

Barbouzes, bullets and beat-ups: South Pacific media realities



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David Robie*

School of Communication Studies
AUT University
Aotearoa/New Zealand

Abstract: The Melanesian sub-region of the South Pacific, in particular, has been branded by some political analysts as an “arc of instability” (Dibb, 2002), due to upheavals such as coups (Fiji), ethnic conflict (Solomon Islands), paramilitary revolts (Vanuatu) and secessionist rebellion and civil war (Bougainville-Papua New Guinea and the Southern Highlands). Simplistic notions and prejudices about the region pose challenges for journalists attempting to report with depth, context and analytical skill. Pressures and dilemmas for the news media continue to gain momentum in the South Pacific, often from a cultural as well as socio-political dimension. While the media in some countries are refreshingly outspoken and courageous, in others there is a worrying trend towards self-censorship. This paper critiques coverage in the region and some of the problems in an age of globalisation and preoccupation with security. It also sketches some strategies designed to challenge images of the region beyond “coups, conflicts and contraband”.

** Dr David Robie is Associate Professor and Diversity and Publications Coordinator with Auckland University of Technology's School of Communication Studies. He was coordinator of both the journalism programmes at the University of Papua New Guinea and University of the South Pacific for a decade until 2002. He is the editor of Pacific Journalism Review and author of Mekim Nius: South Pacific Media, Politics and Education (2004), The Pacific Journalist (2001) and Nius Bilong Pasifik: Mass Media in the Pacific (2005).*

david.robie@aut.ac.nz
www.asiapac.org.fj

Introduction

CHALLENGES facing journalists and media covering the South Pacific region have become increasingly more complex in a rapidly changing globalised world. The Melanesian sub-region of the South Pacific, in particular, has been branded by some political analysts as an “arc of instability” (Duncan & Chand, 2001; Dibb, 2002; Henderson & Watson, 2005; James, 2006), due to upheavals such as coups (Fiji), ethnic conflict (Solomon Islands), pro-independence ructions (New Caledonia), paramilitary revolts (Vanuatu), secessionist rebellion and civil war (Bougainville-Papua New Guinea and the Southern Highlands). While a predominantly Australian view of the region forecasts a “more demanding and potentially dangerous neighbourhood” (Dibb, p. 7; Hegarty, 2005), New Zealand argues from a far more “Pacific” perspective that sees the region as less threatening (James, 2006; McCarthy, 2005). According to Dibb and other Australian analysts, Canberra’s strategic objective after the defence of Australia is to “help foster the stability, integrity and cohesion of our immediate neighbourhood, which we share with Indonesia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, East Timor and the island countries of the Southwest Pacific”. In the wake of 9/11, the Bali bombing of October 2002 and a perceived higher level of internal conflict in several Pacific countries, Australia – already strongly aligned with US security interests and objectives – adopted a radical new “activist/interventionist” approach to regional security in 2003 (Hegarty, 2005). In contrast, from a New Zealand perspective:

Australia sees the Pacific as potential or actual failed states, a potential source of terror and/or transnational crime and/or drug trafficking and/or pandemics (not to mention a corrosive China-Taiwan rivalry) and accordingly fashions an Iraq-style fixit response which a New Zealand analysis would say is bound to fail because it fails to see the island societies, economies and governments in their totality. New Zealanders, perhaps unjustly, would urge a more subtle analysis.

Periodic military policing interventions won't address the lack of jobs for the exploding populations in Melanesia, which pose a complex strategic economic, social and political challenge for Australia and New Zealand, not just the islands themselves. Pacific labour mobility is just one of a number of interrelated issues. (James, p. 6)

Simplistic notions and prejudices about the region pose challenges for journalists attempting to report with depth, context and analytical skill. Pressures and dilemmas for the news media continue to gain momentum in the South Pacific, often from a cultural as well as socio-political dimension. Major cutbacks in New Zealand news organisations, particularly the two major newspaper chains – both Australian-owned¹ – has meant an increasing reliance on reporting the region through a Canberra-prism even though this often does not match a New Zealand perspective (Latif, 2006).

The developments also pose major problems for Pacific media covering the region with very limited resources. While the media in some countries are refreshingly outspoken and courageous, in others there is a worrying trend towards self-censorship. This paper critiques coverage in the region and some of the problems in

an age of globalisation and preoccupation with security. It also sketches some strategies designed to challenge images of the region beyond “coups, conflicts and contraband” (Thaman, 2001). The paper is fairly discursive and includes some personal perspectives as a journalist working in the region.

1. Media Freedom clip

2. Media – the Pacific Way clip

Frontline reporting

While reporting in the South Pacific, I covered the assassination of Pierre Declercq, secretary-general of the pro-independence Union Caledoniènne in New Caledonia (1981); “Black Friday” rioting in Pape’ete (1983); the Hienghène massacre in New Caledonia (1984); assassination of Kanak independence leader Eloi Machoro (1985); the bombing of the *Rainbow Warrior* by French secret agents (1985); military coups in Fiji (1987) and the start of the Bougainville civil war (1989/90). On assignment covering coups and conflict in the Philippines in 1988, I shared a hotel room in Manila with former Protestant pastor Djoubelly Wea, the assassin who gunned down Kanak independence leaders Jean-Marie Tjibaou and Yéiwene Yéiwene for what he perceived to be a betrayal of the independence movement by signing the 1989 Matignon Accord. Wea was himself shot dead by one of Tjibaou’s bodyguards (Robie, 1989, p. 280).

As a journalism educator from 1993, when I joined the University of Papua New Guinea after being a freelance foreign correspondent, the emphasis was more on what

our student journalist newsroom focused on covering, such as the ongoing Bougainville civil war; Sandline mercenary crisis (1997), the shooting of three students at UPNG (2001); and also at the University of the South Pacific, the George Speight coup in Fiji (2000) (see Robie, 2004).

In a 2005 survey of violent conflict in the South Pacific, political analyst John Henderson found that one of the “more surprising” findings was that 10 political assassinations had happened in the region since 1981. The assassinations included New Caledonian independence leader Pierre Declercq (1981); Belau President Haruo Remeliik (1985); Kanak independence leader Eloi Machoro (1985); New Caledonian independence leaders Jean-Marie Tjibaou and Yéiwene Yéiwene (1989); Bougainville Premier Theodore Miriung (1996); Samoan cabinet Minister and anti-corruption campaigner Luagalau Leva’ula Kamu (1999); West Papua pro-independence leader Theys Hiyo Eluay (2001); and two leading Solomon islands political figures, Cabinet Minister Augustine Geve (2002) and Peace Council member Frederick Soaki (2003). Henderson noted:

In 2000, the Fiji military commander, Frank Bainimarama narrowly escaped an attempt on his life. These findings suggest that political killings have become part of the region’s pattern of political violence.

The South Pacific’s military and paramilitary forces have contributed to violence in the region, particularly in Melanesia. About 120,000 Pacific Islanders have died in conflicts over the past quarter century (Table 1). The region has so far experienced:

- Four coups – two in Fiji in 1987, and a further one in May 2000, followed by a putsch in the Solomon Islands the following month. A fourth coup seems

inevitable in Fiji with the military chief and prime minister on a collision course.

- Seven mutinies – the Vanuatu paramilitary in 1996 and 2002, PNG military forces in 1997 (over the Sandline mercenary affair), 2001 and 2002; and part of the Fiji army in July and November 2000.
- One cross-border military strike by a friendly nation – French secret service saboteurs bombed the *Rainbow Warrior* in New Zealand in 1985.
- Systematic military oppression – by Indonesian forces in West Papua since Jakarta seized the province from the Dutch colonisers in 1963.

Table 1: Armed conflicts in the South Pacific region

Ongoing	Independence struggle in West Papua (Indonesia) (estimated deaths more than 100,000)
Ongoing	Tribal fighting in PNG's Southern Highlands and other provinces (several hundred deaths each year)
1980s	Independence struggle in New Caledonia (France) (more than 50 deaths)
1987 and 2000	Three coups in Fiji (first two coups bloodless; at least 20 deaths in Speight coup in 2000) *
1990s	Bougainville independence struggle (PNG) (more than 10,000 deaths)
1999-2006	Solomon Islands conflict (estimated 200 deaths)

Source: Adapted from Henderson J. (2005); * according to Field, M. (2005), p. 261.

Some analysts and journalists argue that the region should not get carried away with extreme perceptions over so-called “failed states” or even “rogue states” (Crocombe, 2005; Field, 2005; Fraenkel, 2005; Tully, 2005). The Biketawa Declaration (2000 – collective crisis response) and Nasonini Declaration (2002 – implementing anti-terrorist measures) were Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) responses that led to the establishment of the multinational Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) in early 2003. Jon Fraenkel argues that the major security threats in the region are “internal, not externally inspired terrorist atrocities”. He adds with a note of relief that there are “no movements in the Pacific like Al Qaeda, or the Red Brigades of the 1970s, which, following the failure of their efforts to capture mass appeal, retreat into committing bloody terrorist atrocities against perceived opponents” (see Fraenkel, 2004a). In contrast, Melanesian conflicts in Bougainville, Fiji, the Papua New Guinea Highlands, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu – and now also in the Polynesian feudal monarchy of Tonga with seven deaths in the November rioting –

are fuelled by local disputes, including demands for autonomy and/or independence, clan-based or ethnic divisions or land-related disputes.

In the case of Tonga, which was never colonised, the conflict is about greater democracy and self-determination for the citizens. According to Fraenkel:

When the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) warned of a developing “post-modern badlands” in the Pacific Islands, and politicians began talking seriously of the need for urgent “pre-emptive” action, you had to wonder whether their perceptions of the Pacific were being coloured by the type of images conveyed in futuristic movies such as Minority Report. In that film, tomorrow’s murderers can be identified, arrested and convicted using a psychic machine before they are even conscious of having decided to commit crimes. To anyone familiar with Pacific politics, these images of postmodern security threats were outlandish scaremongering (Fraenkel, 2005, p. 120).

The major conflict in the region has been West Papua, often billed the “forgotten war”, yet this issue has been largely neglected by international media and the issue of state-terrorism has never been addressed. Criticism of Pacific Islands regionalism projects often portrays this notion as a “by-product of the perceived security and other needs and ideologies of external powers” (Crocombe, 2005, p. 155). West Papua is a critical example of this. In the early era of Pacific regionalism, the former Dutch colony of West Papua was the second-largest entity until 1963.

Since then it has seen more conflict than the rest of the region put together. Indonesia obtained West Papua, against the wishes of the Papuan people, because the US and Australia saw more benefit to themselves in supporting Indonesia against West Papua. This is still the case, despite Indonesian forces having killed over 100,000 Melanesians. (Crocombe, 2005, p. 155)

Now through a new security treaty with Indonesia, Australia is even more overtly becoming involved in repression of pro-independence activists (Forbes, 2006). The Indonesia and Australia Framework for Security Co-operation is expected by diplomats to put an end to the diplomatic rift caused when Australia granted 43 Papuans asylum earlier this year. Both nations will agree to respect each other's territorial integrity. The treaty will recognise Indonesian sovereignty over Papua and commit both countries to suppressing independence activists. Sophie Grig has

condemned Indonesian atrocities in West Papua as the worst in the modern world in terms of “scale and ferocity” (Grig, 2004). Amnesty International and other human rights organisations have documented these atrocities (Amnesty International, 1997; South Asia Human Rights Documentation, 2006). Such enemies are generally called “terrorists” and their governments “rogue states”. Instead, Australia and (to a lesser extent) New Zealand authorities and media call the Papuan victims “rebels” or “separatists” and support the oppressors.

According to Fraenkel, trying to reconfigure real domestic security threats in the region “so that these appear to conform to the supranational ‘war on terror’ agenda perpetuates the prevailing ignorance about Pacific conflict” (2005, p. 122).

It increases the risk that these real problems will remain unaddressed. This is not the first era in world history when regional conflicts have been depicted as if they were playing out the worst fears of ill-informed superpowers. During the Cold War era, local conflicts in Africa, Asia and Latin America were regularly framed in east-west terms. As a result they often became intractable, seemingly irresolvable and far bloodier than they needed to have been.

Journalists committed to covering the Pacific region frequently find it frustrating working with news media that do not employ sufficient resources, or misread or interpret events simplistically and without sufficient depth. Vanuatu-based photojournalist Ben Bohane is in the vanguard of those who have brought an independent and critical perspective for journalists. A curator’s commentary for a recent exhibition of his work concluded, “The media maxim ‘If it bleeds, it leads’ may account for [an Australian] tendency to focus on eruptions in a perceived status quo rather than monitoring the sequence of events that precede or influence them (Dean, p. 158). Such tendencies equally apply to the New Zealand media. However, at a policy level New Zealand has a self-perception of being *from* the Pacific rather than *in* the Pacific as is the case with Australia. This is partially influenced by the relatively large population of Pacific Islanders living in New Zealand (Table 2). Former Agence France-Presse reporter Michael Field, now working for Fairfax in New Zealand, complains frequently about the lack of quality of New Zealand coverage of the region: “There’s a lack of respect in every aspect of how New

Zealand covers its own Pacific Island people and how we cover the Pacific”

Table 2: People from Pacific countries living in homelands and in Aotearoa/NZ

Country	No. in home country	No. in NZ	Total No.	% in home country	%in NZ
Cook Islands	21,000	52,600	73,600	29	71
Fiji	836,000	7,000	843,000	99	1
Niue	1,600	20,100	21,700	7	93
Samoa	182,700	115,000	297,700	61	39
Tokelau	1,500	6,200	7,700	19	81
Tonga	98,300	40,700	139,000	71	29
Tuvalu	9,600	2,000	11,600	83	17
Totals	1,150,700	236,600	1,394,300	83%	17%
Other Pacific*	7,472,200	7,000	7,479,200	99.999	0.001

Source: Adapted from McCarthy, L. (2005); * “Other Pacific” includes American Samoa, Federated States of Micronesia, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Wallis and Futuna.

(Mediawatch, 2001). According to James Tully, New Zealand coverage of Pacific affairs has been eroded by relatively few resources devoted to foreign news and many reporters failing to go beyond a “goodies” and “baddies” view of events.

This reduction in the use of foreign correspondents, with their greater depth of understanding, has seen an increased reliance on what has been variously called “hit and run” or “parachute” journalism. This is when people who have a relatively small knowledge of a particular nation or political issue are dispatched for a short-period to file ongoing daily coverage and then some kind of analytical wrap-up at the end of the week or fortnight. The coverage is usually of some sort of conflict – political or military – or a natural disaster. (Tully, 2005, p. 296)

Case studies

Barbouzes and state terror

The only real case of terrorism in the South Pacific has not been so-called terrorist groups but in fact been a case of state terrorism by a friendly nation – the French bombing of the Greenpeace environmental campaign ship *Rainbow Warrior* in Auckland's Waitemata Harbour on 10 July 1985. Some 13 French *barbouzes* – secret agents – were believed to have been operating in New Zealand at the time of the attack. Two of the bombers were arrested and the aftermath of the bombing has continued two decades on (see Robie, 1986, 1989, 2005; Maclellan, 1998, 2005; King, 1986).

A compensation deal for New Zealand mediated in 1986 by United Nations Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar awarded the government \$13 million (US\$7 million) and the money was used for an anti-nuclear projects fund and the Pacific Development and Conservation Trust. The agreement included an apology by France and the deportation of jailed secret agents Alain Mafart and Dominique Prieur after they had served less than a year of their 10-year sentences for manslaughter and wilful damage of the bombed ship. They were transferred from New Zealand to Hao Atoll in French Polynesia to serve three years in exile at a “Club Med” style nuclear and military base – but were both spirited separately back to France within three years and feted and decorated.

In 2005, the agents' New Zealand lawyer, Gerard Currie, tried to block the broadcasting of footage of their guilty pleas in court – shown on closed circuit to journalists at the time but not seen publicly – from being broadcast by a Television New Zealand current affairs programme, *Sunday*. Losing the High Court ruling in May 2005, the two former secret agents appealed against the footage being broadcast. But they had surely lost any spurious claim to privacy over the act of terrorism by publishing their own memoirs – *Agent Secrète* (Prieur, 1995) and *Carnets Secrets* (Mafart, 1999). Both Prieur and Mafart were quite explicit and colourful about their guilt in their books. For example, Mafart recalled in his book:

The Court is declared open. Judge Ron Gilbert enters, looking extremely formal, wearing a robe and an Elizabethan-style wig. I have the impression of being a mutineer from the Bounty ... but that in this case the gallows would not be erected in the village square. Three courteous phrases are exchanged between Judge and our lawyers, the charges are read to us and the Court asks us whether we plead guilty or not guilty. Our replies are clear, "Guilty!". With that one word the trial is at an end. (Mafart & Prieur v. TVNZ [2006] CA92/05 68/69).

In an unanimous ruling on 7 August 2006, three Appeal Court judges gave TVNZ permission to show the footage of Mafart and Prieur pleading guilty to the manslaughter of photographer Fernando Pereira. Lawyers for the French spies had argued that they never approved the closed circuit television footage being kept as a permanent record, and its screening would compromise their privacy (NZ court sinks French agents' *Rainbow Warrior* case, 2006). But judges Mark O'Regan, Grant Hammond and Terence Arnold said they were satisfied that airing of the footage was warranted:

[This bombing] involved covert criminal activity by the security forces of one state on a friendly state's territory, and against a friendly state's interest. It is an event that has been, and will remain, important in New Zealand's history. As time passes, there will be new generations of New Zealanders who did not live through the Rainbow Warrior affair and so will not have personal knowledge of it. Their knowledge of this important event in New Zealand's history will come through what they are told, through what they read and through what they see in the visual media ... A visual image of the kind at issue in this case may be a very powerful mechanism for conveying information about events. Who can forget the graphic face of the film images of the defendants in the dock at Nuremberg? (Mafart & Prieur v. TVNZ [2006] CA92/05 68/69).

3. Rainbow Warrior tapes clip

TVNZ's success in the 20-year-struggle to get the court tapes aired was shortlived. After some of the footage was broadcast and posted online in news bulletins on

August 7, the spies' lawyers won a further court stay in a bid for a final appeal, preventing the *Sunday* programme showing the clip. The Supreme Court dismissed an application for leave of appeal on September 26 and *Sunday* finally broadcast the footage on October 1 (TVNZ wins right to screen *Rainbow Warrior* trial tapes, 2006).

In a personal footnote to this affair, my interview with TVNZ commenting on the footage was caught up in the post-court upheaval and pulled offline on TVNZ's website, citing temporary removal for legal reasons" (Taped confession, 2006). In January 1987, a year after my book on the bombing and nuclear testing in the Pacific, *Eyes of Fire*, had originally been published and two months before the Fiji military coup, I was arrested at gunpoint by French troops near the New Caledonian village of Canala. The arrest followed a week of being tailed by secret agents in Noumea. When I was handed over by the military to local gendarmerie for interrogation, accusations of my being a "spy" and questions over my *Rainbow Warrior* book were made in the same breath. However, after four hours of questioning I was released (Robie, 2005; Robie, 1987a; 1987b; David Robie est alle trop loin en photographiant les Militaires, 1987).

4. Rainbow Warrior interview clip

West Papua and the 'Asia Pacific border'

The Indonesian-controlled province of [West] Papua is a tragedy of the post-colonial era, according to Maire Leadbeater of New Zealand's Indonesia Human Rights Committee (2005, p. 493). American Samoan congressman Eni Faleomavaega regards West Papua as a "classic example of colonialism in the world today" (2001). While Australia and other Western nations have followed a policy actually supporting Indonesian suppression of protesters and movements seeking self-determination, New Zealand since the current Labour government took office in 1999 has been "focused on avoiding any disruption to New Zealand's relationship with Indonesia" (Leadbeater, p. 495). This policy is fairly similar to an accommodation that New Zealand practised in relation to East Timor after it was invaded in 1975. Faleomavaega notes that, as with East Timor, Indonesia took West Papua by force in 1963. In a "truly shameful episode", the United Nations in 1969 sanctioned a

fraudulent referendum, where only 1250 delegates – “handpicked, coerced and paid-off by Jakarta” – were allowed to take part in an independence vote.

Since Indonesia subjugated West Papua, the native Papuan people have suffered under one of the most repressive and unjust systems of colonial occupation in the 20th century. Like in East Timor, where 200,000 East Timorese are reported to have lost their lives, the Indonesian military has been ruthless in West Papua. Human rights reports estimate that more than 100,000 West Papuans have died or simply vanished at the hands of the Indonesian military, which has facilitated the economic exploitation and displacement of West Papuans whose lands and mineral resources have been taken against their will and without proper compensation (Amnesty International, 1997; Faleomavaega, 2001, p. 2)

Chief Theys Hiyo Eluay became a catalyst for the struggle for independence in the late 1990s in spite of an ambiguous relationship with senior military and police officers in the Indonesian occupying forces. He had “flair and courage” (Ipenburg, 2002) that raised the awareness of ordinary Papuans about their rights and a vision for the future. In February 2000, Theys organised a Great Debate (Musyawarah Besar, Mubes) to discuss the future of West Papua and to consider a strategy for the independence struggle. The Free Papua Movement (OPM) was also present. This was so successful that a further “merdeka”, or “freedom”, congress was held in May-June 2000. He declared that Papua had never been part of Indonesia.

5. “Morning Star” clip

Barely 18 months later, Chief Eluay was assassinated by Kopassus special forces after being kidnapped. He was found strangled in his car on 11 November 2001 in a remote spot 45 km from the capital of Jayapura. His driver had vanished and was also believed to have been murdered. Seven commandos were accused of Eluay’s murder and almost two years later four special forces soldiers were sentenced up to three-and-a-half years in jail. Kopassus Lieutenant-Colonel Hartomo, jailed for instigating the murder, claimed he had ordered his subordinates to persuade Chief Eluay to not go ahead with plans to declare independence in 2002.

While news media have been accused of ignoring the human rights abuses and atrocities in West Papua (Vezech, 2006), news organisations such as Radio New Zealand International say they have reported vigorously on the Papuan struggle. News editor Walter Zweifel points to more than 250 stories about West Papua in the past four years, acknowledging about other media: “It’s also a case of news editors knowing nothing about West Papua, or not caring about the issue. It’s a place that is exploited for its gold, copper, diamonds, gas and oil.” Even in neighbouring Papua New Guinea, coverage has waned in spite of the efforts of Papuan journalists. According to a study by Patrick Matbob and Evangelia Papoutsaki, “there has been a dramatic decline in the PNG press coverage of West Papua over the past 20 years” (2006, p. 102). In their view this “sporadic coverage” can be attributed to regional geopolitics and a “general decline in professional journalism standards” in the PNG press. The Freeport-McMoRan copper and gold corporation this month unveiled a \$US25.9 billion offer for “fellow US copper producer Phelps Dodge to create the largest North American miner” (Freeport-McMoRan’s artful dodge, 2006). In April 2006, in the wake of the issue of 43 asylum seekers from West Papua, photojournalist Ben Bohane reported about the “open Asia-Pacific border” in a revealing expose about corruption and intrigue.

6. Asia-Pacific border clip

Fiji – Coup-coup land

On 19 May 2000, the multiracial coalition government led by Fiji’s first Indo-Fijian prime minister, Mahendra Chaudhry, was seized at gunpoint in Parliament and held hostage for 56 days. The predominantly Indo-Fijian Fiji Labour Party dominated the coalition that swept into power on a landslide victory at the polls just a year earlier. The coalition also included three minority parties supported mainly by indigenous Fijians. Both deputy prime ministers were indigenous Fijians. Coup leader George Speight, a failed businessman who had been declared bankrupt following cancellation of some contracts (notably involving mahogany timber) with the Chaudhry government, was due to face fraud charges the week after the coup. Speight, six renegade soldiers from the Counter-Revolutionary Warfare Unit (CRW), ironically

established by former coup leader Sitiveni Rabuka to protect the elected government, and other supporters who flocked into Parliament kept the cabinet members and parliamentarians prisoner.

The Fiji military declared martial law on May 29 and negotiated with Speight until an accord was reached on July 9 granting him immunity and a constitutional review in exchange for the release of the hostages. After leaving Parliament, Speight and 369 supporters were arrested in a dawn military raid at a school on July 27. But the military commander, Commodore Frank Bainimarama, reneged on the immunity from prosecution agreement, saying it had been signed “under duress”.

Many journalists were criticised for being too close to the Speight terrorists by living in Parliament with the gunmen (see Gounder, 2006, Robie, 2001, 2004; Field, 2005). In her unpublished 2006 Masters thesis, Christine Gounder (a reporter at the time of the coup) examined the so-called Stockholm syndrome – derived from a 1973 hostage siege in the Swedish capital where the victims empathised with their captors – and its affect on journalists covering the Speight coup.

Apart from Speight’s supporters, journalists were the only ones who spent a lot of time with the coup leader, either at press conferences or staying at Parliament to get good stories. As a result, some journalists began to “sway” towards Speight or began to experience the Stockholm syndrome. This was reflected in their stories. (Gounder, 2006, p. 4)

Although the High Court condemned Speight on 17 February 2002 to death for treason, the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment by the Prerogative of Mercy Commission. “But few believe the masterful media manipulator will serve more than a token symbolic period in ‘prison’; he is detained on the tropical isle of Nukulau, off Suva, a former haven for local picnickers” (Robie, 2004, p. xiii).

Dubbed “coup-coup land” because of three coups in just 13 years (the others were on 14 May 1987 and 25 September 1987), Fiji is currently facing mounting speculation over the possibility of a fourth coup. Bainimarama has urged Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase to resign and issued vague threats of military action. International “observers

and journalists” reportedly “fear their bitter standoff is edging Fiji towards its fourth coup since 1987” (Army tries to cool Fiji coup talk, 2006; Bainimarama absent from GCC meet, 2006). The Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) has called for the scrapping of controversial draft legislation such as the *Qoliqoli Bill* (which would establish indigenous ownership of the sea adjacent to tribal land) and the *Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Bill* (which had included an amnesty for jailed and suspected coup perpetrators) and the resignation from government of people implicated in the 2000 coup.

7. Fiji coup? clip

Tongan riots

Outside the so-called Melanesian “arc of instability”, the kingdom of Tonga erupted into violence suddenly on 16 November 2006 with rioting and arson in the centre of the capital of Nuku’alofa, leaving an estimated 80 percent of the central business district razed or in ruins. The cost of the damage was estimated at \$90,000 (NZ ponders aid package and next role for troops, 2006). The rioting followed an earlier pro-democracy rally when thousands of Tongans demanded a vote on proposed democratic reforms to the country’s semi-feudal political system. Seven people died in the riot and the aftermath (Semi-feudal political system behind trouble, 2006). The catalyst for the rioting was the decision by the Tongan Parliament to go into recess for the year without taking a vote on democracy proposals in a report by the National Committee for Political Reform. Australian and New Zealand troops, police and emergency services were sent to Tonga to help restore order and secure the international airport. More than 100 people were arrested in relation to the riots.

The pro-democracy movement called on King Siaosi Tupou V, who assumed the throne after the death of his father Taufa’ahau Tupou IV in September 2006, to dissolve Parliament and appoint an interim administration before holding democratic elections. The movement presented a petition to the King, urging the Prime Minister, Dr Feleti Sevele (himself the owner of one of the destroyed stores), and his cabinet to resign. King Tupou V’s cousin, Koloiana Naufahu, the first member of the Tongan royal family to speak out publicly since the rioting, called for convicted rioters to be

executed. She told Television New Zealand: “The people involved should be rounded up and shot really. We have the death penalty here in Tonga.”

8. TV3 Tonga clip

Although regional news media were caught by surprise by the violent turn of events, many commentators have indicated that the warning signs have been there for some time yet ignored (Misa, 2006). In September, for example, a pro-democracy businessman, Dr Tevita Tui ‘Uata (the son of one of the kingdom’s six pro-democracy MPs), warned that Tongan patience was running out and there would be “an explosive reaction” if the demands for Tongans for full democracy were not met. According to Pacific affairs columnist Tapu Misa, some of the rioting appeared planned and some appeared to be motivated by commercial jealousy – like the destruction of shops owned by ethnic Chinese. Chinese immigrants are resented because they “bought their citizenship with money that disappeared into the royal coffers” during a Tongan passport scam.

It seems clear that what began as a show of force to put pressure on a reluctant government took on a life of its own. But it would be a mistake to dismiss the real source of the discontent which sparked the riots. The pro-democracy movement is blaming the government, the government blames them back (Misa).

9. TV1 Tonga – Taione clip

Other security issues

Conventional struggles with a military and paramilitary context are not the only sources of conflict in the Pacific and the Tongan crisis was a pointer to this. As in the case of East Timor and the Solomon Islands, there has been considerable criticism of the role of the Australian and New Zealand interventionist forces. “New security” issues are facing the region – in Polynesia and Micronesia as well as Melanesia – and they include:

- Political – governance (including corruption), law and order, human and communal rights, and political and legal systems/reforms
- Economic – stagnation and marginalisation, resource distribution and inequalities, poverty, unemployment, globalisation (including free trade), money laundering, trade disputes
- Environmental – climate change/sea level rise, environmental degradation, natural disasters, nuclear issues, and unsustainable resource exploitation such as fisheries/logging.
- Social issues – land disputes, ethnic tension, social inequalities, unemployment, high illiteracy rates, religious differences and gender inequality
- Health – infectious disease (such as HIV/AIDS, diabetes, SARS), and life expectancy

The rate of HIV/AIDS infection in Papua New Guinea and West Papua, in particular, is rapidly growing out of control.

10. Sik Nogut (Sick No Good) clip

The Pacific journalist

Pacific journalists face major challenges reporting these complex issues in the region and training and education of reporters has become a growing challenge. Only two countries in the region have university-level journalism schools – Fiji (University of the South Pacific) and Papua New Guinea (Divine Word University and the University of Papua New Guinea) – which are also the nations with the largest economies and most diverse media.

In two media industry surveys (Robie, 2004), marked differences were found in the profiles of journalists in both countries – especially in education and professional

formation, salaries and in ethical attitudes. In fact, rather than a “Pacific-style journalism” as flagged by earlier researchers such as Layton (1993) and Wakavonovono (1981), distinctive Fiji and PNG journalism profiles and approaches have been emerging. In general, Papua New Guinea journalists have been better educated, older, more experienced, but more poorly paid. While there were similarities over the core values of journalism between the two countries, Papua New Guinean journalists appeared to possess more sophisticated values in their relationship and role with the community, which can be attributed to tertiary education.

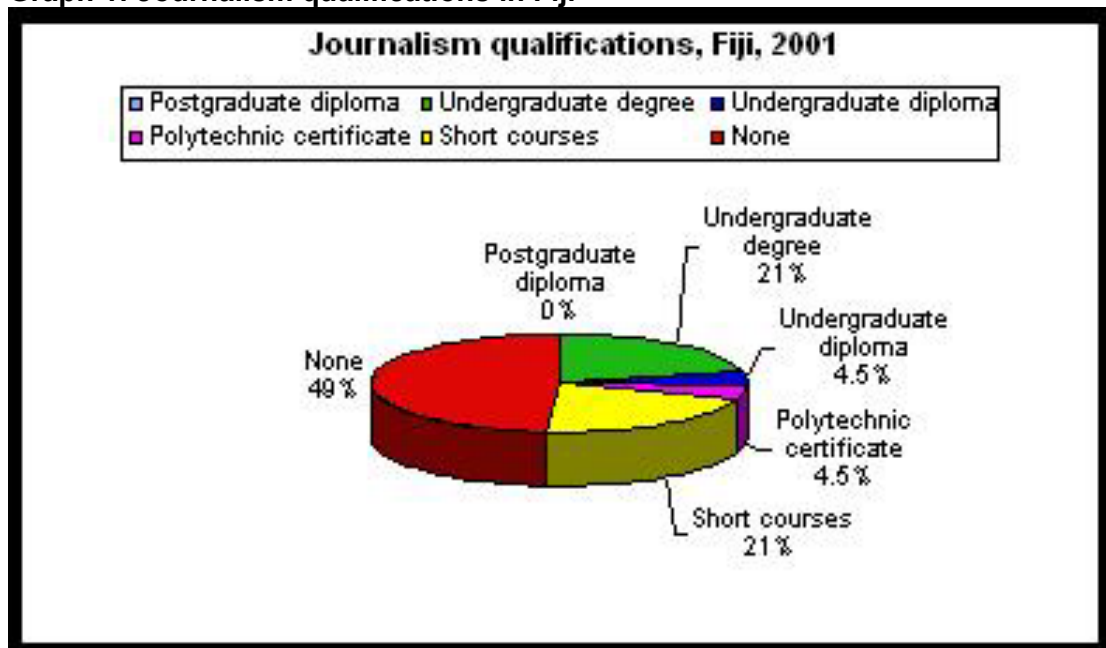
It is in the area of educational qualifications and training that significant statistical differences between the two countries are reflected. Surveyed Papua New Guinean journalists have been found to be more highly qualified than their Fiji counterparts. Between 1998-99 and 2001, the proportion of PNG journalists has climbed from 73 percent in the earlier 1998/9 pilot survey to 81 percent, almost threefold higher than in Fiji. However, in the same three-year period the number of Fiji journalists with a degree or diploma rose by more than a third from 14 percent to 26 percent. This reflects the growing number of graduate journalists entering the workplace from the University of the South Pacific. Conversely, the proportion of journalists *without* basic training or qualifications also climbed slightly in both countries to almost half of all journalists in Fiji (49 percent) and 14 percent in Papua New Guinea. However, almost one in four Fiji journalists of the survey respondents indicated they had completed professional and industry short courses run by regional or donor organisations. Papua New Guinea was less reliant on donor organisations because the country’s media organisations were more integrated with the two university journalism schools.

While the typical Fiji journalist is most likely to be male (marginally), single and under the age of 25, with less than four years’ experience and a native Fijian speaker. He works for English-language media and is a school leaver with no formal training or higher education (Graph 1). On the other hand, a typical Papua New Guinea journalist is most likely to be female (also marginally), single, under the age of 29, with about five years experience, and a Tok Pisin speaker. She is working on English-language media and most likely she has a university diploma or degree in journalism

from either the University of Papua New Guinea or Divine Word University (Graph 2) (Robie, 2004, pp. 235-236).

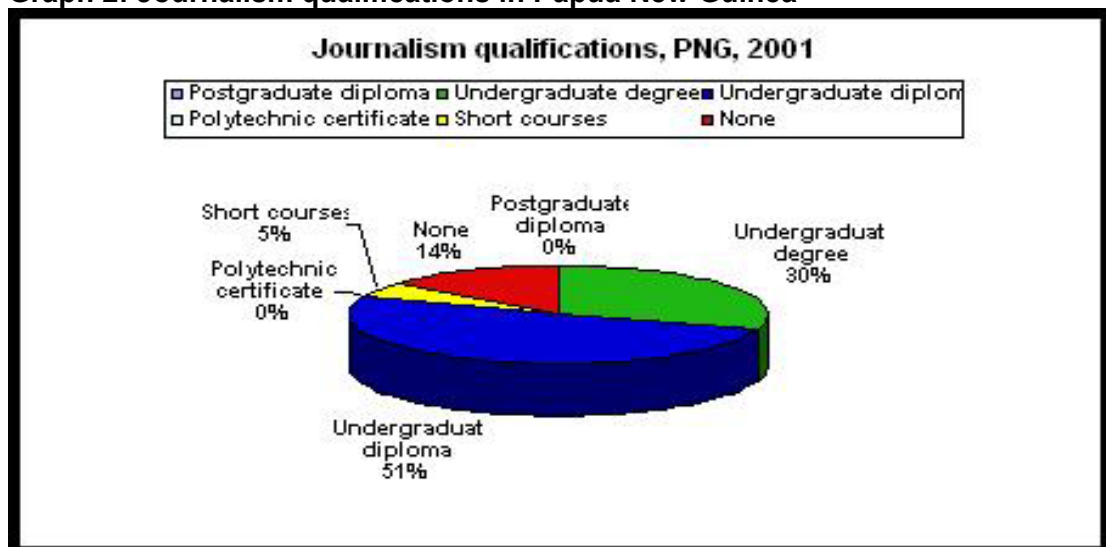
The Fiji journalist usually believes that a combination of a media cadetship and university education is the best way to be trained as a journalist, although he is unlikely to have had the opportunity to do so. While he strongly supports the notion of investigative journalism as a measure of commitment to being a watchdog on

Graph 1: Journalism qualifications in Fiji



Source: Robie, D. (2004)

Graph 2: Journalism qualifications in Papua New Guinea



Source: Robie, D. (2004)

democracy, he will probably regard culture and religion as major obstacles. Also, he thinks the public has a “satisfactory” perception of journalists.

However, the Papua New Guinean journalist most likely believes that journalists should receive a university education with a media organisation attachment or internship. She probably entered journalism to communicate knowledge to the community, and to expose abuses of power and corruption. She may go into public relations, but is less likely to do so than in Fiji. She also has an understanding of the role of development journalism and considers it relevant to Papua New Guinea. She is also less likely to see culture and religion as obstacles such as in Fiji. Also, she thinks the public has a “very good” or “good” perception of journalists.

Across the board in Fiji and Papua New Guinea — and even more so elsewhere in the Pacific — salary structures are “pretty appalling”, as one prominent PNG journalist described it. She echoed the views of more than two-thirds of the 57 journalists and media executives or policy makers interviewed for my book *Mekim Nius* (2004). One of the ironies is that although Papua New Guinean journalists are generally better educated and with a higher mean experience, they are far more poorly paid than in Fiji. According to the 2001 survey, the mean salary scale for Fiji journalists was F\$13,000 a year while the median for PNG journalists was a mere K11,000 a year.²

Salaries for journalists are woeful to say the least. Raw ‘journalists’ are hired straight out of school and in turn paid extremely low wages for the hours they work. This in turn, leads to sub-standard journalism, which in turn leads to a misinformed, frustrated public. Media organisations jump on the bandwagon and offer inconsequential salary increases to lure staff who have had a trickle of experience from other media organisations, leading to staff swapping and the proverbial revolving door syndrome so common to newsrooms in Fiji (Singh, interview, 2003).

This state of affairs raises concerns about how independent the media really is with such low wage structures, or how exposed the media may be to the influence of so-called “envelope journalism”³ inducements by unscrupulous politicians, as in Indonesia, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea or the Solomon Islands. Ingrid Leary notes: “Pay rates are very poor. That’s the number one problem for journalism in the

Pacific, and could ultimately spell the end for freedom of expression and human rights in the region” (interview, 2003). According to former leading Fiji newspaper editor Jale Moala, “pay is the greatest obstacle to developing journalism in the region” (interview, 2003). One senior PNG journalist summed up the views of many about the lure of paid influence:

If you're working for an absolutely meagre wage that's not going to get you through much, your opinions are going to be able to be changed or swayed with a bit of influence. Somebody is going to be able to persuade you basically, with a bit of cash or some sort of incentive ... Processes are not followed by public servants because somebody has a bigger need and will take a shortcut. And I don't think we can exclude journalists. In the case of the Skate Tapes⁴ revelation about journalists being allegedly paid, we had the opportunity of one incident being taped. I think it would be pretty embarrassing if other incidents were taped. I think it is rife.

Along with journalists and the media industry, growing corruption is also causing unease among the educators. “Lack of funding is a real problem. And ethics,” argues University of Papua New Guinea’s media academic Sorariba Nash. “I am starting to sense this massive corruption coming” into society (interview, 2001). He believes there has been a dramatic rise in junkets and freebies being used as inducements to win over journalists.

Further research is needed to explore this issue. Certainly the main newsroom survey for the research in *Mekim Nius* confirmed an appalling state of salaries for journalists. More than two-thirds of PNG journalists (68 percent) were in the lowest paid bracket of between \$5,000 and \$10,000. “I was staggered to find how poorly paid a lot of them were,” noted the ABC’s then correspondent in Port Moresby, Richard Dinnen. “I [found] people doing jobs that in Australia would earn A\$80,000 to A\$100,000 a year were getting less than K20,000 a year in Papua New Guinea to exercise exceptionally high responsibility” (interview, 2001). Journalism lecturer and *National* columnist Kevin Pamba noted there was no structure in salary and working conditions for journalists at most PNG news organisations. Relating an experience at one media organisation over a job offer when he graduated in 1995,

I asked them about health cover, accommodation and other things. The next thing I got was that they told me that I could always get out of the newsroom — so I did [and joined a rival daily newspaper]. (Pamba, 2001)

In Fiji, less than half of the journalists (44 percent) were in the lowest range, according to the survey.

Few Pacific journalists adequately background or research stories, or provide the context that is needed to make sense of a news or current affairs development. Investigative journalism is rare. During the Speight coup in 2000, for example, there was little in-depth reporting of the Fiji state-owned mahogany harvesting issue, although this was a critical factor in the political upheaval in Fiji. What was published in Fiji was largely republication or rehashing of reports compiled by investigative journalists in foreign media.

Conclusion

A major change needs to happen to alter the mind-set among some news media organisations covering the Pacific that are reluctant to invest in resources needed for serious reportage of the region. At a Fiji seminar in mid-2004 on industry self-regulation, prominent publicist and Samba Ltd director Matt Wilson called for the establishment of a media wages council and better investment in training. Saying the majority of working journalists in Fiji had little or no training at all, the former 1960s *Fiji Times* journalist added: “I can see standards slipping inexorably — I can see no improvements” (Media self-regulation under criticism, 2004). Perhaps, too, the public needs to take a more demanding and critical role about media standards and the need for education: “The public should take part in the training of journalists,” suggests Pacific Network on Globalisation (PANG) coordinator and publisher Stanley Simpson. “We have journalism education institutions, we have in-house training, but we cannot just rely on this alone because we need an active public to respond to the media”.

The Pacific needs journalists with the skills necessary to address globalisation and “the new regionalism”. There is an urgent need for more journalists who can make

sense of the new Australian, New Zealand and international “interventionist” engagement with the Pacific that is broadly shaping regional trends: proposals involving intensifying cooperation such as proposals for a regional panel of judges, a common list of Pacific prosecutors, a regional shipping registry, a regional financial unit, and stepped-up regional training in good governance. Undoubtedly, the grand Pacific Plan could lead to closer economic integration and free trade deals and — eventually — a common currency and some form of political integration.

Governments increasingly focus on the risks to security and economic growth from transnational threats, such as terrorism and organised crime, and also failures of governance such as corruption. The universities face an increasing challenge in identifying and addressing the media industry’s real needs and equipping a new generation of journalists with a sound education needed for development journalism. Pacific journalists need to be provided with the philosophy, socio-political, historical and contextual knowledge to match the technical skills of being effective communicators and political mediators in their developing societies. And managements must develop fair and equitable salary structures for career journalists if they hope to keep staff with the vital training and skills.

Pressures and dilemmas for the news media continue to gain momentum in the South Pacific, often from a cultural as well as a political dimension. While the media in some countries are refreshingly outspoken and courageous, in others there is a worrying trend towards self-censorship. Some media industry observers argue that reclaiming Pacific images and “envisioning a future without coups, conflicts and contraband” is now more urgent than ever (Thaman, 2001). This is due to a perception that the dominant news media in the Pacific is “Western”, with Eurocentric and north-based conceptual models paramount. However, these models have failed to seriously take Pacific and indigenous cultures and their worldviews into account.

Yet South Pacific news media have played a crucial role in exposing corruption and abuse of political power or office, and in some cases leading to redress. It is vital that no political or social institution has absolute authority over the media. Also, the hegemony of news media organisations themselves is at stake.

Notes

¹ Fairfax Media, New Zealand's largest newspaper publisher, owns the *Dominion Post*, *The Press*, *Sunday News*, *Sunday Star-Times* and other titles; APN News and Media owns the largest daily newspaper, *The New Zealand Herald* and other titles.

² Although such a comparison can be misleading, it is interesting to note that the mean salary for a PNG journalist is less than half what a Fiji journalist earns in real terms (F\$5,900) when currencies are compared. Converted by Universal Currency Converter, 26 April 2003. www.xe.com/ucc/convert.cgi: 11 000.00 PGK = 5881.53 FJD.

³ The 'envelope journalism' culture, a play on the notion of development journalism, is one in which sources offer money or other gifts to journalists. It involves a complex web of social, economic and institutional conditions that perpetuate the cultures of gift-giving, bribery and graft in some countries. This culture is explored comprehensively in Angela Romano (2000), *Bribes, gifts and graft in Indonesian journalism*, *Media International Australia*, No 94, pp. 157-171. There are some parallels with the South Pacific.

⁴ See Oseah Philemon (1999). *Media ethics and responsibility*. In *A Fragile Freedom: Challenges facing the Media in Papua New Guinea* (pp 72-73). Madang: Divine Word University Press: On 28 November 1997, a *Post-Courier* front-page headline read: SKATE DENIES BRIBES CLAIM. The news story referred to the infamous Mujo Sefa tapes, which were broadcast by the ABC, detailing alleged bribery and corruption claims against then Prime Minister Bill Skate by his former adviser Mujo Sefa. The story included allegations that Skate had authorised K27, 000 in bribes to be paid to four of his ministers and twelve backbenchers. One tape, broadcast by ABC, showed a scene in Sefa's office with then Internal Affairs Minister Thomas Pelika discussing a payment to be made to somebody in the media. The tape showed Pelika taking an envelope 'supposedly containing K2,000 and putting it in his pocket'. The previous day the *Post-Courier* published details in which it was alleged some K27,000 was to have been given to the minister to 'pay off collaborators in the media'.

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