacific—a hybrid of the developmental and watchdog models.

These arguments resonate with an 'International Debate' organised by the Denmark-based International Media Support in 2007. The debate has some relevance for Fiji, PNG and the Solomon Islands, which have experienced serious levels of ethnic tensions, violent confrontations and political instability. The debate, published in a report, *Press freedom post-conflict: a cause of instability or foundation of democratic development?* (International Media Support, 2007), focused on issues surrounding press freedom in post-conflict situations, with arguments for and against liberalising media environments in post-conflict countries. The questions are worth revisiting in relation to the complexities of issues in the Pacific media sector, and informing debates about media practice and journalist education in the region:

- Should advocates of media freedom stand on principles or pragmatism?
- Are media development actors too dogmatic about freedom of expression, applying it unyieldingly in circumstances where more nuanced approaches are needed?
- Is it a 'one size fits all' approach at its worst?
- How should international community foster and support the appropriate blend of media related programmes in post-conflict settings? (International Media Support, 2007, p. 4)

The debaters were organised into two opposing groups—media purists and media pragmatists. The pragmatists contended that true democracy was impossible without a pluralistic media unencumbered by undue regulation. They insisted that media freedom was the foundation for stability in both democracies and fragile societies alike. Media becomes 'important as a conduit, a channel and a public platform that will (if executed according to sound professional standards) expose failures and malpractices' (International Media Support, 2007, p. 7)

This position underscores the significance of 'sound professional standards' as a pre-requisite for a democratic media. The lack of 'sound professional standards' identifies as an 'internal threat' in Singh's (2020) typology of threats. It highlights the link between media freedom and 'professional' standards: without the latter, the former is imperiled in that lack of standards become a government excuse to impose harsher legislation. This scenario became a reality in Fiji with the government imposing the *2010 Media Industry Development Act* in the name of improving standards (Singh, 2020). The Pacific has a comparatively young and inexperienced journalist cohort pushed into the forefront of news coverage because of high staff attrition rate (Singh & Hanusch, 2021). If the alleged lack of 'sound professional standards' that Pacific governments and others often complain about is attributed to inexperienced and underqualified journalists, then it represents an internal threat to media freedom (Singh, 2020).

Pragmatists further argued that it should not be automatically assumed that the media consistently act as a force for good, respect other peoples' freedoms, show impartiality, or even contribute to stability. They stressed that the limits of free media must be acknowledged, especially in post-conflict settings with a broad variety of concerns to address (International Media Support, 2007). Media is only one and not necessarily the most important priority, hence freedom of expression must be carefully restricted. Whether the media like it or not, these restrictions can promote stability, which would actually be in the interest of the media in the long term. The media is a powerful vehicle to expose injustice, but citizens' welfare is best protected by institutional checks and balances. Therefore, paying attention to the contextual environment (in a post-conflict situation) might take precedence over guarantees of media freedom and freedom of expression (International Media Support, 2007).

The USP Journalism practical training approach
The scenarios outlined in the previous sections reflect some of the dilemmas and dangers in the Pacific island news media sector, and the challenges that they pose to journalists, including student journalists who join the workforce. They also outline questions and dilemmas about which type of journalistic style is best suited for the Pacific region. In this regard, practical training is indispensible to provide student journalists a taste of the real world to equip them with the right

tools to deal with any confronting situations. Practical training is also crucial for experimenting with different forms of journalism in the field, including constructive journalism, which may be more suited than the classical watchdog style in certain situations, as argued in the International Media Support (2007) report.

USP Journalism's major practical learning tool is the student training newspaper and online news portal, *Wansolwara*, besides six-weeks professional work attachments with mainstream media organisations for final year students.

Wansolwara is published twice in the academic year in magazine-format, and is supplemented by an online news portal, *Wansolwara Online*, which is more news-focused, including any major breaking news. The student newspaper is available in PDF format on the *Wansolwara* news website (https://www.usp.ac.fj/wansolwaranews/news/).

Initially 16 pages in size, *Wansolwara* is now a 24-32 page newspaper published in full colour. Since its founding, the newspaper has relied on advertising revenue (raised by the students) to fund production costs, and reporting assignments outside the capital city, Suva.

In more recent years, *Wansolwara* has been published and distributed as an insert by Fiji's two national newspapers free of charge—first by the *Fiji Sun* for several years, and more lately by *The Fiji Times*. Besides nationwide distribution of *Wansolwara*, the support from the national dailies enabled the programme to raise advertising revenue to fund reporting assignments in other Fiji towns and cities, besides Suva.

The regular *Wansolwara* news beats broadly cover campus news and Pacific regional news. Fiji national and community news are also prioritised, since the paper is published out of the USP journalism programme based at Laucala Campus in Suva, Fiji. *Wansolwara* coverage includes USP student politics, Fijian politics, major regional meetings and events, natural disasters and environmental reporting, and any major upheavals, such as the Fiji military coups. Some of the major events covered include George Speight's putsch (May 2000), the first ever mutiny in Fiji's military history (November 2000), Fiji general election (August 2001), the 2000 coup trials and court martial (2002), the Bainimarama coup in 2006 (and its aftermath). The students also cover the softer side of news, such as arts, music, entertainment, and sports. The reporting experiences of the students have been documented in several research papers on experiential learning through *Wansolwara* (see Drugunalevu & Manarae, 2015; Robie, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2010; Singh & Drugunalevu, 2016). The findings indicate that besides the usual benefits of practical training—improving writing skills, developing contacts, building confidence and learning to work under deadline—one of the major benefits is the exposure to various forms of pressure—political, institutional, societal, community and cultural—and learning how to respond to them.

New Zealand-based media academic Philip Cass (2016), the founding lecturer

of *Wansolwara*, has highlighted how from the early days the coverage of some financial irregularities within the USP Student Association resulted in threats against student reporters. Singh and Drugunalevu's (2016) work indicated that little had changed in the following years, with their case studies documenting the experiences of a second-year student who faced threats and coercion for reporting discrepancies in the USP Student Association finances. Another second-year student was assaulted on campus for another report into student association financial irregularities. The third case study showed a how final year Samoan student was ostracised by her fellow Samoan campus community for reporting a dramatic slump in their academic performance. This example was consistent with Robie's (2002, p. 147) observation of how customary obligations and pressures are frequently a burden on journalists in the South Pacific. It was only through practical training that the Samoan student was able to get an early taste of such cultural pressure. While initally she felt depressed, she said that the experience toughened her (Singh & Drugunalevu, 2016).

The USP student press has, at times, drawn controversy from the faculty, especially in relation to the 2000 Fiji coup coverage, with USP administrators closing the news website due to 'safety concerns', and the then vice-chancellor Esekia Solofa (in Robie, 2002), issuing a statement claiming that journalism students should be trained through 'simulated' instead of 'real' journalism.

However, Singh and Drugunalevu (2016) have argued that it was through practical training that students gained first-hand experience in problem-solving skills, such as circumventing gatekeeping at USP during the 2000 coup, and skirting state censorship in covering the 2006 Fiji coup. While the hostile reactions against student reporters are unpleasant, the exposure to confronting situations provided an early taste of real-world journalism. The learning outcomes showed that the experience toughened students' resolve, indicating that students should not be cocooned because they learn from the exposure (Singh & Drugunalevu, 2016).

National elections as a training ground for student journalists

In terms of practical journalistic experience, elections are among the most significant news events in any country, as they involve a plethora of major national issues under intense scrutiny and debate in the public arena, at like at no other time. The debates and the media coverage of the incumbent government's performance can be seen as a form of 'national audit' of the country's governance and state of affairs, including how the issues at stake would be addressed in future. Elections not only provide journalists with easy access to a multitude of newsworthy stories, both of the hard and soft news categories, but also a deeper understanding of the nation and its problems, both through the public debates, and via interviews with the election candidates, expert commentators, and every day people out to cast their votes. The politicians in the race are

usually more accessible to journalists than normal, vying as they are for votes to get into office. These elements make elections an excellent news event for student journalists to try their hands at.

Both Fiji's 2018 and 2022 elections were significant in that they were only the second and third elections held under the new 2013 Constitution, implemented by the Bainimarama government, which came into power through the 2006 coup. The 2013 Constitution was Fiji's fourth since independence in 1970, which betrays the country's turbulent political history, including the forceful removal of democratically-elected governments in 1987, 2000 and 2006. The 2018 and 2022 elections were seen as a test of the durability of the 2013 Constitution, and the robustness of Fiji's fledgling democracy. The elections offered student journalists both a major opportunity and a major challenge with regards to cutting their teeth in political reporting in the complex Fijian political terrain. Societal pressures in the multiethnic country are at their height during a politically-charged event like the elections (Ramesh, 2010), and one of the major challenges journalists face is how to not inflame a tense situation, while reporting the facts without resorting to undue censorship.

For USP journalism, the elections are an opportunity not to be missed, despite the risks, or perhaps because of the risks. Election coverage aligns with USP Journalism's longstanding motto to not shy away from tough assignments, based on the premise that shielding students from the real world that awaits them does not adequately prepare them for the challenges that lie ahead. To the contrary, exposure to the elements provides an indication of what could be in store in the field, and the experience conditions students to the hard realities of news reporting in real time.

Because taking calculated risks is part and parcel of journalism, it should be, by default, part and parcel of journalism training, notwithstanding that journalist safety is paramount, and any calculated risks need to be mitigated by, among other things, adequate preparation and clear safety protocols. For the elections, this includes identifying the potential risks beforehand, assessing their gravity and formulating worst-case-scenario plans to deal with any contingencies. In other words, to get the best results from elections, extensive pre-planning is required, not just to understand the process and how best to report on it, but also how to keep safe. During the workshops for the 2018 and 2022 elections, it was noted that while tensions are higher than normal during the polling period, actual violence was rare. However, the student reporters were advised not to take any chances, and to be on higher alert than normal while on their reporting rounds. Students worked in teams, and were reminded to always be aware of their surroundings. Should a situation arise, it was safety first, and they were to leave any risky site or area, as soon as possible, with reports to be filed once they were out of the danger zone. The students were advised to keep in phone contact with each

other and the lecturers, and to call the police for help, should the need arise.

Despite a few temporary tense moments, the two elections passed without any major problems, and the students did not encounter any risky situations.

Besides physical risks, there were the non-physical risks to consider, such as the legal repercussions of falling foul of Fiji's electoral and media regulations. In this regard, the students attended several workshops designed to train them on not just the practicalities and ethics of elections reporting, but also on the mechanics of both Fiji's electoral system and its national media law. This included two workshops organised by the US Embassy in Suva on 'Political and Elections Reporting' by journalism professors Mark Horvit and Gary Kebbel, from the University of Missouri and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln respectively. Student reporters also attended Amnesty International's launch of the Human Rights Agenda outlining six essential priorities for all candidates to commit to, and a final briefing and training on the safety and security of journalists. The reference for this training was the Reporters Without Borders' *Handbook for Journalists During Elections*.

These generic workshops were supplemented with several in-house workshops specific to the Fiji elections. The training was conducted by the USP Journalism teaching staff and other local experts, based on resources developed by the Fijian Elections Office and Reporters Without Borders. It included an internal workshop by USP Journalism staff on election reporting guidelines and legislation, based on the *Fiji Elections Office Media Handbook 2022* and, Dialogue Fiji's *Elections Reporting Guide for Fijian Journalists*. The topics also covered Fiji's 2013 constitution, electoral system and political landscape, and the provisions of the punitive *Fiji Media Industry Development Act*.

The workshop served to remind students about the impacts of Fiji's media act, and reinforced the fact that even though they were student journalists, they were equally bound by and accountable to the laws of Fiji. The workshop re-emphasised the critical public interest role of the journalists in elections, given that the public usually rely on information in the news media to inform their voting decisions. In this regard, balanced, fair and accurate coverage was more crucial in national elections than normal, and the journalist was pivotal in this regard. Discussions about the public interest responsibility of the journalist in elections coverage was pertinent in Fiji in light of media biases uncovered in a research report based on the content analysis of the 2018 elections. Entitled, *News Coverage of Fiji's 2018 General Election Campaign: Insights from a Content Analysis of the National Print and Broadcast Media*, the report was co-written by this author (Singh & Lal, 2022) and published as a discussion paper by the Australian National University's Department of Pacific Affairs.

The results indicated that four of the five media organisations heavily favoured the governing FijiFirst party in the 2018 election, in both the quantity

and tone of the coverage. The only exception was *The Fiji Times,* whose coverage was comparatively more balanced, and more critical of the incumbent (Singh & Lal, 2022). The reasons ranged from the effects of Fiji's punitive media law, conscious and subconscious bias of journalists, the political and ideological alignment of the media company, and state financial incentives in the form of advertising contracts and public service broadcasting (Singh & Lal, 2022).

Editorial approach, news outputs and learning outcomes

In his contribution to the Dialogue Fiji report on the media coverage of the 2018 elections, Fijian political scientist and the director of the McMilliam Brown Centre, New Zealand, Professor Steven Ratuva, stated that election stories sell, especially when spiced with intrigue, scandals, mysteries, conspiracies and warring narratives:

> The media can feed into election frenzies, inflame passion and at times encourage boisterous political behaviour and prejudice, which can be socially destructive. By the same token, the media can also be used as a means of sensible, intellectual and calm engagement to enlighten the ignorant and unite people across cultures, religions and political ideologies. (Panapasa, 2022)

Ratuva's message is pertinent to Fiji, a fragile country vunerable to ethnic tensions and societal conflict, in the backdrop of a restive military, with four coups to show for it. The aggressive and sensationalist style of reporting highlighted by Ratuva is usually attributed to the traditional watchdog journalism approach adopted by mainstream media, with the challenging task of balancing commercial imperatives with a public interest role (Bennett & Serrin, 2005). The Western-liberal inspired watchdog journalism approach is based on adversarialism, which purports to report the facts and hold governments accountable to the public. In the Pacific, watchdog journalism is praised for holding power to account, but sometimes accused of being simplistic and excessively negative. In the Fijian context, questions about whether the media fuel communal tensions and/or contribute to instability gained traction after the 2000 coup. Political scientist Ratuva was one of many analysts to highlight the Fiji media's potential culpability in the 2000 coup. Ratuva stated that media portrayal of then Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry, the first Fijian of Indian descent to hold that position, fed the rising tide of ethnonationalist mobilisation in Fiji. The media did not create conditions for the ethno-nationalist upsurge, which was already present, but provided nationalists the 'legitimacy to roll on' (Ratuva, in Robie, 2001a).

All this is not to say that watchdog journalism does not have a role in Fiji or the Pacific, but rather, to strive for balance, and to be open to experimenting with new journalistic approaches. In this regard, USP Journalism's news coverage is

also informed by alternative journalistic models, such as solutions and constructive journalism.

The Constructive Journalism Institute based at Aarhus University in Denmark describes itself as 'an independent center at the heart of the global constructive journalism movement'. It states on its website:

> Traditional news reporting is often biased on the side of negativity and cynicism, forgetting to contextualize the news of the day with relevant context and research. This imbalance has resulted in people grossly over-estimating the negative and under-estimating whatever progress has been made on a particular issue. Surveys across the world show that what the public believes about their countries is often far from the truth. People rate the performance of their societies much more poorly than the reality. This has consequences for how people live, vote and treat one another. (Constructive Institute, n.d.)

The institute goes on to add that 'political polarisation has also encouraged the growth of partisan agendas online, which together with clickbait, algorithms feeding on outrage and various forms of misinformation, help to further undermine trust in media—raising new questions about how to deliver balanced and fair reporting in the digital age. Business as usual is no longer an option for news organisations' (Constructive institute, n.d.).

The limits of the watchdog approach and its risks in certain situations or settings are well documented, and alternative/supplementary formats such as peace journalism, conflict-sensitive reporting, solutions journalism, and constructive journalism have been proposed (see Frohardt & Temin, 2003; Howard, 2009; Lynch & McGoldriek, 2005). These journalistic frameworks are deemed more thoughtful, less commercial; more analytic, and less deadline-driven or frenzied. Notwithstanding breaking news, they allow journalists more time to research, reflect and write.

In this regard, the USP student press is non-commercial, and does not face the same financial pressures as the mainstream media, which allows for greater flexibility to experiment with different news reporting approaches. The 2018 and 2023 elections reporting was predicated on, and also informed by previous experiences of USP student journalists coverage of the 2001 elections. As the then coordinator of the USP Journalism programme, David Robie observed, the mainstream media were focusing on slanging matches between the different parties, whereas the students were keen to provide independent and different coverage. He added:

> Our focus will be the issues and whether the different parties take notice of the needs of the grass roots. This experience will give students a tremendous sense of purpose which will serve them well in the future. (cited in Cass, 2002, p. 571)

Robie's stance is reminiscent of the constructive journalism school of thought, based on an editorial approach that goes beyond the 'if it bleeds it leads' scenario by focusing on important societal issues (Constructive Institute, n.d.). Constructive journalism not only recognises, but 'enhances the vital role of "watchdog" by promoting democratic conversation and suggesting solutions to problems' (Jørgensen & Risbro, 2021, p. 2). Because the mainstream news media usually take the dominant 'hard news' approach in covering elections, USP journalism made a conscious decision to adopt a 'soft news' methodology for the 2018 and 2022 elections to differentiate its news product, rather than duplicate what was already being covered in the establishment press. Rather than chase powerful politicians and the elite candidates based on the dominant news values of 'prominence', 'impact' and 'conflict', USP Journalism chose to focus on the news value of 'human interest', which is usually considered 'soft news'. Where the news media chased prominent candidates and politicians on the campaign trail for interviews, USP Journalism chose to focus on the women and youth, who are usually marginalised in society, and underrepresented, both in Parliament and in news media coverage. As a group, the voices of women and youth, whether election candidates or voters, are often crowded out by the bigger players and USP Journalism decided to prioritise the former by providing them with a platform. The USP Journalism election reporting team was told to elevate the 'faces' and 'voices' of women, youth and ordinary voters through stories that reflected their struggles, hopes, dreams and aspirations. This was the vein of the coverage in both the 2018 and 2022 elections, which produced more than 40 stories on the two elections, besides social media updates on the *Wansolwara* Facebook page, @WansolwaraNews (est. 5,126 followers) and Twitter feeds (@uspwansolwara). In 2018 there was a special 8-page edition of *Wansolwara* specifically on the elections, published as an insert in the *Fiji Sun* daily newspaper. There was no print edition in 2022 because of some logistical challenges.

The human interest angle meant giving the community a voice and allowing them to express what the elections meant for them, rather than just reporting it as a race, or a fight between the political parties and the major candidates. Students were able to speak/interview Fijians from all walks of life, and visit and report from some remote parts on Viti Levu, which the mainstream media do not often cover.

The focus on youth, women, and the community was reflected in headlines such as 'My vote will count'; 'Young voter fails to win but optimistic about future'; 'First time voters speak up'; 'Hope for a better future'; 'Voters share concerns'; 'Aspirations, wages, employment top priority', and so forth. In 2018, voters aged between 18-30 years comprised one-third of the total registered voters, so providing a platform to group was justified. In 2018, Journalism students interviewed USP associate professor Sandra Tarte, who pointed out

that it seemed first-time voters did not think that their vote mattered, despite their voting power. Student leader Aneet Kumar highlighted the need for more youth in policy-making forums and parliamentary committees, while first-time voter Vivek Pawan called for government policies to support students who could not secure scholarships. Another young voter, Marianne Tabuaciri, then a politics and sociology student at USP, highlighted the need to address issues around mental health and poverty, youth unemployment, and create additional scholarship opportunities.

One of the highlights of the 2018 election was the increased number of women in Parliament—10—compared to eight in 2014, although this number dropped to six in 2022. One of the successful candidates interviewed in 2018 was the then newly-elected opposition member of parliament, the National Federation Party's Lenora Qereqeretabua, who stressed that female representation in Parliament can only occur if women enter the race for office. On the momentus occasion of a record number of women being elelcted in 2018, Qereqeretabua stated that they would transform Parliament into a more inclusive and bipartisan chamber.

These few examples of the coverage not only encapsulate the focus on societal issues, youth and gender, but demonstrate the multiple advantages of practical training, and the experience and knowledge gained from it. Besides speaking to election candidates, student reporters get a chance to interview youths, who are their peers, and everyday people out to cast their votes. Not only was this an opportunity to improve their writing skills, student journalists gained in-depth knowledge about the challenges in the country, especially as they relate to women, youth and ordinary citizens. Student journalists also get an opportunity to practice interviewing everyday people and their peers, allowing them to build confidence, in preparation for interviews with more prominent, powerful and potentially difficult individuals, such as politicians, business tycoons, an others. Their learning outcomes of the pre-election training are not to be discounted either. They allow student journalists to acquire indepth knowledge about the electoral system and the media laws of the country, as they apply to the elections and to news reporting in general.

Conclusion

This article re-emphasised the importance of practical training for student jour-nalists. Practical reporting carries certain risks but this is outweighed by the learning outcomes. Besides, handling risks is part of journalism training, and the risks can be mitigated by proper planning and adoption of safety measures. This article used USP journalism students coverage of the 2018 and 2022 Fiji elections as case studies to make the argument for applied learning and to posit that shielding students from confronting situations does not prepare them ade-quately for future challenges in the real world, whereas exposure to the elements

provided an early taste of what to expect, and how to cope with it. Being put into challenging reporting assignments and environments, and facing difficult situations allowed students to hone their problem-solving skills and work out innovative ways of overcoming obstacles. Pre-elections training deepens student knowledge of media laws and electoral systems, while the coverage of elections instils better understanding of the country and its people by following national debates and covering them, and by interviewing and interacting with everyday citizens and election candidates.

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Dr Shailendra Singh is associate professor and discipline coordinator of journalism, School of Pacific Arts, Communication and Education, The University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji. He is also on the editorial board of Pacific Journalism Review *and a research associate of the Asia Pacific Media Network.*
shailendra.singh@usp.ac.fj

Geraldine Panapasa is former editor-in-chief of the Wansolwara *journalism newspaper and former journalism tutor at The University of the South Pacific.*
geraldine.panapasa@gmail.com

Time to rethink 'watchdog' journalism in the Pacific

Abstract: For more than five decades, 'Watchdog Journalism' has been taught as the yardstick for a free media. With the so-called 'mainstream' media becoming increasingly commercialised—both in a global scale and domestically—and with the media being primarily owned by business conglomerates, the 'watchdog' model has created a journalism culture that is too adversarial and creates conflicts rather than helping to solve today's problems/conflicts. A new paradigm of watchdog journalism is needed where the media is able to hold powerful players to account for facilitating the development/livelihood needs of communities, especially those in the margins of society. This new paradigm of journalism needs to focus on 'development rights' rather than 'human rights' taking into account many aspects of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs should be looked at in terms of a new definition of human rights where the journalist could play a similar role to that prescribed in 'watchdog' journalism theory, but looking for solutions rather conflicts, and include a larger field of stakeholders which need to be made accountable such as governments, big business and particularly conglomerates—even NGOs and faith-based organisations. This watchdog role needs to be applied to trade agreements and other treaties, including those addressing climate change. To develop a new journalism culture to address these issues, media training programmes in the Pacific need to rethink their strategies and examine how to promote independent social media models that are economically and sustainably viable.

Keywords: China, climate change, democracy, development journalism, development rights, Fiji, journalism models, journalism theory, Pacific journalism, sustainable development goals, United Nations, watchdog journalism

KALINGA SENEVIRATNE
Independent journalist and researcher, Sydney

Introduction

FOR WELL over five decades, we have been teaching the idea of a 'free media' as one that is privately owned and being able to make governments accountable for the welfare of its people—not suppress them. We call it 'watchdog' journalism. According to the US Freedom Forum, you cannot have

democracy without a free press (media) (Freedom Forum, n.d.). It describes the watchdog theory as:

> Protected by the First Amendment, a free press means our government answers to the people. An independent news media uses its watchdog role to investigate and report on government overreach and wrongdoing and hold those in power accountable for their actions. Because of press freedom, we get to decide what news, information and entertainment to consume. The government does not have the power to select which media to allow. Our exposure to a variety of viewpoints encourages self-expression and debate and helps us make informed decisions about our community and country. This core freedom also entertains us, provides a 'first draft of history' and spurs some of us toward activism. At its best, the press connects us and provides information we rely on to participate in public life—protecting all our freedoms. (Freedom Forum, n.d.)

These are good lofty principles, but does it work that way today? When the mainstream media in the United States and United Kingdom disseminated lies (without fact checking) claiming that Saddam Hussein had 'weapons of mass destruction' paving the way for the US and its allies to invade Iraq in 2003, did it really spur the public towards antiwar activism?

In his study of how a misinformed public can be manipulated by foreign influences to support going to war against Iraq, Ferguson (2023) noted: 'Disinformation is a deliberately constructed narrative intended to deceive, while the well-meaning carriers of that information who believe it to be true transform it into misinformation.' He argued that 'disinformation cannot become misinformation without a trusted source to serve as its unwitting carrier, which gives the false narrative its power. Knowing one's audience is key to this process because trusted sources differ based on the target' (Ferguson, 2023).

This is an important argument to consider when analysing how the 'China-bashing' journalism by the Western (as well as Indian and Japanese) media is driving people towards supporting military spending rather than questioning the overreach of governments and their alliances with the industrial-military complex.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the media's unquestioning promotion of vaccines and one particular brand Pfizer—without questioning the morality of making huge profits (made by Pfizer in particular) out of a pandemic, and the US government's lack of support for a motion at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) by developing countries to lift the patents on the vaccines, is more akin to 'vaccine consent' journalism rather than watchdog journalism (Seneviratne, 2021). In fact, those who dared to question the efficacy of the vaccines, the role of global Pharma monopolies and patent regimes, were labeled as 'conspiracy theorists' and shut out of the mainstream media, and even platforms like Facebook

and Twitter. That is not watchdog journalism that makes powers accountable for their actions.

Watchdog journalism worked as long as media owners only owned media; today they have become conglomerates owning not only networks of media, but also other businesses, even in oil and arms industry. Today this 'watchdog' has become the 'lapdog' for everyone with power and they are not necessarily governments.

So, when the conglomerates own the media, we need a watchdog to watchdog the watchdog. Speaking at a media conference in Beijing in 2005, Dr Shashi Tharoor, the UN's then Head of Public Information said:

> The question isn't whether the media teaches, it's what it teaches. It can reinforce existing stereotypes, or build new positive ones. It can denigrate and dismiss cultures that are different, or, it can show how wonderful this complicated world of ours is. The custodians of our airwaves can choose to be purveyors of weapons of mass distraction, or, they can choose to be builders of a better world.

Unfortunately, the mainstream media, especially the Anglo-American media—which still wields enormous power to influence (or should I say misinform)—the world, has chosen to be the 'weapons of mass distraction'. If I am going to list them it will take me many pages.

'Free' media and propaganda war

Chandran Nair (2023) has argued that people in China and the non-Western world must realise that when it comes to the workings of the mainstream media we are in a new era—a propaganda war the likes of which the world has never seen before, powered by today's digital technology. 'The media war is real, and tech-driven, and it is not a fight for eyeballs to deliver fair, honest, and educational news. It is almost everything else but that, especially when it comes to China or enemies of the West', he noted.

> On one side is sheer propaganda aimed at the preservation of Western power. The idea that Western media is run by fair-minded people who are independent, driven only by a desire to talk truth to power, is a mirage. It is a myth, and it is a bitter pill that needs to be swallowed. (Nair, 2023)

He argued this was the first stage in enabling one to step out of the propaganda mist we are engulfed in on a daily basis, so that one can examine different viewpoints as news is consumed. 'This is not easy, given the current dominance of Western media outlets and their apparently collective mission,' Nair argued.

Weaponising democracy and human rights

Today much of the world believes that world peace is threatened, not by terrorists,

Russia or China, but by the US, NATO and its allies such as Australia—but that is not what we are being told by the global Western media. Western media tries to convince us that China is a secretive power that is trying to create debt-traps to corner the resources of the world, while on the other side the Chinese say that their mission is to deliver a shared future of prosperity for the global community (Zheng, 2023).

It is important to understand this bias in the global media narrative in the midst of the process taking shape in the South Pacific, where Chinese development aid is labelled as 'debt traps' while the West's promotion of a 'security threat' from China is being normalised. As far as the Pacific is concerned, it is Australian media's narrative of a Chinese threat that should be worrying. If no proper critical journalism is practised in the region, the Pacific would be forced into debt to arm itself in alliance with Western powers.

It should also be remembered that the Pacific was treated as 'forward defence' battlefields for the war with Japan in the Second World War and as a dumping ground for nuclear weapon testing after the war.

In March 2023, *The Sydney Morning Herald* (*SMH*) and *The Age*, published a series of five articles by defence analysts arguing that Australia needed to prepare for war with China within the next three years, and the country was not prepared for it. The series came as the federal government was beginning to consider the biggest defence shake-up in nearly four decades. In an editorial, *The Herald* said 'discussing Australia's preparedness or lack of preparedness for war is responsible journalism and important for democracy' (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2023).

In an article written a few months before his death in December 2023, the exiled Australian journalist John Pilger (2023) warned that America's 'war on terror' had cost millions of lives but the enormity of this violence and suffering seemed to have no place in Western consciousness. He added that as China-bashing heated up in mainstream journalism, no literary critics and journalists seemed prepared to question the foundations of the Western way of life (and their mentality).

Referring to fear-mongering in the mainstream Australian media about an 'imminent Chinese attack' on Australia in coming years, Pilger argued that regularly they had political and military analysts who presented these views to 'poison' Australian's minds, without any credible evidence to back them up (Pilger, 2023). He noted:

> There is no threat to Australia. None. The faraway 'lucky' country has no enemies, least of all China, its largest trading partner. Yet China-bashing that draws on Australia's long history of racism towards Asia has become something of a sport for the self-ordained experts. (Pilger, 2023)

Dollar-chasing democracy vendors

It is through the funding of NGOs (non-governmental organisations) to mount so-called 'colour revolutions'—that the Western media describe as 'people's movements for democracy and human rights'—that alliances are promoted, especially among young people to promote Western-centric domestic political agendas. The West has thus weaponised democracy and human rights and the Anglo-American media are its missionaries.

These 'colour revolutions' have manipulated the youth to overthrow governments—not subservient to the West—by calling for greater democracy and human rights. When they succeed, the new democracy has been more draconian than what they had—Egypt, Libya and Ukraine are some examples. It is no surprise that China's President Xi Jingping (ABC, 2022) warned about these colour revolutions in a speech to the Shanghai Corporation Organisation summit in 2022 and offered to set up a counter-terrorism training centre to help monitor them.

I would call these groups 'dollar chasing democracy vendors'. They say what the Western funders want to hear. They cannot be trusted to be news sources.

Most Asian governments, including India, have imposed strict controls on NGOs receiving money from overseas because these 'colour revolutions' are fuelled by Western funding agencies – to instigate insurgencies (First Post, 2023). The Pacific would also need to closely scrutinise NGO funding from overseas and impose controls if that is designed to create chaos and threaten national security.

Military mindset

If the media is going to act according to the true spirit of the watchdog media theory, they should be questioning loud and clear the military mindset of the West, where everything is today interpreted as 'security threats' and solutions are promoted as increasing your military budgets and preparing for war. War is good business for Americans. Consider their stock prices after Russia's invasion of Ukraine and multi-billion military aid packages on offer. If critics question this military spending, they are likely to be labelled as a 'Chinese (or Russian) stooge'.

ABC News (Burgess, 2023) reported in January 2023 that as the Ukraine war continued, the US arms industry had become the biggest winner. The report pointed out that 'some EU officials' had expressed concerns about the US reaping the benefits of prolonging the war, through arms sales and increasing gas prices, while some of its member countries had to replenish stocks sent to Ukraine.

Protecting democracy and human rights are a pretext for such war preparations, and the 'watchdog' journalists have become their cheer leaders. If providing independent and diversity of views, to spur us into activism is watchdog journalism that is not happening. There is no hint of growing peace movements in the West, or elsewhere.

Rules-based order

Today we often hear Western leaders and their media—Australia included—talking about protecting a 'rules-based order' from Chinese threats. Do the media actually ask, what is this rules-based order and how does it work? India's Foreign Minister S, Jaishankar, addressing the UN General Assembly in September 2023, described it well. He said:

> The international order is diverse and we must cater for divergences, if not differences. The days when a few nations set the agenda and expected others to fall in line are over. As the United Nations itself symbolises, finding common ground is an imperative. To listen to others and to respect their viewpoints, this is not weakness; it is the basics of cooperation. Only then can collective efforts on global issues be successful. (Jaishankar, 2023)

He was not directing this at China—China's foreign minister would have said something similar, if called upon to describe this so-called 'rules-based order'.

Most countries in the Global South have been extremely unhappy at the way the West started a war with Russia and asked them to fall in line. Jaishankar has been blunt about this and a video of his comments that called for a change in the European mindset went viral across the globe (Jaishankar, 2022). Today, when it comes to reporting China, not only the American media but also the Australian media practises a type of journalism I regard as 'China-bashing journalism' not watchdog journalism. The Chinese call it 'smear journalism'. Such journalism misrepresents many of the good things China is doing by calling these initiatives 'debt traps' or 'security threats'.

Spanish journalist Javier Garcia, author of a new book, *China: Threat or hope?: The pragmatic revolution*, in an interview with China's Xinhua news agency (Xia, 2023) listed the 'arsenal of words' aimed at instilling fear in anything related to China and reinforcing the negative image installed in the heads of readers, manipulating the terms like 'regime', 'purge', 'propaganda' and 'repression' or expressions like 'power struggles', 'under threat' and 'debt trap'. In this sense, the rich in the United States are millionaires or great entrepreneurs, while those in China are oligarchs; China does not fire corrupt or inefficient officials, but rather 'purges' them; China does not grant advantageous loans to develop infrastructure in poor countries, but 'traps' them in debt; China adopts 'vaccine diplomacy', and other countries donate them selflessly.

Unfortunately, when it comes to reporting about China, Australian media has forgotten what objectivity and fairness is. This is irrational, irresponsible journalism not freedom of expression. It is threatening Australia's security and that of the region.

Reporting the Pacific

This type of China-bashing journalism is also common when the Australian media reports about China's engagement with the South Pacific. Everything that China does is a security issue or threatening the rules-based order in the Pacific.

Daru in Papua New Guinea is an interesting example. In December 2020, China announced a $200 million deal to build a fisheries harbour in this sleepy village, which did not even have a daily market (Cluff, 2020). Immediately, the Australian media and several parliamentarians in Canberra became hysterical (I was in Sydney at the time), declaring that China was planning a naval base 200 kilometers from Australia's shores.

What went largely unreported was that just before the announcement, China had signed an agreement (Godfrey, 2020) to build a fish processing plant in PNG and to allow PNG to export fish products to China, which has the world's largest seafood market. In the long term this project would have opened up the China market to the fishing industry right across the Pacific via the Daru fishing harbour, where a new city was to have been built.

A potential win-win situation was turned into a divisive security issue.

Pacific: A hotspot of geopolitical conflict

Adjunct Professor Vijay Naidu in Development Studies and Governance at the University of the South Pacific has argued that the South Pacific became a hotspot of geopolitical battles at the turn of the century with the Chinese coming into the region.

> South Pacific was expected to be under the ANZUS umbrella in the post-Second World War period[1]. They were to be kept together under regional organisations like the South Pacific Commission and not to be too involved with countries that ANZUS partners see as enemies. Thus, Pacific Island Countries (PICs) had very little involvement with the Soviet Union or with China. Even India was looked upon with suspicion. I would go further and say, in fact, all Asian countries were regarded with suspicion by ANZUS … With increased engagement in the Pacific by China there is virtually hysteria in all these ANZUS countries. (V. Naidu, interview with the author, October 2023).

Naidu views this hysteria as stemming from the fact that for a long time since the end of the Second World War, the South Pacific region had been a backyard for Australia, New Zealand and the US. 'So they see this as something almost exclusively their own. They had this policy of strategic denial to the Russians (Soviet Union). I think they would like to have that against the Chinese,' he argues.

China's engagement with the Pacific is growing. In a two-hour meeting with China's ambassador to Fiji, Zhou Jian, he told me that he would like the Pacific

media to see China as a development partner. (Zhou Jian, meeting with the author, May 2023). In April 2022, the China Pacific Island Countries Climatic Action Cooperation Center was inaugurated in Shandong Province in China. There are a number of other projects covering health, agriculture, construction, police training and so on across the Pacific.

In September 2023 (Seneviratne, 2023a), Shandong Province and Fiji signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to exchange scholars and experts from the provincial institution to assist the Pacific Island nation in the agriculture sector. At the signing event, Fiji's Agriculture Minister Vatimi Rayalu said that Fiji and China had a successful history of cooperating in agriculture. He told the Fiji Broadcasting Corporation that this initiative was critical to agricultural production to promote heightened collaboration among key stakeholders and help Fiji connect to the vast Chinese market. China was also helping Fiji to revive its rice farming sector and had recently posted six Chinese agriculture technicians to help introduce high yielding seeds and rice farming technology in order to attract young people to become rice farmers (Seneviratne, 2023b).

Unfortunately, the Australian media is unable to see the development assistance aspects of these projects. On the other hand, they praise the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme (PALM) as a development aid project that would help Pacific Islanders, especially Fijians, to earn a good living in Australia and help their families back home.

In an article in *The Fiji Times*, Catholic Archbishop of Fiji, Peter Loy Chong (2023) claimed that the workers were treated as 'modern day slaves' in Australia. It is not only seasonal workers, Australia is openly encouraging professionally qualified nurses, teachers and other skilled staff to migrate to Australia to plug a skills shortage. In the process, it is threatening to seriously disrupt public health and education sectors, and also the agriculture sector in Fiji. Pacific media need to hold Australia accountable for this situation.

They are being guided by Australians to think of the monetary benefits Fijian families would enjoy from remittances sent back home. Addressing an economic forum at the Asian Development Bank in Manila in September 2023, Fiji's Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Professor Biman Prasad (2023) said:

> We see major global powers locked in a geo-strategic competition. This is hugely unsettling for us across the Pacific. Fiji and the Pacific nations find themselves on the frontlines of this geopolitical contestation. This contestation will have long-term adverse consequences for the region. There are no win-win options on the road ahead. None. There will only be hard choices. (Prasad, 2023)

The Australian and Western media have played an irresponsible role in bringing the region to this predicament. They have created a poisonous cocktail

of conflict reporting and this kind of watchdog reporting—biased and prejudiced—has created an adversarial journalism culture that is creating conflicts and the media don't know how to solve it or more so to promote cooperation for development.

Conclusion: Development rights and rethinking watchdog journalism

In an essay by a final year journalism student, Nivash Kumar (2023), at The University of the South Pacific (USP), he said:

> Development journalism is a news reporting framework that prioritises the economic and social development of a region. In the Pacific region, where many countries are still struggling with poverty and lack of basic infrastructure, development journalism can play an important role in highlighting the issues and proposing solutions. This approach involves working closely with communities and stakeholders to identify their needs and to report on the progress being made towards achieving those goals. It can also help to foster a sense of community engagement and responsibility, which is crucial for long-term sustainable development. (Kumar, 2023)

This is precisely what the Pacific media needs and watchdog journalism concepts could be applied to such reporting without treating these as conflicts needing two opposing viewpoints. In the Pacific, we can address the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and report in such a way that journalism assists in achieving these goals.

In October 2023, the UN Human Rights Council voted to forward to the UN General Assembly a draft international covenant on right to development, which was supported by both China and India, and opposed by 13 Western countries (UN Human Rights Council, 2023). If adopted as an international treaty, rather than individual rights, this community rights concept would be more suitable for the Pacific.

Human rights, according to the development rights agenda, are what is there in the SDGs. Providing clean water and sanitation to the people, a good education, developing and nurturing sustainable systems of agriculture to provide food security to people, protecting the environment and protecting communities from the impacts of climatic change, empowering women, providing proper housing and healthcare to people, and so on.

Governments should be held accountable to providing these rights to people, but that cannot be achieved by the media always accusing governments of inefficiency or corruption.

We as reporters need to go out to the communities talk to the people and find out how they live, what is lacking and how they think these services could be provided and how, by governments. Then, we can ask questions from the

government of how they could provide for the people and what are the barriers? Journalists could even become a facilitator of a dialogue between the communities and the government.

Such development rights based reporting could also question the geo-political machinations in the region and question outside powers about their role in Pacific affairs. This includes close scrutiny of Chinese activities as well, but in an objectuve manner. As China sees assistance to the Pacific as investments – not charity or aid—these investments need to be carefully analysed to see if it is assisting local communities by creating jobs and other income generating avenues or if it is setting debt traps. If Chinese workers are brought in, if they are doing jobs that could be done by locals, and also if they are being trafficked by crime syndicates. There are many human trafficking syndicates that are involved in trafficking people—both out of the Pacific and into the Pacific. Some of these traffickers may be Chinese, but they should not be linked to the Chinese government nor should Fijian and Australian traffickers be linked to their own governments. Those trying to instigate 'colour revolution' need to be exposed as well for trying to destablise countries, and be made accountable.

In 2017 and 2018, I was involved with a group of Asian communication scholars with UNESCO funding to develop curriculum to train Asian journalists in 'mindful reporting' using philosophical concepts from Buddhism and Confuciasm. We are now in the process of promoting this curriculum called 'mindful communication for sustainable development'. This will be very useful for the Pacific to address climatic change issues.

So let us rethink the concept of 'watchdog' journalism—not reject it—but refine it so that journalism will unite and empower the people not divide them. This empowerment is not necessarily about freedom of speech, but journalism helping people to improve their living standards to live comfortably and peacefully, especially without being exploited economically, such as for cheap labour.

Note
1. The Australia, New Zealand and United States Security Treaty (ANZUS) was established in 1951 as a non-binding collective security agreement to cooperate on military matters in the Pacific Ocean region (Wikipedia).

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Dr Kalinga Seneviratne is a consultant to the Journalism Programme at The University of the South Pacific in Fiji and a research fellow at the Shinawatra International University in Bangkok, Thailand. He is a former head of research of the Asian Media and Information Communication Centre (AMIC), Singapore.
kalingasen@gmail.com

Challenging the Pacific 'blind spots' through images

Photoessay: A unique feature of *Pacific Journalism Review*, compared with many other journalism and media research journals, has been a particular focus on photography and documentary. Contributors have been eclectic and varied, ranging from activist photojournalist John Miller (Ngapuhi), who charted the new wave of Māori assertiveness from the first Nga Tamatoa protest at Waitangi in 1971 and who offered a research portfolio on the Ngatihine Land/Forestry legal dispute in Northland Aotearoa, to Ben Bohane's 'Melanesian mythical places with unreported conflicts', to Kasun Ubayasiri's 'Manus to Meanjin' study of refugee migration, to Filipino Fernando G. Sepe's stunning but shocking portrayal of President Rodrigo Duterte's extrajudicial 'war on drugs' (in reality a 'war on poverty'), through to Todd M. Henry's Tongan 'Gangsters in Paradise' and the realm of kava in New Zealand. At least a dozen portfolios have been published by the journal and this article examines and reflects on some of the highlights. The photoessay is completed with a portfolio of protest photographs from the seven months of Israel's War on Gaza.

Keywords: activism, blind spots, decolonisation, documentary, Kanaky, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, photoessays, photojournalism, Tonga, War on Gaza

DAVID ROBIE and DEL ABCEDE
Asia Pacific Media Network

'THE Pacific Islands have long been a refuge,' wrote celebrated Vanuatu-based investigative photojournalist Ben Bohane in the introduction to his extraordinary 2013 collection The Black Islands, 'for eccentric foreigners and castaways too, who often fell into one (or several) of these categories: mercenary, missionary or misfit.' Adding to his message of how the region was a magnet for mystics and mayhem, he wrote:

> As a photojournalist who has lived and journeyed through these shimmering islands, perhaps I am a crude mix of all of the above. I was drawn

to them because they still seemed like mythical and remote places in an increasingly familiar world, while many of its conflicts were largely unreported. There were family connections too.

So beginning in 1994, I ran a naval blockade to cover the war in Bougainville and soon found others too, wars the rest of the world had conveniently forgotten: in East Timor, West Papua as well as Bougainville. Then there were riots in New Caledonia, civil war in the Solomon and coups in Fiji ... (Bohane, 2013)

Ben began his long association with *Pacific Journalism Review* research journal (and thus the Pacific Media Centre) with an illustrated investigative article in 2001 about the complex divided loyalties within the Fiji military following the George Speight attempted coup debacle in May 2000. He characterised the crux of the divide to be between the 'professional' soldiers, typified by then Commander Voreqe Bainimarama (later coup leader and ultimately elected prime minister), who believed the military should stay out of politics, and the 'politicals', who sought to ensure the supremacy of indigenous Fijian rights.

He followed this up with two powerfully evocative portfolios of photographs published in 2006 (Bohane & Dean) and 2014 (Bohane) editions of the journal. In the former, Ben featured some of his photos from the Bougainville war, which started in 1989 in response to an environmental crisis over Panguna copper mine;

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Figure 1: A raskol from the Kips Kaponi gang in his Port Moresby hideout, Papua New Guinea, 2005. Featured on the cover of Vol 12(2) in Ben Bohane's portrayal of 'spirit and war in Melanesia'.

a troop deployment of Australian troops (and other Pacific forces, including from Fiji and New Zealand); the controversial arrival of 43 West Papuan refugees in 2006 and the 'ethnic cleansing' in the Solomon Islands the same year (Figure 1).

Bec Dean, curator of Ben's original *Black Islands* exhibition at the Australian Centre for Photography in Sydney, noted that the photographer's long-standing journalistic focus in the region had been to explore the connections between kastom and resistance movements. As she described it, kastom is a broad term 'derived from the Tok Pisin (Melanesian pidgin) for "custom" used to describe dynamic new religious movements with a traditional and spiritual base'. As Ben himself described it:

> As an Australian, resident in Vanuatu, I see myself as a Pacific islander and reject the grandiose claims of Australia being a 'continent'. I believe that this notion has blinded Australians to the reality that we remain forever linked to other Pacific islands through the blood and songlines of our indigenous people and our historical and military legacy in the region.

Another influential photographer, this time in Aotearoa New Zealand, has also had a long association with *Pacific Journalism Review* and the Pacific Media Centre with his trajectory of civil rights, anti-apartheid, anti-nuclear, social justice, political transformation and indigenous struggle. John Miller (Ngāpuhi) received a Media Peace Prize Lifetime Award in 2003 for his contribution to the struggle for peace as a 'sympathetic observer'. Recently his enormous archive—and he has a prodigious memory—on events such as the Springbok tour of 1981, the hikoi (Mãori Land March), Waitangi protests and the 2006 tangi of the Mãori Queen, Te Arikinui Dame Te Ataiangikaahu has been developed into an iconic collection. He has been a frequent guest lecturer for the Pacific Media Centre, and was one of the recipients of the first centre research grants in 2007 which led to the photoessay 'Seeing the wood for the trees—Ngatihine' published in 2011.

The first Nga Tamatoa protest at Waitangi in 1971 launched a new era of assertiveness in the struggle for Mãori Treaty, land, and cultural rights. Such events as the Mãori Land March (1975) and the occupations at Bastion Point and Raglan (1978) received prominent treatment in mainstream media of the day, noted *Pacific Journalism Review (Figure 2)*. However, how well equipped were the then predominantly monocultural news organisations in understanding underlying issues behind such protests? John sought some answers:

> My own interest in issues of media coverage comes from an involvement in a complex legal dispute over a Mãori-owned land block 35 years ago, during which I had much contact with journalists of the day, at a time when the media landscape was much less ethnically diverse. Of the 41 or

so 'mainstream' journalists I had varying contact with over a 24 month period from 1976 to 1978, 36 were Pākehā, three were Māori (one of these a trainee) and two were Samoan. I was effectively presenting a minority culture issue to media workers overwhelmingly of the majority culture. I discovered that the subject was virtually unknown territory to these journalists. This was certainly a 'blind spot' issue. (Miller, 2011)

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Figure 2: The fight for Māori land: A compilation of articles by Robert Jones in 1978 by photojournalist John Miller (Ngāpuhi) in a research project for the Pacific Media Centre and an early photoessay by *PJR* (Miller, 2011).

Social psychologist Emily Pronin first coined the term in research relating to the bias blind spot in 2002. While the research was primarily about the bias of the average person (85 percent of a sample of 600 people considered that they were less biased than the average American), it has a particular applicability to news media too. Situations abound where editors and news directors fail to provide coverage or analysis of issues, thus creating blind spots for their audience. Marginalisation by mainstream news media in New Zealand of the West Papua human rights crisis is an obvious example of this.

My own work has certainly focused on media blind spots and human rights, which has led to photographic exhibitions in Kenya (a social justice portrayal of Madagascar), Auckland ('Faces of Africa' and 'Nuclear Exodus: The Rongelap Evacuation', later turned into a television video broadcast on *Tagata Pasifika*)

Figure 3: Heavily armed French CRS riot police confront Kanak pro-independence protesters in Nouméa's Montravel suburb, New Caledonia, in 1984. This was featured on the cover of v19(1) 'Media and democracy in the Pacific' and in the 10th anniversary publication of the Pacific Media Centre (Marbrook et al., 2017).

and Wellington, and books including *Eyes of Fire* (1986), *Blood on their Banner* (1989), *Mekim Nius* (2004) and *Don't Spoil My Beautiful Face: Media, Mayhem and Human Rights in the Pacific* (2014) (Figure 3).

In the past decade, the Pacific Media Centre, especially through its publications, *Pacific Journalism Review*, *Pacific Journalism Monographs* and books, such as *Conflict, Custom & Conscience: Photojournalism and the Pacific Media Centre, 2007-2017* (Marbrook et al., 2017), sought to challenge blind spots, and offer a 'voice for the voiceless' (Robie, 2023). Journalism schools prioritise journalists as detached observers, keeping their distance. However, we need to examine our media role more closely and more critically. Does our journalism perpetuate human rights violations or conflict, or does it contribute to restoring peace and justice?

Nepali Times editor-in-chief and publisher Kunda Dixit, is the author of *Dateline Earth*, a critique of Western mainstream media and the control of news by multinational corporations reflecting the interests and preoccupations of industrialised countries. The original edition of this book (in 1996) was essentially before the rise of the internet and social media networking: 'News was whatever happened in the US, Western Europe, Australia, and the periphery wasn't deemed to be important.' When the revised edition emerged in 2011, says

Dixit, the mediascape wasn't any better; corporate media control still persisted in the internet age, although by now it was also struggling to maintain a successful business model.

However, with the cybernet revolution, believes Kunda, photojournalism, especially of an investigative edge, is enjoying a resurgence. Kunda was keynote speaker at a 2011 'Investigative Journalism and Technology' conference at Auckland University of Technology, which later provided an incentive for the founding of New Zealand's Centre for Investigative Journalism. His inspirational exhibition of 'peace photographs' by a range of photographers featuring the 10-year Maoist civil war in his country created quite a stir. Some of the images, including the cover of this book, are featured in this collection and were drawn from his trilogy *The People War* (Figure 4). I wrote in a review about the influence of his works:

> Dixit's prophetic view that issues such as jungle families sickened by mine tailings, peasants impoverished by global free trade, countries harmed by toxic waste and general environmental neglect were often ignored is now widely accepted in the region with a wider range of environmental and human rights reporting now a normative. Climate change has contributed to a paradigm shift. (Robie, 2009, p. 230)

PACIFIC MEDIA CENTRE

Figure 4: The cover of the 2017 photojournalism collection published by the Pacific Media Centre on the occasion of its 10th anniversary, partially inspired by the work of *Nepali Times* editor Kunda Dixit (Marbrook et al., 2017).

Many staff, students and volunteers affiliated with the Pacific Media Centre have achieved outstanding results in investigative photojournalism and documentary work, including Karen Abplanalp (2012), whose investigative feature 'Blood Money' in *Metro* magazine, forced the NZ Superannuation Fund (NZSF), which has an ethical investment policy, to withdraw from the American and Indonesian-owned Freeport copper and gold mine at Grasberg in West Papua. This feature won several investigative journalism awards. Del Abcede has chronicled the personalities, cultural diversity and initiatives of the centre for the past decade with empathy, depth and passion. Film maker Jim Marbrook's feature-length documentary *Cap Bocage* on a New Caledonian environmental saga began its genesis with a small—and inaugural—seed grant from the PMC in 2007 (Marbrook, 2015). His initiative created the impetus for this book and he inspired a documentary dimension to the Pacific Media Centre's work through Te Ara Motuhenga.

News media ought to be vigilant in countering elected despots who use their mandate to destroy the very institutions that allowed them to be voted into power in the first place, argues Kunda Dixit. When he spoke in Auckland, he issued a challenge which is just as valid today:

> Let's work on a paradigm shift in the way we in the media approach stories. We should strive to cover deprivation and the causes of social injustice, not just its effect. It means each of us having a conscience and using it—by striving to be fair in an unfair world. (Dixit, 2011).

Undoubtedly the most compelling, certainly the most shocking, photoessay published by *Pacific Journalism Review*, has been a 2018 series of 10 photographs taken at night by ABS-CBN photographer Fernando G. Sepe Jr of victims of then Philippines President Rodrogo Duterte's state-sanctioned murderous 'war on drugs' which reached a peak at one stage of 32 people killed in a single day. According to Amnesty International, the more than 3,600 people slain in the killing spree already by 2016—more honestly a 'war on poverty'—had exceeded the 3,240 people estimated to have been 'salvaged' (a Filipino term for extrajudicial killings) during the nearly 14 years of the dictatorship under Ferdinand Marcos (Thompson, 2016). The editors of *PJR* expected to get some robust responses from academics and journalists after seeing the published photos (Figure 5). However, although the collection was downloaded more than 450 times, responses were muted. Sepe himself wrote in the abstract:

> The photoessay *Healing The Wounds From the Drug War* was the trail of people's lives that have been disrupted by this brutal campaign in the Philippines. It was about what happens to those people left behind after the killings. Some who survive end up in decrepit jails. The families of the

dead, mostly from the poor who get by in hand-to-mouth existence, end up buried in debt only to have their loved ones get a burial. But it was also a story of hope for those given a new lease of life by organisations willing to assist in the rehabilitation of drug addicts. (Sepe, 2018).

Figure 5: Journalists take photos of a body discovered by a roadside near a garbage dumpsite in suburban Quezon City, Philippines, 10 February 2017.

Among more recent photoessays published by *PJR* since it left AUT University and began publishing with the independent Asia Pacific Media Network have been a unique and idiosyncratic collection of refugee poster montages, 'Manus to Meanjin', a study of polymorphic borders and Australian imperialism, by Kasun Ubayasiri (2021). He followed this with a study two years later of refugee migration with a series of stunning portraits.

Documentary photographer, photojournalist and visual storyteller Todd M. Henry has also had two powerful photoessays published by *PJR*. The first, 'Gangsters in Paradise: the deportees of Tonga' was based on the documentary of the same title (Henry, 2019). As a photographer with a tendency to focus on social issues and subcultures, he was keen to 'start a conversation in Tonga itself regarding how this growing community can be better supported and understood by the wider Tongan public'. His later photoessay (Henry, 2022) was about documenting the use of kava in different parts of the Pacific, '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'.

This portfolio on these pages focuses on photographs that we have taken at various protests over the genocide against Palestinians in Aotearoa (Tamaki Makaurau) and Australia (Melbourne and Adelaide) that we have attended virtually weekly since Israel's War on Gaza began on 7 October 2023. Palestinian photographers and journalists have borne the brunt of this war with the highest death rate of media people in any war. According to Al Jazeera, 147 journalists have been killed in eight months, a phenomenal casualty rate compared with both the Vietnam War (63 killed in two decades) and Second World War (67 killed in seven years) (Robie, 2024a, 2024b). More than 36,000 people have been killed, two thirds of them children and women, and more than 80,000 wounded.

For the past eight months, Gaza's photographers, videographers and camera operators have been bearing witness, ensuring the civilian catastrophe unfolding in the enclave is not forgotten. With Israel barring entry into the strip for foreign journalists, Gaza's reporters have been the only ones to report on the crisis on the ground. They were rewarded in spite of their terrible sacrifice in early May when UNESCO named the Palestinian journalists covering Gaza as the laureates of the 2024 Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize (Palestinian journalists, 2024).

Our photo gallery pays tribute to the ordinary citizens and families in Aotearoa New Zealand protesting weekly for the past eight months for justice and an immediate end to the war.

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Dr David Robie is founding editor of Pacific Journalism Review. *He established the Pacific Media Centre (2007-2020) and is now deputy chair of the Asia Pacific Media Network, publisher of* PJR. *Del Abcede is designer of* PJR *and photographer for* Asia Pacific Report. *An earlier version of this article was published in J. Marbrook, D. Abcede, N. Robertson, and D. Robie (Eds.),* Conflict, custom and conscience: Photojournalism and the Pacific Media Centre 2007-2017 *(pp. 10-13). Auckland, NZ: Pacific Media Centre.*
davidrobie.nz@icloud.com

Image 1: Ali, the 'Free Palestine' voice. Auckland, 2024.

Image 2: 'Would it be okay if they killed me?'. Auckland, 2024.

Image 3: 'All I want for Christmas is peace in Palestine.' Melbourne, 2023.

Image 4: 'Free Palestine v Google'. Auckland, 2024.

Image 5: 'Free Palestine' traditional dress. Auckland, 2024.

Image 6: 'Tongans for Palestine.' Auckland, 2024.

Image 7: 'Decolonise your mind', Auckland, 2024.

Image 8: Piggyback child protester. Melbourne, 2023.

Image 9: 'Never again means never again', Adelaide, 2024.

**Image 10: 'Right to self-defence does not apply to occupiers.'
Auckland, 2024.**

Image 11:   Jews in solidarity.' Melbourne, 2023.

Image 12: 'No violence in our name.' Aotea Square, Auckland, 2024.

Image 13: 'Google profits off Israel's genocide—drop Project Nimbus'. Te Komitanga Square, Auckland, 2024.
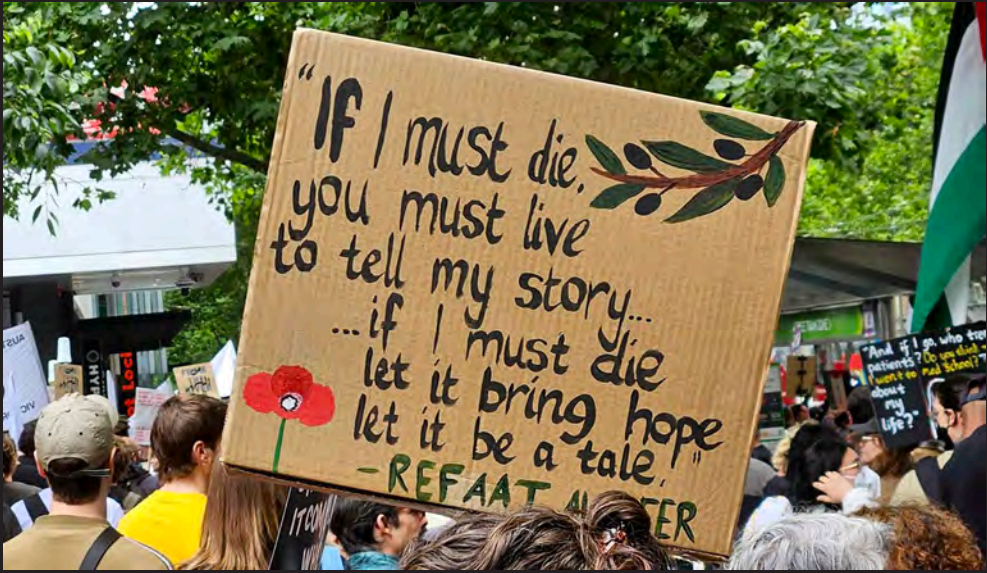
Image 14: 'If I must die . . . ', poem by Rafaat Alareer. Melbourne, 2023.

Image 15: 'You can't build a "holy land" on mass graves of children.' Queen St, Auckland, 2024.

Image 16: 'Genocide Joe' mintage cape. Te Komititanga Square, Auckland, 2024.

Image 17: 'There is only one solution . . .' Te Komititanga Square, Auckland, 2024.

Image 18: 'Pasifika for Palestine.' Queen St, Auckland, 2024.

Image 19: Palestinian whānau—' The right to return', Aotea Square, Auckland, 2024.

John Pilger

A maverick globe-spanning journalist

9 October 1939 – 30 December 2023

Abstract: The breadth of Australian-born British-domiciled investigative journalist John Pilger's journalism was staggering. Over five decades, he covered wars and/or social conflicts in Australia (frequently) Burma, Cambodia, Chagos Islands, Chile, China, Czechoslovakia, Iraq, Japan, Mexico, Nicaragua, Okinawa, South Africa, Timor Leste, Vietnam, the UK and the US etc. He produced powerful documentaries about these issues. He was truly a globe-spanning journalist. He died aged 84.

Keywords: Australia, documentary, investigative journalism, journalism, journalists, John Pilger, Julian Assange, obituaries, United Kingdom

JOHN JIGGENS
Independent journalist, Byron Bay

I N A SPEECH he made in Sydney in 2011, defending WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, John Pilger recalled how it was always impressed upon him when he was young that Australia was a brave country: that it stood up to authority, and it stood up for justice. Such national myths were at best half-truths, Pilger said, but in the country's political life, there was scant evidence of this. But now and then, an Australian came along who made such myths seem true. Julian Assange was such an Australian, he said.

'I find him an extraordinarily brave Australian. And I can't say that about many of my compatriots in the same way. I'm not saying that there aren't brave Australians, but I can't think of any that has really been so unusually brave by his standing up to a superpower. Brave in starting a project like WikiLeaks that he knew would get him into trouble.

'One of the things that of course almost has never come out of the generally appalling media coverage of Julian and WikiLeaks is the reason for WikiLeaks. It had a moral base. It was about justice. He nailed his colours and the colours of WikiLeaks to that mast. This was going to be about justice. It was about seeking justice through letting people know what is going on, to letting people know what those who have power over their lives are saying, I can't tell you

how brave this is. Many people have tried to do this and failed. Julian succeeded actually, because the information that he has got out to people all over the world has made a difference.'

Those same moral qualities that Pilger admired in Julian Assange underpinned Pilger's own journalism. Like many Australians, I have read numerous Pilger articles, a few of his books, and watched several of his more than 60 documentaries. I stand in awe of his enormous output over six decades of what he called 'maverick' journalism.

Most of his documentaries and scores of his articles are available on his website, johnpilger.com, which is an enormous journalistic treasure trove, a contrarian archive of the history of our times.

The breadth of John Pilger's journalism was staggering. Over five decades, he covered wars and/or social conflicts in Australia (frequently) Burma, Cambodia, Chagos Islands, Chile, China, Czechoslovakia, Iraq, Japan, Mexico, Nicaragua, Okinawa, South Africa, Timor Leste, Vietnam, the UK and the US etc. He produced powerful documentaries about these issues. He was truly a globe-spanning journalist.

His first documentary, *The Quiet Mutiny* (1970), was about US soldiers in Vietnam who were 'fragging' their officers, which was slang for throwing grenades into the tents of the commanding officers they didn't like. Many of the conscripted US soldiers were rebelling against the Vietnam war. His most impactful documentaries were *Year Zero: The quiet death of Cambodia* (1979) about the *Khmer Rouge* and *Death of a Nation: The Timor Conspiracy* (1994). His final documentaries were *The Coming War on China* (2016) and *The Dirty War on the National Health Service* (2019).

It is worthwhile visiting his website, not only for these documentaries, but for a series of interviews he did of other journalists, called *Outsiders*. Pilger interviewed two other great war journalists from the generation before him who covered the Second World War: Wilfred Burchett, who talked about being the first Western reporter into Hiroshima after the atom-bombing, who wrote a powerful piece of journalism, 'The Atomic Plague: I write this as a warning to the world' (Burchett, 1945), and Martha Gellhorn (1945), who described walking into the Dachau death camp at the end of the Second World War and documenting the horrors she saw; two revelatory and astonishing pieces of journalism.

As Herman and Chomsky argue in *Manufacturing Consent* (2002), the mainstream media rarely give you the truth. Instead, they give you what powerful people want you to believe. As a rare truth teller in the mainstream media, like Wilfred Burchett before him, and the man he saw as his successor, Julian Assange, Pilger presented Australians with powerful counter-narratives to the warmongering of our mainstream media and the ASPI-inspired propagandists of the ABC.

Figures 1 & 2: To many, John Pilger was the greatest *Daily Mirror* reporter of all—a journalistic legend who fought against injustice, championed the underdog, exposed the horrors of war, and held power to account all his life.

Since Pilger was an important supporter of Julian Assange, and had spent his last decade defending Assange, I interviewed Julian Assange's father, John Shipton for Bay FM about his memories of his good friend John Pilger.

The two met when Julian Assange sought asylum at the Ecuadorian embassy. Assange used to host Christmas dinner there and John Shipton would go over to England every Christmas and stay ten days. He first met John Pilger when they

PILGER DIES AT THE AGE OF 84

shared Christmas dinners with Assange at the Ecuadorian embassy.

Like many Australians, John Shipton had followed Pilger—the written works more than the film documentaries. In particular, *A Secret Country* (1993) had a big effect on his understanding of Australia. Recently he rewatched Pilger's documentary *Palestine Is Still the Issue* (1977), in light of Israel's 2023-24 war on Gaza, which he thought held up well.

Pilger's earliest documentaries had David Munro as director and the pair had a long-term partnership which ended when Munro died in 1999 after making 20

documentaries with Pilger. Pilger wrote the scripts, was the interviewer, and the narrator. His scripts were exemplars of modern journalism, adorned with an abundance of the most viscous irony and a passionate desire to expose the deceits of the mainstream narrative. As the front man, Pilger was handsome and his camera voice, though occasionally over-preachy, was magnificent even then, sounding like Moses descended from the mountain to chastise the worshippers of the Golden Calf.

'He was a chronicler of the world of the late-20th century,' said John Shipton, who praised his bravery. 'He chronicled it all, and he feared nothing. In particular, he had the amazing capacity to maintain virtue and moral integrity, and extraordinary energy in chronicling the depravities of empire. You know, in the sense that he bore the unbearable weight of all this depravity, he managed to hold his head high and work his way through it and bring to us a truthful description of the actions of these depraved people that rule this empire.

'He reported on everything: the vigour of the man was extraordinary; he was immensely productive. Having been on the road now for 11 years myself, you know, you get frazzled, and I mean that psychically, not physically. It did wear John out physically. In the last five years he had a series of sicknesses.

'I don't know the origins of his relationship with Julian, but he was publicly and privately a defender of Julian. What I mean by privately is that he introduced lawyers who he thought were competent.

'John and Julian, their virtues seem to me to be an absolute hunger to seek justice, to believe that justice can come as a result of truthfulness. They didn't say that to me. However, that is what I continued to observe. John had a greatness of soul you know; a magnificent human being in every and all respects: interpersonally, truthfully; a capacity to write, a capacity to speak, a capacity to absorb facts and information and bring it forth into a justice-seeking narrative. You know, there's certain greatness of soul you require. He was an Australian Dostoyevsky, distinctly Australian, but he wrote in a Dostoyevskian tone.'

An interesting example of mainstream media invention of 'facts' was the claim made in one of Pilger's UK obituaries that Pilger had lost money when Julian Assange broke bail and went into the Ecuadorian embassy. The same false claim can be found in Wikipedia's article about Pilger. It must be true, of course, because it has a footnote that references a UK tabloid!

'This wasn't true,' John Shipton contradicted. Not only was the story not true, but the tabloid misinformation also covered up an astonishing act of bias by the English judiciary. John Pilger had indeed volunteered to post bail for Assange, but the judge refused to allow Pilger to post bail, calling Assange and Pilger 'peripatetic Australians'.

Pilger described this incident too.

'My own high point was when a judge in the Royal Courts of Justice leaned across his bench and growled at me: "You are just a peripatetic Australian like

Assange." My name was on a list of volunteers to stand bail for Julian, and this judge spotted me as the one who had reported his role in the notorious case of the expelled Chagos Islanders. Unintentionally, he delivered me a compliment.'

Said John Shipton, 'I argued with John Pilger about that matter that the establishment in the United Kingdom holds Australians in contempt for our origins; that we were populated by what were called convicts. They were actually slaves. They regard us a relic of empire.'

Julian Assange, who has suffered a life-endangering overdose of 'British justice', is due to find out whether he will be extradited to their US overlords. There will be protests around Australia.

John Shipton organised a seminar in Melbourne on March 9 at Storey Hall, RMIT called *Nightfalls in the Evening Lands: The Assange Epic*. John Pilger was to have been one of the speakers, but the list of speakers remains impressive. The website is at: nightfalls.info.

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Dr John Jiggens is a citizen journalist. He was the founding editor of The Westender *and* The Cane Toad Times *and currently works in the community newsroom at Bay-FM in Byron Bay. This obituary was first published by John Menadue's public policy journal* Pearls and Irritations *on 11 January 2024 and is republished with permission.*
thesydneyconnection@live.com.au

Arnold Clemens Ap

His West Papuan legacy lives on

1 July 1946 - 26 April 1984

Abstract: Arnold Clemens Ap was born on 1 July 1946 on Numfor Island in Biak, at the time, part of the Dutch colony of Netherlands New Guinea. After schooling at church missions in Biak, he studied geography at the Teacher Training School of Cenderawasih University in Abepura, Jayapura, between 1967 and 1973. That year, he was appointed as the curator of the university's museum, known as Loka Budaya, which became a centre for West Papuan cultural revival. His work to collect and perform songs in Papuan languages played a vital role in the development of a West Papuan national identity, transcending colonial boundaries and inter-tribal conflicts. He was murdered by Indonesian special forces in 1984. This year, 26 April 2024, marked the 40th anniversary of the death of this charismatic cultural leader. For West Papuans, in exile and at home, it has been an important time for commemoration.

Keywords: Cenderawasih University, culture, decolonisation, human rights, identity, Indonesia, Melanesian, language, obituaries, oral tradition, songs, The Netherlands, West Papua

NIC MACLELLAN
Independent journalist and researcher, Melbourne

I N 1969, Indonesia annexed the western half of the island of New Guinea, through the so-called Act of Free Choice (Maclellan, 2023; Musgrave, 2015). As Indonesian authorities began to expand legal systems and education in Bahasa Indonesia, a generation of young West Papuan intellectuals responded through a cultural renaissance, recording and performing traditional West Papuan songs.

For Arnold Ap, Sam Kapissa and Eddie Mofu, music was a vital tool for raising awareness about human rights abuses, environmental degradation and the social and political issues facing communities across West Papua. Their band, Mambesak, founded in 1978, was the forerunner of later West Papuan groups, from the Black Brothers to Black Paradise (Figure 1). Today, these traditions are carried on by groups like the Sorong Samarai band and the Black Sistaz (the daughters of former members of the Black Brothers).

Despite his popularity, Arnold Ap's work as an anthropologist, ethnomusicologist and musician was a threat to the Indonesian authorities. He was

Figure 1: Mambesak founders Arnold Ap (left) and Sam Kapissa: 'Bird of paradise' in the Biak language.

detained, imprisoned and later murdered by Indonesian special forces soldiers, supposedly killed while trying to escape from prison. On 26 April 2024, the 40th anniversary of the death of this charismatic cultural leader was marked. For West Papuans, in exile and at home, it has been an important time for commemoration.

Inspiration for a new generation

Ronny Kareni is a West Papuan musician, scholar and cultural activist. Based in Australia, he performs with the Sorong Samarai band and plays bass guitar for the Black Sistaz. For Kareni, Arnold Ap's work to collect and perform songs in Papuan languages played a vital role in the development of a West Papuan national identity, transcending colonial boundaries and inter-tribal conflicts. Kareni's performance with the Sorong Samarai band symbolises this notion of 'one people, one soul', from Sorong in the far west of West Papua, to Samarai in the east of PNG's Milne Bay Province.

Kareni says that an important part of Arnold Ap's legacy is the way that Mambesak used music and song to promote national consciousness among Papuans.

'Their music pretty much speaks about the struggle of the people, whether it's in traditional sounds or contemporary sounds—the struggle is in the songs,' he explained. 'That was profound in the work of Arnold Ap, Eddie Mofu and Sam Kapissa. They knew that West Papua was going to go through an episode

of dark history, where language preservation would be so important.

'They understood there were diverse languages across the land mass of New Guinea, from the islands to the west of Sorong and down to Merauke,' Kareni said. 'They realised early on that they needed to collect and archive songs, so that the younger generation like myself, and those who come after, can still listen to the songs. It acts as a symbol of resistance. The historical documentation of the traditional songs and oral traditions recognises our identity, our history and our aspirations as West Papuans.'

Challenging colonialism

Arnold Clemens Ap was born on 1 July 1946 on Numfor Island in Biak, at the time, part of the Dutch colony of Netherlands New Guinea. After schooling at church missions in Biak, he studied geography at the Teacher Training School of Cenderawasih University in Abepura, Jayapura, between 1967 and 1973. That year, he was appointed as the curator of the university's museum, known as Loka Budaya, which became a centre for West Papuan cultural revival.

Interviewed by The Jakarta Post in 2021, Papuan anthropologist Ibiroma Wamla said:

> In those early days, Ap would depart to far-flung corners of Papua, sitting down with village elders and documenting each place's traditional music, dance, sculpture and folklore. He would document everything: local words of wisdom, lyrics and poetry, the process of building traditional houses and even how they make traditional boats . . . Through his work as an anthropologist, curator and bandleader in the highly popular group Mambesak, Arnold Ap celebrated Papuan culture at a time when such expressions of indigenous pride could lead to arrest, intimidation and death. (Ibrahim, 2021)

In August 1978, Ap and Kapissa co-founded Mambesak (meaning 'bird of paradise' in their Biak language). They performed their own songs, such as 'Orphan Child', a lament in Biak that spoke of Dutch colonialism and the betrayal of Indonesian annexation (Glazebrook, 2008). Beyond this, they began performing songs in a variety of Papuan languages – music that still unites the disparate peoples of a nation with a population of more than two million. Ap collected songs that fuelled a sense of West Papuan identity, from coastal and mountain communities, from east and west, songs that celebrate a connection with the land. He also drew on the spirit and traditions of the Koreri movement, which flourished around Biak and Serui from the 1930s.

For young musicians today like Ronny Kareni, this preservation of traditional songs, melded with contemporary forms, is a vital contribution to the nationalist movement in West Papua.

'By collecting and archiving these songs, it brings together tribal groups to sing songs that are not in their mother tongue,' Kareni said. 'Even now, 40 years on, I can sing those songs even if I don't know the language. I don't necessarily understand what the song says, but with the music I can chant with it or sing along with it, whether from Merauke or the Fak Fak area or from Sorong. It's a testament to what Mambesak achieved, that generations like mine and the younger ones can carry on the spirit of nationalism.'

From the late 1970s, Ap, Kapissa and other band members understood the importance of using new technologies to share this traditional music across the nation. Every Sunday, they broadcast a weekly radio show from Jayapura, called Pelangi Budaya dan Pancaran Sastra (Rainbow of Culture and Radiance of Literature). From 1978, they recorded seven albums, with the music widely distributed through cheap but accessible cassette tapes. They also prepared four songbooks that collated traditional songs and music from across West Papua, published with the assistance of Cenderawasih University.

Murder most foul

From the early 1960s, the preservation and celebration of West Papuan culture was seen as potentially subversive by Indonesian authorities and a challenge to the unitary Indonesian nation. Noted human rights activist Carmel Budiardjo wrote that immediately after the 1969 Act of Free Choice, 'a huge bonfire was organised in the main square of Jayapura, presided over by Indonesia's Minister of Culture, Rusiah Sardjono. Symbols of public life, cultural artefacts, school textbooks and Papuan flags were set ablaze. About 10,000 Papuans were herded into the square to watch the ceremonial burning of what was described by Sardjono as "their colonial identity".'

After five years of activity from the late 1970s, Mambesak's growing popularity triggered a vicious response from the Indonesian armed forces.

On 29 November 1983, Mambesak performed for the West Papuan governor. The following day, Arnold Ap was detained by Kopassandha (an Indonesian special forces unit later renamed Kopassus, which became notorious for human rights violations in Timor-Leste, West Papua and across Indonesia). Following his arrest over alleged sympathies with the outlawed Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM), Ap was dismissed from his post at the university 'on suspicion of subversive activities'.

For months, there were few details of his fate. By February 1984, however, family members fled into exile, after hearing rumours that Ap and other detainees were being tortured in prison. In April, the Indonesian authorities then announced that Ap and four other detainees had escaped from jail. Later investigations suggested there was no escape, but that a military officer unlocked Ap's cell door on 21 April 1984, and ordered that he and the other detainees should be driven to a

military base camp on the coast. Just days later, on April 26, Arnold Ap, Eddie Mofu and two other detainees were shot or stabbed to death.

One Indonesian police officer, who later sought refuge in Papua New Guinea, said the authorities feared Ap as 'extremely dangerous because of the activities of his Mambesak players and wanted him sentenced to death or given a life sentence, but could not find evidence for a charge in court'.

Mambesak's Sam Kapissa died in Jakarta in 2000—many West Papuans believe he was also murdered by the Indonesian military, like other cultural leaders such as Chief Yafet Yelamaken, who also died of 'food poisoning' in 2002. In subsequent decades, bands like Black Brothers and Black Paradise maintained the spirit of Mambesak, with audiences in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and across Oceania. Today's cultural workers like Ronny Kareni draw on this same tradition.

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Nic Maclellan works as a journalist and researcher in the Pacific Islands. As a broadcaster and correspondent, he has contributed to Islands Business *magazine, Radio Australia,* The Guardian, Inside Story, The Contemporary Pacific *and other regional media and journals. He has written widely on the environment, development, decolonisation and demilitarisation in the Pacific, and was awarded the 2015 Outstanding Contribution to the Sector award by the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) and the Walkley Foundation's 2020 Sean Dorney Grant for Pacific Journalism. An earlier version of this article was first published by* Islands Business.
nicmaclellan@optusnet.com.au

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DR PHILIP CASS is reviews editor for Pacific Journalism Review.

A grim year ahead, but some cause for optimism

EVERY day more and more online content is disappearing behind paywalls as publishers try to protect their dwindling revenues.

Whether readers confronted by paywalls will bother to subscribe or simply seek the information elsewhere—or just give up and look at another Beyonce listicle—is one of the scenarios prompted by the appearance of the latest set of predictions about the future from the Reuters Institute.

The view from Reuters and author Nic Newman is that this will be the year when AI will really break out and that by 2026 the majority of content online will be generated synthetically.

Newman, who was a founding member of the BBC News Website, has taken the view that much of what will happen is inevitable, driven by falling revenues and an increasingly disconnected and disinterested audience.

Six months into 2024, conflicts in the Middle East, the Ukraine, Myanmar and a dozen other places, the constant peril of climate change and the continued presence of an ever-mutating COVID virus provide a grim backdrop for the media and their consumers.

Newsrooms face collapsing revenues and consumers are faced with inflation. Soaring prices afflict daily life and massive job cuts continue—something seen recently in New Zealand. In April, Warner Bros. Discovery announced it was closing Newshub, with the loss of 300 jobs. TVNZ then axed several news programmes, with the loss of another 68 media roles.

One journalist described the cuts as 'a blow for democracy' (Corlett, 2024).

Journalists face unprecedented threats around the world, even in the supposedly democratic West where extreme rightwing politicians and demagogues have gained a level of support not seen since the 1930s. According to

the international Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), unprecedented numbers of journalist have died in the past year, with most of those being Palestinian journalists killed while covering the conflict in Gaza.

The year's top five jailers of journalists are China, Myanmar, Belarus, Russia, and Vietnam, with most journalists being locked up on charges of somehow endangering the state (CPJ, 2023).

Audiences themselves remain an acute problem, with signs that many people are actively avoiding the news, or at least parts of it they do not like and are simply exhausted by what seems like a constant avalanche of grim news.

Publishers are considering a number of ways to hold on to those audiences or to bring them back. According to Newman, two thirds of publishers are considering trying to better explain complex stories, nearly half are contemplating what he calls 'more solutions oriented or constructive approaches to storytelling' and more 'inspirational' human stories.

Interestingly, he says there was less support among the editors interviewed for the report in publishing more positive or entertaining stories. Perhaps they noticed all the unsold Taylor Swift magazines on the supermarket shelves after the circus left town.

Other solutions being considered include combining packages of digital news and non-news content. Newman suggests this could include games, podcasts, magazines, books, and even content from other publishers.

The problem with this is that it will be all too easy for consumers to fail to see or even to not understand the difference between news and advertising. We have seen for years how publications have quietly abandoned the description of 'advertorial' for paid copy and disguised it with phrases such as 'sponsored content'.

The importance of these puff pieces should not be underestimated. According to Hardy (2021), 'brand sponsored editorial content has offered publishers the potential for increased earnings, and marketers a means to tackle ad-avoidance and boost engagement . . . Sponsored content was the second most important revenue generator (44 percent), after advertising (70 percent) and ahead of subscription (31 percent), according to a worldwide newsroom survey'.

More worryingly for traditionalists, Newman predicts that even more newspapers will stop printing a daily edition as the cost of printing and distribution continues to rise.

How, then, will publishers and newsrooms cope, especially when faced with competition from AI, faked content and unpredictable audience behaviour? Despite everything, Newman is cautiously optimistic, as are some of his interviewees.

He argues that much of the faked and digitally manipulated material was easy to spot (think of the photo of the Princess of Wales and her children) and was mostly not intended to fool people (Mackintosh & Relph, 2024). However, 70 percent of those interviewed for the Reuters report said they be-

lieved AI and Generative AI would lower levels of trust in the media.

Citing political philosopher Hannah Arendt, Newman argues: 'The biggest danger may not be that people "believe the lies but rather that nobody believes *anything* any longer".'

And yet not everybody is entirely downbeat and it is possible to end this review with this optimistic view:

'The explosion of crap content definitely has the potential to shake the trust in media,' says Christoph Zimmer, head of product at *Der Spiegel* in Germany, but he also argues this could eventually allow some news media to 'differentiate ourselves even more clearly as a quality medium, and thus even strengthen our position.'

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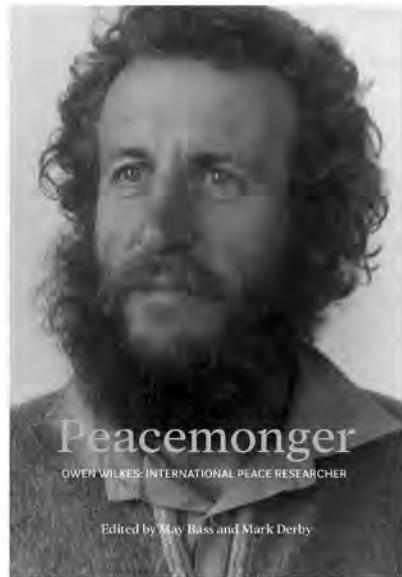
Dr DAVID ROBIE is founding editor of Pacific Journalism Review.

Behind the war on Gaza – how Israel profits globally from repression

The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel exports the technology of occupation around the world, by Antony Loewenstein. Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2023. 265 pages. ISBN 9781922310408.

JUST MONTHS before the outbreak of the genocidal Israeli war on Gaza after the deadly assault on southern Israel by Hamas resistance fighters on 7 October 2023, Australian-German investigative journalist and researcher Antony Loewenstein published an extraordinarily timely book, *The Palestine Laboratory*.

In it he warned that a worst-case scenario—'long feared but never realised, is ethnic cleansing against occupied Palestinians or population transfer, forcible expulsion under the guise of national security'.

Also the claimed fig leaf of 'self-defence' was an obscene justification offered by beleaguered Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for his eight-month war of vengeance, death and destruction unleashed upon the people of Palestine, both in the Gaza Strip and the Occupied West Bank, that has killed at least 36,000 Gazans—71 percent of them women and children—and more than 502 Palestinians in the occupied West Bank.

As Loewenstein had warned in his 265-page exposé on the Israeli armaments and surveillance industry and how the Zionist nation 'exports the technology of occupation around the world', a catastrophic war could trigger an overwhelming argument within Israel that Palestinians were 'undermining the state's integrity'.

That catastrophe has indeed arrived. But in the process, as part of growing worldwide protests in support of an immediate ceasefire and calls for a 'free Palestine' long-term solution, Israel has exposed itself as a cruel, ruthless and morally corrupt state pre-

pared to slaughter women and children, attack hospital and medical workers, kill journalists and shun international norms of military conflict to achieve its goal of destroying Hamas, the elected government of Gaza.

Interviewed by Al Jazeera after a four-day temporary truce (which was extended) between Israel and Hamas took effect, author Loewenstein described the conflict as 'apocalyptic' and the most devastating in almost 80 years since the Second World War.

He also blamed the death and destruction on Western countries that had allowed the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) to 'get away with things that no other country could because of total global impunity'.

The United States, led by a feeble and increasingly lame duck President Joe Biden—'genocide Joe', as some US protesters have branded him—and several Western countries have lost credibility over any debate about global human rights.

As Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan says, the US and the West have enabled the ethnic cleansing and displayed a double standard by condemning Hamas for its atrocities on October 7 while giving Israel a blank cheque for its crimes against humanity and war crimes in both Gaza and the Occupied West Bank.

In fact, as Erdoğan has increasingly condemned the Zionists, he has branded Israel as a 'terror state' and says that Israeli leaders should be tried for war crimes at the International Criminal Court. Indeed, the International Court

if Justice at The Hague ruled in January 2024 that it was 'plausible' that Israel had committed genocide in Gaza in a case brought by South Africa and it ordered the Israel military not to take actions that violate the Genocide Convention (Al-Kassab, 2024).

It has also been disturbing that President Biden has publicly repeated Israeli lies in the conflict and Western media has often disseminated these falsehoods (Al Jazeera, 2023). Media analysts say there is systemic 'bias in favour of Israel' which is 'irreparably damaging' the credibility of some news agencies and outlets considered 'mainstream' in the eyes of Arabs and others (Nashed, 2023).

Loewenstein, who was awarded Australia's 2023 Walkley Award in the journalism book category in November 2023 (Scribe, 2023), warned in *The Palestine Laboratory* that 'an Israeli operation might be undertaken to ensure a mass exodus, with the prospect of Palestinians returning to their homes a remote possibility' (p. 211).

Many critics fear the bottom line for Israel's war on Palestine is not the elimination of Hamas—which was elected the government of Gaza in 2006—but the destruction of the enclave's infrastructure, hence the savage assault on almost all of the Strip's 32 hospitals (including the Indonesian Hospital) and bombing of 49 percent of the housing for 2.3 million people. Loewenstein reports:

In a 2016 poll conducted by [the] Pew Research Centre, nearly half of Israeli Jews supported the transfer or

expulsion of Arabs. And some 60 percent of Israeli Jews backed complete separation from Arabs, according to a study in 2022 by the Israeli Democracy Institute. The majority of Israeli Jews polled online in 2022 supported the expulsion of people accused of disloyalty to the state, a policy advocated by popular far-right politician Itamar Ben-Gvir (p. 211).

Dangerous escalation

Loewenstein saw the reelection in November 2022 of Netanyahu as Prime Minister and as head of the most right-wing coalition in the Israel's history as ushering in a dangerous escalation of existential threats facing Palestinians.

The author, who is himself of Jewish origin, cites liberal Israeli columnist and journalist Gideon Levy in *Haaretz* reminding his readers of 'an uncomfortable truth' after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Levy wrote that the long-held Israeli belief that military power 'was all that matters to stay alive, was a lie' (p. 206). Levy wrote:

> The lesson Israel should be learning from Ukraine is the opposite. Military power is not enough, it is impossible to survive alone, we need true international support, which can't be bought just be developing drones and drop bombs.

Levy argued that the 'age of the Jewish state paralysing the world when it cries "anti-semitism"' was coming to a close.

The daily television scenes—especially on Al Jazeera and TRT World News, arguably offering some of the most balanced, comprehensive and nuanced coverage of the massacres (in contrast to such media as BBC and CNN with journalists embedded with the Israeli Defence Force—have borne witness to the rogue status of Israel.

Turkey's President Erdoğan has been one of the strongest critics of Netanyahu's war machine, warning that Israel's leaders will be made accountable for their war crimes. His condemnation has been paralleled by multiple petitions and actions seeking International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutions against Israeli leaders, including demanding an arrest warrant for Netanyahu himself.

According to Loewenstein, Israel's 'Palestine laboratory' and its toxic ideology thrives on global disruption and violence. As he says:

> The worsening climate crisis will benefit Israel's defence sector in a future where nation-states do not respond with active measures to reduce the impacts of surging temperatures but instead ghetto-ise themselves, Israeli-style. What this means in practice is higher walls and tighter borders, greater surveillance of refugees, facial recognition, drones, smart fences, and biometric databases (p. 207).

By 2025, Loewenstein points out, the border surveillance industrial complex is estimated to become worth US$68 billion, and Israeli companies such as Elbit Systems are 'guaranteed to be among the main beneficiaries'.

Three years ago Israel spent US$22 billion on its military and is the 12th biggest military supplier in the world, with sales of more than US$345 million.

The potency of Palestine as a laboratory for methods of controlling 'unwanted people' and a separation of populations is the primary focus of Loewenstein's book. The many case studies of Israeli apartheid with corporations showcasing and profiting from the suppression and persecution of Palestinians are featured.

The book is divided into seven chapters, with a conclusion, headed 'Selling weapons to anybody who wants them,' 'September 11 was good for business,' 'Preventing an outbreak of peace,' 'Selling Israeli occupation to the world,' 'The enduring appeal of Israeli domination,' 'Israel mass surveillance in the brain of your phone,' and 'Social media companies don't like Palestinians.'

How Israel has such influence over Silicon Valley—along with many Western governments—is 'both obvious and ominous for the future of marginalised groups, because it is not just the Jewish state that has discovered the Achilles heel of big tech'.

Examples cited by Loewenstein include India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi successfully demanding that Facebook remove posts critical of his government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, and evidence of Facebook posts causing 'real harm against minorities' in Myanmar and Russia as well as India and Palestine.

The company's global policy team argued that they risked having the platform shut down completely if they did not comply with government requests.

Profits before human rights.

Loewenstein refers to social media calls for genocide against the Muslim minority having 'moved from the fringes to the mainstream'. Condemning this, Loewenstein remarks: 'Leaving these comments up, which routinely happens, is deeply irresponsible' (p. 197).

He argues that his book is a warning that 'despotism has never been so easily shareable with compact technology'. He explains:

> The ethnonationalist ideas behind it are appealing to millions of people because democratic leaders have failed to deliver. A Pew Research Centre survey across 34 countries in 2020 found only 44 percent of those polled were content with democracy, while 52 percent were not. Ethnonationalist ideology grows when accountable democracy withers, Israel is the ultimate model and goal' (p. 16).

The September 11, 2001, terror attacks on New York and Washington 'turbocharged Israel's defence sector and internationalised the war on terror that the Jewish state had been fighting for decades' (p. 49).

Along with health workers (200 killed and the total climbing), journalists have suffered a heavy price for reporting Israel's relentless bombardment with at least 142 dead in Gaza (Haboush, 2024; Robie, 2024)

The Paris-based media freedom watchdog Reporters without Borders has accused Israel of seeking to 'eradicate journalism in Gaza' by refusing to heed calls to protect media workers (RSF, 2023).

The situation is dire for Palestinian journalists trapped in the enclave, where ten have been killed in the past three days, bringing the total media death toll in Gaza since the start of the war to 48. The past weekend was the deadliest for the media since the war between Israel and Hamas began.

RSF also said Gaza from north to south had 'become a cemetery for journalists'.

Of the 10 journalists killed between November 18-20, at least three were killed in the course of their work or because of it. They were: Hassouna Sleem, director of the Palestinian online news agency *Quds News*, and freelance photo-journalist Sary Mansour who were killed during an Israeli assault on the Bureij refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip on November 18.

According to RSF, they had received an online death threat in connection with their work 24 hours prior to them being killed.

Journalist Bilal Jadallah was killed by an Israeli strike that hit his car directly as he was trying to evacuate from Gaza City via the district of Zeitoun on the morning of November 19.

He was a prominent figure within the Palestinian media community and held several positions including chair of the board of Press House-Palestine, an organisation supporting independent media and journalists in Gaza.

Most of the journalists were killed with family members when Israeli strikes hit their homes, reports RSF (2023).

It is offensive that British and US news media should refer to Hamas as 'terrorists' in their news bulletins, regardless of the fact that the US and UK governments have declared them as such. They are resistance fighters. As a former journalist with British and French news agencies for several years, I wonder what has happened to the maxim that had applied since the post-Second World War anticolonialism struggles—one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter. Thus 'neutral' descriptions were generally used.

As President Erdoğan, has already pointed out, Hamas are nationalists fighting against 76 years of Zionist Israeli colonialism and apartheid. Palestine is the occupied territory; Israel is the illegal occupier (Gavin, 2023).

Loewenstein argues in his book that Israel has sold so much defence equipment and surveillance technologies, such as the phone-hacking tool Pegasus, that it had hoped to 'insulate itself' from any political backlash to its endless occupation.

However, the tide has turned, with several countries such as South Africa, Brazil and Turkey closing Israeli embassies and recalling their diplomats. The UN General Assembly overwhelmingly voted 143-9 in May 2024 for Palestinian statehood (UN General Assembly votes, 2024); the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ordering a halt to Israel's assault on Rafah (defied by Tel Aviv) on the ongoing South African genocide case against Israel; and the separate International Criminal Court (ICC) chief prosecutor's application for an arrest warrant against Netanyahu and other Israeli and Hamas leaders

for alleged crimes against humanity and war crimes are all evidence of this change.

There is a shift in global opinion in response to the massive price that the Palestinian people have been paying for Israeli apartheid and repression for 76 years. While Iran has long been portrayed by the West as a threat to regional peace, the relentless and ruthless bombardment of the Gaza Strip for eight months has demonstrated to the world that Israel is actually a threat.

However, Israel is on the wrong side of history, as demonstrated by *The Palestinian Laboratory*; it has become a global best seller and translated into multiple languages Whatever Israel does, the Palestinians will remain defiant and resilient.

Palestine will become a free, sovereign state. It is essential that international community pressure ensures that this happens for a just and lasting peace.

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ANNIE CASS is a Pacific Journalism Review *contributor.*

Even amidst the pain, author manages to show kindness

Excommunicated. A multigenerational story of leaving the Exclusive Brethren, by Craig Hoyle. Auckland: Harper Collins, 2023. 327 pages. ISBN 9871775542018

IN THIS deeply personal memoir, *Sunday Star Times* journalist Craig Hoyle turns his lens on his own family and the destructive effects upon them of their religion.

Growing up in an Exclusive Brethren family meant closeness and warmth, but it also meant strict discipline, public prayers every day, and not really having schoolfriends for young Craig. It also meant there were family members nobody talked about because they had transgressed increasingly arbitrary sets of rules, or called out high-handed or incompetent leadership.

It was an upbringing that imbued in Hoyle a deep sense of personal guilt for such crimes as secretly bringing a schoolmate home to play, but as he grew older it became increasingly clear that he was in danger of joining the shunned and excluded. Craig was gay.

With apparently unflinching honesty, Hoyle examines all his quirky and talented family, those who stayed with the Brethren and those who left, and why

A Protestant Christian cult founded in the UK in the early 19th century, the Exclusive Brethren had always been a tightly managed community, but through the later 20th century became subject to leaders who closed their flock off from the wider world with increasingly strict prohibitions on mixing with others, engaging with technology and even reading the news. They also encouraged alcohol consumption on the grounds that it facilitated honest communication.

The effects of these diktats could be heartbreaking. Those excluded lost husbands or wives, brothers and sisters. Children grew up without one or the other of their parents, without particular aunts and uncles, or with

grandparents living but dead to them.

Deep hostilities eroded trust. In a sect as small as the Brethren, community is face to face. Everybody knows your name. Everybody knows your face. Conformity was all. And the word of the Man Of God, the Brethren's leader, is absolute.

But young Craig had heard whispers that the church's leaders were far from perfect. Hoyle goes into some detail about the alcoholism and the sexual misbehaviour of some at the top of the Brethren's leadership.

Much of this he only learned properly after he left the church and began investigating it properly, but some was already apparent to the teenage Craig as he struggled, and failed, to reconcile his sexuality with the church that represented all that was familiar and safe to him, whether it was comfortable or not.

It says much about the confidence of the church's point of view that it was their attempts to erase Hoyle's sexual 'deviancy' through bullying and prescription drugs that finally drove him from the church. He wasn't the first one to go.

Outside the church, he had unexpected support from relatives he had been taught to fear, because they had also been excommunicated.

This is very much a book about community. It's about Hoyle's family, those happy within the church, those guilt-broken by the church's demands, and those free of the Brethren. It's about the Brethren themselves, of course (Craig Hoyle: life after excommunication, 2023).

I was struck by Hoyle's continued respect for much of what he was brought up with. Although his childhood was experienced as one of relative isolation and deprivation, he has many happy memories.

His parents were desperately unhappy, and the health problems they suffered, both physical and mental, created terrible problems for their children, but Hoyle now has the distance to be objective, and in that objectivity, kind.

Craig Hoyle went on to work for *60 Minutes* in Australia, TV3 and Radio Live in New Zealand and as chief news director for the *Sunday Star-Times*.

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Dr PHILIP CASS is reviews editor of Pacific Journalism Review.

Story of Rabaul eruptions has lessons for wider Pacific

Return to Volcano Town: Reassessing the 1937-43 volcanic eruptions at Rabaul, by R. Wally Johnson and Neville Threlfall (editors). Canberra: ANU Press, 2023. 410 pages, ISBN 9781760466039.
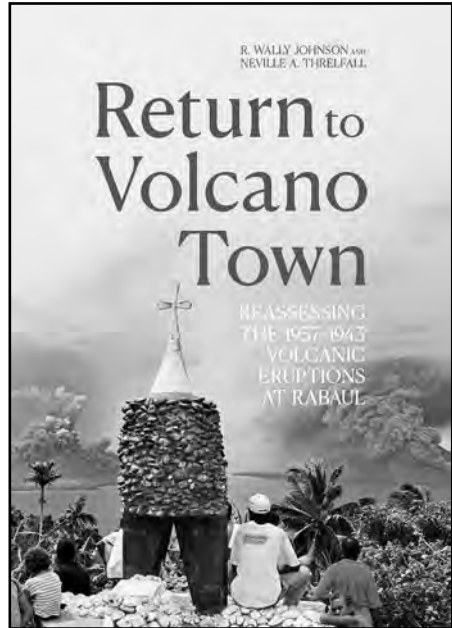
EARLY one morning in 1953 my father and kiap David Hook set out from Popondetta to climb Mount Lamington in what was then the Territory of Papua and New Guinea. Mount Lamington had exploded in January 1951, the largest eruption on January 21 releasing a pyroclastic flow that roared down the mountain and killed an estimated 3000 people.

The carriers working with my father and the patrol officer abandoned them as the approached the mountain and it was towards the end of the day that my father came home, his boots cut to ribbons by the volcanic rock, his clothes ragged and soaked in sweat and his pockets full of colour slide film.

My family would be enthralled by his pictures of boiling rock and pools of lava for years afterwards.

I had it much easier.

When 'my' volcanoes—Vulcan and Tavurvur—exploded in Rabaul in September 1994 I was taking photographs of the Hiri Moale festival for the *Times of Papua New Guinea* as the trading rafts from along the Papuan coast came in to Ela Beach in Port Moresby.

Foreign journalists were being discouraged from going to Rabaul, but my boss, Anna Solomon, got me onto a flight with a group of business people going to inspect, among other things, the damage to the Travelodge hotel where I had stayed on a research trip at the beginning of the year.

By the time we landed two people had been killed; one, we were told, by a flying rock while walking across the golf course and the other run over during the evacuation. The official death toll later rose to 10.

There was no lava to be seen, just a sound like a jet engine that went on day and night and filled the air with

volcanic dust and grit that destroyed expensive cameras (mine cost me 20 kina from Steamships and was fine) and filled Simpson Harbour with pumice. As this new book reminds us, the ash plumes were so big they were photographed by astronauts on the space shuttle *Discovery*.

Everything was grey and the heat was stifling. The dining room of the Travelodge was full of water that had rushed in during the eruption. My photographs in the next issue of the *Times* showed roofs and buildings collapsed under the weight of the ash and of armed security guards who were there to stop the looting, but were themselves accused of making off with other people's property.

One photograph showed the local owners of the roofless Rabaul Club packing up their belongings.When Anna saw the photo in paste-up she said, *'Oh, wantok, mi sori tumas long yu.'*

Neville Threlfall's new book covers the 1994 eruption in far more scientific detail than I can supply and it is all the better for it. He and Johnson have adapted and updated the earlier work, *Volcano Town*, which gives a good general background to vulcanological activity in Papua New Guinea.

The new book brings the story up to date and uses the latest research to explain what has happened and how. Volcanoes are extraordinarily important to PNG. Eruptions in the past have scattered ash from the Bismarck sea to the highlands and Rabaul, once the capital of German New Guina, is built around a massive caldera caused by the collapse of a volcano. The fact that the town is surrounded by active volcanoes and volcanoes that might become active give it a certain nervous charm.

For vulcanologists, the 1994 eruptions allowed for a much closer re-examination of the 1937 explosion which killed about 500 people and devastated the town. It has also allowed speculation about a number of issues such as whether there are triggers for eruptions and what patterns can be established which show a link between an earthquake in one part of the world and a volcano in another up to 30 years later.

It is a matter of fierce debate in the vulcanological community, but in the Pacific, where so many volcanoes are active, it might be a vital one. Understanding how populations have reacted to eruptions, what level of damage might be caused and how to respond to it are vital issues for long term planning.

(One local entrepreneur suggested that a fortune could be made by dredging all the pumice out of the harbour and selling it for fertiliser)

There is good detail about how authorities have reacted and might react to such disasters, but it is worth remembering that the lessons from the Rabaul eruptions may also be applicable elsewhere.

The so-called 'ring of fire' that encircles the Pacific also comes into New Zealand's backyard. While not strictly volcanic (although involving the same titanic subterranean forces) leading scientists have recently warned that an earthquake is odds-on to occur in the

Hikurangi Subduction Zone where the Pacific tectonic plate slides under the Australian one.

An earthquake here could shake New Zealand for up to eight minutes, resulting in an estimated 20,000 deaths. Losses due to damaged buildings alone would be $144 billion.

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GENOCIDE

YES!

FANCY EXPECTING MEDIA TO PUBLISH A PHOTOSHOPPED IMAGE!

WESTERN MEDIA

I'VE NEVER FELT SO INSULTED!

EVANS.

MALCOLM EVANS is an award-winning New Zealand cartoonist and columnist.

Contrasting Al Jazeera's forensic *October 7* report with TVNZ's Tame interview

October 7, directed by Richard Sanders, Al Jazeera Investigations (Documentary); *Israeli-Hamas War: Israeli Ambassador on rising deaths in Gaza,* TVNZ *Q&A* with Jack Tame (Current Affairs).

FOR a more informed report of what actually took place when Hamas fighters broke through the perimeter fences surrounding Gaza to attack Israel on 7 October 2023, Al Jazeera's hour-long documentary, *October 7,* which was broadcast on March 20, exposed the lies of the Israeli/US propaganda machine, and has been pivotal in transforming the Palestine/Israel narrative and so too the politics of the Middle East.

Examining seven hours of footage from both sides of the conflict, including from CCTV, dashcams, personal phones and headcams of dead Hamas fighters, it includes a comprehensive list of those killed and reveals widespread human rights abuses by both Hamas fighters and others who followed them through the fence.

However, Al Jazeera's investigation also found that many of the worst

stories that came out in the days following the attack were false. This was especially true of atrocities that were used repeatedly by politicians in Israel, repeating the old propaganda trope alleging babies were beheaded and young women were raped, to justify the ferocity of the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) subsequent bombardment of the Gaza Strip.

In particular, the Al Jazeera documentary revealed that IDF claims, that it found 8 burned babies at a house in Kibbutz Be'eri, later embellished in fanciful detail by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, were entirely untrue. There were no babies in the house and the 12 civilians inside were killed by Israeli forces when they stormed the house.

This was but one of a number of incidents where the Israeli police and army appear to have killed Israeli citizens, making Al Jazeera's *October 7* documentary a deep dive into the events that has now led to the deaths of tens of thousands of people, the significance of which will reverberate for decades.

In stark contrast, here in Aotearoa New Zealand, the *Q&A* interview, which TVNZ's Jack Tame conducted with the Israeli ambassador just days later, in April, was a tragedy for different reasons

Hard on the heals of a leaked *New York Times* directive detailing what words its staff can and cannot be used to describe the carnage Israel is raining on Palestinians, proof positive since those reports are published verbatim here in New Zealand, that our understanding of the conflict is carefully managed to always reflect a pro-Israel bias (Baroud, 2024; De Jong, 2023; Pilger, 2006), Jack Tame's show reflected the anti-Palestinian propaganda paradigm.

Forget the humanity of an estimated 120,000 dead and wounded Palestinians and countless others facing famine and disease sheltering in tents or what is left of destroyed buildings, Western media are discouraged from using phrases such as 'genocide', 'occupied territory', 'ethnic cleansing' and even 'refugee camps', along with 'slaughter', 'massacre' and 'carnage'.

And so in like vein did Jack Tame conduct the *Q&A* interview with the Israel Ambassador to New Zealand, Ran Yaakoby, which was taped in the Israeli embassy.

Curiously, while acknowledging at the top of the broadcast that 'Tensions continue to intensify in the Middle East', raising the prospect that both sides of the story might be aired, viewers were told it would involve an interview with the Israeli Ambassador alone.

By that date, April 22, more than 34,000 Palestinians had perished, the vast majority of whom were women and children, and most of them were killed inside their own homes, in hospitals, schools or United Nations shelters.

From his introduction, 'establishing' that the genocide taking place in Gaza had its genesis in the October 7 attack by Hamas, and not in the Nakba of 1948 followed by almost 76 years

of systematic repression, Jack Tame was complicit in an almost hour-long presentation of pro-Israel propaganda.

Attempting to justify the atrocities it has committed against the Palestinians, which has seen it facing the charge of committing war crimes and genocide, currently being considered by the International Court of Justice (ICC), the Israeli ambassador had a field day.

Presenting an appalling lack of balance, included Tame's nodding agreement with the Israeli ambassador's discredited claims of Hamas atrocities alleging 'beheadings' and 'necrophilia', and for describing Israelis as being 'butchered' (five times he used the word) while Palestinians were merely 'killed'. It was a new low in the New Zealand media's record of bias when it comes to the presentation of the facts about the Palestine/Israel conflict.

In the very week that we were preparing to remember, on Anzac Day, the horrific sacrifices made in previous wars and even as Israel's genocidal slaughter of Palestinians brought us closer to World War Three than at any time since the Cuban missile crisis, that TVNZ should have pre-recorded—and so had time to edit, but didn't—such a disgraceful presentation was simply appalling. The programme was the subject of protests claiming bias outside the TVNZ headquarters in Auckland on April 26 and many public complaints (Pacific Media Watch, 2024), yet, ironically, Tame was awarded New Zealand's 2024 Voyager Political Journalist of the Year Award.

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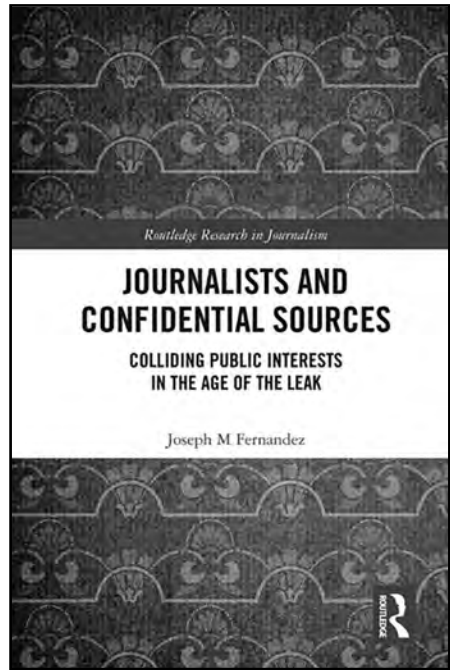
Dr DAVID ROBIE is founding editor of Pacific Journalism Review

Defending the right to confidential sources and whistleblowers

Journalists and Confidential Sources: Colliding Public Interests in the Age of the Leak, by Joseph M Fernandez. Routledge Research on Journalism Series. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2021. 287 pages. ISBN 9780367474126

IN 2015, media law professor Joseph M. Fernandez co-authored a comprehensive article for *Pacific Journalism Review* (Fernandez & Pearson, 2015) about the status of Australia's shield law regime, drawing on his research to see whether it met journalists' expectations and whistleblower needs in an era of unprecedented official capabilities. It didn't, as can be seen from growing concerns over court cases that, according to the peak journalists' organisation Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA), 'clearly demonstrate Australia's patchy and desperate journalist shields fail to do their job'.

Six years later, Fernandez's research trajectory led to this book, *Journalists and Confidential Sources*, which has impressively and meticulously drawn together all the complicated threads in what is a core field for all public interest journalism, especially investigative journalism. It should be on hand in all newsrooms.

While it focuses particularly on Australia, it also draws comparisons with parallel jurisdictions in Aotearoa New Zealand, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States in a remarkably timely contribution to global debate on the fraught and widespread reliance by journalists on anonymous sources, whistleblowers, and those owed an obligation of confidentiality.

Fernandez analyses the problems involved in such confidential relationships and freedom of expression frameworks and examines the deteriorating public 'right to know' mediascape and proposes solutions and reforms.

The book provides a comprehensive baseline for some high profile recent cases involving confidential

sources and a former wartime hero in Afghanistan and a whistleblower who has been sent to jail over leaks involving the development of Australia's neighbouring fledgling state of Timor-Leste. The verdict in this later case, which has been described as 'Australian politics' biggest scandal', was highly unpopular and has been widely condemned.

In January 2024, the ACT Court of Appeal published secret judgements to mark the end of the lawyer Bernard Collaery and 'Witness K' saga about Australian espionage against Timor-Leste in a bid to get a negotiating advantage over oil and gas deposits under the Timor Sea. The case underscored the need for the Albanese government to implement transparency and whistleblowing reforms (Feng, 2024).

In 2021, Witness K pleaded guilty and was given a suspended sentence. Collaery pleaded not guilty and in July 2022, following the election of the Albanese government, Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus, KC, discontinued the prosecution.

When delivering her ruling to allow parts of the initial judgement, which was then published, Chief Justice Lucy McCallum, said: 'There is no place for secret trials in Australia's democracy.'

However, the outcome in this whistleblowing case was markedly different from that of the continued pursuit of 'war crimes whistleblower' David McBride. He is an Australian and former British Army major and Australian Army lawyer.

In 2016, McBride provided the Australian Broadcasting Corporation with documents that contained information about war crimes committed by Australian soldiers in Afghanistan. He was jailed in May 2024 for five years and eight months for his principled actions and supporters claimed the Australian government was 'more interested in punishing him for revealing information about war crimes . . . than the alleged perpetrators' (Al Jazeera staff, 2024).

The defamation case of fallen Australian war hero Ben Roberts-Smith against the Nine Network, its three major titles, *The Sydney Morning Herald, The Age*, and the *Canberra Times*, plus three named high profile investigative journalists, opened up many questions and reflections related to the Fernandez book's findings.

In June 2023, a court found that reports published in 2018 by the Nine-owned newspapers were substantially true. The reporting claimed that the ex-SAS corporal, a Victoria Cross winner, had ordered a junior soldier to kill an elderly unarmed prisoner in Afghanistan to 'blood the rookie'. Roberts-Smith resigned from his media management job and he has appealed (AAP, 2024).

As the *Journalists and Confidential Sources* author himself outlined to me in a recent communication, 'The Ben-Roberts Smith defamation case is critical in any attempt to appreciate the role of confidential sources to journalists seeking to tell important stories that involve national security, influential personalities (as plaintiffs and as financiers) with abundant

resources and power to thwart the telling of such stories' (J. Fernandez, personal communication with the author, 4 January 2024).

At the time of the book's publication, recalls Fernandez, the case was going through the motions of a full court hearing and judgment. The final result which came well after publication saw a spectacular win by the media (Fairfax Media Publications and its journalists, including Chris Masters and Nick McKenzie) in what has been commonly described as the 'trial of the century' (*Roberts-Smith v Fairfax Media Publications Pty Limited (No 41)* [2023] FCA 555), and a 'correspondingly stunning loss by the defendant and his backers' (Fernandez, personal communication).

In a post-judgment article, political communication professor Andrea Carson (2023) noted: 'In court, the pair relied on a defence of truth—a high bar when relying on confidential sources. Australia has among the toughest defamation laws of any liberal democracy.' She argued that this added to an already difficult task of public interest investigative journalism, which 'seeks to unearth truths that those with power wish to keep hidden'.

Fernandez has also pointed out the 'graphic details' that have emerged from the case on the 'raw figures' of the sheer amount of money involved in this case in defending investigative journalism—Seven West Media tycoon Kerry Stokes, Roberts-Smith's former employer, is estimated to be spending A\$16 million on his legal battle 'against the media' (Whitbourn & Hall, 2024).

Discussion of these two cases involving whistleblowers, the Timor-Leste espionage saga and the Roberts-Smith defamation trial, alone provide ample evidence of how essential *Journalists and Confidential Sources* is to contemporary public interest journalism. As Fernandez notes in his conclusion, 'press freedom is not a privilege or a luxury for bestowal on an exclusive class but a right for journalists to serve citizens in accord with democratic ideals' (p. 279).

Journalist-source confidentiality undertakings, argues Fernandez, are an important aid in the Fourth Estate 'pursuit of openness, transparency, and accountability in governance'.

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Noted:

Planning for the survival of megacities

Come Hell or High Fever: Readying the World's Megacities for Disaster, by Russell W. Glen. Canberra: ANU Press. 2023. 482 pages. ISBN 9781760465537.

WITH a title straight out a Tom Clancy novel and a writing style that manages to combine facts, analyses and deep understanding of his topic with the pace of a thriller, Russell Glen's book is as entertaining and it is thought provoking.
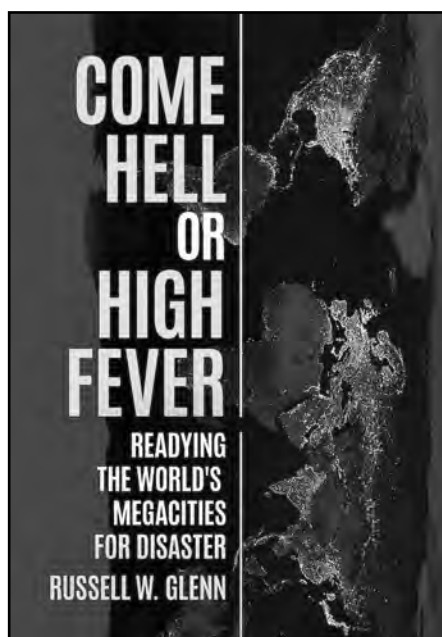
Russell predicts that the world's largest urban agglomerations, like Tokyo, are at risk from a variety of disasters and that it is vital for local and national leaders to think seriously about how to deal with them.

He believes that megacities will last. He does not share the view that they will be abandoned, rather, that there is a need to strengthen them by planning for major contingencies well ahead of time. He cites cities that have been afflicted in the past, such as today's Istanbul which was ravaged by earthquakes, or modern Tokyo, which he said escaped by a whisker the catastrophe of radioactive contamination from the destruction of the Fukashima reactors in the great earthquake of 2010.

Earlier reviewers have noted that urban populations occupy three percent of the planet's land area, but use 41

percent of the world's ground surface water and use 60-80 percent of energy. Conversely, they also achieve 80 percent of the world's economic productivity.

Dr Glen served with the US Army Corps of Engineers and has a long-standing interest in large cities, both from a disaster and a military perspective. It is not surprising then that he considers how to fight effectively in large cities.

Lieutenant-General Sean Mac-Farland (2023) of United States Army noted: 'Understanding how to wage war in dense urban terrain is essential, especially if a nation also seeks to hold the moral high ground. The fruits of any victory won among people that fails to consider the lessons in *Come Hell or High Fever* are likely to be very bitter.' —*PHILIP CASS*

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Cover: 'The journalists of Gaza have changed the world with their blood, truth and love.' Pro-Palestine protesters in Auckland, New Zealand, acknowledge the 2024 UNESCO World Press Freedom Award being presented to the Palestinian journalists covering Gaza for their 'courage and commitment to freedom of expression . . . in these dark times.'
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