

Media in Asia: Aspirations, Choices and Realities

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‘West Papua in the Papua New Guinean Press’

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“The media in their privileged position as the makers and shapers of public opinion have a responsibility to ensure fair and balanced coverage in the context of crisis situations in the Pacific – for refugees in Nauru and Manus Island, those on the borders of PNG and West Papua, IDPs in Fiji and the Solomon Islands” (Action, 2002:1).

West Papua’s struggle for independence from Indonesia has gone largely unnoticed by the international media. It is sporadically covered by the neighbouring and regional media and this only in times of crisis such as refugees crossing borders, hostage taking and protests against the Freeport Mining Company that operates the world’s biggest gold deposit.

Much of the coverage reflects geopolitical complexities involving Indonesia’s growing political influence in the region that discourages neighbours and the international community from taking a position on what is considered a national matter and out of fear of destabilising the country and the region.

This paper explores the West Papua issue through the Papua New Guinea media. Much of the coverage in the past came during the height of clashes between Indonesian and Free Papua Movement forces usually along the border of West Papua and PNG and in times of refugees crossing the borders. However, there has been a great shift in coverage over the last 20 years indicating a decline in stories on West Papua and a general lack of interest from PNG media to invest time and effort for proper coverage.

Comparing to earlier coverage and taking also into consideration that PNG is the only neighbouring country that shares not only land borders but also a Melanesian heritage and several thousand West Papuan refugees, the decline in media coverage is not easily justified. This research is seeking to identify the reasons for this decline. The assumption is that this is due to regional geopolitics (PNG’s increasingly closer relationship with Indonesia and Australia’s influence on PNG regional politics) and a general decline in journalism practices in the PNG media.

A comparative content analysis of three PNG newspapers at two different time frames was carried out in order to study the change in press coverage. In addition, in depth interviews with journalists involved in the reporting of West Papuan were also taken in order to help us better understand the media’s role in covering West Papua. Interviews with West Papuan individuals present in PNG were also done to understand better the conflict and their perceptions of how they are represented in the PNG media.

I. The West Papua Conflict

A former Dutch colony known at different times with different names, Netherlands New Guinea (until 1962), West Irian (1962-1973) and Irian Jaya (1973-2000), Papua, as it is currently internationally recognised, is a province of Indonesia and the other half of the island of New Guinea, bordering Papua New Guinea to the east. Those who do not recognize the legitimacy of Indonesia’s claim to Papua refer to the area as West Papua (New Internationalist, 2002:13; Wikipedia; Osborne, 1985; OPMRC members interview with the authors, 9/5/06).

The Dutch ceded sovereignty of Dutch East Indies to the Indonesia Republic in 1949, excluding however the Dutch New Guinea on the argument that it was geographically and ethnically different and that it should eventually be given self determination. They started preparing the territory for independence in the fifties and encouraged the setting up of the first Papuan parliament that was expected to design and implement full independence by 1970. The New Guinea Council decided on the national symbols including a national anthem, flag (Morning Star) and on the country's new name that was to be West Papua (ibid).

Cold war politics were though decisive for the fate of West Papua. Indonesia was approaching Russia over an arms deal and the United States, concerned about the potential rise of communism in Southeast Asia, put pressure on the Netherlands and Australia to change their early position that supported West Papua's independence resulting in the surrender of the Dutch territory to Indonesia (see Osborne, 1985; Budjiardjo & Lien Soei Liong, 1983; New Internationalist, 2002:22; Rumakiek, 2004). In an agreement signed by Indonesia and the Netherlands, ratified in the UN in 1962, it was stipulated that authority would transfer to a UN temporary Executive Authority that would eventually hand the territory to Indonesia in 1963 until such time as a UN-conducted 'Act of Free Choice' could determine the West Papuan's will. What followed was the end of the New Guinea Council's work by the Indonesian government, which forbade the use of any national symbols. Resistance was organised around that time and the Free Papua Movement (OPM, Organisasi Papua Merdeka) was set up in 1964 (ibid).

West Papua was formally annexed by Indonesia under the controversial Act of Free Choice sponsored by the UN in 1969. The decision was based on the voting of 1026 tribal leaders who were forced to vote in favour of Indonesia's rule (ibid). *Sydney Morning Herald's* editorial on this event, titled 'Neo-colonialism' argued against this decision and foresaw the arising issues:

The alternative to an Indonesian colony is an independent West New Guinea, aided by the UN, by the Netherlands and by Australia and looking forward ultimately to political association with an independent eastern New Guinea. In realistic terms, by ignoring the fact that New Guinea is ethnically and geographically an entity and that all the 'musyawarah'¹ in the world cannot turn Melanesian Papuans into Indonesians, we are helping to prepare the ground for a Papuan irredentist movement and laying up grave trouble in store for New Guinea and consequently for ourselves (quoted in Osborne, 1985:47).

The Australians were concerned about the impact this might have on the eastern part of the island that they administered under UN mandate and which they were preparing for independence. However, bigger regional politics overrode these concerns. Since then West Papuans have strived for their independence with an on-going conflict that has pushed several thousands to leave the country as refugees.

The unspoken element in the argument against or for the West Papua independence was and has been the rich mineral resources of the region and who would have the right to exploit them (Martinikus, 2002:20). In 1977 the construction of the world's largest

¹ An Indonesian word describing a process of decision making by consensus (op.cit).

copper and gold mine began by the US company Freeport-McMoRan Copper & Gold under an agreement with the Indonesian government that was signed two years before the Act of Free Choice. There was strong local reaction to the construction of the mine and to this day there are frequent protests by West Papuans against the mine, which is Indonesia Government's biggest tax-payer (New Internationalist, 2002:12). The latest protests in March 2006 were extensive and had several victims, partly used as a way of expressing local grievances about the siphoning of revenue out of the province to the central government budget with little benefit to West Papuans and indirectly linked to the issue of independence (Pacific Media Watch, 17 March 2006).

Today there are reports for serious human rights violations with references to Indonesian army, militias and Islamic militants' (e.g. Laskar Jihad) heavy presence and abuses (The New Internationalist, 2002; 2005:4,5; Martinikus, 2002: 59; 2006). In the last decade Indonesia has also accelerated its transmigration program under which several hundreds of thousands of Javanese and Sumatrans have moved to West Papua in an effort to consolidate further Indonesian rule of the region (ibid).

There have been some efforts from the Indonesian government in the past to address the West Papua issue. During the Abdurrahman Wahid administration in 2000, West Papua gained a special autonomy status. He helped fund the Congress from which a united West Papuan independence movement emerged. However this new softer policy changed when Megawati Sukarnoputri took over power, which saw the region subdivided into smaller provinces (The New Internationalist, 2002:10; Rumakiek, 2004).

As far as Indonesia is concerned, the territory has been an integral part of the Republic of Indonesia, transferred to them in 1949 and had achieved independence then. Indonesia sees itself as the legal successor to all territories of the former Netherlands East Indies. They argue this on the international principle, which asserts that boundaries of nascent post-colonial countries conform to their pre-sovereign ones (The Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Port Moresby, 2001:3).

As far as West Papuans are concerned, West Papua is a case of Asian colonialism (West Papuans interview with authors, 9/5/06; see also the Kennedy Report on West Papua, 2006). This has also been the sentiment of regional leaders who condemned the transfer of WP to Indonesia as an Asiatic colonialism (Somare quoted in Osborne, 1985: 44). On the diplomatic front there is interest and moral support but only the Republic of Vanuatu has taken concrete actions by allowing West Papuans to open an information office in its capital (Rumakiek, 2004).

There are still 17 colonial territories on the UN's Decolonization list. West Papua is not one of them. As far as UN is concerned, West Papua lost its right to self-determination in 1969. Pacific Islands Forum has taken this issue on and has argued that Indonesia colonised WP with the help of the UN and the Netherlands against the wishes of the people and has called for the decolonisation of the West Papua (PCRC, 2001).

The general feeling as expressed by the OPM's international spokesman John Ondowame, is that as long as the Pacific Island countries, particularly Melanesia and the big brothers of the region, Australia and New Zealand do not support the issue of West Papua, the issue will never go beyond the regional borders (Pacific Media Watch,

11 April, 2006). In January 2006, several West Papuan refugees landed on the northern coast of Australia asking asylum on the argument that the Indonesian military is carrying out a genocide in WP. Australia's decision to grant asylum visas to these refugees caused a heavy diplomatic rift and media-based backlash between the two countries.

Australia's subsequent efforts to minimize the harm over the granting of asylum visas by trying to reassure Indonesia that they are not trying to undermine its sovereignty and territorial integrity indicates Indonesia's strong political influence in the region. Papua New Guinea was involved in this process as some more West Papuans tried to reach Australia via PNG. Once more, a crisis puts West Papua on the regional media's map.

West Papua & Foreign Media

It is an undeniable fact that the West Papuan struggle for independence is one of the least reported conflicts both regionally and internationally. Tim Sharp calls the West Papua struggle one of the Australian media's most neglected areas of coverage in more than three decades (Sharp, 2006).

Even when West Papua becomes a story in foreign media, the focus often gets away from the actual cause of the conflict, hijacked by regional politics played at a higher diplomatic level between governments and other organizations and with not enough West Papuan voices heard. Australian mainstream media's neglect, Tim Sharp argues, can be viewed as a 'facet of the Australian diplomatic policy of complicity and acquiescence towards its near neighbour, Indonesia' (opcit).

The lack of information on West Papua is also largely due to restrictions imposed on foreign journalists to travel to the region. Previous records indicate Indonesian state's efforts to obstruct the flow of information about West Papua to both Indonesian and foreign media as McDougall reported in the late 80s:

The official blackout is more effective than the one for East Timor. The Indonesian press remains under tight strictures not to become curious about, much less report, anything about armed conflict, casualties, or even detentions in Irian Jaya. Consequently, the low-level war in Irian Jaya is an unknown to most Indonesians as it is to most foreigners (McDougall quoted in Kirsch, 2002:72).

The availability of local information through West Papua media is also very limited. Local papers, like *Cepos Cederawasih Pos* and *Tifa Irian*, both in Indonesian, are owned or run by Army/TNI and politicians (Werror, interview with authors, 9/4/06; Pacific Media Watch, 5 May 2006). Press freedom is absent when reporting on local matters.

According to Martinikus, an Australian journalist that visited West Papua in 2002, the region's remoteness is not the only reason that deters most visitors. The Indonesian military has made it very difficult for journalists to visit the area. It has been commonplace for journalists requesting visas to travel to WP to have their request denied. To travel *undercover* is to risk arrest, which has become increasingly common. Journalists who do succeed in entering the area are heavily monitored and intimidated, as was the case of Oswald Iten, a Swiss journalist who was detained in 2002 for taking photos of an independence rally while was on a tourist visa (Martinikus, 2002: 3, 54;

fCcN, Nov 9 2005). Many journalists have also been deterred by the mysterious deaths of journalists and arrests and torture of human rights workers (Evans, 2004).

The death of Mark Worth, a PNG born Australian journalist in 2004 by unknown causes in West Papua was treated as suspicious as it came two days after the announcement by ABC television of the screening of his documentary 'Land of the Morning Star'. This was seen as his life-time project on West Papua where he worked most of his life. He was believed to be linked to the footage screened by Australian channel SBS's Dateline program in November 2003 of OPM leaders making appeals to the international community to help bring a peaceful solution to the West Papua problem. Two days after the program, several West Papuans including one of the leaders seen in the film, were killed in a raid by Indonesian army (AsiaMedia, 2004).

The Indonesian authorities have become better at keeping information out of the Western media, which has made people of West Papua more desperate to be heard (Martinikus, 2006). The Jakarta Foreign Correspondents Club confirmed in February 2006 that for more than a year no foreign correspondent had received permission to go to West Papua. Restrictions have been in place for some time, with temporary press cards clearly indicating that there are not for visits to Aceh or Maluku (ibid).

The ban on all foreign media, churches and NGO was enforced on the argument that their presence in West Papua would 'encourage Papuans to campaign on issues of human rights' (IFJ, 2006). The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) complained to the Indonesian government about the ban, stating that 'the silencing and censoring of the media will only fuel misinformation and foster conditions for abuse, mistreatment and corruption' and that 'the denial of foreign media access to West Papua suggests an attempt to conceal human rights abuses' (ibid).

It is in this information-poor environment that the West Papuan conflict has been taking place and has largely been overlooked by the regional and international press. Lack of financial support has held back OPM and OPMRC in their activities in campaigning their cause through the media as the OPMRC chairman, Moses Werror argued (email communication with Papoutsaki, 3/6/06). The long struggle has drained the resources of many West Papuan leaders and international supporters. There is information available online through the numerous websites such as the OPMRC webpage set up in Hokaido, Japan (ibid), however these are sources that attract those already interested in the conflict and do not have the same impact as the mainstream media on public opinion. At least one country in the region, Papua New Guinea, should have been in a better position to report on the issue of West Papua, mainly because of the large numbers of refugees in its borders and inside the country and the cultural affiliation that bonds these two communities.

II. West Papua & PNG: a Shifting Relationship

In 1969, Papua New Guinea's current Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare, then a member of the Papua and New Guinea's Territorial Assembly, accused Australia of maintaining 'concentration camps' along the border for West Papuan asylum seekers. He told the Assembly:

We often hear the UN condemning European colonialism but it never thinks of condemning Asiatic colonialism, and this is what is happening now on our border and it is colonialism on the part of Indonesians (Osborne, 1985: 44).

Somare was later to become a leader that Indonesia would call 'a good friend'. He was responsible for establishing the bilateral relationship with Indonesia two years before independence that was followed by a Treaty of Mutual Respect, Friendship and Cooperation that was signed in 1986 (Osborne, 1985). The treaty has been responsible for a much closer relationship between the two countries' military forces at the border. Kilvert, Australian journalist, has written of the close relations between the PNG and Indonesian military forces based on the border, often involving rewards given to local PNG Defence Forces commanders, intelligence officers and federal MPs for their cooperation (Martinikus, 2002:8; Map, 2001). The predicament that Somare found himself in, and that is to change from being a critic to cooperate with Indonesia, is one that is shared by other Melanesians leaders and people in PNG. Most, if not all, Papua New Guineans sympathise with their Melanesian neighbours in West Papua and their cause but are forced to also recognise Indonesia's sovereignty.

The PNG media, are no exception, and have also found themselves in this situation when reporting on West Papua related stories, especially the West Papuan refugees issue which has been a regular feature since the West Papua/Indonesia conflict began. What identity to give to the West Papuans fleeing across the border was a dilemma the government of PNG and the media had to decide on. In order to avoid offending Indonesia, PNG government chose to call these people 'non-traditional' or 'illegal' border-crossers although the status of the West Papuans fulfilled the criteria of being classified as refugees (Osborne, 1985: 102). This has resulted in conflicting descriptions of the fleeing West Papuans who, sometimes in the same story, would be referred to both as border crossers and refugees. For example on February 29, 1984, a *Post-Courier's* headline on page 2 announced: "Future of Irian Jaya *refugees* in doubt" while the lead paragraph of the same story read: "The future of Irian Jayan *border crossers* is still uncertain, according to the Justice Minister, Mr Bais". The Indonesians preferred the harmless term 'border crossers' which was used to describe traditional crossers to refugees which would attract UNHCR and the world's attention.

The number of West Papuans fleeing their homes and coming into PNG rose dramatically in 1984 presenting a dilemma for the PNG government. Not wanting to upset Indonesia, the PNG government not only refused to recognise these people as refugees but also went to the extent of prosecuting them for illegally crossing the border with a view to repatriating them. The general reaction in PNG was one of outrage and the government was heavily criticised. A group of University of PNG lawyers were moved to urge the government to treat the border crossers as refugees under international law (*Post-Courier*, 1984: 3).

Osborne points out that for many months PNG government prevented UNHCR access to the refugees in the hope of preventing the issue being internationally recognised. It also stopped the churches and NGO groups to provide humanitarian aid. However, the PNG media was generally sympathetic with the West Papuan refugees, and continued to highlight their growing influx. There was a serious backlash to the government policy to play down the growing refugee problem when in August 1984, Pastor Roy Woods of the Evangelical Church of Papua revealed through the member for North Fly

Warren Dutton that 51 refugees had starved to death in one of the camps. The report was published by the *Post-Courier* (13 August 1984) and in September, graphic pictures of starving and dying women and children at the camps were displayed in *The Times of Papua New Guinea* juxtaposed with a headline that read: "Holiday camps?" A few weeks before a PNG Government Foreign Affairs official had said: "We do not want people coming across the border for a holiday" (*The Times*, Sept 27, 84). The PNG government was stunned into action in recognising the crossers as refugees and allowing UNHCR to become involved.

There are currently 10,400 West Papuan refugees in PNG of which 3,400 are living in East Awin refugee camps while 7000 are living in eight camps close to the PNG border. The UNHCR and Border Affairs Division of PNG Government is administering the East Awin camp while those in other camps who have decided against moving to East Awin are not recognised as refugees. They are instead getting assistance from a few expatriate staff, missionaries and volunteers providing health services, educational and vocational training and small business development expertise.

According to the UNHCR Country Report Plan for 2006, the PNG government acceded to the 191 Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees and in 1996 endorsed a "Limited Integration" policy that allowed West Papuan refugees who had been relocated to East Awin to be granted Permissive Residency status. As permissive residents they enjoy (conditional) freedom of movement; can engage in business activities; enrol in PNG schools and tertiary institutions; and access health facilities. Restrictions include not residing in the border areas of Western and Sepik Provinces, not engaging in political activities, not having voting rights and not having the right to membership of political parties.

All along, however, PNG and Indonesian governments have tried to repatriate the refugees back to West Papua however, many refused to return fearing retaliation. However, when a refugee woman, Magdalene Hamadi, requested to return briefly to attend her grandfather's funeral, the Foreign Affairs department praised her as an example a West Papuan 'volunteering' to return. However, she was soon back in PNG and *The Times* (Sep 27, 1984) clarified the reason for her trip.

PNG's first attempt to repatriate the refugees was also badly implemented in 1984 and the PNG Government was heavily criticised. A group of refugees at Blackwara camp near Vanimo who agreed to be repatriated thought they were going to be driven to the border and were to walk back to Arso where they had come from. However, instead they were put on a ship, which sailed to Jayapura where there was a grand welcome for them organised by the Indonesians for the media. The UNHCR, which was heavily involved in the care for the refugees, was not involved in the repatriation to ensure it was done properly (Osborne, 1985: 190-192). It is estimated today that 3905 refugees have voluntarily returned to West Papua since 1985.

The media in PNG has also not been consistent with the reporting of refugees. While there are currently 10,400 refugees in PNG, very little is being reported about them. Harlene Joku, a former journalist of West Papuan origin who had written a lot about West Papua in *The Times of PNG* and *The National* said usually the newspapers did not assign her to cover West Papua. She said she did the stories on her own initiative. One

of her stories was on the refugees in East Awin. She said her coverage of East Awin, was done because it was international year for refugees. She had to do a proposal letter to the management and then liaised with the High Commission for Refugees in Port Moresby to get to East Awin (Interview with the author, Matbob, 31/3/06). Former Editor of *The Times* Franz Joku was also concerned about this:

That is a sore point really because I have risen out of that lot, the refugees. My family was a refugee family in the 60s and I have come through that experience. And I think it is a sore point and I say so because the media tends to focus more on the plight of people who are in similar situation elsewhere yet right on our backyard or doorstep or even in our own country in the case of the many thousands who have been allowed to enter, there is very little discussion going on to the extent that some of us are beginning to question about the refugees being held or continue to be held in quarantine camps such as East Awin for example, we are talking about these camp being opened up many years ago maybe 15 years ago. Now for me they are actually being imprisoned. Decisions have to be made whether they should remain there; they have every right to have their kids educated, and have every right to seek gainful employment. These are being denied to this group of people, and there are many of them. Already we are talking about refugee camp generation, I mean there are so many children have been born to them whilst there I think something needs to be done. The media is not paying so much attention to this (Interview with the author, Matbob, 31/3/06).

Yet there is regular information about the refugee situation in PNG available on the internet on the UNHCR website that journalists can follow up to get a good story. For instance, there are constant tensions between the refugees and Papua New Guinean landowners or PNG government authorities, which gets little media coverage at all. The refugees are often in a vulnerable situation and are open to abuse from nearby villages or those in authority to care of them. Matbob, one of the authors of this paper and a journalist with *The Times* from 1985-89, recalls that while covering West Papua in the 1980s, he had to report about complaints from authorities and women in Vanimo town about a sex trade between Black Water refugee women and public servants in Vanimo.

Coverage of the refugees and West Papuan stories in the PNG media in recent times seems to have shifted the focus away from PNG to Australia. A number of West Papuans have started seeking asylum in Australia rather than in PNG as has happened in the past. They seem to attract more regional and international media attention which helps publicise their cause as a West Papuan activist stated recently in the media (Rheeney, 2006b). As for PNG, a country that has been vigorously covering West Papua for many years, there is little coverage of recent happenings. Whatever is obtained is presented in briefs as regional or international stories and not as a story happening in its neighbourhood. Even when Australian media recently reported of plans to divert some asylum seekers back to PNG, there was not a single story or follow up in the PNG media with regard to that.

West Papua & the PNG media

Throughout the years, the PNG media's cover of the West Papua issue has been uneven, from regular coverage, particularly in periods of crisis (1980s), to minimal in the present days. With such big number of refugees and the social and political implications this might have in the country, it is surprising.

There have been pressures from the Indonesian authorities that were deeply concerned in the past about the activities of the PNG media in covering the situation. Since the 1980s, the Indonesian government through its embassy in PNG has gone to pains to try and improve relationship with the PNG media.

When Papua New Guinea became independent in 1975, the country's media was already providing regular coverage of its western neighbour. The colonial struggles in West Papua, and the clashes between the West Papuans seeking independence and the Indonesians who took control of the island became an issue on the international scene drawing interest from the media. The influx of West Papuan border crossers into PNG in the 1960s also placed the issue on the agenda of the PNG press.

The PNG media in their coverage of West Papua have tended to follow the conventional patterns of news coverage that is defined by the western journalism principles of what is news. The pattern therefore saw a rise and drop in news coverage, increasing when there was activity that was defined as newsworthy by the media and decreased when there were no 'newsworthy' activities. As a result, West Papua coverage in the PNG media tended to increase when there were large influx of border crossers into PNG following clashes between OPM (Organisasi Papua Merdeka) and the Indonesian military and police. A number of kidnappings by OPM also made news regularly. This meant that there was coverage in the issues of the only daily newspaper in the country at the time – *Post-Courier* – as well as coverage on the national broadcaster that was the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation* at the time. The coverage dropped when there were no clashes or border crossers and limited activity.

While this tended to be the general pattern of coverage since the 1960s up until recently, there have also been other factors that have contributed to creating the presence of West Papua, or lack of it, in the PNG media.

West Papua's transfer to Indonesia by the Dutch happened during the decolonisation process that was taking place throughout the Pacific Islands in the 60s and 70s. This had the effect of keeping the focus on West Papua in PNG. The new breed of Papua New Guinean educated elites coming through tertiary institutions were influenced by the wave of nationalist propaganda that enveloped the country and region at the time as PNG headed for independence.

Some of these University graduates went on to work in the PNG media and continued championing the issues of nationalism and decolonisation. They included journalists such as Anna Solomon, former Editor of *Wantok* Newspaper and General Manager of Word Publishing Company, Neville Togarewa, former senior reporter with *The Times* of PNG, Franz Joku, former Editor of *The Times* and others.

The issue of decolonisation process in the colonies of the South Pacific also had the attention of the international media particularly those of the colonising powers such as Australia. This was done either by establishing their own correspondents or by using local journalists as correspondents. PNG journalist, Franzalbert Joku, who began working at the *Post-Courier* in 1975, said the Australian media organisation representatives were already based in Port Moresby including *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Melbourne Age*, *ABC* and *AAP* (interview with Matbob, 31/4/06).

The presence of these media correspondents amongst the local journalists meant there was healthy competition for stories, and West Papua was well covered in PNG and in the region. On the outset, the world's interest in stories such as West Papua stemmed from issues of stability of the region and conflicts amongst the new emerging independent states and how these were seen in light of the cold war conflict in Europe.

Some journalists of the local media also had a personal interest in the issue. There were journalists who worked for the PNG media who were originally West Papuans. They had fled across the border with their parents with the Indonesian arrival. They had a personal motive of keeping West Papua in the media both locally and internationally. These journalists were also invaluable to both the local and international media because they had direct contacts in West Papua who kept them informed of what was going on despite attempts by Indonesia to suppress information.

The West Papuan journalists also helped to create an interest amongst their Papua New Guinean counterparts who after all were mostly sympathetic with their Melanesian brothers and sought to ensure their cause was well covered. It was the PNG journalists (and some foreign ones) who actually crossed over a number of times into West Papua to visit OPM camps and write stories about the conditions and struggles along the border. Some of these journalists included Neville Togarewa, Frank Kolma, Sinclair Solomon, Babani Maraga and Angwie Hriewhazi.

Changes in PNG media

However, from the early 90s onwards the presence of foreign media in PNG began to fade as offices were closed and correspondents moved away. Conflicts erupting in other parts of the world also meant that media organisations began concentrating scarce resources away from the Pacific region. In PNG the vibrant free press has been facing a number of challenges. These included two attempts by the government to control the media with the Ramoi media bill in 1987 and the Chan's Constitutional Review Commission in 1996 which were largely unsuccessful because of public opposition (Dorney, 1999). The independent press has also been heavily reliant on advertising, much of it coming from the government, and there were instances where the threat to withdraw advertising was seen to undermine editorial independence in newsrooms. (Solomon, 1995). Politicians have continued to blame the media for being responsible for PNG's poor image overseas while the government has remained reluctant to issue visas to foreign journalists to cover stories in PNG.

There were also changes within PNG affecting the local media with the demise of premier weekly newspaper, *The Times of Papua New Guinea*, the daily *Niugini Nius* while the National broadcaster *NBC* funded by the government was severely affected by funding cuts. It must be noted here that *The Times of Papua New Guinea* and its sister paper *Wantok* had provided regular and excellent in-depth coverage of West Papua and in general stories to do with justice, law and order, environment issues, etc. There was also a shift in the focus of the media, especially the radio stations, with the opening up of commercial radio stations that included *FM 100* and the *PNG FM* stations. These stations placed more emphasis on entertainment rather than news and information.

Many of the key journalists (named above) who were responsible for the coverage of West Papua in the early years also moved on from the media to other occupations. The new journalists who replaced them and who had come out fresh from journalism schools did not have the same background knowledge and experience of the West Papuan issue. The contacts that the journalists had when covering West Papua also seemed to have faded into the background. One such contact in Madang remarked that the prolonged struggle against Indonesian rule might be a factor why the interest of the PNG media has waned (Werror, interview with the authors, 9/5/06). Another factor may have been the backlash from the Indonesian military in 2001 to the wave of support for independence amongst West Papuans that resulted in the death of Theys Eluay.

Indonesian PR machine

The Indonesian government representatives in PNG have also been successful in recent years in improving their image in association with the coverage of West Papua in the PNG Media. In the 70s and 80s, the Indonesian embassy in Port Moresby was having great difficulty handling the negative image of Indonesia in the PNG media with regard to West Papua. In fact, the standard reaction was to make no comment when journalists sought information concerning West Papua.

Anna Solomon, former editor of Wantok recalls that the ‘policy of her newspaper then was to always verify the news that we got with the Indonesian embassy here in Port Moresby. Most of the time we did not get any response at all’ (interview with Matbob, 21 March 2006). However, this changed in the 90s with Indonesian officials taking the initiative to invite journalists to the embassy for functions and also to organise trips for them to visit West Papua and other parts of Indonesia.

The governments of PNG and Indonesia have also formalised bilateral agreements, which have benefited a number of Papua New Guinean organisations including a number of journalists. More positive stories about Indonesia have been appearing in the media from time to time. A recent story on The National provides evidence to this by reporting on PNG teachers from the Sepik region, bordering West Papua to the north, learning Bahasa Indonesia in Bali with the aim of preparing PNG students to take further studies in Indonesia (Solomon, 2006).

General Ineffectiveness of the PNG media

The presence of West Papua in the PNG media did not necessarily mean that West Papua gained a wide publicity in PNG. When the West Papua issues flared up in the 1960s, the influence of the media in both PNG and West Papua would have been limited to the colonial officers and to the few educated natives of the island.

Today the impact of the media in PNG is still severely limited. This is because of factors such as low literacy levels which, according to the Department of Education, is under 50 per cent (Primary Education Handbook, 2000), isolation of the majority of the country’s population in rural areas with limited access to media, high distribution costs for newspapers and radio/TV signals to remote parts of the country, and poverty that limits access to media products (Rooney *et al*, 2004). An example of PNG’s limited media impact was illustrated this year when some people were interviewed about the country’s first Commonwealth Gold Medal win in swimming. One of the interviewee, a

taxi driver in Port Moresby city, had never heard of Commonwealth Games, nor Ryan Pini, the PNG swimmer who had just beat world record holder Michael Klim of Australia.

However, Anna Solomon as former General Manager of Word Publishing Company, said journalists have no excuse these days:

Our reporters are lazy [...] you have the Internet there at your fingertips compared to what it was like when I was in the news room. ... it used to take us a week or a couple more days to get information that you would get on a computer and fax. (Interview with Matbob, 21/3/06).

This is supported by Franz Joku who argued while it is much easier getting information on West Papua now because of the internet compared to the old days when you had to actually cross the borders to get the information, the reporting today is unjustifiably limited. He argued that there is little interest by PNG media covering those countries closer to it, mostly concerned with what happens in its major urban areas (interview with Matbob, 31/3/06). Solomon in her interview with Matbob added to this by arguing that Papua New Guineans have a 'tunnel vision', looking only at what is happening in the capital and 'not looking at things happening outside that may have a long term consequences'. She was referring in particular to the recent Freeport demonstrations in West Papua expressing her dismay at the lack of information about the real causes for the demonstration.

With the OPMRC headquarters based in PNG, sourcing information should not be a problem. It's chairman, Moses Werror, living in Madang town for several years, has used his base in PNG to promote the cause internationally with petitions to the UN and the Indonesian government. He commented that while in the past journalists were in touch with him; this has changed in the last few years (email communication with Papoutsaki, 3/5/06; 4/5/06).

The current limited coverage of West Papua by PNG media adds to the general lack of information available to those could perhaps make a difference in terms of shaping public perceptions and government attitudes on West Papua and West Papuans in the country.

III. PNG Press Content Analysis

A content analysis of PNG press provides a comparative view of variations in coverage. The content analysis focused on press, taking two newspapers on two different time periods: *The Times* (weekly, English) and *Post Courier* (daily, English) during March-May 1984 and *The National* (daily, English) and *Post Courier* in March-May 2006. These two periods were chosen, as there was a refugee's crisis, albeit of a different scale, that involved both PNG and Australia at different degrees. Therefore, most attention is paid to stories relevant to West Papuans as refugees/asylum seekers to make the content analysis of the two periods more comparable.

The Times has ceased to print in the mid 90s but it is used in the content analysis to indicate the difference in weekly newspapers in terms of in-depth coverage and the impact of its absence in recent WP press coverage. The National is used only in the second time period as it started publishing in 1993.

The content analysis was approached by **national** and **regional/international news** (indicating which section of the newspaper they were in), news **type** (hard news, feature), **prominence** (front page, 2nd/3rd page, 4th/5th page, other section), **source** by **by-line** (PNG journalists, foreign correspondents, international news agency, no by-line) and by **voice** heard (West Papuans – OPM/refugees/other, PNG individuals/organizations, Government and other Authorities – Indonesian, PNG, Australian, UNHCR, Churches, other) and **focus** (WP, WP/Australia, WP refugees/Australia, Indonesia/Australia, Indonesia/PNG, WP/PNG, WP refugees/PNG, other). These categories were defined partly on a preliminary content analysis that indicated what stories were covered and partly on the understanding of the authors of what elements would be important in covering this issue. Each newspaper was analysed on its own and compared against the other and both sets of newspapers were compared in terms of time coverage.

The main hypothesis is that PNG Press cover of West Papua has declined over the years and this is due to regional geopolitics and general decline in journalism professional standards in the PNG press. Other assumptions put forward were: PNG press cover of West Papua is influenced by PNG's relationship with Indonesia; PNG press current cover of West Papua is minimal; West Papuan refugees in PNG have been receiving inadequate cover by PNG media; PNG Press relies heavily on international news agencies on covering the West Papua situation; PNG Press relies heavily on official sources; PNG press cover of West Papua depends on Australian media cover.

V. Findings

The findings from the March-May 2006 content analysis when compared with the same period in 1984 confirm the main hypothesis, which indicates a dramatic decline in number, length, direct and multi sourcing and voices heard in the covered stories. The following break up of the findings by time period and newspaper provides more supporting details.

- March-April 1984: *The Times, Post Courier*

The total number of stories run by the Times of PNG and Post-Courier in the March-April period, 1984 on West Papua was 133 not counting opinion and editorial pieces. A selection of 73 stories directly relating to refugees and border crossers have been chosen for analysis. These stories were illustrated by 47 photographs and graphics.

Of the 73 stories, 66 were hard news stories and only *The Times* had 7 feature stories containing detailed interviews, excerpts of speeches and background pieces. A total of 20 stories made the front pages, and 36 were on the 2nd and 3rd pages. The rest of the stories appeared on local pages inside both newspapers.

Most of the stories in the papers totalling 38 were written by PNG journalists but interestingly, a high number of stories had no by-lines (27). The lack of by-lines could be attributed to the policy of the newspapers. Foreign correspondents contributed 2 stories while International News Agencies had 5 stories in Post-Courier. It must be noted here that foreign correspondents such as Chris Pash at the time were working for

International News Agencies and sometimes both the name of the correspondent and the newsagency appeared.

For source by voice(s), the majority of the stories, 52, had a single source, followed with 18 stories based on two sources and only six had multiple voices. In most of the stories, the voices of the PNG government dominated (17), followed by Indonesia (14) and PNG organisations (14). The voices of these organisations were all concerned about the refugees. The voice of OPM (6) is next followed by refugees (4), PNG individuals (4), churches (4), others (4), Australia (3) and UNHCR (2). The voices of PNG organisations are prominent here because law organisations, students, and other government and private agencies became involved in the issue.

With regard to the focus of the stories, West Papua refugees/PNG dominated with 40, which is expected considering the period was the beginning of the mass exodus of the 10,000 refugees into PNG. As a result of that, Indonesia/PNG had the next highest focus (11) as the two countries debated the plight of the refugees. West Papua/PNG had the next highest focus (7) as well as West Papua (7) and that was because *The Times* featured the OPM struggle prominently. Focus on Indonesia/Australia was minimal (2) and West Papua/Aust (1). There were six stories focusing on the Dutch/West Papua and also West Papua/Indonesia which were not part of the criteria in this analysis.

One can conclude that in 1984 there was much more comprehensive coverage of West Papua from the number of stories compared to recent times. Of course, a lot of activities were happening right on the border of PNG and Indonesia and there was a massive movement of refugees across to PNG. The journalists were covering stories on the ground at the border, across in Jayapura and also as far as Jakarta. These meant the media organisations were using resources to move journalists around and had good contacts and sources and were doing an effective job.

Amongst the prominent voices of the PNG and Indonesian Government authorities, organisations in PNG also featured equally. These reflected the interest that groups like the University and tertiary students, lawyers, provincial governments, fundraising groups and Red Cross had in the refugee issues and came out in the media in support for their wellbeing.

- March April 2006: *The National, Post Courier*

There were a total of 70 stories and two photo stories. The photo stories were included as they were the only news that made front page, one picturing transporting settled East Awin camp refugees inside the PNG border accompanied by a small caption demonstrating the difficult transportation conditions in the area. The other pictured West Papuan demonstrators during the demonstrations against the Freeport mining company in Jakarta on February 28, 2006. It was accompanied by a largish caption. Both of them were by AAP.

The *Post Courier* had more stories, amounting to 43 of which 12 were on national news section and 31 on regional news section. *The National* had almost half the stories, 25 plus the two photo stories. Only 4 were on the national news section and 21 on regional. Regional news dominated the West Papua coverage. This is because of the West Papuan asylum seekers arrival in Australia and the subsequent diplomatic rift

with Indonesia which dominated the coverage. Although there were cases of West Papuans crossing the borders to PNG, some on their way to Australia, these stories received much less attention.

Almost all the stories in both newspapers were hard news, except from two articles in the Opinion section of *The National* on the Australian/Indonesian diplomatic rift and one on the latest West Papua unrest and another one in the weekend section on a missionary's work with WP refugees in PNG. In terms of prominence, most stories were on the 4th/5th page and in other sections of the newspapers and with some exceptions, most were short articles with many coming under 'briefs'.

When it comes to source by by-line, most stories come from international/regional news agencies, mostly from AAP (57 stories, plus the two photo stories). Only 7 had a PNG journalist by-line with another 8 PNG national news stories with no by-line. Some of these PNG news no byline stories could be sources to international news agencies too as there was little or no direct reporting from a PNG source.

Regarding source by voice (s), the majority of the stories (43) were based one source, followed with stories on two sources. Only 12 were multivoice. In most stories, these sources were officials, government and other authorities with the Indonesian government dominating (35), with Australian coming second (16), PNG government and other authorities were voiced in 9 stories, while WP refugees were voiced in only 8 stories and mostly through representatives (lawyers, human rights activists). Both newspapers followed a similar pattern.

Regarding the focus of the stories, the Indonesian/Australian dispute over the recent asylum seekers was the dominant focus point (27) with stories on the recent unrest in WP and the demonstrations against Freeport coming second (20, plus one photo story). Whilst both newspapers followed similar pattern in their regional news stories, the *Post Courier* devoted more stories (9) in its national news section on recent WP refugees in PNG. Most of these stories concerned the uncertain identity of three Indonesian citizens washed ashore a PNG island the north of the country. Over the period of three months, it never became clearer if these individuals initially thought to be fishermen were in fact West Papuan students from Jayapura fleeing the recent unrest. The dominant voices in these stories were from the Indonesian Embassy in Port Moresby and PNG police and other authorities.

The only story on PNG's policy regarding West Papua and Indonesia was reported also by the *Post Courier* titled 'Rethink Papua Policy' based on a press release by opposition leader, O'Neil arguing that the PNG's non-interference policy on political issues in Indonesia's Papua province needs to be reviewed and stating that 'the present policy of appeasement is based on fear towards Indonesia' (Rheaney, 2006a). This is the only news indicating the nature of PNG and Indonesia's connection, implying an unequal relationship.

There were only 2 stories and the one front page photo story on the existing refugees in PNG and their living conditions. The *Post Courier* devoted a 'brief' in the national news section on West Papua refugees living in Manus islands getting access to safe water (Thursday, April 13, p 3). *The National* devoted a feature article by Lloyd Jones,

AAP PNG correspondent, on a missionary working in East Awin refugee camps. Although the churches are the main service providers in the area, and they certainly deserved to have their voice heard, it is interesting that the journalist chose to focus entirely on one voice, this of the missionary and not let the refugees voice their issues directly.

Summarising the findings from the comparison of the two newspapers, most stories were dominated by regional hard news originating from international news agencies (mostly AAP), short and with almost no in-depth analysis of the issues mentioned, single sourced in their majority, with the Indonesian government/authorities being the dominant voice, followed by Australia and mostly focused on the relationship of Indonesian/Australia, neglecting to give voice to the West Papuans either as refugees or in any other capacity.

Conclusions

Concluding from the above, there has been a dramatic decline in the PNG press cover of West Papua over the past 20 years. The contributing factors for the decline of press coverage is mainly due to regional geopolitics and general decline in journalism professional standards in the PNG press.

More specifically, the cover of Papuan refugees in PNG has declined to minimum and superficial level; direct sourcing of information has also declined as PNG Press seems to rely heavily on international news agencies on covering the West Papua situation on both sides of the border; West Papua voices have been reduced as PNG Press relies more and more heavily on official sources, this is seen as a general trend in the PNG media; in regards to geopolitical influence, PNG press cover of West Papua depends on Australian media cover and on stories that affect mostly Australian directly on the Indonesia/West Papua issue. There was not enough evidence to show that West PNG press cover of West Papua is influenced by PNG's relationship with Indonesia, however the growing importance PNG puts in its relationship with Indonesia can be influencing public perceptions.

As the West Papuan conflict remains unresolved, keeping it out of regular media reporting it can only contribute to the deterioration of the situation as the frustration of West Papuans increases. With a conflict like this in its doorstep, PNG cannot keep a blind eye, especially so as it hosts so many West Papuans. Increasing in-depth reporting on this issue can help PNG citizens to better understand how West Papua is part of a complex relationship between Indonesia, Australian and Papuan New Guinean.

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- Franz Joku, former Editor of *The Times*, interview with Patrick Matbob, Port Moresby, 31/4/06
- Harlene Joku, former journalist of *The Times*, interview with Patrick Matbob, Port Moresby, 31/3/06
- Moses Werror, OPMRC Chairman, interview with the authors, 9/5/06
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