



## Conflict reporting in the South Pacific

### *Why peace journalism has a chance*

*David Robie*

#### **Abstract**

Peace journalism is hardly a new concept, Galtung and Ruge having provided a key conceptual underpinning in 1965 and in later studies. However, while it flourished significantly in parts of the globe in the 1990s, notably the Philippines, albeit frequently referred to there as ‘conflict-sensitive journalism’, it has only relatively recently become an approach seriously considered as applicable in a South Pacific context, especially in the wake of the Bougainville civil war and the Solomon Islands ethnic conflict. With other political upheavals such as four coups d’état in Fiji in two decades, paramilitary revolts in Vanuatu, riots in Tahiti and Tonga, protracted conflict in Papua New Guinea’s Highlands, and the pro-independence insurrection in New Caledonia in the 1980s, conflict resolution poses challenges for the region’s journalists and their education and training. Peace journalism is one approach that can arguably make sense of a region that has become increasingly complex, politically strained and violent, yet the concept is generally eschewed by mainstream media as a threat to the core values of ‘traditional journalism’ itself. This article examines conflict trends in the South Pacific, discusses the concept of peace journalism and argues that journalists can take a more constructive approach to reporting conflict in the region.

**Keywords:** conflict reporting, conflict resolution, war reporting, peace journalism



So-called mainstream journalism [is] committed almost exclusively in the interests of power, not people.

*John Pilger 2010*

## **Introduction**

The study of wars and news media portrayal and reportage of conflict has been well developed as an academic discipline, termed by some as 'war journalism' (Keeble, Tulloch & Zollman 2010:2). But the study of peace journalism lags far behind. While the Melanesian subregion of the South Pacific, in particular, has been branded by some political analysts as an 'arc of instability' (Alfred Deakin Lectures 2001; Dibb 2002; Duncan & Chand 2002; Firth 2005; Henderson & Watson 2005) because of upheavals such as the four Fiji coups d'état since 1987, Solomon Islands ethnic conflict, the Bougainville civil war and pro-independence disturbances in New Caledonia, journalism models deployed by the region's media have largely focused on 'conflict' or 'war' reporting as a predominant news value. There has been less reporting or even debate on process or alternative paradigms. While a primary Australian view of the region projects a 'more demanding and potentially dangerous neighbourhood' (Dibb 2002:7; Hegarty 2005), New Zealand argues from a far more 'Pacific' perspective that sees the region as perhaps less threatening (McCarthy 2005; James 2006). However, an Australian media conflict perspective that eschews notions of peace journalism generally prevails.

Peace journalism is hardly a new concept, Galtung and Ruge having provided a key conceptual underpinning in 1965 and in later studies. However, while it flourished significantly in parts of the globe in the 1990s, notably the Philippines, albeit frequently referred to there as 'conflict-sensitive journalism', it has only relatively recently become an approach seriously considered as applicable in a South Pacific context, especially in the wake of the Bougainville civil war and the Solomon Islands conflict (Kabutaulaka 2001; Fraenkel 2004a). With other political upheavals such as the Fiji coups, paramilitary revolts in Vanuatu, riots in Tahiti and Tonga, protracted conflict in Papua New Guinea's Highlands, and the pro-independence insurrection in New Caledonia in the 1980s, conflict resolution poses challenges for the region's journalists and their education and training. Centres of peace and conflict resolution research in Australia and New Zealand have increasingly turned to peace journalism as a subject for inquiry, though it is still in its infancy as a discipline for study in the Pacific. The discipline is sometimes seen as an approach in an academic and practical context that can arguably make sense of a region that has become increasingly complex, politically strained and violent. Yet peace journalism is generally eschewed by mainstream media as a threat to the core values of 'traditional journalism' itself. This article examines conflict trends in the South Pacific, discusses the concept of peace journalism and argues that journalists can take a more constructive approach to reporting conflict in the region.

### **Peace journalism: 'Exposing truths on all sides'**

War journalism often focuses on violence as its own cause and is less open to examining the deep structural origins of the conflict (Galtung & Vincent 1992). Heavy reliance on official sources leads to a general zero-sum analysis and deepens divisions. 'Peace' is defined as victory plus ceasefire. It is of little consequence that the deeper causes of the conflict remain unresolved, condemned to resurface later. After a period of violent conflict, such as the civil war in Bougainville, war journalism concentrates on visible effects—those killed or wounded and damage to physical surroundings,

not the impact on the people's psychology, sociology or culture. A decade after the end of the Bougainville war, the people are still recovering and rebuilding their lives in the autonomous region, emerging from under the shadow of a struggle popularised by New Zealand author Lloyd Jones in his 2006 novel *Mister Pip*. War journalism also dehumanises the 'enemy' and is 'propaganda-oriented, elite-focused and victory-oriented, and tend[s] to concentrate on institutions (the "controlled society")', as Keeble, Tulloch and Zollmann express it in a recent book advancing the theoretical framework for journalism and conflict resolution (2010:2).

In contrast, the notion of peace journalism offers a

'voice to all parties', focused on the invisible effects of violence (trauma and glory, damage to the social structures), aimed to expose 'untruths on all sides', [. . . is] 'people-oriented', [gives] 'a voice to the voiceless' and [is] solution-oriented. (ibid.)

According to Romano (2010), drawing on Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick (2005), at the simplest level:

Peace journalism relies on traditions of fact-based journalism, with close scrutiny of word and images. Journalists must avoid emotive and imprecise expressions, dichotomies of good versus bad, a focus on the victimhood and grievances or the abuses and misdemeanours of one side only, and the use of racial and cultural identities when they are not necessary. Journalists must attribute unsubstantiated claims to their sources rather than presenting them as facts, avoid focussing on the victimhood or causes of one party to the exclusion of [an] other, and seek diverse sources and viewpoints. (Romano 2010:27)

In essence, much of this is good practice in traditional journalism but in times of conflict journalists 'do not always scrupulously' follow such ideals (Romano 2010) and there have been frequent examples of this in the South Pacific (e.g. Field 2005; Moala 2001; Robie 2001; Woodley 2000). In a Fiji context, flawed news media responses to the George Speight attempted coup of 19 May 2000 illustrated this. As seasoned *Fiji Daily Post* editor Jale Moala noted later:

[That] coup polarised the races in Fiji, or so it seemed. And in seeming to do so, it created a situation in which many reporters found it difficult to focus on the issues from a totally impartial point of view as they were swept away by the euphoria of the moment and the tension and the emotion that charged the event. This was true of both indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian reporters alike.

Fear may have also played a role. As a result, the perpetrators of the terrorist action, led by George Speight, received publicity that at the time seemed to legitimise their actions and their existence. (Moala 2001:125)

According to Canadian journalist and media development in conflict specialist Ross Howard, it does not take a war correspondent to recognise that journalism and news media can incite violent conflict. He offers several examples, including:

In 1994, Radio Milles Collines in Rwanda incited genocide by employing metaphors and hate speech. Serbian state broadcasting during the 1995 and 1999 Balkan conflicts is almost equally infamous. Incompetent journalism and partisan news management can generate misinformation which inflames xenophobia, ethnic hatred, class warfare and violent conflict in almost any fragile state. The anti-Thai violence in Cambodia in 2003, triggered entirely by partisan media, is a more recent example. Radio Netherlands' website on counteracting hate media indicates that hate radio is currently operating on five continents. (Howard 2009:1)

However, Howard also adds that less recognised is the potential for journalism to influence conflict resolution. Yet in recent years a range of literature has been developed critiquing the potential for media to 'promote conflict resolution rather than war and violence' (Keeble, Tulloch & Zollmann 2010:2). Keeble, Tulloch and Zollmann, for example, cite a 17-point plan (see figure 1) for practising peace journalism outlined by Lynch and McGoldrick, who summarise by saying that peace journalism is when journalists use the insights of conflict analysis and transformation to 'update the concepts of balance, fairness and accuracy in reporting' (2005:5). Howard argues that peace journalism can 'inject context, an appreciation for root causes, and a new capacity to seek and analyse possible solutions, to the otherwise daily repeating of violent incidents as news'. For journalists and the news media in the South Pacific, there are growing opportunities for seeking alternative models that are more appropriate for the region's realities than Australian or New Zealand newsroom experience, where peace journalism is rarely debated. The Philippines is one such notable example.

**Figure 1** Practising peace journalism

1.	Avoid concentrating always on what divides parties, on the differences between what each says they want. Instead, try asking questions that may reveal areas of common ground.
2.	Avoid focusing exclusively on the suffering, fears and grievances of only one party . . . Instead, treat as equally newsworthy the suffering, fears and grievances of all parties.
3.	Avoid 'victimising' language like 'devastated', 'defenceless', 'pathetic', 'tragedy', which tells us only what has been done to and could be done for a group of people by others. This is disempowering and limits the options for change. Instead, report on what has been done and could be done by the people.
4.	Avoid focusing exclusively on the human rights abuses, misdemeanours and wrongdoings of only one side. Instead, try to name all wrong-doers and treat allegations made by all the parties in a conflict equally seriously.

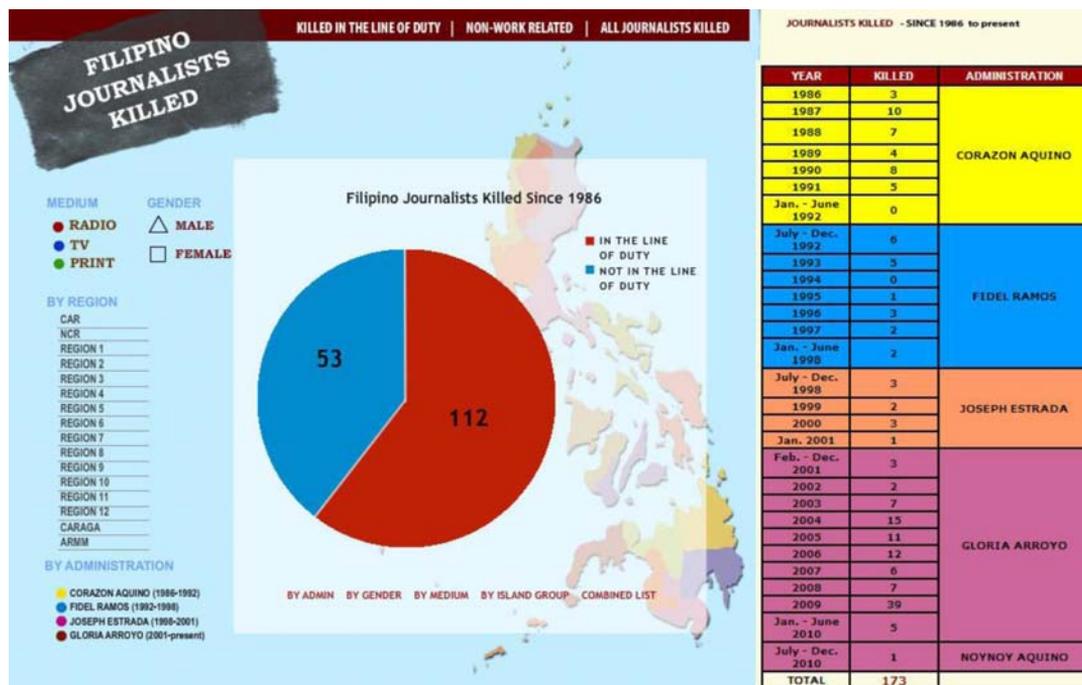
*Source:* Extracted from Lynch and McGoldrick's 17-point plan for practising peace journalism (cited by Keeble, Tulloch and Zollmann 2010:3).

### The Philippines: peace journalism in a culture of impunity

One of the cradles of the development of peace journalism studies has been in the Philippines, where advocates of the discipline have been forced to contend with both a culture of suspicion due to a protracted Maoist insurgency being waged by the New People’s Army (NPA) against the authorities and a culture of impunity over the widespread murders of news workers, activists, and civil and human rights advocates. Suspicion and scepticism have led to the branding of peace journalism as variously either a ‘left-wing’ or ‘right-wing’ manipulation and journalism educators have often been more comfortable employing the term *conflict-sensitive journalism* instead.

Paradoxically, while having one of the ‘freest and least fettered’ media systems in Asia (cited by Patindol 2010:194), the Philippines also ranks as one of the most dangerous countries for news media, after Iraq, because of the high death rate of local journalists (figure 2). Journalists have been assassinated in the Philippines with impunity for almost a quarter of a century—ever since the end of martial law and the flight of ousted dictator Ferdinand Marcos into exile in 1986. The media played a critical role in the People Power Revolution that led to the downfall of Marcos. In more than 23 years since democracy was restored, the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines recorded 136 killings of journalists, or an average of one killing every two months (cited by Arao 2010). The NUJP and other groups monitoring media freedom noted ‘the killings have worsened under the Macapagal–Arroyo administration [until recently defeated at the polls] as an average of one journalist got murdered every month from 2001 to 2009’ (ibid.).

Figure 2 Filipino journalists killed under four administrations, 1986–2010



Source: Centre for Media Freedom and Responsibility (MMFR), Manila, Philippines, 2010. Available at: [http://www.cmfr-phil.org/map/index\\_inline.html](http://www.cmfr-phil.org/map/index_inline.html)

The NUJP said in its year-end statement after the slaughter of 32 ambushed journalists that 2009 would be 'forever remembered as a year of unprecedented tribulation for the Philippine press, with the November 23 massacre in Ampatuan town in Maguindanao [a province on the southern island of Mindanao] making its grisly mark in history as the worst ever attack on the media'. The long-awaited start of the trial on 1 September 2010 was postponed after just one hour by Judge Jocelyn Solis Reyes, after a defence lawyer argued more time was needed to comment on pre-trial documents. Ampatuan town mayor Andal Ampatuan, Jr and 16 police officers, who allegedly served as members of the Ampatuan clan's private army in Maguindanao, are currently on trial. They face murder charges for the massacre of 57 people, including the journalists and media workers, who were travelling in a convoy with a political candidate running against Ampatuan Jr for Governor of Maguindanao.

In the context of such killings of journalists, media educators have questioned how to advance peace journalism as a discipline when practitioners are faced with opposition, 'not just from individuals and groups but from the entire media system itself' (Patindol 2010:193):

For peace journalism to be sustainable, those who have been trained in the field need to band together and engage in mutually helpful exchanges, building solidarity as they jointly work towards implementing peace journalism in the mainstream. (ibid.)

This drive for solidarity led to the establishment of a movement of journalists, communication educators and industry professionals trained in 'basic peace journalism' in Bacolod City, Philippines, in 2004 to establish a Peace and Conflict Journalism Network (PECOJON). Since then, this movement has spawned several national and international networks, with about 250 members in the Philippines and 165 members from 15 nations. But the rampant killing of news people, particularly radio reporters and talkback hosts, has led to a sustained debate about ethics and professionalism in the Filipino media. Columnist Danny Arao raised a key question in his weekly commentary in *Asian Correspondent* (2010): How should journalism be taught at a time when journalists are killed with impunity and the government remains hostile to press freedom? He sought answers to these three queries:

1. Should aspiring journalists be taught to practise 'cold neutrality' in handling issues?
2. Is it right for a professor to encourage students to follow the law consistently?
3. Can professors and students simply dismiss the media situation and limit the classroom discussions to the theories related to journalistic writing, with special emphasis on grammar, syntax and diction?

Arao also noted that the Philippines, given the constitutional guarantees and laws protecting freedom of speech, is said to be the freest press in Asia. But he also sounded a warning: 'There is, of course, a difference between freedom of speech and freedom after speech as journalists face dire consequences for exercising what is supposed to be their constitutional rights' (ibid.:1). 'Cold neutrality', argues Arao, simply cannot be observed in a situation where the killings of journalists 'become the highest form of censorship'. 'The stakes are too high for journalists to practice indifference in the culture of impunity that gives rise to media repression,' he added. While laws are necessary to maintain order in a society, there are laws that end up 'muzzling the media instead of protecting them'.

Killings of journalists inevitably encourage many other media people to embrace peace journalism, or to become 'activists'. Arao also argues that there should be no dichotomy in journalism between form and content because both are important. A critically important role of a journalist is to shape public opinion and therefore the ability to analyse is equally important with writing skills. Ideally, peace journalists move beyond presenting 'just the facts', because of their awareness of how easily these facts can be 'manipulated by narrow interests and unchallenged mythologies, especially from traditional elites' (Howard 2009:3).

### Reporting Pacific conflict

While reporting in the South Pacific in the past three decades, I covered the assassination of Pierre Declercq, secretary-general of the pro-independence Union Calédonienne in New Caledonia (1981), the 'Black Friday' rioting in Pape'ete (1983), the Hienghène massacre in New Caledonia (1984), the 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 (1989/1990). 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 Yeiwéné Yeiwéné for what he [Wea] perceived to be a betrayal of the independence movement by the signing of the Matignon Accords. Wea was himself shot dead by one of Tjibaou's bodyguards (Robie 1989:280).

Subsequently, for me as a journalism educator from 1993 (when I joined the University of Papua New Guinea after being an independent foreign correspondent for many years) the emphasis was more on what our student journalist newsroom focused on covering. Examples included the then ongoing Bougainville civil war; the Sandline mercenary crisis (1997) and the shooting of three students at UPNG (2001). Later, in 1998, I was appointed to the University of the South Pacific, where the students covered the George Speight coup in Fiji (May 2000) and other major news events (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) and Belau president Haruo Remeliik (1985); Kanak independence leader Eloi Machoro (1985); New Caledonian independence leaders Jean-Marie Tjibaou and Yeiwéné Yeiwéné (1989) and 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:

**Figure 3** Armed conflicts in the South Pacific region, 1980–2010

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)
A1980s	Independence struggle in New Caledonia (France) (more than 50 deaths)
1987, 2000, 2006	Four coups in Fiji (first two coups bloodless; at least 20 deaths in Speight coup in 2000; the Bainimarama coup in 2006, bloodless so far*)
1990s	Bougainville war of independence (estimated 10,000 deaths)
1999–2006	Solomon Islands ethnic conflict (estimated 200 deaths)

Source: Adapted from Henderson (2005: 5).

\*According to Field (2005:261).

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. (2005:8)

The South Pacific military and paramilitary forces have contributed to violence in the region, particularly in Melanesia. An estimated 120,000 Pacific Islanders have died in conflicts over the past quarter of a century (see figure 3). 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 followed in Fiji in December 2006, with the military chief and elected prime minister having been engaged on a collision course for more than six months prior to the putsch. Some argue that the abrogation of the 1997 Constitution on 10 April 2009 and sacking of the republic's judges amounted to a 'fifth coup'.
- 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 (namely, France, with the attack on an environmental ship in Auckland Harbour though bound for a peaceful protest in French Polynesia).

- Systematic military oppression—by Indonesian forces in West Papua since Jakarta seized the province from the Dutch colonisers in 1963. 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 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, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu—and arguably in the Polynesian monarchy of Tonga with seven deaths in November 2006 rioting—are fuelled by local disputes, including demands for autonomy and/or independence, clan-based or ethnic divisions or land-related disputes (Fraenkel, 2004b).

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: 120)

The major conflict in the region has been West Papua, often billed as the ‘forgotten war’, yet this issue has been largely neglected by international media and the issue of state terrorism has rarely 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 2005:155). 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 2005:155)

Now, through a security treaty signed with Indonesia in November 2006, Australia is becoming even more overtly involved in the repression of pro-independence activists (Forbes 2006). Diplomats expected that the Indonesia and Australia Framework for Security Cooperation would put an end to the diplomatic rift caused when Australia granted 43 Papuans asylum early in 2006. Both nations

agreed to respect each other's territorial integrity. The treaty recognises Indonesian sovereignty over Papua and commits both countries to suppressing independence activists. Sophie Grig (2004) condemned Indonesian atrocities in West Papua as the worst in the modern world in terms of 'scale and ferocity'. Amnesty International and other human rights organisations have documented these atrocities (Amnesty International 1997; South Asia Human Rights Documentation 2006; West Papua Advocacy Team 2010). 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 tacitly support the oppressors.

According to Fraenkel (2005:122), 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':

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, for example, is in the vanguard of those who have brought an independent and critical perspective in the media. A curator's commentary for a Sydney exhibition of his work in 2006 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 2006:158). 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. By the 2006 Census, the number of Pacific people in New Zealand had climbed to 266,000 (6.9% of the population) and was greater than the populations of several Pacific Islands Forum nations ('Demographics of NZ's Pacific population' 2006). According to James Tully, New Zealand coverage of Pacific affairs has been eroded by relatively few resources devoted to foreign news and by 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 2005:296)

## Selected conflict examples

### *State terrorism in the Antipodes*

The only real case of terrorism in the South Pacific has not involved so-called terrorist groups but has 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 more than two decades later (see King 1986; Robie 1986, 1989, 2005a, 2006, 2007b; Maclellan & Chesneaux 1998; Maclellan 2005).

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 (Robie 2007b). But they had surely lost any spurious claim to privacy over the act of terrorism by publishing their own memoirs—*Agent Secrète* (Prieur with Pontaut 1995) and *Carnets Secrets* (Mafart & Guisnel 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 and Prieur*. TVNZ, 2006)

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 (*Agence France-Presse* 2006). But judges Mark O'Regan, Grant Hammond and Terence Arnold said they were satisfied that the 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 and Prieur v TVNZ*, 2006)

This historic footage was iconic of a critical conflict issue confronting New Zealand, but also the entire Pacific region, and is invaluable for peace journalism debate. It is also revelatory in the context of the digital revolution and the impact of media imagery on peace and conflict-sensitive journalism. TVNZ's success in the 20-year struggle to get the court tapes aired was initially short-lived. After some of the footage was broadcast and posted online in news bulletins on 7 August, the spies' lawyers won a further court stay in a bid for a final appeal, preventing the *Sunday* programme from showing the clip. The Supreme Court dismissed an application for leave of appeal on 26 September and *Sunday* finally broadcast the footage on 1 October ('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 off-line on TVNZ's website, citing temporary removal for 'legal reasons' ('Taped confession', 2006). In January 1987, a year after my book about the bombing and nuclear testing in the Pacific, *Eyes of Fire* (1986) had originally been published and six months before the first 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, I faced oral accusations of being a 'spy' and intimidatory questions were levelled at me over my *Rainbow Warrior* book. However, after four hours of questioning I was released (see Robie 1987a, b, c; Robie 2005a:167).

### ***West Papua and the 'Asia Pacific border'***

The Indonesian-controlled province of (West) Papua is a tragedy of the postcolonial era, according to Maire Leadbeater (2005:493) of New Zealand's Indonesia Human Rights Committee and author of a book about East Timor and allegations of New Zealand's complicity in Indonesian colonialism (Leadbeater 2006). American Samoan congressman Eni Faleomavaega (2001) regards West Papua as a 'classic example of colonialism in the world today'. 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 previous Labour government took office in 1999 has been 'focused on avoiding any disruption to New Zealand's relationship with Indonesia' (Leadbeater 2005:495). 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 indigenous Papuan people have suffered under one of the most repressive and unjust systems of colonial occupation in the twentieth century. As in East Timor, where 200,000 East Timorese are reported to have lost their lives, the Indonesian military has been ruthless in West Papua (Nevins 2005). 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; Crocombe 2007:461; Faleomavaega 2001:2).

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 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. Barely 18 months later, Chief Eluay was kidnapped and assassinated by Kopassus special forces. 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 not to 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 (Zweifel 2010), 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 that other media have little interest: 'The main reason for this is, I believe, is the absence of First World protagonists—most notably, Anglo-Saxons.' (Zweifel 2010:69). 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 (2006:102), 'there has been a dramatic decline in the PNG press coverage of West Papua over the past 20 years'. 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 in November 2006 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 (2006) reported about the 'open Asia–Pacific border' in a revealing exposé about corruption and intrigue.

Traditional forms of journalism in the Pacific region have often failed to report accurately and fairly on the neocolonial exploitation of a disputed territory. On the other hand, the limited reporting on Papua in mainstream media focuses on the allegations of human rights by the Indonesian military occupation and the impact on resource exploitation and environmental degradation. Yet a peace journalism template would build on empowerment factors that could lead to peaceful resolution.

### **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, and trade disputes
- *environmental*—climate change/sea level rise, environmental degradation, natural disasters, nuclear issues, and unsustainable resource exploitation such as fisheries and logging
- *social issues*—land disputes, ethnic tension, social inequalities, unemployment, high illiteracy rates, religious differences and gender inequality
- *health*—infectious disease (such as HIV and 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.

All these issues have a potential peace journalism perspective. Richard Rhodes (2008) refers to a journalism that is 'more assertive in the pursuit of a story, more sceptical towards the mighty and more sympathetic towards the weak. The challenge is to strike a balance.' Rukhsana Aslam (2010:346) calls for greater involvement by educators and for peace journalism to be included in curricula. She sees a 'great need' in professional journalists' education and training to promote knowledge about conflict and analysis and awareness of their 'social responsibility' role to prepare them better for challenges in the field.

### **The Pacific journalist and education**

Pacific journalists face major challenges reporting these complex issues involving conflict in the region, and training and education of reporters has become a growing challenge. Little context is provided that would potentially nurture an environment supportive to notions of peace journalism. Most journalism educational contexts are heavily influenced by Australia and New Zealand institutions, where peace journalism is not widely researched or taught. Only two countries in the region have university-level journalism schools with full degree programmes—Fiji (University of the South Pacific) and Papua New Guinea (two schools, one at Divine Word University and the other at University of Papua New Guinea). However, there are five fledgling Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) level journalism schools in Fiji, Samoa (at the National University of Samoa), Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu.

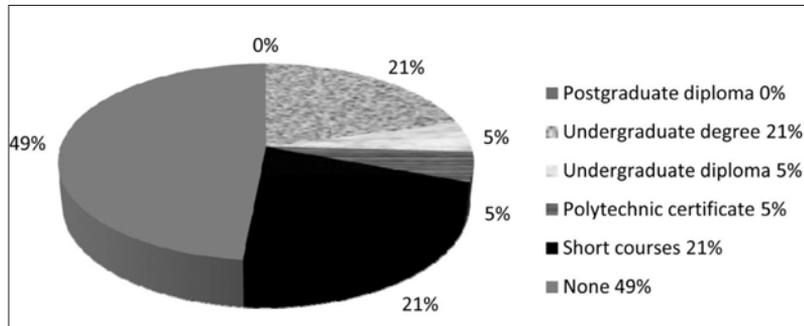
In two media industry surveys in the two major Pacific countries with the largest economies and the most developed media industry, Fiji and Papua New Guinea, marked differences were found in the profiles of journalists in each country—especially in education and professional training, salaries

and ethical attitudes (Robie 2004; Philemon 1999). In fact, rather than a 'Pacific style journalism' as flagged by earlier researchers such as Layton (1993) and Waqavonovono (1981), distinctive Fiji and PNG journalism profiles and approaches were found to be emerging. In general, Papua New Guinea journalists have been better educated, are older and 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. Since the end of the Bougainville war in December 2002 after the Operation Bel Isi conflict resolution process, a growing interest in peace journalism has evolved in Papua New Guinea. Belatedly, a similar interest has been growing in Fiji, as demonstrated by this edition of the *Journal of Pacific Studies*.

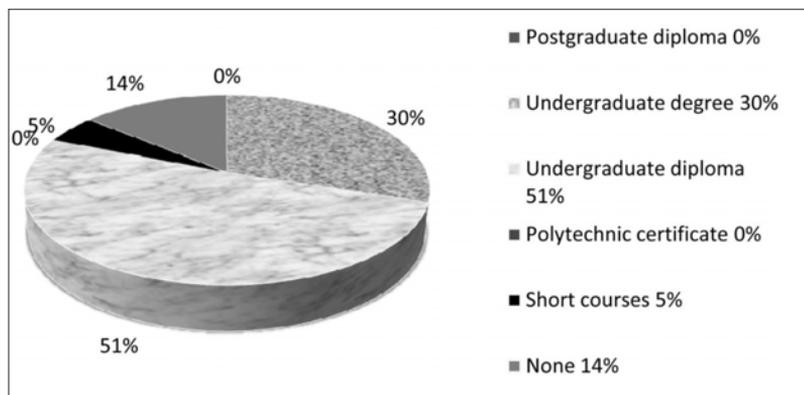
It is in the area of educational qualifications and training that significant statistical differences between the two countries are reflected. Surveyed Papua New Guinean journalists have been found to be more highly qualified than their Fiji counterparts. Between 1998–1999 and 2001, the proportion of PNG journalists with a tertiary degree or diploma has climbed from 73 % in the earlier 1998–1999 pilot survey to 81%, almost threefold higher than that in Fiji. In the same three-year period the number of Fiji journalists with a degree or diploma rose by more than a third from 14% to 26%. 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%) and 14% 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.

On one hand, the typical Fiji journalist is (marginally) most likely to be male, single and under the age of 25, a native Fijian speaker with less than four years' experience. He works for English-language media and is a school leaver with no formal training or higher education (figure 4). On the other hand, a typical Papua New Guinea journalist is (also marginally) most likely to be female, single, under the age of 29, a Tok Pisin speaker with about five years of experience. She is working in English-language media and most probably she has a university degree or diploma from either the University of Papua New Guinea or Divine Word University (figure 5) (Robie, 2004: 235–6).

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

**Figure 4** Journalism qualifications in Fiji, 2001

Source: Robie 2004:217.

**Figure 5** Journalism qualifications in Papua New Guinea, 2001

Source: Robie 2004: 218

However, the Papua New Guinean journalist most probably 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.

## Conclusion

Against this educational and training mediascape, how can notions of peace journalism or conflict sensitive journalism take root? As Howard notes (2009:1), conventional journalism training and development 'generally contains little or no reference to the wisdom of five decades of academic and professional study of conflict'. He argues that conflict analysis theory and skills are still not considered mainstream journalism prerequisites or practices. However, Howard also cites examples of the gradual development of journalism training courses that are indeed recognising 'conflict-sensitive journalism' as a methodology. While such training includes core journalism values and

skills, this approach includes an introduction to conflict analysis, the concept of conflict and most common causes, the forms of violence by which conflict is played out, and some insights into the techniques of resolution.

On an optimistic note, Howard suggests these added capabilities developed through education and training lead to a 'better story selection and much more insightful writing and broadcasting' (p. 2). And he adds: 'At best, they substantially expand a stressed community's dialogue and possibly offer glimpses of common ground'.

Filipino columnist Danny Arao (2010), in answer to his questions raised earlier in this article, suggests that 'cold neutrality' actually becomes 'counterproductive' to the shaping of public opinion when it is considered that a journalist is 'expected to analyse and not just present data'. He argues that the challenge for student journalists over pressing social issues is to acquire the 'necessary skills and knowledge of articulating their analysis in a manner that can be understood by their audiences'. He says that in order for the teaching of journalism to be effective, the profession should 'remain critical of the forces that perpetuate media repression'.

Peace journalism or conflict-sensitive journalism education and training ought to provide a context for journalists to ensure that both sides are included in any reports. The reporting would also include people who condemn the violence and offer solutions. Blame would not be levelled at any ethnicity, nor would combatants be repeatedly identified by their ethnicity. But the reporting would constantly seek to explain the deeper underlying causes of the conflict. This approach to journalism surely could offer some hope for conflict resolution in the Pacific and a peaceful future.

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