

**1999 Australian Press
Council Fellow:
David Robie
Report and speeches**

edited by Jack R Herman



An Occasional Paper

CONTENTS

Introduction	3
1999 Australian Press Council Fellow Report	
Part 1:	
Dilemmas for the Pacific news media	4
Part 2:	
Fellowship visit to Australia	13
Speeches	
Cyberspace media and the Pacific's political frontier	16
South Pacific newsroom training and research: Trends and dilemmas	23

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INTRODUCTION

Professor Dennis Pearce (Chairman, Australian Press Council)

The Council has, since 1995, sponsored a Press Council Fellowship to bring to Australia an international expert to meet with, and talk to, the Australian media and the public.

The earlier Fellows mainly carried out the latter function, addressing a number of meetings and seminars in the various states. However, the 1999 Fellow, David Robie, took a different approach. He saw his role as educating the Australian audiences about the south Pacific media and their problems, but also saw a role in learning about the way in which the Australian media worked and building links between the Australian media and the south Pacific.

During his Fellowship, David visited Brisbane, Sydney and Canberra. While the quality of his contributions to seminars and discussions in all three locations was very informative, the most lasting effect of his visit will be through the publication of this report.

The report itself is in two parts, the first detailing the concerns that dominate the thinking of the south Pacific media, and the second with his visit to Australia and what he learned. His recommendations will give us all pause for thought.

Appended to the report are two of the papers he delivered while in Australia, one on the Internet aspects of south Pacific media activities and the other on education and training of journalists in the region.

David Robie's visit helped us all to learn more about what was happening in our region. I trust that this volume will spread that education wider within the Australian media community.

The previous Fellows have been:

1995: Professor John Soloski, a US defamation law expert

1996: Professor Claude-Jean Bertrand, a French academic specialising in the study of media accountability systems. He delivered the Twentieth Anniversary Address.

1997: Lord Wakeham, Chair of the UK Press Complaints Commission, who addressed the Sydney Institute on the question of privacy and the press.

There was no Fellowship awarded in 1998.

Booklets containing the addresses given by Prof Soloski and Prof Bertrand are available from the Council.

1999 Australian Press Council Fellow Report

Part 1: Dilemmas for the Pacific news media

THE DILEMMA for the press, as Benjamin Franklin put it more than two and a half centuries ago, is: "If all printers were determined not to print anything until they were sure it would offend nobody, there would be very little printed."

Today freedom of expression is a universal value. It is enshrined in several international and regional documents, such as the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* — Article 19 — and the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*.

But it has taken a long struggle for press freedom to achieve this. And it needs constant vigilance to preserve it.

Evolving media councils in two South Pacific nations, Fiji and Papua New Guinea, have made major contributions to defending freedom of expression and notions of fairness, balance and accountability in the region, and the raising of professional standards.

They have also helped ward off varying attempts to gag or hinder the news media from carrying out its democratic role in the public interest. Both councils have been assisted by the Australian Press Council.

As Fiji Media Council chairman Daryl Tarte noted in its 1997 annual report:

A free media really means a media free from any interference by government or any kind of censorship. A system that allows a newspaper, radio station or television station to criticise and comment on government policies without fear of being closed down.

In Fiji, editors and news directors have the freedom to express their opinions and to publish information that has leaked from government or commercial sources without fear of recrimination. (Tarte 1997:3)

Nevertheless, pressures and dilemmas continue in the region, often from a cultural as well as a political perspective. While the media in some countries is refreshingly outspoken and courageous; in others there is a worrying trend towards self-censorship.

Journalism education and training is also of growing importance in the Pacific and an important foundation for media freedom.

Yet Pacific media freedom in general, and the Fiji Media Council in particular — branded in June 1999 as a "toothless tiger" by Assistant Information Minister Lekh Ram Vayeshnoi - was facing considerable pressure in mid-year. (Vayeshnoi, 1999: 7)

In extraordinary generalised claims, the minister alleged in Parliament that "arrogant" news media in the Fiji Islands "deny fair and equal coverage to opinions that may be contrary to their agenda; they distort and misrepresent facts to arrive at preconceived conclusions, and they have shown that while quick to criticise others, they drag their feet and are not above refusing to acknowledge their own mistakes". (Ibid: 2)

He highlighted what he claimed to be "a few myths commonly held by the media":

Myth one: That the media is an entity that is above all else in society and has the duty — no, the right — to pass judgement on those it feels inclined to.

No one component of society can be given such all-encompassing powers. When then does the media think they are above everyone else?

Myth two: That the media is beyond reproach and censure.

A media organisation that believes this will soon find it has placed itself beyond the reach of the population it purports to serve — rather like the previous [Rabuka] government, if I may add...

Myth three: That the media knows what is best for everyone else.

Again, this is an autocratic view and does not sit well in a pluralistic society

Myth four: That the media represents the society and that they are therefore the forums for the dissemination of public policy and information.

If the media truly believes this, may I ask them how many of their organisations, particularly the news departments, are a true reflection of our society. Are the decision-makers in these departments an accurate reflection of the ethnic, cultural, religious, economic and political diversity that exists in our society?

Myth five: That the media has the mandate from the public to be their mouthpiece.

But I don't know how the media can take this view. Even contributions to their open columns — which should be the voice of their readership — are doctored, censored and in some cases ignored altogether.

Myth six: That the prerogative rests with the media — and the media alone — of not only what is covered, but the manner in which it is covered.

The term editorial prerogative is used to excuse the media from having to explain their decisions and choice of news, or how they cover it. (Ibid:3-5)

“While the media think they are the watchdogs in the society, they think they require no watchdog,” Vayeshnoi continued. He also talked about his plans for media legislation, presently being dusted off from the draft laws under the Rabuka government.

But one section of Vayeshnoi's speech, at least, struck a more positive chord with Fiji's news media:

The government looks to a dynamic media and an informed media which can act as our own critic. It is not only in our interest to have a strong and vibrant media, but also in the interest of the country as a whole. (Ibid:6)

The Pacific delegation at the first Oceania conference of the World Association for Press Councils (WAPC) in Brisbane on 21-23 June 1999 included the chairs of the Fiji Media Council, Daryl Tarte, and the PNG Media Council, Luke Sela. Two prominent Pacific journalists and publishers who have faced imprisonment or harassment from vindictive governments also spoke — *Samoa Observer* publisher Savea Sanoa Malifa, winner of the 1998 Astor Award for Press Freedom, and *Tongan Times* publisher Kalafi Moala.

Fiji as a model

Both Malifa and Moala look to Fiji's council as a possible model for their countries. Moala, who has been harassed by authorities and was jailed in 1996 for contempt of Parliament, called for the establishment of a press council in Tonga. He said:

We want to be involved in setting up associations such as a press council, and subject ourselves to training which will help us to be more adaptable to a changing government attitude toward the independent press. One of our desires is to see a Press Council set up in Tonga, but the formation of such a council needs to be thought through carefully since 90 per cent of media ownership in Tonga is either the government or the church. (Malifa 1999)

Beneath all the recent hype of the debate in Fiji there are fundamental issues at stake about media freedom and democracy. In a free society open debate must be encouraged, freedom of speech being a central tenet of democracy. But should the news media be given total freedom, and who, as Vayeshnoi questions, should watch the watcher?

Ever since 1971, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), the main body representing the world's journalists, has upheld the Munich Charter, a code which declares:

Every journalist worthy of that name deems it is his/her duty to observe [the charter code of ethics].

Within the general law of each country, the journalist recognises, in professional matters, the jurisdiction of his/her colleagues only; he/she excludes every kind of interference by governments or others.

This is not just a claim for autonomy and quality journalism against political threats, as the media freedom debate in Fiji has often focused on. It is also a claim for autonomy against commercial threats. But the simple fact is that the Fiji news media is committed to improving professional standards — it has busy programmes of industry training organised by the Pacific Islands News Association (PINA), and the Fiji Islands also hosts the fast developing University of the South Pacific regional journalism professional diploma and degree programme at its Laucala campus.

Even so, the Fiji media does a pretty fair job (with some lapses), especially given the limited resources. Codes of ethics and practice already exist — there is no case for legislation. And the self-regulating Fiji Media Council has been doing a good job on the basis of its handful of adjudications so far. As case studies develop, it will improve.

6 - Robie's a Fellow

The notion that a statutory “media council” imposed by government legislation could raise standards in the news media is ill-advised, and jeopardises the progress already achieved. Such a body would have little local or international credibility in “watching” the watchdog.

Most credible contemporary press councils include a tripartite structure — representatives of owners, journalists and the public. And they rely on public censure. The rationale, as Professor Claude-Jean Bertrand, a Paris University based authority on world media accountability systems (MAS) and the 1996 Australian Press Council Fellow, says, is simple. It is a question of “ownership”:

1. Proprietors own the industrial means to obtain, process and distribute the news.
2. Professional journalists own the competence to find, filter and process the news.
3. As for the public, it owns the freedom of speech and press (Bertrand, 1999:1).

According to Bertrand:

A press council is a non-governmental association of people who wish to protect the freedom and quality of the news media, mainly by making them accountable to the public. And they do this mainly (but not only) by receiving complaints from the public, and giving their opinion on such grievances — with no power to punish except by exposure, or publication. (Ibid)

Case study one: Papua New Guinea

Towards the end of 1995, when Papua New Guinea’s Constitutional Review Commission first mooted possible legislation against press freedom, the *Post-Courier* was among the media that greeted the news with more than a degree of pessimism. In a sombre editorial titled PNG HEADED FOR DICTATORSHIP?, the newspaper warned that the move could be the beginning of a drift towards a “dictatorship style of government” in Papua New Guinea (*Post-Courier*, 1996).

Fortunately, the news media organisations in a determined show of unity did their best to head off such a scenario under the CRC’s so-called “Seventh Directive”. In a bold effort to inform the public of the issues at stake — the media organisations made a move to promote public awareness of the importance of freedom of the press and freedom of expression and information as pillars of a democratic society.

A new Media Council of Papua New Guinea was established, incorporating the defunct Press Council but with a wider mandate now covering broadcast media. The revamped council organised a two-day seminar in February 1996 with the theme “Freedom at the crossroads: Mass Media and the Constitution”. Although the CRC media subcommittee did not treat the media seminar as seriously as it ought, and the public largely ignored it, the move was strongly supported by the news media industry, and other interested groups.

It was a healthy barometer reading for the state of the news media and comprehensive news coverage spread its message. There was strong representation of the news media — Anna Solomon, then chairperson of the PNG Media Council; EMTV chief executive John Taylor representing broadcast media; and then *Post-Courier* senior reporter Neville Togarewa representing the journalists’ union. They suggested that the subcommittee might back off recommending further legislation intended to control the news media (*Pacific Journalism Review*, 1996)

In its interim report, drafted after six months of hearings and considering submissions, the CRC subcommittee said: “The existing laws on the media are sufficient and the government should not propose and get Parliament to enact any new restrictive legislation”. However, the subcommittee went on to recommend that an “independent Media Commission” be established. This caused some disquiet because it was argued that the “commission” should have government involvement, including the choice of its members.

The misgivings proved well-founded when three draft media laws emerged in November 1996 with draconian effects for journalists and media organisations — and the public’s right to know. The International Press Institute described the *Media Commission Bill* and the *National Information and Communication Bill* — which sought to register journalists and radio/television presenters, and to license publishers and broadcasters respectively — as both being open to abuse by government authorities.

The draft *Freedom of Information Bill* was a watered down version of what had been expected. In fact, some described it as a “control of information” Bill. Under the proposed *Media Commission Bill*, a nine-member Media Commission, to be appointed by the head of state, would have been given power to refuse or renew application for a certificate of registration. Before a journalist or presenter could be registered, he or she must

have qualifications satisfactory to the commission and be “a fit and proper person”. Fines of up to K2000 were provided for offending “unregistered” journalists.

Among the many critics at the time who condemned the draft legislation were Papua New Guinea’s Chief Ombudsman Simon Pentanu who dismissed the CRC’s drafters as having “no clear aims other than perhaps a number of thinly disguised political agendas”. A PNG Media Council analysis said the two media bills had approached the dilemma of truth with “a heavy handed approach, imposing unacceptable risks on society” (Solomon, 1996:102)

In the face of the public outcry, the Bills were shelved, but fears linger on that similar legislation could be revived.

The original Press Council

Papua New Guinea’s original Press Council was founded almost two decades earlier, in December 1985, with a former judge, William Kaputin, being appointed chairman. Established and funded by the media organisations for “achieving a better industry and promoting good relations between the industry and the public”, it had the following composition (Ibid): Three industry representatives from the *Niugini Nius* (now closed), *Post-Courier* and Word Publishing; one representative from the PNG Journalists’ Association; and two members from the public plus the independent chair. The objectives were to act:

1. As a guardian of the freedom of the press which is an essential element of our democracy; and
2. As a forum to which everyone could make complaints against the press.

The code of ethics endorsed by the old Press Council was a code adopted by the PNG Journalists Association modelled on the 1944 Australian Journalists’ Association code, but it has not been modified or modernised in the two decades since PNG became independent in 1975. The Papua New Guinea code:

1. To report and interpret the news with scrupulous honesty.
2. Not to suppress essential fact and not to distort the truth by omission or wrongful emphasis.
3. To respect confidences in all circumstances.
4. To observe at all times the fraternity of their profession, and never take unfair advantage of fellow journalists.
5. Never to accept any form of bribe, nor to permit personal interest to influence their sense of justice.
6. To use only honest methods to obtain news, pictures and documents.
7. To reveal their identity as representatives of the press, or of radio or television services, before obtaining personal interviews for publication.
8. Always maintain, through their conduct, full public confidence in their integrity and dignity of their calling.

The revised PNG Media Council

At the time of the “Freedom at the Crossroads” seminar in February 1996 which then Australian Press Council chairman Professor David Flint addressed, the old PNG Press Council had already become defunct. As Ms Solomon recalls:

We were confident that the measures already in place in our newsrooms were sufficient to see that whatever we reported in our newspapers, and from our radio and television stations, was non-defamatory and was within the country’s code of ethics. That was how we operated.

In October 1995, when the Governor-General announced this Seventh Directive, we started getting worried. However, we did not react quickly enough because we thought we would first wait and see what happened. (Ibid:103).

The new PNG Media Council is in the process of revamping its statement of aims, objectives and principles which will cover both print and electronic media. It has applied through the AusAID Pacific Media Training Initiative for assistance in this process.

Training of journalists and other media personnel will also be encouraged, and the council plans to encourage

8 - Robie's a Fellow

the adoption of a new code of ethics for media newsrooms in Papua New Guinea. Among its objectives are to set up a complaints body to hear public grievances against the media. With this model working well, believes Ms Solomon, "We will; not be left open to any form of legislation which will eventually encroach on the freedom of expression and publishing that we enjoy today" (Ibid:105).

In spite of the PNG Media Council not being a formally registered body, current chairman Luke Sela says that it has considerable influence:

The situation is quite funny in that although we are not properly constituted, the government does listen to us. We have actually issued our first edict — on advertising. Basically [it is] an advertising policy — telling the advertising agencies what to do and when to say it. It is rather an interesting concept. We will see how that works (Sela, 1999).

Case study two: Fiji Islands

The Fiji News Council was formed in 1996 as an independent self-regulating media body and was renamed as the Fiji Media Council in 1998. Currently it has seven industry members (representing Associated Media Ltd, Communications Fiji Ltd, Daily Post Company Ltd, Fiji Times Ltd, Fiji Television Ltd, Islands Business International Ltd and Island Networks Corporation Ltd), seven public members and an independent chairman, former Sugar Industry Tribunal chairman Daryl Tarte. Its objectives are to:

1. Promote high journalistic standards.
2. Enhance the media's image.
3. Safeguard the media's independence.
4. Uphold freedom of speech and expression.
5. Uphold the public's right to be informed accurately and fairly.
6. Respect and promote an independent and effective Complaints Committee.
7. Promote a Code of Practice for journalists and media organisations.

Originally the council did not have public members. However, in 1997 the Thomson Foundation report on future media legislation and regulation for the Fiji Islands was submitted to the Fiji Government, then headed by Sitiveni Rabuka. The council and several Fiji media organisations made formal submissions to the Government on recommendations made in the report. Professor Flint was also invited to Fiji to speak about media self-regulation and freedom issues (and he was followed by his successor Professor Dennis Pearce in 1998). The Thomson recommendations including establishing a media council with public members. In 1998, the council began including public members to match that proposal.

One of the significant features of the Fiji Media Council, especially when compared with its Papua New Guinea counterpart, is the reasonable success of its Complaints Committee. Explaining the committee's role, Tarte says:

Some may argue that the Complaints Committee should have more teeth and power to impose fines or other sanctions. However, the council is a voluntary organisation with no legal status. The Complaints Committee judges complaints on the basis of ethics and not law, though these inevitably do overlap. The adjudication takes the form of a reasoned judgement upholding or rejecting the complaints and the media organisations are committed to publishing that adjudication. This is a moral rather than a legal obligation. (Tarte, 1997)

Complaints Committee adjudications

During 1997, for example, the year of the council's latest annual report, a total of 28 complaints were received from individuals or organisations. Of these, 26 were either settled or there was no further correspondence after the initial response. One complaint was referred to the Complaints Committee and the adjudication was eventually published. Two complaints remained unresolved at the end of 1996; both were settled without a need to refer to the Complaints Committee.

In the only adjudication that year, columnist Len Flier

complained that an article that he had submitted for publication in *The Sunday Times* was altered without his permission. he claimed that the article was altered in such a way as to distort the meaning. *The Sunday Times* refused to accept the complaint; they claimed that it was understood that a newspaper reserved the right to edit any material that it published. Following a considerable volume of correspondence it became

obvious that an impasse had been reached.

The matter was therefore referred to the Complaints Committee for adjudication. An adjudication was duly made and was published in full by *The Sunday Times*. In brief, the committee found that the root cause of the dispute arose through lack of communication between the editor and the writer. They agreed that Mr Flier should have been advised that changes had been made to his article but they did not agree that the matter was as serious a breach of Mr Flier's rights as he claimed (Fiji News Council, 1997).

In another example of an adjudication, with significance for May 1999 general election, the then opposition Fiji Labour Party complained in August 1998 that twice during that month

the party had sent media releases to *The Fiji Times* on front page stories, but neither statements were published. The party claimed they were denied the right to comment on issues of national importance and claimed deliberate bias by the newspaper. The party claims that to refuse to print reactions to government policies and actions, particularly from opposition parties, is to deny their right to freedom of expression. The party states that with general elections coming up next year [1999], the media has a responsibility to ensure fair and balanced coverage.

In response, *The Fiji Times* have stated that the editor is the sole arbiter of news values. *The Fiji Times* state that there are days when political comments are printed, but days when other news takes precedence. The paper claims they strive for balance, but maintains this cannot be delivered [on] a daily basis (Fiji Media Council, 1998).

The adjudication ruled (in part):

As the nation moves towards the first general elections under the new Constitution, it is timely that this matter should come before the committee for adjudication. The complain gives rise to a number of important issues, which the committee will take this opportunity to address in the hope of minimising conflict between the media and political parties.

It is worth quoting at the outset from Adjudication No 670 in September 1993 by the Australian Press Council: "The newspaper is not a conduit for slanging matches between politicians."

There is a clear obligation on the media organisations to correct inaccuracies, but no newspaper can possibly publish responses from political parties to all matters or statements that are issued by government or political parties. Indeed, many newspapers throughout the world take a biased political position in their editorial while striving to maintain balance in reporting news. In a small country like Fiji, where one newspaper dominates, *The Fiji Times* has an obligation to its readers, not only to a balance of information about all aspects of the national life, but a balanced presentation of political opinion.

While newspapers should give reasonable coverage to political issues and to political parties in the run-up to the general election, the Complaints Committee upholds the editor's right to make the final decision as to what is printed in the newspaper. (Ibid)

Code of Ethics

The Fiji Media Council's code of ethics before the Thomson Foundation Report recommended changes was: Journalists and news organisations should

1. Report and interpret the news with scrupulous honesty by striving to disclose all essential facts and by not suppressing relevant, available facts or distorting by wrong or improper emphasis.
2. Place unnecessary emphasis on gender, race, sexual preference, religious belief, marital or physical or mental disability.
3. In all circumstances respect confidences received in the course of their calling.
4. Not allow personal interest to influence them in their professional duties.
5. Not allow their professional duties to be influenced by any consideration, gift or advantage offered and, where appropriate, disclose such offer.
6. Not allow advertising or other commercial considerations to influence them in their professional duties.
7. Generally use fair and honest means to obtain news, pictures, films, tapes and documents. Breaches of conduct may be justified in the public interest for the purpose of exposing crime, serious misdemeanour, serious anti-social conduct, protecting public health and safety and to prevent the public from being

10 - Robie's a Fellow

seriously misled.

8. Identify themselves and their employees before obtaining any interview for publication or broadcast.
9. Respect private grief and personal privacy.
10. Do their utmost to correct any harmfully inaccurate reports.
11. Provide fair opportunities for reply to inaccuracies.
12. Distinguish clearly between comment, conjecture and fact.
13. Refrain from harassment or intimidation in the pursuit of information and pictures.
14. Generally avoid identifying relatives or friends of persons convicted of crime unless it is contrary to public's right to know.
15. Refrain from identifying victims of sexual assault unless by law allowed to do so.
16. Generally not interview or photograph children under the age of 16 without the consent of parents or guardians.
17. Refrain from unfairly profiteering personally from financial information received in advance of general publication.
18. Journalists have a moral obligation to protect confidential sources of information.

Case study three: Threats to Pacific media freedom

A smorgasbord of media freedom (and ethical) issues in the South Pacific during 1999 includes:

Fiji Islands:

Sex On The Beach, a hit song by the Dutch-American group T-Spoon, was banned in January on all radio stations in Fiji after public complaints — but Communications Fiji Ltd's FM96 began broadcasting the song again after a few days. The state-run Island Networks Corporation Ltd had earlier banned it from its airwaves. The song had come under fire from religious and social leaders in the Fiji Islands who strongly condemned its lyrics as socially, culturally and religiously offensive. The song is named after a special cocktail which is also served in many local bars and is popular among young people in Fiji. Assistant Minister for Information Ratu Josefa Dimuri said: "I am very disappointed with the lack of moral decency in that particular radio station. We are working on the media review that will cover new broadcasting laws and that will deal with the content and quality of programmes that will be aired by radio stations in Fiji." (*Pacific Media Watch*)

In February, Opposition political parties and media groups protested over the Fiji Government's plans to buy a major stake in the *Daily Post*, one of the country's two daily newspapers. The Fijian Association Party (FAP) pledged on February 9 to launch a High Court challenge against the Government's intention to buy 44 per cent of the newspaper's shares which are currently owned by the Fiji Development Bank. The party claimed the planned purchase for F\$505,000 was a deliberate move to control the *Daily Post's* editorial policy in the run up to the May general election. The paper, particularly its political columnist Mesake Koroi, had been sharply critical of Government policies. FAP leader Adi Kuini Speed said: "It shows how paranoid this Government is in silencing its critics and what lengths it will go to to win this election." (*Pacific Media Watch*)

On March 3, Fiji's Attorney-General, Ratu Etuate Tavai, warned Fiji Television Ltd to follow policies laid down in its broadcasting licence. This followed a controversial television interview with the former commander of the Fiji Military Forces, Ratu Epeli Ganilau, on his political aspirations. It was broadcast by the country's single free-to-air TV channel on 28 February 1999. Tavai said Fiji TV should have sought approval from the Minister of Information, Ratu Inoke Kubuabola, for broadcasting. FijiTV's chief executive Peter Wilson said the interview with a public figure was in fact "the normal business of television news and current affairs". (*Daily Post/Pacific Media Watch*)

In mid-April, the management of Communications Fiji, Ltd., owners of commercial radio station FM96, and the Fiji Government's Telecommunications Regulatory Unit clashed over alleged "obscene" language broadcasting. During 1998, the unit received many complaints that language and jokes on the station's morning show were vulgar and offensive to listeners. Unit director Jo Turaganivalu said there had been an assurance from FM96's management that appropriate action would be taken. However, Turaganivalu said complaints continued to pour into his office over the morning show's content. (*Pacnews/Pacific Media Watch*)

On May 6, Fiji's main daily newspaper, the *Fiji Times*, reported allegations by the then opposition Fiji Labour Party that national news media have been "orchestrating an election propaganda" campaign aimed at preventing

the party from forming the next government. The paper said the *Fiji Times* and Radio Navtarang had been singled out by party leader Mahendra Chaudhry as two leading media organisations which had allegedly failed to give equal coverage to Labour (FLP) during the 1999 election campaign. Chaudhry had told an election rally in the capital of Suva on May 5 that the news media must be fair in its coverage of the campaign. He claimed the *Fiji Times* had failed to provide equal coverage of its political meetings. "They will have to learn to deal with us because we will form the next government," Chaudhry reportedly said. [Two weeks later, Chaudhry was prime minister and his Government was lambasting the country's news media.] The *Fiji Times*, owned by a subsidiary company of Rupert Murdoch's transnational News Corporation, published the allegations without editorial comment. (*Pacific Media Watch*)

Papua New Guinea:

On February 17, Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) commander Jerry Singirok publicly apologised to former Prime Minister Sir Julius Chan for alleged defamatory remarks he made during the 1997 Sandline mercenary crisis. In half-page notices in the two national daily newspapers, the *Post-Courier* and the *National*, Brigadier-General Singirok referred to remarks he made to *The Independent* weekly newspaper on 21 March 1997. Singirok said he had asserted that Sandline — which had been hired by the Chan government to assist the PNGDF in ending the Bougainville secessionist crisis — had used the defence force as a front and was equipping a security company that belonged to Sir Julius's family. He said: "If such a statement was construed by members of the general public to mean that Sir Julius Chan was dishonest, corrupt, abusing his position as Prime Minister for personal gain and for members of his family, and that he was selling his country to foreigners for economic gain at the expense of Papua New Guineans, then I am sorry because that was never my intention." Chan had sued Singirok for defamation but issue was settled out of court, including Singirok's apology. (*Pacific Media Watch*)

Samoa:

In January, Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi expressed his annoyance with the Commonwealth Press Union's Lord Astor Press Freedom Award and the *Index on Censorship* Golden Award for Press Freedom being awarded to the *Samoa Observer* publisher Savea Sano Malifa. Tuilaepa said government should have been the recipient for both awards for allowing the newspaper to be published freely in the country. Savea said in an editorial on January 20 that if government wanted to win media awards then the prime minister should open up state media: "In particular, he should tell TV Samoa, Radio 2AP and the newspaper *Savali* to grow up and give the leader of the Opposition, Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese, the same publicity that he, Tuilaepa, has been taking for granted for many years." State media ban views by the Opposition. (*Pacific Media Watch*)

On March 16, parliamentary Opposition party leader Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi began his legal case at the Supreme Court in Apia, alleging a ban on access to Government media. Tuiatua claims he is barred from the national radio station 2AP, the national television service Televisi Samoa, and the Government newspaper, *Savali*. When asked why Tuiatua has never been invited to speak on 2AP, the station's director, Ah Kau, blamed "shortages of experienced staff and equipment". Tuiatua was last given air time in 1994. (Pacific Islands News Association)

On March 23, in compliance with a Supreme Court order, the *Samoa Observer* published a full-page apology to Polynesian Airlines. The newspaper had been found guilty of contempt after it defied an injunction restraining it from publishing details about significant "loans" made to its senior officials from company coffers. The court also fined Savea Sano Malifa and editor Aumuagaolo Ropete Ale. The management has further criticised the Samoa Post for urging citizens not to fly Polynesian Airlines since they would be supporting a company that sought to deny press freedom. (*Pacific Media Watch*)

Solomon Islands:

On April 19, it was reported the *Solomon Star* daily newspaper had been gagged from publishing the name of a senior government official who had been arrested in the Australian capital, Canberra. Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation reported that the *Star* was not able to publish the identity of the diplomatic passport holder accused of soliciting an undercover policewoman in Australia. The passport holder was a former cabinet minister and now a senior government official in the Prime Minister's office. (Pacnews/*Pacific Media Watch*)

12 - Robie's a Fellow

In early July, international media organisations called on the Solomon Islands Government to lift a ban on the media from reporting on the ethnic conflict on Guadalcanal Island. “The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) is deeply concerned over your administration’s decision to impose draconian regulations governing all media coverage of the ethnic tensions there,” executive director Ann Cooper said in a letter to Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa’alu. Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF) also wrote to the Prime Minister to protest against the restrictions imposed on local and foreign media and the threat to foreign journalists of arrest or expulsion if their reports on ethnic tensions are considered “unfair”. The Solomon Islands Governor General issued an amendment to the Emergency Powers Act of 1999 which threatened journalists who violated state-imposed reporting restrictions with up to two years’ imprisonment or a fine of up to SI\$5,000 (US\$1,050), or both. The regulations prohibited any reporting that might incite violence, was likely to cause racial disharmony, or was likely to be prejudicial to the safety or interests of the state. (*Pacific Media Watch*)

Tonga:

In February, Tonga’s Minister of Police, Clive Edwards, won a defamation case against the *Tonga Times* newspaper. The Supreme Court awarded 40,000 pa‘anga (US\$ 25,360) in damages to Edwards, against publisher and editor Kalafi Moala. The case stemmed from an article in the newspaper in January 1997 which alleged that Minister Edwards was at the forefront of the government’s alleged persecution of its political rivals. Justice Daniel Finnigan said he took into account the damage to Edwards’ reputation, emotional distress caused to him, the damage to public confidence and the effect on Edwards’ ability to carry out his public function. (*Pacific Media Watch*)

Vanuatu:

On April 29, the independent *Trading Post* newspaper alleged in a front-page report that its owner and publisher, Marc Neil-Jones, had been allegedly assaulted by a former business associate of Deputy Prime Minister Willy Jimmy in a dispute over the paper’s coverage of an election case. The report said Neil-Jones had been attacked with a chair by Charlie Pakoa in Club Vanuatu in the early hours of 25 April 1999. According to the *Post*, Neil-Jones reported the incident to the country’s independent Ombudsman and filed an assault complaint with police. The newspaper was also threatened over any reports on the incident. Peter Sali, political advisor to the minister, visited the newspaper office with police to deliver a message from the Deputy Prime Minister that his name was not to be mentioned in any planned news coverage. (*Pacific Media Watch*)

On May 11, the Austrian-based International Press Institute’s *World Press Freedom Review* was cited for a report on media freedom in Vanuatu. While the review conceded that media freedom in the country had advanced a long way from the days when the main sources of information were a government radio station and newspaper, there had been several cases of abuse of media freedom during 1998. The IPI review reported an incident where Vanuatu’s Ombudswoman, Marie Noelle Ferrieux-Patterson, had complained that the local language service of government-owned Radio Vanuatu no longer carried her findings of misconduct by government ministers. The reports went back on air but Ferrieux-Patterson was told that journalists had been threatened by a prominent politician. Also, in January that year, “a journalist was assaulted, equipment damaged and the government-run radio and television station [Vanuatu Broadcasting Corporation] temporarily forced off the air by rioters. This followed [broadcast] disclosures by the Ombudswoman that leading politicians improperly took large loans from a national retirement scheme for workers.” (International Press Institute/*Pacific Media Watch*)

Part 2: Fellowship visit to Australia

As we have a small academic team at the Journalism Program at the University of the South Pacific (two staff, including myself), I confined my visit to Australia to less than two weeks, visiting Brisbane, Sydney and Canberra between June 20 and July 1, 1999. The visit was an enriching experience for me and I was able to establish important contacts and gather resource materials at a crucial time in our program's development as we are initiating the Pacific's first postgraduate journalism program from the year 2000. I hope the visit was as beneficial for the Australian Press Council and those who contributed so much to my stay, Chairman Dennis Pearce, and especially the office team, Executive Secretary Jack Herman, Deborah Kirkman, and Michelle Hilder.

Brisbane

On the day before the WAPC Oceania regional conference opened on June 22, I was hosted by the School of Arts, Griffith University, and the Australian Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy, at the Gold Coast campus for a seminar, "Reporting Political Change in the Pacific and Asia — are journalists ready?" The issues addressed were the fundamental political and social transformation in the Pacific and Asia which is placing increasing demands on all journalists, whether reporting from Australia or abroad. The job of foreign correspondent is becoming more complicated as their version of events competes with a growing number of sources from satellite TV to online news services.

The seminar included Professor Alan Knight, Chair of Journalism at Central Queensland University in Rockhampton; Angela Romano, an Associate Lecturer in Journalism at Queensland University of Technology and who has just completed doctoral research on the media and Indonesia's New Order; and myself. Dr Knight's paper addressed "Spin controlling at the end of Empire: How do journalists deal with government attempts to control press coverage of the fundamental political and social transformation in the Asia-Pacific region?"; Ms Romano spoke of "The Changing press of post-Suharto Indonesia"; and I presented a paper on "Cyberspace media and the Pacific's political frontier". Papers from this seminar are being published in *Media International Australia*.

During the WAPC Oceania conference I presented two papers, one on media research at USP and an overview of the contemporary South Pacific media. It was also a golden opportunity to renew contacts with my Pacific colleagues, and others such as Fr Trevor Cullen, a doctorate scholar with the University of Queensland and formerly of Divine Word University in Papua New Guinea, as well as meet many new media and related personalities.

On Thursday and Saturday after the conference, I took the opportunity of conducting library research at the University of Queensland for my own doctorate on the theme "Journalism Education in the South Pacific 1974-2000: Politics, Policy and Practice". One unfortunate oversight during the post-conference period is that I missed an opportunity to attend the Council's adjudication process in Brisbane. On Friday, I had a series of meetings with Professor John Henningham, Head of Journalism at UQ; Senior Lecturer Dr Rod Kirkpatrick; *Foreign Correspondent* webmaster Belinda Weaver; and also with Steve Sharp of Griffith University.

Sydney

On Monday, June 28, I had meetings with Christine Fogg, Journalism Coordinator at the University of Technology Sydney and Peter Cronau, co-coordinator of *Pacific Media Watch*, an independent monitor on media freedom and ethics which maintains an important website resource www.pactok.net.au/docs/pmw. The afternoon and evening was spent out at Gore Hill with executive producer Deb Richards and her team on ABCTV's *Media Watch* program while they produced the Monday night's show. It was a particularly valuable experience as the program dealt with the vigilante hysteria and media harassment of a convicted child killer, John David Lewthwaite, who had just been released into society on parole after 20 years in prison for his crime. This episode included digital footage taken by one of the researchers with a handycam which exposed unethical behaviour by a Sydney journalist.

On Tuesday, June 29, I met with ABC National Radio's *Media Report* journalist Robert Bolton and gave him

14 - Robie's a Fellow

a briefing and background papers on the government versus media crisis in Fiji. This led to an episode about Fiji on *Media Report*, broadcast on July 22. I also met information communications specialist Rob Garnsey of ABC and Pactok Communications (a low-cost Pacific Internet service provider) and Dr Penny O'Donnell, Acting Head of Journalism at UTS. All afternoon was spent with SBS Radio where I had meetings with SBS Sydney Radio Station Manager Raymond Moti, formerly of Fiji; David Ingram, National Training Manager with SBS Radio, who was in the mid-1980s a journalism lecturer at the University of Papua New Guinea (and co-author of *The News Manual* Pacific journalism training textbook; and Francis Lee, Chairman of the Asian Media Council of Australia. We discussed possible joint journalism education and training ventures in the Pacific.

On Wednesday, June 30, I met the president of the International Federation of journalists (IFJ), Chris Warren, who is also general secretary of the Australian Journalists Association branch of the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA). After a visit to the Australian Press Council's Sydney office, I also had meetings with author Robert Pullan, of the Australian branch of *Index on Censorship*; and Pieter Wessells, of the Australian branch of the Commonwealth Journalists' Association. In the afternoon, I visited Gore Hill again to touch base with the ABC TV *Four Corners* team and had a discussion with executive producer John Budd. This was a worthwhile visit but there was a certain nervous undercurrent about the program "Blood on the Cross", being produced on the Indonesian-ruled province of Irian Jaya (West Papua). The report, by Mark Davis, about the 1996 hostage crisis, ruffled feathers when it was eventually broadcast on July 12 because of allegations implicating the International Red Cross (ICRC) and British military personnel. The program alleged that the ICRC, British soldiers and mercenaries, played a role along with the Indonesian military, ABRI, in the murder of innocent West Papuan highlands villagers.

Canberra

On Thursday, I flew to Canberra for a day trip and presented a seminar with the University of Canberra's School of Communication, "Cyberspace media and the Pacific's political frontier", a repeat of the paper that I had presented in Brisbane. During the visit I met with Dr Warwick Blood, Head of the School of Communication and editor of *Australian Journalism Review*; Journalism Lecturer Jennifer Kitchener; and Dr Satendra Nandan, a Fiji expatriate and Director of the Centre for Writing and Culture Studies. Anthony Mason, editor of the *The Monitor*, conducted an interview with me and published an article about the innovative Internet-based journalism program at USP (Mason 1999).

Conclusion:

The Australian Press Council's work in support of the fledgling media councils in the Pacific is valuable and an important part in educating the public and politicians on the role that an independent media must play in the good governance of the region. My own visit to Australia, thanks to the Council, has contributed to enhancing links between the University of the South Pacific, owned by 12 countries in the region, and various Australian journalism schools and media organisations, and contributed to strengthening a dynamic but under resourced journalism program.

The Council can continue this process by:

1. Encouraging and supporting the development of new national media councils in the South Pacific.
2. Strengthening the two existing media councils in Fiji and Papua New Guinea by encouraging a move towards tripartite structures and by providing continued advice and support.
3. Providing Australian Press Council publications and research on the media to the University of the South Pacific's library at all three campuses in Fiji, Samoa and Vanuatu.
4. Encouraging higher standards of media professionalism in the region by providing an annual "Australian Press Council Pacific Scholarship" for experienced industry journalists who would like to study fulltime on the USP undergraduate or postgraduate programs. Such a scholarship would preferably be for regional Pacific Islands students studying at the University of the South Pacific rather than Fiji Islanders who have a lot easier access to studying at the campus, either fulltime or part-time. Pacific governments do not list journalism as a desired priority career, therefore it is extremely difficult for Pacific Islands journalists to get the usual tertiary scholarships offered through AusAID and New Zealand Overseas Development Assistance programs. Few working journalists can afford the cost of studying full time.

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Cyberspace media and the Pacific's political frontier

[David Robie's speech at the Griffith University seminar, "Reporting Political Change in the Pacific and Asia"]

A COUPLE OF DECADES AGO, when I was working as an editor with the *Daily Nation* in Kenya, our then editor-in-chief, George Githi, had this to say:

For governments which fear newspapers there is one consolation: We have known many instances where governments have taken over newspapers, but we have not known a single incident in which a newspaper has taken over a government.

This quote has stuck in mind since then and I use it as my email signature.

But in recent times, with the global surge of the information superhighway, many news media or information websites have been giving governments a rocky time.

Websites might not have exactly taken over governments, but the Internet has certainly given a dramatic impetus to the winds of change.

As media educator and film maker Bob Hooper argues,

If the Soviet Union was brought down by the fax machine, Malaysia's transition to new leadership will be driven by the Internet ... In the power struggle between [Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad] and his former protege, [Anwar Ibrahim], at least in cyberspace, clearly holds the advantage" (Hooper 1998).

In Indonesia, momentous change and a move to independence, or at least autonomy, in East Timor, unthinkable a year ago, has been fuelled by the Internet.

In April, students from the Institute for the Study of Information Flow (ISAI) and NGO activists pressured the House of Representatives to draft a new press freedom bill before the inauguration of a new president and cabinet after the general election on June 7 (*Pacific Media Watch* 1999a).

The need for a new bill, the campaigners claim, stems from a risk that the new political élite in Indonesia will be made up of the same people who controlled and exploited the nation during the Suharto era.

Websites focusing on developments in Indonesia and the courageous activism of the Alliance for Independent Journalists (AJI) seeking freedom of speech and information have hastened the changes.

Repression against journalists in East Timor and elsewhere in Indonesia has continued, and Information Minister Yunus Yosfiah is an unlikely champion of a free press, given his role as the military commander in the October 1975 assault in which the Balibo Five were murdered by Indonesian soldiers.

According to a recent Committee to Protect Journalists' report, journalists in Indonesia are "attempting to forestall future repression by holding seminars and discussions on ethics and working to build a press council that will be responsive to public concerns over irresponsibility". The report adds:

Publishers are quietly hoping that new publications don't offend public sensibilities by pushing the envelope too far in what remains a conservative, overwhelmingly Muslim country. Media groups have supported the creation of a dozen more watchdog organisations around the country that investigate and respond to complaints against the press. Even the most vocal of Indonesia's Press associations, the once-banned Aliansi Jurnalis Independen (Alliance for Independent Journalists, or AJI), has started a monthly publication called *Independent Watch* to monitor the quality of press reports (CPJ, 1999).

In China, activists have been imprisoned for advocating democracy.

Software engineer Lin Hai was arrested on 25 March 1998 for providing 30,000 email addresses to a pro-democracy Internet newsletter. On 20 January 1999, he was sentenced to two years in prison.

Physicist and dissident Wang Youcai was sentenced on 21 December 1998 to 11 years in prison; the charges against Wang included trying to organise a peaceful opposition party and sending email messages to dissidents in the U.S.

According to the Blue Ribbon Free Expression Website <<http://www.eff.org/blueribbon.html>> — one of the

world's four most "hit" sites — more than 20,000 email messages have been sent to the Chinese Government on behalf of Lin Hai and Wang Youcai.

A press release will be issued when the number of messages reaches 30,000 to match the number of email addresses Lin Hai was convicted of sending.

In Zambia, the revelations on a Website of the independent *Post* newspaper had been so threatening to the national government that authorities in April laid siege to the editorial offices and printing plant and arrested eight journalists (*Pacific Media Watch* 1999b).

The editor-in-chief, Fred M'membe, well known in Commonwealth media circles, was charged with espionage — along with the eight staff members — over a front page story that questioned the country's military capacity to withstand an incursion from neighbouring Angola.

In Yugoslavia, international protests in early May followed the police shutdown of the independent Radio B92 and three other radio stations in Serbia in a crackdown on dissent and to suppress news on the NATO bombing (*Foreign Correspondent* 1999).

According to B92's website, "our premises have been sealed off" and the station's director had been "ousted" from his job. He was replaced by a political hack from the country's ruling Socialist Party, effectively imposing Government control.

The Internet has played a prominent role in the Balkans conflict. Since foreign journalists were expelled from Yugoslavia, much information was relayed to the outside world via email and the World Wide Web.

Even in the South Pacific, in spite of relatively few users, news sites on the Internet have caused more than ripples.

In 1997, the Websites of both daily newspapers in Papua New Guinea "came of age during the Sandline mercenary crisis, underscoring the value of content on the Internet" (Robie 1997).

During the decade-long secessionist rebellion against the Papua New Guinea Government, the Bougainville Freedom Movement's Webpage based in Australia publicised — and still publicises — the struggle for peace. It has had remarkable success with its Website and a global email list in setting a Pacific-wide and global media agenda.

"With the Internet, we have broken a barrier and gone out to the world, and the world is listening, watching and waiting," says Vikki John, the movement's national coordinator in Sydney.

And in Fiji, the freedom of the Internet affair last year and the latest media website which was established in April — and quickly featured a controversial interview with Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka about the so-called "Kama Sutra" scandal about politicians added political spice in the run-up to the historic elections (Robie 1998a).

Fijilive <www.fijilive.com> followed up on this with scoops which included Rabuka's apology to the Indo-Fijians of the nation for his military coups in 1987, saying he had been "used" by others. He also named his five co-conspirators — two who are dead and a third who is now Opposition Leader (*Fijilive* 1999).

It also reported on the possible legal actions against him for treason, kidnap and torture if he lost the election — as he did — and he travelled outside the Fiji Islands.

In the 24 hour period after counting began, *Fijilive* had a phenomenal 10,000 visits — almost three times the normal load. With 10 staff, the site posted the first website election coverage, well ahead of the Fiji government's official site.

Fijilive's journalists kept updating every five minutes in 24-hour shifts.

Publisher Yashwant Gaunder says he believes the remarkable success of his website was due to the 60,000 Fiji Islanders who had migrated from the country after the coups.

"It is early days yet," he says. "Some news sites are closing. I was in New Zealand recently where the *National Business Review* site closed and the *Time-Pathfinder* one has closed. Media are finding they are not making any money.

"But we are determined to keep our lead. We have always been an innovator" (Gaunder 1999).

Websites are likely to closely monitor the progress of the new Labour government. Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry, the country's first Indo-Fijian national leader, has pledged an "open and free press" but his government has been sending out conflicting signals. Time will tell.

18 - Robie's a Fellow

The outgoing regime led by Rabuka had been accused of paranoia and blatant attempts at manipulating the media on the eve of the election campaign when the government bought a controlling 44 per cent shareholding in the ailing *Daily Post* newspaper during February.

It was argued by critics that taking over the *Daily Post* was breaching the “spirit and the letter” of section 30 of the 1997 Constitution which guarantees freedom of the media and expression.

The Rabuka government had been angered by some trenchant articles in the *Post*, particularly by its outspoken political columnist Mesake Koroi, provoking an extraordinary full page government advertisement, at public expense, attacking the “false allegations” in Koroi’s popular weekly Opinion column.

Ironically, the publicity ensured Koroi’s articles would be read on the web.

A clash over a television interview with a rival politician, former military commander Ratu Epeli Ganilau, along with the refusal to allow a “blacklisted” New Zealand journalist into the country, did nothing to allay concerns about the government’s commitment to a free media.

The barring of the TV journalist was dismissed as a bureaucratic bungle by Assistant Minister Ratu Josefa Dimuri, who called for a review of the so-called blacklist. But critics remained unconvinced.

Senator Jokapeci Koroi, president of the Fiji Labour Party, asked: “What has happened to the freedom of the press which this government supposedly respects? Or is it still in the *modus operandi* that existed immediately after the coup.”

As it turned out, the *Daily Post* brushed aside the criticisms over its sale and, under the leadership of editor Jale Moala, turned in arguably the best print media coverage of the elections.

It has proved a rather gutsy newspaper in spite of its limited resources and staff when competing with the established *Fiji Times*, a Murdoch paper.

But promises by the Labour government have looked rather empty given several incidents since the election, including a “freeing up” of reporting on the traditional and secretive Great

Council of Chiefs which was not free at all, and the roughing up of a television reporter by an over-zealous security policeman “minding” Prime Minister Chaudhry.

Fiji Television lodged an official complaint with the Information Ministry over the incident.

Both a former Information Minister, Filipe Bole, and Assistant Information Minister Dimuri were dumped by Fijian voters in the election.

Chaudhry, formerly a trade unionist, now has the information portfolio in his hands. Assistant Minister Lekh Ram Vayeshnoi has warned that the media will not be allowed to “abuse this enormous power” being promised under a draft Freedom of Information Bill.

The Bill is a positive spin-off from a comprehensive study of Fiji’s news media undertaken on behalf of the Rabuka government by the Thomson Foundation in 1996. However, questions hang over proposed legislation under the previous government for a code of ethics and broadcasting standards and a statutory body to replace the successful self-regulating Fiji Media Council.

Vayeshnoi said:

Some media organisations, to some extent, have been seriously lacking in carrying out their duties. They have shown that the public’s right to accurate and factual information appears the least of their concerns.

They have shown that they have seriously eroded their credibility and their very important position in a free functioning democracy (Vayeshnoi 1999).

In fact, all the Fiji news media performed credibly and fairly in reporting the election, which involved a new preferential voting system and was covered for the first time by national television.

[References here to parliamentary speeches on June 21-22 condemning the Fiji news media and comments on hints of ownership legislation].

The Internet is transforming both the way many news media work in developing nations, and also how radical movements try to change the world and exploit the media message.

Alternative news media are being given a tremendous boost.

The modest *Green-Left Weekly*, for example, which covers environmental, political, gender, labour and human

rights issues, has just as big potential as the A\$350,000-a-year *Sydney Morning Herald* site.

Early examples of effective use of the Internet were demonstrated in the early 1990s by Latin American guerrilla movements such as Mexico's Zapatistas and Peru's Tupac Amaru.

The use of cyberspace to spread their message quickly has been adopted widely among activist groups around the world. As InterPress Third World news agency's former Manila bureau chief Kunda Dixit says:

Across the world, human rights activists, national liberation movements, indigenous groups from the Ogoni to the Karens, NGOs and activists have found silicon bonding in the horizontal communication provided by the Internet.

Its inherent anarchy, decentralised nature and freedom from official control has made the Internet the ideal medium for civil society (Dixit 1997: 148).

However, although they may have mastered the Internet to bypass government control over traditional media and reach a larger audience, most of these groups have not yet adapted their messages to their new medium. Often their Internet message is still doctrinaire and parochial.

The Internet is especially suited to underground organisations, NGOs and alternative media because a Website can easily be moved from one country to another.

Many radical groups also avoid censorship by operating through sympathisers based in other countries who have access to the Internet.

In many ways the Internet is a contemporary equivalent to the days of the pamphleteering style of journalism two to three centuries ago — when news media were genuinely a pluralistic “marketplace of ideas”.

This is in sharp contrast with the conventional news media of today which has been rapidly shrinking, swallowed up by closures and takeovers by the Rupert Murdoch, Berlusconi and Ted Turner style of mega media corporations.

Surviving independent media voices have been gagged by the trivial era of “infotainment” and “tabloid” babblespeak.

But the degree to which people can benefit from the Internet's democratisation potential, bringing about true decentralisation or spreading knowledge and awareness of issues, and education, will depend on how much support the “information poor” get to log on.

In countries like India, for example, only seven in every 1000 people have a phone.

Low cost is also one of the great advantages of free speech on the Internet. Except for the initial cost, building a Website is less expensive than running a newspaper, and it reaches a newspaper-size audience running to thousands.

The cost savings of the Internet is an important factor in the digital technology revolution happening in many newsrooms around the world. The Singapore *Straits Times* is one of the world leaders in Internet innovation.

The *Straits Times* sends reporters and photographers into the field locally and abroad all the time. In addition, the paper has nine bureaus abroad. And two offshore editorial units — a Sydney office consisting of a fulltime team of Australian subeditors — and an office in Manila supplementing the art and infographics output of the paper's Singapore-based team.

The telephone bills have in the past been astronomical.

As the paper's business editor and a technical expert, Paul Jansen, says, the Internet and email have now made the newspaper's economics far rosier (Jansen 1998).

Today, our reporters in the field and from our overseas bureaus, can choose to file their reports directly into our computer system through a special modem connection, or through email which we then pick up and transfer to our main system in a simple two-step “save file” and “drag and drop” procedure.

Since email involves calls only to the Internet Service Provider in the sender and recipient's respective countries, there is no IDD charge, just local call charges.

In the South Pacific, after a slow start, the news media cyberspace revolution has rapidly caught on.

The first news site was curiously the *Tonga Chronicle*, a sort of hybrid affair on Tahola Kami's pioneering *Kavabowl* Website in late 1995. However, the first actual full newspaper online in the Pacific was the University of Papua New Guinea's journalism training newspaper *Uni Tavur*, hosted on the Sydney University of

20 - Robie's a Fellow

Technology's "Online Journalist" website in March 1996.

By August 1996, *The National* in Port Moresby, the fastest growing newspaper in the South Pacific, had developed the first daily newspaper Website online in the region. One of its sister papers in the Rimbunan Hijau timber group of companies, *The Star* in Malaysia, had a long-established and successful website.

The [*National's*] website, the first daily news one in the region, was the innovative brainchild of the general manager, S. F. Yong. A cyberspace buff and enthused by the lively Website of *The Star*, he was convinced it could be done in Papua New Guinea too.

"Every day he and a senior systems executive colleague waded through the paper, converting files into html format and gaining enormous international goodwill for the paper as a result" (Robie 1997).

The National's Website <www.wr.com.au/national/> is arguably still the most popular cyberspace newspaper in the South Pacific.

Its long-established rival, the *PNG Post-Courier*, followed the next month, in September 1996, with a classified advertising Website linked to the News Ltd advertising Website in Australia.

Finally, the *Post-Courier* also introduced a news Website <www.postcourier.com.pg> in December 1996. This meant a 100 per cent web presence for Papua New Guinea's national daily newspapers at a time when New Zealand, for example, only had a handful of newspapers on line.

Following this, Websites were set up by PNG's national news weekly, *The Independent* <www.niugini.com/independent/> (owned by the nation's churches) in 1998, EM TV (1997) and NauFM (1997).

News media organisation websites have been slow to take off in Fiji, although the sister radio station of NauFM, FM96 (Fiji Communications Ltd), had established a lively Website in 1997, and the news magazine *Pacific Islands Monthly* (1997) has a popular site which is mainly a teaser for potential subscribers.

Islands Business International (1999) has also developed a website. Many other news media have developed sites in the region too, including American Samoa (1997), Cook Islands (1998), French Polynesia (1996) and an Auckland-based Tongan newspaper, *Tongan Times* (1998).

But now probably the most innovative Pacific news media development on the Internet has been the debut of *fijilive* <www.fijilive.com/> — a combination of the news magazine resources of *The Review* news magazine, the *Daily Post* newspaper and Bula Networks radio.

This is backed up by what the publishers claim to be the largest Pacific Website archive, two years in the making. Although the long-established Pacific virtual library and media site of the Australian National University might dispute this claim, there is no doubt that *fijilive* is a remarkable resource.

Publisher Yashwant Gaunder is matter-of-fact about his objective: "Our immediate aim is to provide an award-winning information source on Fiji."

Although Fiji has the largest number of Internet users in the Pacific, about 2500, this is still a tiny market.

Fiji's largest circulation daily newspaper, *The Fiji Times*, is also planning a website as part of an upgrade of its computer pagination system. The company says its *PIM* website is the only media one making a profit in the Pacific.

What do all these rapid and dramatic changes mean for the traditional methods for journalism education in the Pacific? Like elsewhere in the world, it is a major challenge.

According to one recent Australian study, 168 new journalistic tasks and practices have been identified as emerging as an influence of the Internet. Journalism educator Mark Pearson concludes "influences of the Internet upon both the context of journalism and its practice render current approaches anachronistic and demand a reevaluation of the aim, role and function of journalism education" (Pearson 1998).

Nevertheless, another journalism educator, Stephen Quinn, was heartened by his research that the educators appeared to be ahead of the Australian media industry in computer-assisted reporting (CAR). He suggested they "take the lead and drag the media into the digital era".

Quinn also says that Pacific tertiary institutions ignore Internet journalism education "at their peril".

In a sense, the University of the South Pacific has already taken the lead in the region, last year introducing basic Internet web design and CAR techniques in two courses, 201 Print and Online Journalism and 302 Journalism Research.

In the Print and Online course, this means Web design is integrated with the training newspaper *Wansolwara* and online editors process the web edition.

In Journalism Research, students have been introduced to the Internet and databases as part of researching HIV/AIDS stories, the Fiji elections, media reports and major regional stories, such as the controversial shutdown of two faculties and a journalism programme at the University of Papua New Guinea.

They have just completed working on Pacific human rights assignments.

The USP journalism programme also provides an Internet news digest, Pasifik Nius, feeding websites such as *Pacific Islands Report* and researchers worldwide.

Journalism students also contribute to the *Cyber-Times* electronic newspaper at City University, Hongkong.

As Kunda Dixit points out:

While we may think that we live in the age of information, more and more of that information is completely useless in working out answers to global problems or searching for alternative [economic strategies] more suited to living on a planet with finite resources" (Dixit 1997: 151).

Virtually all second and third-year journalism students will routinely get Internet tuition. The USP journalism newsroom has five World Wide Web computers available for regular use by students.

By the standards of journalism schools in Australia or elsewhere, this may not seem much. But by the standards of South Pacific media newsrooms, where probably no more than one Internet computer is available for reporting — and this is probably locked up in the general manager or chief editor's office, it is remarkable.

The journalism facilities are also put into context when it is realised that the university as a whole has just eight computers in the library's Internet Café for the use of more than 5000 students.

The University of Papua New Guinea pioneered journalism education on the Internet in the Pacific in 1996. At a time when UPNG was still waiting to go online, a partnership with UTS's Department of Journalism and Social Analysis meant that the UTS *Online Journalist* <138.25.138.94/acij/> website hosted UPNG's initial efforts (Robie 1998).

The *Papua Niugini Nius* <www.usp.ac.fj/journ/nius/index.html> email listserve service and website were also created in 1996 in partnership with Pactok Communications, a low cost Asia-Pacific regional email and website cooperative with partners in Cambodia and Malaysia as well as South Pacific states.

By March 1998, the pivotal centre of Internet initiatives in journalism education moved from UPNG to the University of Hawai'i and USP's main Laucala campus in Fiji. In Hawai'i, it took just over a year for *Pacific Islands Report* <pidp.ewc.hawaii.edu/pireport/> to become a key regional news source with around 15 stories a day.

A collaborative project of the Hawai'i's East-West Center's Pacific Islands Development Program and the Center for Pacific Islands Studies at the University of Hawai'i it aims, according to editor Al Hulsen, to increase public knowledge and understanding of the Pacific.

Three journalism students are involved in the project.

At USP, in April 1998, the USP Journalism programme launched *Pacific Journalism Online* <www.usp.ac.fj/journ/>, the region's first extensive Internet journalism training tool and research resource.

In August 1998, UNESCO awarded a F\$5000 grant to USP Journalism to help develop the project. Equipment was purchased and a journalism graduate was employed part-time to upload files for the website, including the training newspaper *Wansolwara Online* subsite.

This role has now been taken over by journalism students as they become trained in Internet publishing. By the beginning of June 1999, eighteen second-year USP journalism students had created websites which had been posted on Pacific Journalism Online.

One particular plus of the Internet training, is a growing awareness of the Pacific region as a whole. Never before have journalism students — or journalists for that matter — had such quick and comprehensive access to the region's news media and other research sources.

The new curriculum involves greater attention to issues of legal risks across international jurisdictions, ethics, privacy, confidentiality, freedom of expression, social justice, business acumen and consumer protection as well as the technical skills involved.

22 - Robie's a Fellow

However, online journalists still vitally need the key abilities of critical thinking, research skills, story-telling and a passion to keep people informed.

These then, are the fresh voices of the future in Pacific cyberspace. Hopefully, their brand of journalism will contribute to regional solutions rather than problems.

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South Pacific newsroom training and research: Trends and dilemmas

[David Robie's speech to the Research Papers session of the WAPC Oceania Regional Conference]

Introduction

The University of the South Pacific is a unique regional tertiary education institution with 12 member countries. It is based at Laucala Campus in Suva, capital of the Fiji Islands. It also has campuses in Samoa and Vanuatu, and established centres in all its member countries, including Fiji. The university is currently spending F\$12 million in aid funds from Australia, New Zealand and Japan to upgrade its USPNet regional satellite communications and teaching system. It has 9515 enrolled students with 54 per cent of them studying through extension programmes.

The journalism program in the School of Humanities is relatively new. Founded in 1994 with French Government aid funds, the program has a BA degree double majoring in journalism and a second discipline. This followed an earlier journalism certificate course at USP which had foundered in the 1980s.

So far, 16 journalists have graduated from the university with a BA degree in journalism and two in the new industry-based Diploma in Pacific Journalism. Eleven have graduated from the Fiji Islands, two from Federated States of Micronesia, two from Vanuatu, one from Samoa, one from the Solomon Islands and one from Tahiti.

All but five of the graduates have jobs in the news media or related industries. Three of the remainder took teaching positions while a fourth is attached to the Journalism Program studying for a masters degree in development studies. The program is also hosting another masters student from the Auckland Institute of Technology who is doing a thesis on development and the Fiji elections. The program has proposed postgraduate journalism courses commencing in the year 2000.

Last year, one journalism student won gold medals as the best student in the history/politics department in the School of Humanities and the best student in the School of Humanities. Unfortunately, he did not win the gold medal in journalism because it did not exist for this new program. This has been rectified for 1999.

Currently, the Journalism Program has 63 enrolled journalism students and more than doubling in size in 1998. It includes six practioners taking the Pacific diploma (all working journalists or information officers from the Fiji Islands), and 57 from eight Pacific and Indian Ocean countries taking the degree program. The program publishes a training newspaper, *Wansolwara*; the first media training and resource website in the region, *Pacific Journalism Online*; broadcasts the news service for *Radio Pasifik*; an FM station based on campus; and makes television documentaries broadcast on *Pacific Way* on the region's television stations.

Trends and dilemmas in the Pacific newsroom

Research programmes have been developed only recently on the USP Journalism Program but several interesting projects are now under way:

- **One project is a research pilot** comparing training, qualifications and attitudes in the newsrooms of Papua New Guinea and Fiji.
- **Another project is a sociology and media research and a television documentary** using particular case study about a former journalism student from Tahiti to highlight the fear, anxiety and myths that surround HIV/AIDS in the Pacific. The objectives are to remove the stereotypes that HIV afflicts only marginalised people, and to empower women in their sexual choices.
- **A further project has focused on the use of digital technology and the Internet** in education in developing nations for the transfer of information, methods of distribution, learning protocols, administrative structures and costing.

The Pacific newsroom research grew out of questions about an apparent difference in attitude between the media industries in both Papua New Guinea and Fiji towards journalism education and training. Both nations have a similar sized news media industry, but in Papua New Guinea newsroom attachments for journalism students have been established for almost 25 years. The future of this system may be under question now

24 - Robie's a Fellow

following the planned closure this year of the University of Papua New Guinea journalism program, the pioneering institution in journalism education in the Pacific. Another institution, Divine Word University's communication arts program in Madang, is attempting to expand its courses to absorb the journalism students from UPNG.

Papua New Guinea has two national daily newspapers, the Murdoch-owned *Post-Courier* and the Malaysian-owned *National*, which have the largest circulations in the Pacific. It also has two national weeklies, the *Independent* (formerly the *Times of PNG*) and the Pidgin language *Wantok*, owned by the nation's major churches, and a fortnightly provincial newspaper, the *Eastern Star*. The major broadcasters are EMTV, which has a footprint from the Philippines to Tonga and is wholly owned by Australia's Channel Nine; the private NauFM radio group and state-run National Broadcasting Corporation. All major news media have Internet websites.

Fiji has a much better developed magazine industry with four major monthly or bimonthly news magazine groups. The two daily newspapers are the Murdoch-owned *Fiji Times* and the struggling Fiji-government owned *Daily Post* with a third daily reportedly in the offing. Broadcasters are Fiji One TV; the private FM96 group, which began broadcasting in the year of the military coups; and the corporatised Island Networks Corporation Ltd (previously the Fiji Broadcasting Commission). The *Daily Post*, Island Networks and *The Review* news magazine share a website, *FijiLive*, while the *Fiji Times* is still establishing a website.

The newsroom training survey was conducted in both countries by journalism coordinator David Robie between December 1998 and February 1999 with personal visits to newsrooms with questionnaires. Twelve news organisations were surveyed in this way with one company declining to participate. The response rate ranged between 44 per cent at one newspaper in Fiji and 100 per cent at a radio broadcaster in Papua New Guinea. Overall, the participation rate in this survey was far higher in Papua New Guinea (76.4 per cent of total staff) than in Fiji (57 per cent). But the final sample number of 124 with completed questionnaires are comparable with 59 respondents from Fiji and 65 from Papua New Guinea. These are some of the preliminary findings (Robie, 1999):

Both Fiji and Papua New Guinea have a gender balance (*Table 1*), according to the sample — 50.8 per cent men and 49.2 per cent women in Fiji, while Papua New Guinea has a slight majority of women (52.3 per cent) over men (47.7 per cent). This compares with journalism student balances at UPNG where two-thirds are women, and USP where the balance is 35 women and 28 men.

The median age of journalists in Fiji is 23.5, ranging between the youngest at 18 and the oldest at 50. There is also a large bulge in the 22-24 age group. In Papua New Guinea, the median age is 30.5, ranging between 20 and 50. Also, the ages of PNG journalists are spread more evenly across the range.

Papua New Guinean journalists were found to be the most qualified with 72.2 per cent having completed formal tertiary qualifications (*Table 2*), contrasting with 13.3 per cent in Fiji. The Fiji figure represents a fall since the last survey, in 1992, when Layton (1995) found 16 per cent. Although the new journalism course at USP has started providing graduates for the media workforce, and there is a growing tendency of Fiji journalists to gain degrees abroad, these trends have not yet shown significantly in the statistics. The PNG figure was an increase over the 68 per cent of tertiary qualified journalists recorded by Layton in her survey. But an earlier survey in 1984, which focused on the National Broadcasting Commission (Phinney, 1985), showed the figure had been even higher in Papua New Guinea, at 76 per cent. However, the more recent statistics would include a higher proportion of degrees to undergraduate diplomas.

When breaking down the tertiary qualifications into the actual degrees, Papua New Guinea and Fiji both had one masters degree; 13.8 per cent in PNG had degrees (Fiji, 5 per cent) and 56.9 per cent in PNG at least had undergraduate diplomas (Fiji, 6.7 per cent). Fiji's strength was shown in industry certificates (13.5 per cent) whereas Papua New Guinea had none in this category. Also, 25.4 per cent of journalists in Fiji had done short courses while only 15.3 per cent of journalists in Papua New Guinea had done any. However, while almost half of Fiji's journalists (47.4 per cent) had no qualifications at all, barely 6.1 per cent of PNG journalists fell into this category.

On attitudes to education and training, journalists in Fiji (79.6 per cent) and Papua New Guinea (80 per cent) were evenly matched with desiring a combination of both tertiary journalism programmes and in-house cadetships. However, while a higher group of journalists in PNG favoured tertiary programmes alone (9 per cent) as against 5 per cent in Fiji, it was the reverse in Fiji with 15 per cent favouring an in-house cadetship compared with just 1.5 per cent in PNG.

The major education institution was the UPNG with 32 graduates in the news media workplace, including several editors, followed by 18 graduates from Divine Word University in Madang, PNG. Four USP graduates

were recorded although a new batch of a dozen graduates in the region have not been included in this survey. Journalists in Fiji had a far different view than their counterparts from Papua New Guinea on their media role in the community (*Table 3*). Significantly more journalists in Fiji (62.7 per cent) than in PNG (46 per cent) favoured the western “watchdog” model as the preferred role. However, more than double the number of journalists in PNG (36.9 per cent) than in Fiji (15 per cent) saw the role of the news media as the “defender of truth”. Also, 12 per cent of PNG journalists saw the public “empowerment” model as important, compared with just 6.7 per cent in Fiji. Journalists in PNG (24.6 per cent) were also more likely to see the media as a “nation builder” than in Fiji (17 per cent). Almost eleven per cent of Fiji journalists were unable to answer this category at all, all of them without any formal training, while only one per cent from PNG did not answer.

The qualitative components of this survey along with comparisons between news organisations will be developed in a later paper.

***Maire's story* — an HIV/AIDS documentary (Ingrid Leary)**

When countering the spread of HIV/AIDS in Pacific Island communities, the first crucial step in containing the spread of HIV in Pacific Island communities is to remove the stigma of infection and discrimination against people who have HIV or AIDS. Based on this objective, the action research by journalism lecturer Ingrid Leary (1999) is intended to use one particular case study to highlight the fear, anxiety and myths that surround the virus, to dismantle the stereotypes that HIV afflicts only the marginalised, and to empower women in their sexual choices. According to Leary:

To achieve these objectives, information is not enough. The audience must be drawn into the situation in a way that demands empathy and compassion. It was considered that conventional television storytelling devices such as narration, tightly-edited interview grabs and the inverted pyramid journalism structure, while informative, would not develop the rapport between the audience and subjectivity to allow for a fundamental attitude shift. A more effective style would use longer scenes and sequences and allow the subject, not the producer, to “tell the story”. It was thus decided to produce a *cinema verité* style 60-minute documentary adapted for Pacific conditions and resource constraints.

The subject of the program is a 24-year-old Tahitian woman, Maire Bopp Dupont, a University of the South Pacific student who has completed a double major arts degree in journalism and history politics. Bopp first became aware of her seropositivity when she was diagnosed with AIDS in Fiji in October 1998. She later traced her infection to a long-term relationship. Her former partner had not disclosed his seropositivity.

[A two-minute clip from *Maire's Story* was shown at this point.]

Maire Bopp first spoke publicly about her case some six weeks after her diagnosis of seropositivity, at the Pacific Islands News Association (PINA) conference in Tahiti in December 1998. Her presentation received widespread publicity throughout the Pacific, and was probably the first widely publicised region-wide “coming out” by somebody living with AIDS.

Bopp's case was the subject of several interviews and stories published and broadcast by the Fiji media prior to and during the STD and AIDS Regional Conference in Nadi in February 1999, at which she was a speaker. She was also awarded the inaugural University of the South Pacific Journalism Programme's Storyboard Award and *Daily Post Prize* in February 1999 for her contribution to regional journalism.

Her advocacy work continued in Rarotonga during March 1999 which was videotaped for this action research project, and she has embarked on similar public campaigns in her own islands of Tahiti and Moorea in French Polynesia.

Leary's action research project is funded by Fiji's Health Ministry and French Government, and is also supported by USP's Sociology Department and the Journalism Program. The documentary is due to be completed in October 1999. Two sub-masters will be produced — one for release in the English-speaking Pacific with French sub-titles; the other for the French-speaking Pacific with English sub-titles.

Commitments have been made to have the video packaged and redistributed region-wide to television companies, HIV and AIDS advocacy groups, health groups including health training organisations, tertiary institutions, education ministries, as well as general purchase at cost.

Information technology for enhanced education (Pat Craddock)

In the latter half of 1998, associate journalism lecturer and senior audio producer Patrick Craddock went on a four-month study trip to the Knowledge Media Institute of The Open University London; The Panos Institute in London; and various organisations in East Africa. These included World Space, the Kenya Institute for Mass Communications and Media Network International Ltd in Nairobi.

His study focused on the use of digital technology and the Internet for the transfer of information, methods of distribution, learning protocols, administrative structures and costing.

Unforeseen logistical obstacles affected the development of the study. As Craddock describes this:

In early August, I was in Nairobi when the American embassies of Tanzania and Kenya were simultaneously bombed. The Nairobi blast demolished two buildings and killed over 250 people. I was four blocks away. This was close enough to feel the hot wind generated by the explosion and to hear the ground murmur in protest. Panic dominated that day. ... The authorities in Nairobi had never experienced a calamity of this nature and assumed that more trouble was on the way. It became difficult to research anything anywhere (Craddock, 1999).

The USP Media Centre is still using a combination of analogue and digital equipment. In the United Kingdom the digital service is becoming supreme. Most analogue equipment is being phased out as being too expensive, hard to service due to the non-availability of spare parts and slow to operate compared to digital equipment. If the analogue method is used to record data, this information is then transferred to a digital mode for use in CD-ROM or DAT or Optical Disc (OD), or transferred straight to the Internet.

The USP also has a slow bureaucratic system for obtaining new equipment and spare parts. For example, the ordering of goods by credit card through the Internet or by phone is not practised by the university.

Craddock studied how One World and the Panos Institute supplied print, audiocassette and streamed RealAudio programs to the developing world. RealAudio is a program that can be installed on any computer with a soundcard from a 486 upwards. His study made proposals how short segments of news and music could be transferred over the Internet via a compression format for USP use.

He also made comparisons of problems for "convergence" between East Africa (Kenya), where 28,800 BPS is a common standard, and parts of the South Pacific, where USP just last year was upgraded to 68,000 BPS. He examined some world trends and their applicability for the USPNet project.

Most Web accessers in the South Pacific region excluding US territories, Australia and New Zealand have slow connections to the Internet and they pay fees several times higher than their Australian counterparts. This situation is unlikely to change quickly as the Post Office controllers in the South Pacific region want to retain exclusive rights as both Internet server and revenue collector.

Craddock noted that East Africa has a similar scenario to the South Pacific in terms of government control of Post Office charges. The poor maintenance of postal lines also restricts the quality of Internet access efficiency. He suggests that web users in the South Pacific planning web sites consciously consider designing them for quick access by reducing elaborate design features that slow down the client access to large files i.e. animated graphics, large JPEG and audio files.

Conclusion

The University of the South Pacific journalism program intends to develop a range of research projects. However, it is restricted by lack of staff and resources. The program is cooperating with a number of other institutions, notably the Auckland Institute of Technology, University of Queensland and University of Technology Sydney's journalism and mass communications courses. It is hoped that the proposed postgraduate program for the new millennium will lead to expanded resources and a widening research program, with growing research and projects by advanced students as well as staff.

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Note

The tables referred to in the paper are available from David Robie <robie_d@usp.ac.fj>