Making a Case for Peace Journalism in Fiji

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Abstract

In a nation’s struggle for peaceful resolution to political conflict, reconciliation and good governance, the media is a watchdog, a source of information, education and inspiration as well as an outlet for self expression. The news media play a crucial role in peace processes but can also get caught up in the conflict. As the news media in Fiji struggles with its own history of reporting conflict in Fiji and with a repressive environment under the Public Emergency Regulations and the Media Decree, this article strives to make a case for peace journalism for Fiji as a way forward for both the news media and the nation of Fiji.
Introduction

For more than two decades now the course of Fiji’s political journey has been determined by violent upheaval. Coups d’état – three military and one civilian – have led to the emergence of what has been labelled a ‘coup-culture’ in the once peaceful archipelago. The political crises have been public due largely to widespread coverage by the news media to such an extent that some of the ‘battles’ have been waged through the news media. There have been occasions when the news media has added to the conflict.

But what happens when the news media itself is in conflict with the very institutions on which it is supposed to be reporting? What happens when the news media chooses to advocate rather than maintaining a neutral position? Does the news media have a role in resolving these crises and transforming the coup culture into a culture of peace?

In this essay I argue that despite the attempts of the news media in Fiji to provide ‘balanced’ coverage of the political crisis since the December 2006 military coup d’état, reporting and editorial decision-making can be considered both war/violence journalism and peace/conflict journalism. Using concepts of peace journalism propounded by Galtung and developed further by Lynch and McGoldrick, I will examine the local news media’s coverage of the 2006 coup in Fiji and its relationship with the military-backed interim government. I will also discuss some of the key reasons for this practice, as well as pinpointing what elements of the peace journalism model exist in the Fiji situation. I will outline what peace journalism offers in terms of opening up the conversation on this conflict, before offering some suggestions through which the Fiji news media can begin to practise peace journalism.

The Fiji context

Political conflict

To have a clear sense of how the Fiji news media covers conflict and political crises it is important first to have an understanding of the political situation in Fiji. Since 1987 the country has experienced three military coups and a civilian putsch, has gone from being an independent dominion with Queen Elizabeth II as its head of state to becoming a republic, and is currently, after only four decades of independence, operating under its third constitution. The issues surrounding the various political crises have ranged from a perceived threat to indigenous Fijian institutions and land, ethnocentrism and corruption, to power struggles among politicians, as well as within the traditional chiefly system; and unresolved conflicts of interest between politicians, business interests and the military. The 1987 military coup d’état began a cycle of political upheaval, which has been termed the ‘coup culture’, within which the armed overthrow of a democratically elected government has become a justifiable method of political change if enough cause for change can be shown. The fact the Fiji military leadership instigated three out of four coups, and was drawn into the fourth, has lent itself to a ‘might is right’ philosophy that perpetuates this coup culture and makes any efforts at promoting peaceful conflict resolution difficult. The fact that Fiji is a multiethnic, multicultural and multi-religious country also adds to the complexity of the issue of peace-building.
While two decades of political instability make it difficult to give even a snapshot of Fiji's political situation, some key points are essential to the understanding of the context in which the Fijian news media functions:

- 14 May 1987 — Lt Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka led the first coup d'état against the newly elected coalition government of Dr Timoci Bavadra. The protection of indigenous interests was the reason given for the takeover.

- 25 September 1987 — Rabuka staged a second coup d'état, against the interim government and the council of ministers. He took over as head of state and declared Fiji a republic.

- 19 May 2000 — a civil putsch ostensibly led by George Speight with assistance from elements of the military took over the democratically elected parliament, holding Fiji's first Indo-Fijian Prime Minister, Mahendra Chaudhry, and government Members of Parliament hostage for eight weeks. Fijian paramountcy was given as the reason for the takeover. Looting of shops in the capital city and some rural Indo-Fijian communities occurred. The military intervened, declared martial law and following the release of hostages, arrested Speight and major perpetrators. The military handed power to an interim civilian government.

- 5 December 2006 — After months of increasing tension between government and military, the military commander, Commodore Josaia Voreqe (Frank) Bainimarama, ‘assumed’ executive authority and dismissed the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase. Corruption, racist policies and government protection of 2000 coup perpetrators were among reasons given for the takeover. Bainimarama handed back power to the President of Fiji, Ratu Josefa Iloilovatu Uluivuda, who appointed him as interim Prime Minister of a caretaker government, advised by a military council.

- 10 April 2009 — Following a Court of Appeal ruling a day earlier, which declared the 2006 takeover and dismissal of the elected government and the appointment of the Interim Government to be unlawful, the President of Fiji abrogated the Constitution of Fiji and instituted a ‘new legal order’, declaring that he would serve as head of state by Decree. Commodore Bainimarama was appointed Prime Minister and all previously serving Cabinet Ministers were also reappointed.

The Fiji news media

At that time there were eight daily news media organisations: the two radio networks of Communications Fiji Limited and Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited; three newspapers – the Fiji Times (owned then by Rupert Murdoch’s News Limited), the Fiji Sun (locally owned by CJ Patel, Fiji’s largest distribution company) and Fiji’s Daily Post (owned by a consortium of local and overseas investors and the Fiji government); two television stations (One National News – Fiji TV and Mai TV); and one dedicated news website, Fijilive.com.

My work in the media in the last decade has offered me some insight into the workings of a number of media organisations. These experiences shed some light on the rationale, or sometimes lack thereof, behind the news and the honest difficulties faced by reporters bringing their stories in time to make publication deadlines. Due to the ongoing migration of senior journalists in the wake of the political crises, the average age of a journalist/reporter in Fiji is currently 27 years. While in
the last six years graduates from the Journalism programme of the University of the South Pacific (USP) have entered the media industry, the majority of reporters currently in the industry entered the field as cadet reporters, fresh out of school or on a ‘practical’ work attachment from the School of Journalism. The only training these reporters have has been work experience, coupled with in-house training and for those fortunate enough to be selected, overseas and local workshops and training seminars. In recent years a Media and Journalism certificate has been developed at the Fiji Institute of Technology (now part of the Fiji National University) for reporters with experience but no qualifications in journalism to undergo some formal training. From a professional standpoint, local journalists continue to struggle for better working conditions and salaries. A survey in late 2000 found that the starting salary of graduate journalists in Fiji was between FJD7,000 and FJD10,000, which was approximately half of the starting salaries for school teachers and nurses (Sauliga 2000).

Journalists in Fiji are best described as generalists. Their knowledge base is wide but shallow, for their assignments vary from day to day. The task load may include the launching of some research document on Monday, a robbery on Tuesday, the expiry of land leases on Wednesday, public health on Thursday and a garden party at Government House on Friday. Most articles are a two to four hundred words in length, with feature articles running to eight hundred to a thousand words. Unless the reporter is working on a feature article, he or she is most likely to find out about their topic either the day before, at the editorial meeting on that particular day, or perhaps, in the case of an unexpected event, as soon as a tip-off is received. That, coupled with the deadline at the end of the day for two or more articles per day, leaves little time for background research: unless the reporter has worked on a similar story before or has prior knowledge of the subject, he or she is limited to what is learned from press releases, interviews and briefs. In Fiji, newsrooms are smaller than in most developed countries, due largely to financial constraints. As a result, fields such as health, politics, business, environment and religion do not have specialist reporters. News editors often have to find a reporter who has an interest in that area and allocate the news story to him or her. The need to ‘improve reporting of issues in depth’, with a ‘critical yet fair evaluation’, has been highlighted by David Robie, former head of the USP’s Journalism programme (Singh 2008).

**Journalists and reporting coups**

The way in which the local news media has covered the coups has been as varied as the manner in which these coups were effected. Until 1987, most local journalists had never actually heard of the term ‘coup d’état’. Coverage of the 1987 coups was based on observation and statements released by the parties involved. A few hours after taking over, Rabuka assured the heads of news media organisations of a ‘censorship free press’. However, he warned against inflammatory reporting. The next day, when all news media outlets reported denouncements of the coup – either by statements by the Governor-General, the Fiji Council of Churches and community leaders or directly in editorials in the Fiji Times and the Fiji Sun newspapers – Rabuka’s regime ordered the two newspapers to stop publishing indefinitely while armed troops and police occupied offices of news organisations and began a purge of critics and opponents by arbitrary detention (Robie 2000).

In sharp contrast, the civilian coup or putsch of 2000 can best be described as a ‘free-for-all’ in terms of media coverage. The leader of the putsch, George Speight, made himself easily accessible to journalists, holding regular press conferences and granting them unprecedented access into the parliamentary complex where he was holding the government hostage. According to Christine
Gounder, ‘he loved the media just as they loved him’ (2007:126). Netani Rika, editor of the Fiji Times, admits that Speight ‘knew how to use the media’ (pers. comm., in an email to the author, 23 November 2008). It was a mutually beneficial situation as journalists were, for the first time in Fiji, in the middle of ‘the action’ and Speight was able to use them for propaganda. Thus the challenge for journalists during the putsch, hostage situation and occupation of the parliamentary complex was not access to the events of the story but the maintaining of journalism ethics. In her analysis of the news coverage of the 2000 coup, Gounder points out two major challenges journalists faced. The first, and the more difficult for local journalists to overcome, was the ‘Stockholm Syndrome’, a behavioural change whereby hostages become familiar with and over time sympathetic to their captors. During the takeover of parliament, journalists were, with the exception of the putsch’s supporters, the only ones to spend a great deal of time with Speight either during news conferences or while remaining at the parliamentary complex waiting for news conferences, which were ad hoc and often held late at night. According to Gounder’s analysis, some of them ‘began to “sway” towards Speight or began to experience the Stockholm syndrome’, which was then ‘reflected in their stories’ (2007:129). There were also criticisms of ‘skirt journalism’ by some female journalists, which may be attributed to the Stockholm syndrome. Compounding this was the fact that most local journalists, who because of the ethnocentric nature of the putsch were either full or part indigenous Fijian (as the safety of Indo-Fijian journalists could not be guaranteed), had cultural or personal ties with the perpetrators or supporters of the putsch.

The second challenge was a lack of understanding of the context of Fiji’s political development, a country only just ending its third decade of independence, in which this putsch was taking place. This challenge was again faced by local journalists, who lacked experience, as will be discussed later, but also by the foreign journalists, the majority of whom can be described as ‘parachute journalists’. Anthony Mason, whose analytical article on the 1987 and 2000 coups in Fiji focused on foreign journalists, points out that ‘parachute journalists’ have ‘little background and few contacts’ on the ground (2007:116).

The news media and the 2006 coup

Prelude to the coup: reporting a war of words

The 2006 coup was a very public affair. The actions of the military were broadcast live on radio and television in special news bulletins. Moreover, the build-up of tension between the military and the government had also been public from as early as 2003. The military used the news media to criticise the government’s close relationship with convicted perpetrators of the 2000 putsch and the attempted mutiny and assassination of Commodore Bainimarama. As the government began to propose controversial legislation, the military made its opposition to these bills known through interviews and press releases. The conflict intensified, with government attempts to remove Bainimarama as military head, Bainimarama began issuing public threats against the government; the government responses were also delivered publicly. In the lead up to the 2006 general elections, the military campaigned actively against the incumbent government. Following the government’s re-election, the war of words escalated with calls for the dropping of the controversial bills or the resignation of Prime Minister Qarase. The military conducted publicised exercises in a show of force and the Prime Minister and the Commander now addressed each other through the news
media. Indeed, the news media covered the entire conflict dramatically, as lead stories were virtually handed to them on a silver platter. Rika acknowledges that the news media consciously allowed the military, government and politicians to ‘use this mode of battle’ (pers. comm., in an email to the author, 23 November 2008). Once the military took over, however, the nature of the crisis changed, and so did the nature of the relationship between the military and the news media.

**News media versus military**

Bainimarama’s assumption of power catalysed the tension between government and military into a political conflict, mirrored by the shift in relationship between the military and the news media, which began to cover the military’s usurpation of power. During the imposition of emergency regulations immediately following the takeover, news media reporting of criticism against and opposition to the latest coup d’état as well as allegations of military abuses of human rights resulted in reprisals from the regime. Reporters Without Borders (RWB) reported that just a few hours after Bainimarama announced he had taken power in a military coup, Fiji Television Limited interrupted regular programming to announce that its ‘news service would only resume broadcasting when it could be independent and free from censorship’. The *Fiji Times* suspended publication and Radio Fiji and Communications Fiji also suspended news broadcasts, following attempts by soldiers to impose advance censorship and the posting of guards at all news media offices. While Bainimarama later gave assurances that the news media would remain independent, and news organisations resumed their operations, a number of journalists and editorial staff, as well as writers of opinion columns and letters to the editor who had been critical of the new regime, were harassed and intimidated (RWB 2006). As a result, news media editorial teams began to practise limited self-censorship. The military also attempted to block critics of the coup and new regime who were using the internet to post weblogs (blogs), although they were unable to maintain this action or find any of the people involved.

The military’s ‘clean-up campaign’, professedly aimed at rooting out corruption, made use of the news media. A number of senior civil servants and holders of public office who were dismissed by the military regime were not notified officially; rather, they were informed through media releases from the regime (Janine 2006). However, with the return of executive authority to the president and his appointment of an interim government, the emergency regulations were lifted and the military returned to barracks. The media once again embraced its role as the ‘Fourth Estate’. According to Shailendra Singh, the current head of the University of the South Pacific’s Journalism programme, the news media in Fiji, in the absence of a parliamentary democracy since December 2006, has ‘played the role of an opposition’ (Radio Fiji News 2008). This has led to ill-concealed conflict between the news media and the interim government, which is still controlled by the military. At an editorial level, the local news media has taken a stand to push for democracy, continuing to ‘call for governance by the people, the return of all military personnel to the barracks, elections, freedom of choice and the removal of oppressive rules’ (Netani Rika, pers. comm., in an email to the author, 23 November 2008). Rika holds the view that the interim government has oppressed the news media since the coup d’état and this is the reason for an ‘open confrontation between the two’ (ibid.). In February and May 2008 respectively, claiming that both were threats to national security, the military regime deported two expatriates working in the news media – Russell Hunter, editor-in-chief of the *Fiji Sun* and Evan Hannah, publisher of the *Fiji Times*. On the eve of World Press Freedom Day, 3 May 2008, Bainimarama issued a statement suggesting that the self regulation by the Fiji media was
a failure, averring a low standard of reporting since December 2006 and heavily criticising the laxity of the Media Council of Fiji in addressing this. The military regime then recalled former military spokesperson, Major Neumi Leweni, and appointed him as Deputy Secretary for Information. The regime embarked on the process of consolidating all existing media legislation, which it was expected would include a new media tribunal.

The current political crisis has also found the news media taking on a stronger role as an advocate for the return to a parliamentary democracy. The reluctance of the regime to set an early date for elections means that this stance has brought the news media into conflict with the regime. Newspaper editorials continue to call for elections, despite statements by the regime that elections will follow, not precede, electoral reforms and the implementation of the People’s Charter for Change, Peace and Progress, a process developed by the National Council for Building a Better Fiji (NCBBF). The news media has been criticised by the regime for not being ‘pro-Fiji’ (Bainimarama 2008) and by the NCBBF for focusing too much on the controversy surrounding the Charter process rather than on the contents of the draft charter itself.

The Public Emergency Regulations and censorship

On Good Friday 2009 the then President of Fiji, Ratu Josefa Iloilovatu Uluivuda, abrogated Fiji’s constitution. Among the decrees promulgated in the instituting of a ‘new legal order’ was the Public Emergency Regulations (PER) Decree.

According to the Public Emergency Regulations introduced under a 30-day state of emergency, the Permanent Secretary for Information was given full control over what the news media report in Fiji. The media was urged to report ‘positive’ news. Ministry of Information and military personnel were placed inside the offices of print and broadcast media or made daily visits. Officials say their job was to prevent the publication or broadcasting of reports that could cause ‘disorder’, ‘disaffection’ or ‘public alarm’.

In protest over the censoring of news content and being told not to criticise the new regime or carry stories that could regarded as ‘incitement’, on Easter Sunday, 12 April, Fiji Television cancelled its nightly news bulletin and the Fiji Times newspaper published blank spaces where censored stories should have been placed, overprinted with the statement, ‘The stories on this page could not be published due to government restrictions’.

In a statement following the imposition of the PER, Reporters Without Borders appealed to both the President and the Prime Minister to ‘repeal measures taken on 10 April that institutionalise media censorship and violate Fiji’s international undertakings to respect the rule of law . . . The military government is heading dangerously towards a Burmese-style system in which the media are permanently subject to prior censorship and other forms of obstruction’, warned Reporters Without Borders (RWB 2009).

Since the imposition of the PER, it is estimated that at least 8 journalists have been detained for alleged PER breaches. A number of foreign journalists and foreigners working in the media industry have been deported while some others are not permitted to enter the country.

The PER, with an initial enforcement life of 30 days, have been renewed every month and remain in force at the time of writing of this article. Government censors continue to be placed in
newsrooms, resulting in self-censorship by some journalists and an adversarial relationship between some editorial staff and the censors.

The Media Industry Development Decree 2010

In June 2010 the Media Development Decree came into effect, bringing with it significant changes to the landscape of the media industry. The new legislation not only established a Media Industry Development Authority but also placed restrictions on ownership and strict editorial guidelines with severe penalties for breaches. Under the decree all media organisations must have ninety per cent local ownership. Faced with this imperative, the Fiji Times newspaper, owned by News Limited, had the choice of selling out to a local investor or facing closure. A local buyer did step forward but even this outcome puts any further foreign investment in the media industry in doubt for the foreseeable future. At the same time, cross-media ownership has also been regulated. This means that if a person owns a beneficial interest in any one media organisation, then that person may own only twenty-five per cent non-voting interest in another media organisation of the same medium or five per cent of non-voting interest in another media organisation of a different medium. The government has promoted the decree as progressive law that ensures greater transparency, accountability and responsibility from the media, but it has not escaped international condemnation.

Over the last two decades, the news media in Fiji has been exposed to various forms of political conflict and has had to adapt to reporting in different situations. Results have been mixed. The constant upheaval has taken its toll on the news media in terms of the lack of experienced journalists to guide the large number of young journalists. The lack of depth and analysis in reporting is another issue that has been a constant challenge to journalists. Under the current military regime, though, the news media has found itself not merely reporting political crisis and conflicts but engaging with the regime to protect media independence and advocating what it feels is the way forward. The constant exposure to conflict and disruption of democracy in Fiji has led the news media to step into the situation on which it is meant to be reporting, and becoming part of the conflict. The next section of the paper examines what indicators point to Fiji journalism being conflict- and propaganda-oriented. This will help us understand how the news media can transform its role from merely reporting conflict to an alternative practice of journalism that contributes to a peaceful resolution of conflict.

The peace journalism option

What is peace journalism?

Peace journalism can be described as a paradigm shift in journalism. It seeks to change the focus of reporting from looking at the events of a conflict to probing for deeper understanding of the roots, effects and possible solutions to a conflict. According to Johan Galtung, the pioneer of peace journalism, its aim is to focus on the ‘peaceful and cooperative aspects in any conflict’. Peace journalism involves reframing news by being people-oriented rather than elite-oriented, and by looking at how violence affects people on both sides of a conflict. It also seeks to keep journalists
focused on discerning the truth in the midst of propaganda during conflicts (Galtung 2005). Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick describe peace journalism as the ethics of ‘journalistic intervention’ (McGoldrick & Lynch 2000) and propose a new framework of reporting conflict.

**Galtung’s model**

For Galtung, peace journalism is an ethical challenge to move from the dominant, realistic and descriptive journalistic practice to one that is idealistic and normative (Galtung 2006). The road to peace journalism begins with an analysis of the orientation of the story. Galtung suggests that the journalist should first look at the focus of the story based on the following four criteria: (I) peace/conflict or war/violence, (II) truth or propaganda, (III) people or elite and (IV) solution or victory.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PEACE/CONFLICT JOURNALISM</th>
<th>WAR/VIOLENCE JOURNALISM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I. PEACE/CONFLICT-ORIENTED</strong></td>
<td><strong>I. WAR/VIOLENCE-ORIENTED</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>explore conflict formation, x parties, y goals, z issues general “win-win” orientation</td>
<td>focus on conflict arena, 2 parties, 1 goal (win), war general zero-sum orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>open space, open time; causes and outcomes anywhere, also in history/culture</td>
<td>closed space, closed time; causes and exits in arena, who threw the first stone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>making conflicts transparent</td>
<td>making wars opaque/secret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>giving voice to all parties; empathy, understanding</td>
<td>&quot;us-them&quot;, journalism, propaganda, voice, for &quot;us&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>see conflict/war as problem, focus on conflict creativity</td>
<td>see &quot;them&quot; as the problem, focus on who prevails in war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>humanization of all sides; more so the worse the weapons</td>
<td>dehumanization of &quot;them&quot;; more so the worse the weapon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>proactive: prevention before any violence/war occurs</td>
<td>reactive: waiting for violence before reporting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>focus on invisible effects of violence (trauma and glory, damage to structure/culture)</td>
<td>focus only on visible effect of violence (killed, wounded and material damage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>II. TRUTH-ORIENTED</strong></td>
<td><strong>II. PROPAGANDA-ORIENTED</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expose untruths on all sides</td>
<td>expose &quot;their&quot; untruths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uncover all cover-ups</td>
<td>help &quot;our&quot; cover-ups/lies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>III. PEOPLE-ORIENTED</strong></td>
<td><strong>III. ELITE-ORIENTED</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>focus on suffering all over; on women, aged, children, giving voice to the voiceless</td>
<td>focus on &quot;our&quot; suffering; on able-bodied elite males, being their mouth-piece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>give name to all evil-doers</td>
<td>give name of their evil-doer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>focus on people peace-makers</td>
<td>focus on elite peace-makers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IV. SOLUTION-ORIENTED</strong></td>
<td><strong>IV. VICTORY-ORIENTED</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace = non-violence + creativity</td>
<td>peace = victory + ceasefire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>highlight peace initiatives, also to prevent more war</td>
<td>conceal peace-initiative, before victory is at hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>focus on structure, culture the peaceful society</td>
<td>focus on treaty, institution the controlled society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aftermath: resolution, re-construction, reconciliation</td>
<td>leaving for another war, return if the old flares up</td>
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Galtung’s Peace Journalism Model

The model presented in figure 1 seeks to engage journalists in the process of expanding ‘the conflict discourse to include peaceful outcomes and processes, making peace perspectives visible’ (Galtung 2006:1; subsequent page references in parentheses are to this text). Galtung goes on to call attention to the way in which facts are selected, distorted and repressed with potential facts (possibilities) often overlooked; pointing out that a critical attitude towards the narratives (text, counter-text, subtext, pretext, context and deeper text) is necessary in order to understand the facts in terms of the wider truth (I–II). This has a bearing on reporting acts of violence, where Galtung’s model shifts the focus to the victims and suffering and looks at the structure, culture and context in which the violence occurs (II). The result is a prevention of the dichotomy of good and evil in the reporting of the conflict. He advises journalists to avoid the over-simplification of language and the use of such terms as peace or terrorists. At the same time, Galtung calls for journalists to look for peace proposals, keeping in mind that this process involves all levels of the community. Finally, he suggests that by asking questions, reporters can stimulate ownership of peace processes within the community (II).

In terms of journalistic ethics, Galtung argues that peace journalism implies the ethics of consequence and action rather than of intent and conviction (IV). The ethics of consequence and action can be found in the concept of solution-oriented journalism in criterion IV of the model. Galtung also places balance and objectivity into the context of peace journalism, with balance meaning attention to all goals of all parties, people as well as elites, in all phases of a conflict (V). Objectivity, on the other hand, refers to the issue of the whole truth in order to avoid propaganda (IV). While journalists make these ethical decisions in the process of reporting conflict, some decisions also need to be made at an editorial level to enable peace journalism to be practised. Galtung puts forward four considerations. First is the need to report peace-oriented progress intended for a conflict resolution. Secondly, the journalist and editor must decide whether they want to stimulate peace or violence. Thirdly, the role of peace journalism is not peace activism but to make peace perspectives visible. Finally, it is important not to confuse empathy for all people involved with sympathy, which is reserved for victims.

Lynch and McGoldrick

The seminal work of Galtung was further developed by Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick, both seasoned journalists. Their contribution to the conversation on peace journalism has complemented Galtung’s peace research by focusing on conflict analysis and developing some practical methods for analysis and reporting. In addition to Galtung’s model of analysis, Lynch and McGoldrick introduce the process of transformation from war journalism to peace journalism. This is done by discussing the ‘ethic of intervention’ within the cycle of violence, in the interests of physical, political and psychological security (McGoldrick & Lynch 2000:11–17; subsequent page references in parentheses are to this text). According to these authors, the process of peace-making includes peace journalism as part of an interwoven process at all levels of society.

Next, McGoldrick and Lynch introduce the feedback loop, in further explanation that merely reporting the facts of a story is incomplete journalism and that journalists need to understand the connections between themselves, the sources they use, the stories they cover and the impact of their reporting.
The feedback loop aims to show the consequences both before and after the facts occurred, in order to give a fuller picture of the journalist’s responsibilities within the context of the interconnectedness of society. They argue that news media claims of objectivity do not take into consideration the consequences of reporting and editorial decisions and can also result in a ‘superficial narrative’.

This process of transformation from war to peace journalism takes into account the context of journalism in the 21st century. McGoldrick and Lynch discuss the development of the global 24-hour news media in terms of the impact of the feedback loop as well as the competitive nature of the news media today, which puts pressure on journalists to provide more sensationalised news for consumers. The authors highlight a wide range of obstacles – from editorial control, government and self-censorship, to limited training – at all levels of the news media industry, that prevent journalists from speaking truth to power.

McGoldrick and Lynch then provide some practical methods on how war journalism can be transformed into peace journalism, basing them on an expansion of Galtung’s evaluation model. They also, significantly, provide new terms of reference for journalists, which, for example transform the previously understood role of journalists as watchdog, into that of enabler; from commentator to communicator; from promoting debate to promoting dialogue; exploring the complexity of a situation rather than looking at the basic ‘facts’; and letting the public rather than the newsroom set the agenda, allowing the views of ordinary people to be taken into consideration (46). These new terms of reference come with a new language of how parties in conflict are described and understanding the correct use of conflict terminology.

**An evaluation of Fiji’s news media**

Evaluation, along the parameters of the Galtung model, of the standard practices of the Fiji news media in the context of reporting the 2006 coup d’état reveals that while indicators of war journalism can be found in all the categories, indicators of peace journalism are also present.
Peace/conflict– or war/violence–oriented

The Fiji news media coverage of the 2006 coup demonstrates a number of indicators in the war/violence orientation. The focus during coverage has been on the military versus the ousted government, military abuses of human rights directed against critics of the coup, the military against the international community and the military against the news media. With very little investigative journalism, coverage has been based on a closed space and time, focusing on the cause of the coup and exits for the military. The conflict between the news media and the military has led to ‘us–them’ journalism. Events-based reporting can be understood as reactive journalism and there has been considerable focus on the visible effects of violence. However, it is possible to find indicators of peace journalism within this category. For example, there has been a consistent effort to make the conflict transparent, give a voice to all parties and examine the invisible effects of violence, especially in terms of trauma and damage to structure and culture.

Truth- or propaganda-oriented

While the news media was originally propaganda-oriented in terms of weight of coverage of the statements from the military, it has increasingly shifted towards the truth-oriented categories in terms of exposing untruths of both sides. This has helped the news media retain its credibility although it has brought it into conflict with the military regime.

People- or elite-oriented

The majority of news reporting in Fiji has been elite-oriented because it has focused on the conflict between the military and government, the military and politicians, the military and senior public servants and businesspeople, the military and the leadership of the Methodist Church in Fiji, the military and the chiefs, and the military and the international community. Even those who are presented as voices of the voiceless are not given enough attention. However, the fact that some consideration is given to those who represent the grass-roots communities and coverage of the ongoing processes to resolve the conflict does match some indicators in the people-oriented category.

Solution- or victory-oriented

The news media’s stance against the military has meant that reporting is victory-oriented. The position to push for the restoration of democracy through the return to barracks of the military and the holding of elections at the earliest possible date means that other options and attempts for peaceful resolutions are not reported in the same light as the options that the news media feels are important. However, the coverage of the work of the National Council for Building a Better Fiji and the proposed People’s Charter for Change, Peace and Progress, the President’s Political Dialogue Forum and Pacific Islands Forum Working Group on Fiji are ways in which the news media highlighting peace initiatives and the prevention of further conflict. Such solution-oriented journalism is a further indicator of the practice of some type of peace journalism.
Making the case for peace journalism

While the foregoing evaluation shows that the Fiji news media is currently practising war journalism, it also reveals some potential for a transformation to peace journalism. These elements of peace journalism are found in the journalistic ideal of ‘objectivity’ when reporting stories, resulting in the aim for transparency and balanced reportage and looking for different angles to a story. The news media now also accepts that governments, businesses and organisations have media strategies in which how a story may be covered and the impact of the story are taken into consideration before statements are released and action taken. These indicators provide the starting point from which peace journalism can be developed. I shall now suggest some possible areas in which the transformation process can take place.

The introduction to the political context of Fiji in the beginning of this essay and attached detailed background on the Fiji coup culture is an example of how peace journalism seeks to provide as much of a context to the conflict as possible so that all the facts are known. This enables audience empathy for all the parties involved, so that reasons from both sides and contributing factors to the conflict can be understood. In the case of Fiji, the lack of investigative journalism has led to sensationalism in reporting and speculation instead of the truth. Rika, who has been editor for both print and television news in Fiji, sees a lack in research and awareness of the context in which conflicts occur as the major stumbling block for journalists in Fiji, saying that journalists ‘must concentrate on issues and facts, not go haring off after sensational scoops’ (pers. comm., in an email to the author, 23 November 2008).

The process of conflict analysis offers an invaluable research tool for local journalists, giving them an understanding of the difference between conflict and violence, which are often mistakenly used to mean the same thing in Fiji. An understanding of the cycle of violence would help journalists understand why journalism is an intervention necessary to break the cycle. Conflict analysis also calls for alternative resolutions to be examined, where the win–lose situation can be transformed into a win–win situation. A peace journalism approach to the current processes of the People’s Charter for Change, Peace and Progress and the Presidential Political Dialogue Forum and other attempts at conflict resolution would shift focus away from supporters who insist on these processes as a prerequisite to democracy and dissenters who insist that these process can only take place within a democracy, and towards examination of the processes for what they offer in terms of peaceful resolutions to the conflict.

Adding to research is the issue of truth and propaganda, which is often tied to what or whom the source of information represents in the context of the story. Among the Fiji news media, there is a reliance on official sources for the basis of stories, with a response sought from the official opposition in order to give some semblance of balance. Peace journalism takes the focus away from the proponents of the conflict and seeks as wide as possible a cross section of views in order to find alternative views and responses. This includes talking to the people rather than the politicians to find out how they are affected, which shifts the focus from the elite to the people. While academics, civil society organisations and religious organisations can be considered elite, if their commentaries on the situation take into account the impact of the conflict on everyday life, it can serve in the opening up of the discourse on the conflict. The news media, particularly newspapers, provide this avenue through the publishing of such opinion articles.
An area that McGoldrick and Lynch point out as an important aspect of peace journalism is the role of journalists in social negotiation. By examining the conflict through the practice of peace journalism, highlighting peace initiatives and focusing on peacemakers and peaceful solutions, journalists ‘can help to create the conditions for peace’ (McGoldrick & Lynch 2000:22). Again, the way in which stories relating to the People’s Charter and Presidential Forum are covered could contribute significantly to this.

There has been an increasing acknowledgement that even in its broadest sense, peace needs inclusive and participatory communication. At the conclusion of its 2008 Congress, the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) declared that ‘enabling people to tell their stories and advocating for these stories to be heard are vital ways to overcome injustice and equality’ (WACC 2008). In Fiji there are a number of non-governmental, civil society and community organisations and individuals working to promote a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Some offer analysis and critiques based on research that local media organisations do not have the resources to undertake. Others offer an alternative perspective on the conflict, such as gender issues, while others contribute to social negotiation. It is important that any efforts to practise peace journalism give a voice to these ‘other voices’.

**Conclusion**

A considered process of peace journalism is essentially one of reframing the news, or more precisely, of widening the frame in which the news story is put. A wider frame allows more of the picture to be seen and more voices to be heard, making news more inclusive, and allows more opportunities for peaceful resolution to be discussed.

It must be pointed out that much of the work of Galtung and Lynch and McGoldrick on peace journalism has been focused on covering distant conflicts. While all the same concepts and methods apply to practising peace journalism during a local conflict, it is more difficult because local journalists are often subjected to influence, personal, political, communal pressure and threats against themselves and their families, as was the case in the 2000 putsch and the 2006 coup d’état. At the same time, the local journalists play an influential role in the shape any discourse on the conflict will assume and the direction it will take.

Peace journalism offers another option to the way conflict is understood and can be addressed. The models of Galtung, Lynch and McGoldrick provide simple steps that can be followed to enable the transformation of the practice of war/violence journalism to peace/conflict journalism in Fiji. This can provide the majority of local journalists, who have little formal academic qualification, with an understandable framework in which to work and make a positive contribution to the society in which they live. At the core of the transformation lies the understanding of conflict, which leads to a paradigm shift in the understanding of the role of the journalist in reporting conflict and reporting within a conflict.
The experiences of 2000, 2006 and the ongoing crisis have induced local editors and journalists in Fiji to accept that a change in the current methods of journalism is important if they are to continue to play a meaningful and positive role in Fiji’s future. Peace journalism provides an ethical option where a new understanding of objectivity, balance, conflict and peace provide the basis for engaging communication and the opportunity to resolve Fiji’s coup culture.

Notes

1 Sanjay Ramesh (2006) gives a good account of the conflict between the Fijian military and government in the period December 2003 to January 2006.

2 This figure is difficult to verify, given that media censorship continues. Some sources put the number of journalists detained since 2009 at between 10 and 20. Most detentions are for no longer than 24 to 48 hours.

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