Karoronga, kele'a, talanoa, tapoetethakot and va: expanding millennial notions of a 'Pacific way' journalism education and media research culture

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Karoronga, kele'a, talanoa, tapoetethakot and va: expanding millennial notions of a 'Pacific way' journalism education and media research culture

DAVID ROBIE iD

As critical issues such as climate change, exploited fisheries, declining human rights, and reconfiguration of political systems inherited at independence increasingly challenge the microstates of Asia-Pacific, approaches to news media and journalism education are also under strain. University-based journalism education was introduced to the South Pacific in Papua New Guinea at independence in 1975 and in Fiji at the regional University of the South Pacific in 1987, while Technical Vocational Educational and Training institutions have been a more recent addition in the region. Some scholars argue there is little difference between Pacific and Western approaches to journalism, or that some journalism schools are too focused on Western media education, while others assert there is a distinctive style of journalism in Oceania with cultural variations based on the country where it is practiced and parallels with some approaches in Asia such as "mindful journalism." This paper examines a "Pacific way" journalism debate which echoes a regional political concept coined by the late Fiji president, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. The paper argues for a greater appreciation of the complexities of media cultures in Pacific nations and proposes a more nuanced, reflexive approach to journalism in the Pacific region. This is reflected in a "*talanoa* journalism" model that he advocates as a more culturally appropriate benchmark than monocultural media templates.

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Introduction

University-based journalism education was introduced to the South Pacific region in Papua New Guinea at independence from Australia in 1975 and in Fiji at the regional University of the South Pacific in 1987 (Robie, 2004, 2008), while Technical Vocational Educational and Training (TVET) institutions have been a more recent addition in the region (PACMAS, 2015). Some scholars (Hanusch & Uppal, 2015; McManus & Papoutsaki, 2004; Philpot, 1994), sometimes with limited experience in the field in the Pacific, argue that that there is little difference between Pacific and Western approaches to journalism, or that some journalism schools are too focused on Western notions of media education (Rooney, 2003; Sharp & Papoutsaki, 2008), while others from Pacific countries assert there is a distinctive style of journalism in Oceania with cultural variations based on the country where it is actually practiced (Bohane, 2013; Cass, 2002; Korauaba, 2012; Latu, 2010; Moala, 2005, 2009; Perrottet, 2015; Robie, 2004, 2014a; Singh, 2015, Titifanue, Kant, Finau, & Tarai, 2017) and has parallels with some approaches in Asia such as "mindful journalism" (Banda, 2015; Loo, 1994, 2013; Seneviratne, 2018; Sinha, 1981). As the teaching and practice of journalism for sustainable development in the Pacific becomes an increasing priority for the region there are challenging developments in the so-called age of the millennials.

While the Fourth Estate is seen as an independent watchdog on political power, this is especially articulated by an American model of the press that has "enthroned itself globally" (Merrill, 2009), and "set an agenda for most media research and journalism education" in the Asia-Pacific region (Latu, 2010, p. 31). However, this is balanced by an indigenous traditional cultural "estate" in the Pacific, sometimes referred to as a "fifth estate" (Robie, 2014, p. 332), which is regarded as a counterbalance to all other forms of power, including the news media. This was certainly found to be the case in Fiji in the wake of at least four coups d'etat in two decades (Philpot, 1994; Singh, 2014) since 1987. This paper introduces a range of indigenous cultural concepts in journalism and media research in the Pacific such as *karoronga* in Kiribati; *kele'a* and *va* in Tonga and *talanoa* in Fiji and the wider region as theorized and applied by journalists (Fairbairn-Dunlop & Coxon, 2014). A comparison is also made with the application of the notion of *tapoetethakot* by a Kareni journalist in both an Asian and South Pacific context.

The two major economic, political, and media-developed countries in the Pacific, Fiji and Papua New Guinea, have increasingly become the subject of a "Pacific way" journalism debate which parallels the regional political concept coined by the late Fiji president and paramount chief, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, to characterize the region's ceremonial and traditional form of negotiation, discussion, and dialogue (Mara, 1997). On the basis of a series of research studies, projects, and personal experience, this paper argues for a greater appreciation of the complexities of the media cultures in Pacific nations. It proposes a more nuanced, reflexive approach to media in the Pacific region based on a flexible and open form of communication, dialog, and negotiation, represented by "*talanoa* journalism."

Methodology

This discursive paper draws on more than two decades of document research, newsroom surveys, and interviews. It also reflects on my personal experience as a journalist and educator spanning almost three decades in the region[1] since the first known Pacific media empirical-based analysis (Phinney, 1985) in Papua New Guinea followed by my own research in Fiji and PNG (see Robie 2003, 2004, 2013a, 2014a). The paper captures some of my students' reflections addressing the question of whether there is indeed a unique Pacific perspective(s) on normative definitions of journalism (Cho, 2011; Hutt & Cleaver, 2017; Ikimotu & Tom, 2018, Korauaba, 2012; Latu, 2010, Perrottet, 2015; Robie, 2010, 2015). Early in the millennium (between 2004

and 2015), Australian Aid began funding various iterations of a TVET Journalism Initiative focused on "engaging and working closely" with the TVET media courses offered in five Pacific countries (PACMAS, 2015).[2] This TVET initiative had identified the need to "strengthen the professionalism of journalism and the provision of high quality entry-level journalism training." However, these TVET programs rarely matched the depth, breadth, and sustainability with the distinctively Pacific curricula of the three main university journalism programs in the region, Divine Word (Madang, Papua New Guinea), University of Papua New Guinea (especially catering for Melanesian states), and the University of the South Pacific (based in Fiji but with some activities at regional campuses of the 12 member states) (Robie, 2008). This paper also cites examples of Pacific culturally based projects that the author has initiated, encouraged, or developed, such as "Frontline" journalism-as-research project in 2012–2019 (see Bacon, 2012; Robie, 2014, pp. 321–343) and the Bearing Witness climate change project in Fiji in 2016–2017 in partnership with Te Ara Motuhenga documentary collective (Robie & Chand, 2017). This paper discusses a variety of cross-cultural approaches to journalism and communication research, ranging from *karoronga, kele'a, talanoa, tapoethethakot*, and *va*, concluding with my own *talanoa* journalism model that I advocate as a suggested exemplar for the region.

Development journalism and multiculturalism

Researchers such as Anand (2014), Banda (2015), Scott (2014), and Xu (2009) have argued for the integration of media studies with development studies while journalists such as Archie (2007), Dixit (1997) and Lewis (2011) have demonstrated how development can be better reported on by journalists with more nuanced and indigenous perspectives. In 2004, I raised in one of my earlier books *Mekim Nius: South Pacific Media, Politics and Education*, the issue of pressures and dilemmas on the news media gaining momentum in the South Pacific, often from a cultural as well as a

sociopolitical dimension (p. 249). I noted that while the media in some countries was "refreshingly outspoken and courageous," in others there was a worrying trend toward self-censorship. My message continued:

> Some media industry observers argue that reclaiming Pacific images and "envisioning a future without coups, conflicts, and contraband" is now more urgent than ever. This is due to a perception that the dominant news media in the Pacific is "Western," with Eurocentric and north-based conceptual models paramount. (p. 249)

Such "Western and Eurocentric" models have failed to seriously take Pacific and indigenous cultures and their world views into account. Pacific news media have played a crucial role in exposing corruption and abuse of political power or office, and in some cases leading to redress. Yet, as I noted later, it was vital that no political or social institution wrested absolutely authority over the news media, as the Bainimarama military-backed government sought to do in Fiji from 2006 onwards, and even following the 2014 and 2019 general elections by creating a "climate of fear and self-censorship" (Robie, 2014b, p. 98). Also, the hegemony of news media organizations is increasingly at stake in a fragmented mediascape.

At the same time, I had observed a style of journalism evolving in the Pacific that often contrasted with a Western approach. This style involved more of a "contribution to the progress of a country – economic and social development, education, and cultural" (Harris, 2018; Robie, 2004, p. 248). I have compared this approach to a five-legged *tanoa* – a bowl used for sharing traditional kava, or "grog," when engaged in discursive *talanoa*, or informal deliberation (Robie, 2012, 2014, p. 32; Vaioleti, 2006, p. 24). While this "Pacific way" model includes the four estates, or pillars, of a normative democratic structure – *Executive, Parliament, Judiciary, Media (Press)* – it also has an important fifth leg/estate: *Cultural hegemony*, representing indigenous tradition, or *kastom*, to use

Figure 1
'Pacific way' tradition and the five-legged *tanoa* image for a *talanoa* model of media communication.
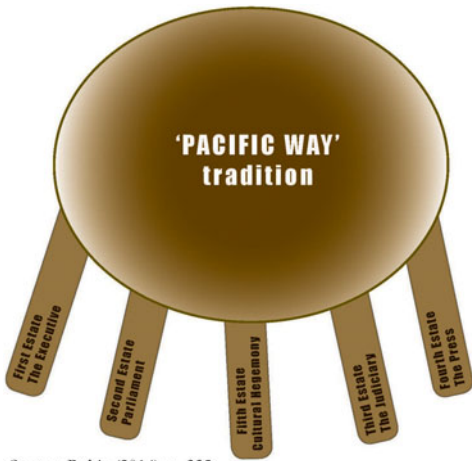
Source: Robie (2014), p. 332.

a Tok Pisin term (see Figure 1). While it can be argued that the evolving media style is a form of development journalism, Pacific journalists face a constant engagement with cultural challenges over negotiating this balance.

> Journalists need to identify key issues and explore their relationship to the poor, middle class, and rich sectors of the nation. It also means a lot more community reporting in the villages – far from the faxed and emailed press releases of the Pacific urban newsrooms. (Robie, 2004, p. 248)

University education has the capacity to provide the analytical skills to successfully report real development. It could be argued that the case for development journalism is especially urgent in the face of the rapid changes now taking place as a consequence of globalization and what might be called "the new regionalism." An example of this is a $19 billion Papua New Guinea liquefied natural gas project, the largest resource extraction development in the Asia-Pacific region. The plant and linking 700-km pipeline operated by ExxonMobil together with the national agency Oil Search and four other companies, challenges journalists reporting on tensions over royalties that threaten a

conflict on the scale of the 10-year Bougainville civil war waged over Panguna mine (Main, 2017). Indeed, a small-scale revolt signaled a warning in June 2018 when armed militants burned and damaged construction equipment and severed a road leading to the development (Woods, 2018). Such resulting development style of journalism deployed in this crisis is often referred to as the "Pacific way," mimicking a regional and sociopolitical concept referred to by Obijiofor and Hanusch (2011, p. 54).

This is nothing particularly new. As noted earlier in this paper, the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, Fiji's founding prime minister, a paramount chief and a former president, is often credited with conceptualizing the true meaning of the phrase "the Pacific Way." Mara's efforts and leadership led to the establishment of the region's major political bloc, South Pacific Forum (now the 18-nation Pacific Islands Forum). Notes by Congressman Eni F. H. Falaeomavaega, formerly chair of the US House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific:

> To a large extent, the Pacific way represents the uniqueness of the island nations and their shared interest in doing things that are totally outside of Western and elitist thinking … It is surely one of the ironies of history that perhaps our communications were better in those far off days than they are today. (Mara as quoted by Falaeomavaega, 2011)

However, the real credit for imagining the "Pacific way" belongs with the Tongan public intellectual and philosopher Epeli Hau'ofa of the University of the South Pacific who wrote about the "Pacific way" in his prophetic essay "Our sea of islands" (Hau'ofa, 1993). He was arguing for a new direction in theoretical and strategic thinking in the Pacific region. As applied to journalism, the concept has been compared to "Asian values" or "Afrocentric" media debates in contrast to the "Western-style journalism" imported during colonial eras (Archie, 2007, p. 86; Neilson, 2015, p. 11; Obijiofor & Hanusch, 2011, p. 52). Among advocates for "Pacific values" as an indigenous approach to journalism have been veteran *Taimi 'o Tonga*

publisher and media freedom champion Kalafi Moala, who argues for freedom for the "voices of dissent" in a changing culture (Moala, 2005, 2009) and for a media style reflecting "our way" and "our cultural view of realities" (cited in Singh, 2015, p. 27). In his 2015 doctoral thesis on the state of media in Fiji, University of the South Pacific journalism coordinator Shailendra Singh similarly advocated Pacific-specific approaches to journalism, calling on the media in the Asia-Pacific region to make better use of the resources available at universities.

> In multicultural societies such as Fiji, journalists deal with political differences, ethnic tensions, social conflicts, cultural sensitivities, autocratic governments, and military coups. Journalists covering these complex issues need not only practical skills but also philosophical and contextual knowledge taught in university curricula. (Singh, 2015, p. 219)

Ben Bohane, a Port Vila-based Australian photojournalist who took out Vanuatu citizenship in 2017, has argued for more than two decades for a far more nuanced Western coverage of the vast archipelago of islands and nations stretching from Easter Island in the east to Timor and Maluku in the West. In an ethnographic thesis in 2006 about *kastom* (custom) and cults in the region, he noted how some indigenous commentators on Pacific culture had "decried the anthropological break-up of the Pacific" into Melanesia, Polynesia, and Micronesia. The argument claimed that with centuries of inter-island voyaging, "we should not be making distinctions between these areas – they are all Pacific peoples with shared bloodlines and culture" (Bohane, 2007, p. 5).

> Much of the political and journalistic discourse analyzing the troubles of Melanesia have centered on a diagnosis incorporating political corruption, poor management, lack of "good governance," urbanization, breakdown of "traditional values", and respect for chiefs, blaming the "*wantok*" system of tribal loyalties,

unemployment, and poor education (Bohane, 2007, p. 3).

However, while many of these elements have certainly played a part in destabilizing the Pacific, especially Melanesian nations, each country confronts different circumstances and unique conflicts. Both journalism and media research need different touchstones other than the Western frames, often with a more spiritual basis underpinning the objectives.

Former *Asia Pacific Media Educator* editor Eric Loo, a Malaysian who has lived in Australia many years, argued in an early article (1994) exploring development journalism "as an aid to multiculturalism" that journalism educators need to take students in a multicultural society "beyond the traditional freemarket model of news operations" to include a social change perspective on the media. Journalism educators should take specific pragmatic steps to increase their students' understanding of the diverse expectations of media consumers from varied ethnic backgrounds and prepare them to be leading social change agents rather than dispassionate "objective" reporters of cross-cultural issues (Loo, 1994, p. 2). With particular reference to climate change, former Fiji journalist turned academic Ushar Sundar Harris writes of a framework she labels as Participatory Environmental Communication (PEC) where she incorporates three interrelated stands, *diversity*, *network*, and *agency*, of the "DNA" as community building blocks for developing a resilient society (Harris, 2018, p. 16).

According to Sharp and Papoutsaki (2008) in an article about "two models" for Pacific journalism education, journalists and media in the region have often been "the target of internal criticism with some arguing that the media is too 'Western'." The counter view is that the media is not tuned in to "the values and cultures of the region (often summarized as 'the Pacific way')." Sharp and Papoutsaki's overview in brief:

> Media in most of these [micro Pacific] countries is elite-oriented and urban-based and tends to give little space to the

opinions of the grassroots. Reporters seem to bypass the wisdom of local communities in terms of how sustainable development can be achieved from below; instead they tend to get their news feeds from press releases by different development or government agencies. (Sharp & Papoutsaki, 2008, p. 83)

The following sections of this paper introduce several methodological approaches to Pacific journalism and media research.

Talanoa and the 'Pacific Way'

In 2007, a Pacific postgraduate *Talanoa* consultation series, deploying access grid technology at all eight New Zealand universities, was launched by Pacific studies Professor Tagaloatele Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop to enhance and develop an Oceania research network. The infrastructure was established under a state-funded "Building Research Communities in the Social Sciences" (BRCSS) initiative. A collection of presentations from these digital seminars were edited together as a book entitled *Talanoa: Building a Pasifika Research Culture* (Fairbairn-Dunlop & Coxon, 2014). While relatively few researchers from the communication studies or journalism disciplines have taken part in these *talanoa*, the researcher capacity-building and ideas generated have considerable implications for media studies in the Asia-Pacific region. As Fairbairn-Dunlop and Coxon (2014) described the primary objective of the *talanoa* series, they seek "to provide a place for critical analysis of Pacific research issues and approaches." She adds:

> [*Talanoa*] was envisaged as a virtual form for connecting – for building relationships between people, ideas, and institutions and for encouraging the development of a critical mass of Pacific postgraduate researchers from across New Zealand universities. (Fairbairn-Dunlop & Coxon, 2014, p. 7)

In particular, it is hoped that such a knowledge space would empower Pacific research by:

- Sharing information about what Pacific research is being done, the gaps and the opportunities;

- Gaining confidence in critically examining differing epistemological positions and exploring, developing and promoting Pacific research methodologies;
- Examining how research methodologies influence research aims, design and implementation and analysis; and
- Experimenting with the use of technology.

Two contributors, in particular, offered chapters on the specific *talanoa* theme, Tui Nicola Clery (2014), who analyzed how activists and civil society advocates have been increasingly using the pedagogical tools for peace building in Fiji, while Telesia Kalavite (2014) explored application of the concepts in a Tongan context. While living in Fiji and teaching at the University of the South Pacific between 1998 and 2002, I had also come to recognize how elements of a *talanoa* methodology might be appropriate in a Pacific journalism environment and I explored the implications in an *Australian Journalism Review* article (Robie, 2013a). As Mahina and Nabobo-Baba have noted (2004, p. 204), indigenous methodologies, pedagogies, and epistemologies need to be embraced by the media in both research and reportage in the South Pacific. Otherwise, Indigenous and cross-cultural perspectives will continue to be marginalized. The challenges for the future for Pacific scholars and journalists are thus "permanent, multifaceted and complex" (cited in Robie, 2013a):

> In the Pacific, people talk of walking forward into the *past* and walking backward into the *future*, where *past* and *future* are constantly fused and diffused in the ever-changing conflicting present. (Mahina & Nabobo-Baba, 2004, p. 204)

Essentially, while *talanoa* is a word widely used across the Pacific in many languages to stress "chat, yarn, or tell stories" (Clery, 2014, p. 108), in a research and journalism context it means "purposeful talk." As Clery explains, *talanoa* as a research methodology "does not mean to talk without content or focus, but it does mean that the pathway of the dialog and the end of the

conversation are not fixed or predetermined." Clery also argues that a *talanoa* discussion has a specific context and is "responsive to the needs of people in a given situation." How Nabobo-Baba explains the approach is:

> *Talanoa* refers to a process in which two or more people talk together, or in which one person tells a story to an audience who are largely listeners … A *talanoa* does not happen in a void; in the Fijian community a *talanoa*, or a request for a *talanoa*, occurs in a specific cultural context, with expectations articulated by the people concerned. *Talanoa* is guided by rules of relationship and kinship, sharing ways of knowing and knowledge, and worldviews. (Nabobo-Baba, 2006, p. 27)

In her chapter in the Fairbairn-Dunlop and Coxon book, Clery provides a nuanced overview and explanation of how a *talanoa* works in practice, how it "proceeds and builds intuitively, in relation to the expressed needs, interests, and aspirations of people." Although her account is primarily in the context of performance and creative theater arts practice and peace research, Clery clearly strikes a chord for the practice of journalism and media research as well.

Karoronga

Several postgraduate journalists and students associated with the Pacific Media Center have explored various Indigenous research and journalism methodologies. For example, while researching a Master's thesis on the politics of climate change in the so-called "disappearing nation" Kiribati, a mid-Pacific Micronesian nation with a population of barely 100,000 spread across the ocean, *Kiribati Independent* editor Taberannang Korauaba (2012) became acutely aware of the shortcomings of Western research models in this environmental challenge. He searched for an Indigenous research model in an oral culture with limited media research or case studies available that might be better suited to his climate change work. Drawn to

notions of deliberative journalism (Romano, 2010) in a Western context, he looked for a parallel in Kiribati culture. Eventually Korauaba settled on the *karoronga* cultural concept as "a framework to engage the media" in addressing complex issues in Kiribati (Korauaba, 2012, p. 2). While the country at the time had a progressive and inspirational leader in then President Anote Tong, there was a disjuncture between the presidency's global voice on climate change and the general awareness of the country's population. A compelling 2018 documentary film, *Anote's Ark*, pays tribute to Tong's dilemma and his people's struggle for climate justice.

Korauaba defined his research approach as Culturally Planned Deliberative Journalism (CPDJ), based upon the cultural concept of cooperation and teamwork – *te karoronga, te uaai, te airiiri*, and *te kataanga.* Finally, Korauaba selected *Te Karoronga* because "its sound is similar to *kareke rongorongo*, the local definition of journalism, or *te kaarongo*" (2012, p. 24). For the actual collection of data, Korauaba deployed the traditional Kiribati methodology of *taono tabon inaim*, the name of a cultural practice used during special visits. As Korauaba explained: "Families involved in this cultural process discuss very important and sometimes sensitive matters, such as engagement arrangements and seeking any confessions for 'wrongdoing'." (Korauaba, 2012, p. 50).

Kele'a and Va

Josephine Latu, a researcher attached to the Pacific Media Watch freedom project at Auckland University of Technology, examined the Tongan cultural context for journalism as a profession and the notion of media freedom in a 2010 thesis. In Tonga, she argued, the promotion of media freedom could be approached at two levels. She described the first approach as "structural, formalized, officialized, and well-publicized demarcations of political rights to free speech and freedom of information." A globalized, Western approach in effect. The second layer "engages more subtle yet

equally powerful, hegemonically absorbed parameters that rely on cultural understandings of *va* (social relationships) and *fatongia* (social duty)." More widely delineated with the phrase *tauhi va* (literally *time* and *space*), 'Ilaiu (2009) has interpreted this as "beautiful relationships, but in a more estheticesthetic context such as architecture and performing arts. According to Reynolds (2016, p. 194), *va* is a relational space in a holistic web of connected spaces." Latu argued that in the media context:

> The challenge for journalists is finding a way to address the deeper cultural condition and incorporate this into the role of media in society as a mediator for democracy. (Latu, 2010, p. 43)

Latu's research motivation had been driven by a growing awareness that is in contrast to the "Tongan way," journalists in New Zealand "pushed the ideal of media freedom without prior restraint," and were especially at ease when reporting political issues. However, in Tonga "news angles were relatively tame, less conflict-driven, and more about relaying information rather than uncovering hidden facts" (p. 44). Nevertheless, Latu observed that journalists frequently found creative ways of skirting around "cultural contraints" in carrying out their role. Among examples, she cited veteran *Taimi 'o Tonga* publisher Kalafi Moala's anecdote about "slipping in just enough information" about a taboo story and letting the reader fill in the gaps (Ibid.)

Principles of democracy and press freedom generally taken as the "norm" in developed societies, argued Latu, "often have to confront contrasting social values and ideologies in the local context, based on the nation's small population, level of modernization, unique social history, and prevalent cultural attitudes focused on group cohesiveness and health interpersonal relationships." These issues are generally overlooked in Western discourses on Pacific media.

> The challenge therefore is finding a way to negotiate a space for democracy within the existent social and cultural framework, in order for it to be absorbed as a bone fide part of the Tongan lifestyle ... [This is] how the concept of *va* can be used to promote good governance and media freedom for the benefit of the Tongan people. (Latu, 2010, p. 118)

This is where the concept of *va* represents space and relationships. It is a communal relationship framework where individuals mutually seek to maintain harmony and mutual support for each other by carrying out cultural obligations and duties, known as *fatongia*. This also means a clearly demarcated system of hierarchy, which in a media context needs to be negotiated. Not an easy task.

Kele'a is not actually a cultural concept in itself, it is the name of a newspaper, *Koe Kele'a* (*conch shell ensemble*), that began life as an anti-establishment and anti-corruption pamphlet, and synonymous with the notion of "democracy." It is symbolic of struggle against the conservative Tongan royal establishment and privilege. As *Kele'a* gained popularity, it eventually became a commercial weekly newspaper. It was founded in the 1980s by pro-democracy leader Akilisi Pohiva, currently prime minister of Tonga.

Myanmar: Tapatoethakot

Concepts of talanoa from the Pacific are also mirrored among some indigenous Asian ethnic groups (Dixit, 1997; Seneviratne, 2018). In Myanmar, for example, an indigenous Karen-Burmese woman researching her community within a "Western" academic setting, albeit in the heart of urban Polynesia in the Pacific, found this a challenge at the Pacific Media Center. Violet Cho (an adopted pseudonym for a refugee journalist writing for *Mizzima News*) said she had "struggled to find a research methodology" that was appropriate for her community (Cho, 2009).

> As a Karen, we have no universities and no current practice for translating our culture into a Western academic form. We have no academic journals or books in Karen language. Our language comes from

an oral tradition but it has been heavily influenced by British colonization. As a Burmese, knowledge production inside my country is extremely restricted, universities are under-funded, subject to strict censorship and plagiarism is widespread. (Cho, 2009, p. 23)

Eschewing Western research methodologies as being inappropriate for her community, Cho adopted the Karen word *tapotaethakot* to give meaning to her research, which was about the novel and creative means that the Karen diaspora community was using social media for communication. *Tapotaethakot* literally means "informal conversation with people who are close" (Cho, 2009, p. 24). According to Cho, this closeness comes from Karen culture, "where people treat others as relatives." Examples that she cites are that people should treat an older man as their "uncle," a younger girl as their "little sister" and so on.

When applied to a research methodology, *tapataethakot* can include principles such as: (1) Respecting participants and treating them according to Karen rules of kinship; (2) Meeting informally and openly, and having "conversations" rather than formal interviews, sharing food (this involves reciprocity with the research disclosing personal information); (3) Being open and upfront about the research purposes; (4) Becoming part of the community; (5) Recognizing and valuing people's experience and experiential knowledge rather than Western "institutional knowledge"; (6) Recognizing and making use of oral tradition and storytelling as legitimate forms of knowledge; and (7) Recruiting research participants informally through personal and family relations, and through community leaders. In Cho's case, she addressed oral tradition and storytelling by using radio as a research medium. She produced five short radio features (for the BBC) to assert Karen oral tradition.

Ethnic language and culture through "exiled" news media, which is available in English, Burmese, and other languages, helped maintain a dream of one day returning to the homeland, Cho found in her research (Cho, 2011, p. 199). Also, media participants were able to keep "up to date" with developments back home.

> In one case, Htoo Say, a Karen man from Auckland's western suburbs, even heard about a personal tragedy through exiled news media. Htoo Say had not had any contact with his immediate family, who remained in Burma. One of his first cousins, who was an insurgent soldier, was shot in a military offensive and Htoo Say only found out about it through exiled media in Thailand when a story was published online. (p. 199)

Participants also talked about "a sense of belonging to virtual Burmese communities, instead of feelings of alienation in New Zealand" (p. 199). Language and the internet were tools to overcome the anxiety of "forgetting" (Cho, 2011, p. 198). As a journalist/researcher, Cho notes when meeting diasporic media participants, she was able to share stories about exile, "which is a way of recognizing each other's suffering and thereby keeping each other's identity as Burmese refugees who have resisted an oppressive regime" (p. 207).

Fiji and Samoan perspectives

Fiji journalism educators Singh and Drugunalevu (2016) present culture as an important variable in the Pacific. Citing Masoe and Prescott (2011), they argue, "It is the source of family and community power, to the point that anyone who defies certain cultural norms can be cast aside" (Singh & Drugunalevu, 2016, p. 51). An example that they gave was a *Wansolwara* student journalism newspaper case about cyberbullying and coercion by critics. This case involved a Samoan campus reporter who was accused of breaching *fa'asamoa*, or the "Samoan way" even though she was on the University of the South Pacific campus at Laucala in Suva, Fiji. The concept of *fa'asamoa* means the binding or unity on the basis of shared values and beliefs, and is considered the embodiment of Samoan culture.

While Singh acknowledges that the region's media is "by no means totally cowed by culture and tradition" (2015, p. 203), he stresses that an alleged lack of critical reporting has been at issue in a range of fora, such as the Pacific Islands News Association (PINA) conference in Noumea, New Caledonia, in 2014. At that event Roch Wamytam, then president of the territorial Congress of New Caledonia, and Dr Colin Tukuitonga, then Director-General of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) shared a view that Pacific journalists tended to "avoid asking the hard questions, are less inquisitive than their foreign counterparts, and rely too much on press releases" (p. 203).

Singh's doctoral thesis (2014) on the state of journalism in Fiji found that some journalists "refuse to be strait-jacketed into the classical Western news reporting format and are trying to break out of it" (p. 206). Singh continued:

> This was evident in one media executive's insistence that while he believed in objectivity, he would not report fundamentally divisive things in the name of "free-for-all journalism." He would rather privilege development stories than stories that could harm the country … [T]he media executive's comments show that some Fiji journalists are questioning the established ways of reporting. (Singh, 2015, p. 207)

An alternative Talanoa journalism model

Since the millennium, I have deployed a "four worlds news values" matrix to explore the nuances of journalism methodologies in the Pacific micro states and in other developing countries in a global South context (see Robie, 2013b; 2014a, p. 330). The problematic notion of "objectivity" is espoused as a dominant ideal for First World media and often media in Asia-Pacific are seen in the West as "compliant" (Loo, 2013, p. 14). However, the notions of "collective agitator" and "nation building" are more important and relevant for the Second and Third Worlds respectively (of which

some countries are becoming more restrictive such as in Eastern Europe, Turkey, and Middle East nations after the so-called Arab Spring in 2011 following a benign period of relative openness). While news values primarily reflect conflict, timeliness, proximity, and personality/celebrity for the First World, for the Indigenous Fourth World an advocacy role as "independent [political] voice," and in "language," "culture," "education," "solidarity," and the "environment" become the mantra (Robie, 2014a, p. 331). Hanusch (2013) and again with Hanusch and Uppal (2015) 2 years later examined a variety of analyses of Indigenous media and journalism strategies described as an "attempt to break out of the stereotypical portrayal by the mainstream and to create a space where they can tell their own stories in their own ways" (Hanusch, 2013, p. 84).

Obijiofor and Hanusch (2011) have also acknowledged the importance of the broader field of communication for development (C4D), including Indigenous development, and have defined development journalism as a model which "advocates the belief that journalism should serve as agents of social change and development in the societies in which they operate" (p. 25). Romano (2010) refers to five categories of development journalism which sees journalists as – nation builders, partners with governments (the model frequently attacked by Western media and wrongly ascribed to all notions of development journalism), agents of empowerment, watchdogs, and guardians of transparency. Using the empowerment category, Romano has referred to *deliberative development journalism* which she sees as "exploring the concerns of people outside the centers of business, politics, and mainstream political power and giving 'a voice to the voiceless'," as Nepalese editor and journalist Kunda Dixit puts it (Dixit, 1997, p. 156).

My own interpretation of development journalism as I have observed it at work in the Pacific and through our own student-led "cutting edge" news media at several universities, is simply called *critical development journalism.* It is a blend of the empowerment, watchdog, and

Figure 2

Tukutaki village landslide survivor Vilimaina Botitu tells her family's story of death and survival.
Source: PACIFIC MEDIA CENTER 2017. YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0weZjJiK-I

transparency variations noted by Romano along with human rights journalism (Shaw, 2011). This also has a parallel with investigative journalism and yet has much in common with the Indigenous notions of journalism and research. However, it focuses on the condition of developing nations and ways of improving this. With this approach, as I have discussed in my 2014 book, *Don't Spoil My Beautiful Face*, journalists are often encouraged to travel to remote areas, interact with the local community and report back on critical projects. Proposed government projects are put under the spotlight and analyzed to see whether they would really help communities. An example of this is the Bearing Witness climate change postgraduate project that I initiated in 2016 in collaboration with the University of the South Pacific's journalism program and Pacific Center for the Environment and Sustainable Development (PaCE-SD). Over 3 years teams of postgraduate student journalists has been dispatched to Fiji to "bear witness" to the environment challenges caused by global warming (Robie & Chand, 2017). Their first report was in April 2016, barely 2 months after the Tropical Cyclone Winston disaster killed 44 people and cut a swathe of destruction through the country. The two postgraduate student journalists focused on the Rewa river delta village of Daku for their in-depth

reports. The following reporting teams over the next 2 years focused on the Viti Levu island village of Tukuraki (Hutt & Cleaver, 2017) – devastated three-times in 4 years by two cyclones and a landslide (Figure 2) – and remote Rabi island (Bhattarai, 2018; Ikimotu & Tom, 2018) (Figure 3).

People are usually at the center of this investigative storytelling. The reports seek to answer the "why?" question. Often the journalist comes up with *proposed* or *potential* solutions and actions. As Sinha explained it:

> The main essence of investigative reporting is "why." Development journalism attempts to highlight the "what, why, and how" of the process of events. The basic philosophy of investigative journalism is to unveil the secrecy, to expose. But development journalism has to be alive to the realities of the situation and has to tail, study, and report the process of socio-economic, cultural, political, [and] educational changes in the country. (Sinha, 1981)

The concept of *talanoa*, or frank face-to-face discussion with no hidden agenda, became most popularized in the contemporary Pacific through the initiatives of East-West Center academic Dr Sitiveni Halapua. It was drawn upon for a series of meetings in Fiji aimed at building relationships and

understanding, in the wake of the coup attempted (and partially successful) by George Speight on 19 May 2000. Halapua defines the philosophy as "frank expression without concealment" and explains that the word is derived from two distinct meanings in the Austronesian languages – *tala*, meaning talking or telling stories, and *noa*, meaning "zero or without concealment" (Halapua, n.d., p. 1). I have previously made a wide-ranging case for *talanoa* as a journalism and media research methodology (Robie, 2013a, 2014a).

For my *talanoa* journalism approach in the Asia-Pacific region, the model contrasts with normative, or orthodox, "Western" journalism in that it has a greater focus on grassroots sources, and less attachment to elite and establishment sources (Robie, 2014, pp. 332–333) (see Figure 4). Instead of tightly edited hard news descriptions, there is more emphasis on providing context and cultural interpretations or explanations. While normative journalism remains "objective" and detached, *talanoa* journalism is more reflexive, more nuanced about cause and effect, and also gives greater weight to grassroots and "citizen public opinion" than dominant top-down views. Instead of an "unfettered" free media approach to conflict, a *talanoa* journalist would balance a defense of a free media with social responsibility. Instead of

entertainment, "infotainment" and sensationalism, a *talanoa* media would always emphasis public interest, civil society and community empowerment, running stories that encourage people to "act" with possible solutions being identified. Also, in contrast to normative mainstream codes that are widely perceived to be ineffective, *talanoa* journalism recognizes and deploys Indigenous, diversity and cultural values.

Conclusion

As critical issues such as climate change, exploited fisheries, declining human rights, and reconfiguration of political systems inherited at independence increasingly challenge the microstates of the Asia-Pacific region, approaches to news media and journalism education have become increasingly under strain. There is a growing need for journalism strategies that are not solely replicating Western news values that have arguably contributed to a declining public trust in news media. Rather than contributing to a conservative view of news media with a diminished concept of the watchdog role, the "Pacific way" journalism debate unleashed indirectly by the late Fiji president, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, has opened the door to a fresh way to imagine Asia-Pacific journalism. This approach to journalism offers a greater

Figure 4

The *talanoa* journalism matrix.

Talanoa journalism matrix

Mainstream Journalism Western	Talanoa Journalism Pacific
Élite-source oriented	Grassroots source oriented
Hard news description	Hard news with context, cultural interpretations
Objective, detached, uninvolved stance	Reflexive stance
Solutions not an issue	Possible solutions for identified problems
Top-down mainstream vertical public opinion	Grassroots, citizen public opinion, horizontal views
Emphasises individualist achievement	Emphasises community achievement
Unfettered free media focused on conflict	Free media, but balanced with social responsibility
Consumer, business orientation	Public interest, civil society, community empowerment focus
Entertainment or sensational angles	Focus on positive outcomes for wider community
Focus on crime, disaster and deviant behaviour	Focus on socio-economic development, community needs, wellbeing and progress
Normative mainstream ethical codes	Community ethics with recognition of indigenous, diversity, cultural values

appreciation of the complexities of media cultures in Pacific nations and proposes a more nuanced, reflexive approach to the craft and profession. The "*talanoa* journalism" model outlines a more culturally appropriate benchmark than monocultural media templates. Hopefully, this model will encourage more Pacific-based approaches in revisiting the role of the media to fit local contexts.

Glossary:

Kel'ea (Tonga)   conch shell … trumpeting against corruption

Talanoa (Pacific-wide)   frank face-to-face discussion with no hidden agenda

Tapoetethakot (Karen)	informal conversation with people who are close
Te Karoronga (Kiribati)	a cultural framework to engage the media
Va (Tonga)	a communal relationship framework which can be used to promote good governance

Pasifika research models (Ako Aotearoa):
https://akoaotearoa.ac.nz/community/auckland-teu-le-vaa-workshop-forum/forum/pasifika-mod-els-research

Notes

1. The author was head of journalism at the University of Papua New Guinea in Port Moresby between 1993 and 1998, and of the University of the South Pacific regional program in Suva, Fiji, 1998–2002. He has been the director of the Pacific Media Center at Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand, founding it in 2007.

2. The five TVETs involved in the Australian AID and Australian Broadcasting Corporation-assisted activity are Fiji National University (FNU, formerly called the Fiji Institute of Technology), National University of Samoa (NUS), Solomon Islands National University (SINU, formerly called Solomon Islands College of Higher Education), Tonga Institute of Higher Education (TIHE), and Vanuatu Institute of Technology (VIT). This PACMAS Journalism Initiative (2014–2019) activity "continues and builds on past program(me) activities with the TVETs in the Pacific," such as the Pacific Media Communications Facility (PMCF) which implemented and supported entry level media and journalism training from 2004 to 2007, and PACMAS Phase 1 (2008–2010).

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   Banbans of Rabi: A Story of Survival (2018). Directed by Blessen Tom and Hele Ikimotu. Pacific Media Center. [Documentary]. www.youtube.com/watch?v=5r6ijUnhAqE

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