

# ethical space

---

The International  
Journal of Communication Ethics  
Vol.15 Nos.3/4 2018 ISSN 1742-0105

---

## Special Issue:

The ethics of the journalistic memoir:  
Radical departures

Edited by Sue Joseph

## PAPERS

- Lara Pawson's genre-bending memoir – *gravitas* and the celebration of unique cultural spaces – by Richard Lance Keeble
- When journalism isn't enough: 'Horror surrealism' in Behrouz Boochani's testimonial prison narrative – by Willa McDonald
- On being unfair: The ethics of the memoir-journalism hybrid – by Lisa A. Phillips
- Stan Grant and cultural memory: Embodying a national race narrative through memoir – by Sue Joseph

## PLUS

- Liberal mass media and the 'Israel lobby' theory – by T. J. Coles
- Media trust and use among urban news consumers in Brazil – by Flávia Milhorance and Jane Singer
- Balancing instrumental rationality and value rationality in communicating information: A study of the 'Nobel Older Brother' case – by Lili Ning
- Dumbs gone to Iceland: (Re)presentations of English national identity during Euro 2016 and the EU referendum – by Roger Domeneghetti
- 'An eye in the eye of the hurricane': *Fire and fury*, immersion and ethics in political literary journalism – by Kerrie Davies
- The science communication challenge: Truth and disagreement in democratic knowledge societies – by Gitte Meyer

#### **Publishing Office**

Abramis Academic  
ASK House  
Northgate Avenue  
Bury St. Edmunds  
Suffolk  
IP32 6BB  
UK

Tel: +44 (0)1284 700321  
Fax: +44 (0)1284 717889  
Email: [info@abramis.co.uk](mailto:info@abramis.co.uk)  
Web: [www.abramis.co.uk](http://www.abramis.co.uk)

#### **Copyright**

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any material form (including photocopying or storing it in any medium by electronic means, and whether or not transiently or incidentally to some other use of this publication) without the written permission of the copyright owner, except in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under terms of a licence issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency Ltd, 33-34, Alfred Place, London WC1E 7DP, UK. Applications for the copyright owner's permission to reproduce part of this publication should be addressed to the Publishers.

#### **Back issues**

Back issues are available from the Publishers at the above editorial address.

© 2018 Institute of  
Communication Ethics &  
Abramis Academic

ISSN 1742-0105  
ISBN 978-1-84549-733-0

Printed in the UK.



## **Aims and scope**

Communication ethics is a discipline that supports communication practitioners by offering tools and analyses for the understanding of ethical issues. Moreover, the speed of change in the dynamic information environment presents new challenges, especially for communication practitioners.

Ethics used to be a specialist subject situated within schools of philosophy. Today it is viewed as a language and systematic thought process available to everyone. It encompasses issues of care and trust, social responsibility and environmental concern and identifies the values necessary to balance the demands of performance today with responsibilities tomorrow.

For busy professionals, CE is a powerful learning and teaching approach that encourages analysis and engagement with many constituencies, enhancing relationships through open-thinking. It can be used to improve organization performance as well as to protect individual well-being.

## **Submissions**

Papers should be submitted to the Editor via email. Full details on submission – along with detailed notes for authors – are available online in PDF format: [www.communication-ethics.net](http://www.communication-ethics.net)

## **Subscription Information**

Each volume contains 4 issues, issued quarterly. Enquiries regarding subscriptions and orders both in the UK and overseas should be sent to:

#### **Journals Fulfilment Department**

Abramis Academic, ASK House, Northgate Avenue, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk IP32 6BB, UK.

Tel: +44 (0)1284 700321, Fax: +44 (0)1284 717889

Email: [info@abramis.co.uk](mailto:info@abramis.co.uk)

Your usual suscription agency will also be able to take a subscription to *Ethical Space*.

## **Annual Subscription**

Membership of the Institute of Communication Ethics includes a subscription to the journal. Please see the application form on the last page of this issue.

For non-members:

*Institutional subscription* £200.00

*Personal subscription* £55.00

Delivery by surface mail. Airmail prices available on request or at the journal's web site.

[www.communication-ethics.net](http://www.communication-ethics.net)



---

# Contents

## Special issue: The ethics of the journalistic memoir: Radical departures

### Editorials

Exploring the ethically challenging craft and construction of the  
journalistic memoir – by Sue Joseph Page 2

*Ethical Space*: The future – by Richard Lance Keeble Page 4

### Papers

Lara Pawson's genre-bending memoir – *gravitas* and the celebration of unique cultural spaces –  
by Richard Lance Keeble Page 5

When journalism isn't enough: 'Horror surrealism' in Behrouz Boochani's testimonial prison  
narrative – by Willa McDonald Page 17

On being unfair: The ethics of the memoir-journalism hybrid – by Lisa A. Phillips Page 25

Stan Grant and cultural memory: Embodying a national race narrative through memoir – by Sue  
Joseph Page 34

---

### Other papers

Liberal mass media and the 'Israel lobby' theory – by T. J. Coles Page 45

Media trust and use among urban news consumers in Brazil – by Flávia Milhorange and Jane B.  
Singer Page 56

Balancing instrumental rationality and value rationality in communicating information: A study of  
the 'Nobel Older Brother' case – by Lili Ning Page 66

Dumbs gone to Iceland: (Re)presentations of English national identity during Euro 2016 and the  
EU referendum – by Roger Domeneghetti Page 75

'An eye in the eye of the hurricane': *Fire and fury*, immersion and ethics in political literary  
journalism – by Kerrie Davies Page 86

### Article

The science communication challenge: Truth and disagreement in democratic knowledge societies  
– by Gitte Meyer Page 94

### Book reviews

*Journalism after Snowden: The future of the free press in the surveillance state*, edited by Emily  
Bell and Taylor Owen, with Smitha Khorana and Jennifer R. Henrichsen (eds) – reviewed by Glenn  
Morrison; *Trauma, shame, and secret making: Being a family without a narrative*, by Francis  
Joseph Harrington – reviewed by Anna Denejkina; *Advertising and promotional culture*, by P.  
David Marshall and Joanne Morreale, reviewed by Jim Macnamara; *Breaking news: The remaking  
of journalism and why it matters now*, by Alan Rusbridger, reviewed by John Mair; *Shooting the  
messenger: Criminalising journalism*, by Andrew Fowler, reviewed by Richard Lance Keeble Page 97

## Editorial Board

### Joint Editors

Richard Lance Keeble University of Lincoln  
Donald Matheson University of Canterbury, New Zealand  
Shannon Bowen University of South Carolina  
Sue Joseph University of Technology Sydney

### Reviews Editor

Sue Joseph University of Technology Sydney

### Editorial board members

Klaus-Dieter Altmeyen Catholic University  
Eichstaett-Ingolstadt  
Raphael Alvira University of Navarra  
Dusan Babic Media plan, Sarajevo  
Mona Baker Manchester University  
Porfiro Barroso Computense University of Madrid &  
Pontifical University of Salamanca, Madrid

Jay Black Editor, Journal of Mass Media Ethics  
University of Western Sydney  
Antonio Castillo Lancaster University  
Ruth Chadwick University of Malta  
Saviour Chircop University of Illinois-Urbana, USA  
Clifford Christians University of Hull  
Raphael Cohen-Almagor Emerson College, Boston, MA  
Tom Cooper University of Montana  
Deni Elliott Liverpool John Moores University  
Chris Frost Stanford University  
Theodore L. Glasser Leeds Metropolitan University  
Anne Gregory

Cees Hamelink University of Amsterdam  
Paul Jackson Manchester Business School  
Mike Jempson Director, MediaWise Trust  
Cheris Kramarae University of Oregon; Centre for  
the Study of Women in Society

### Takeshi Maezawa

Former Yomiuri ombudsman,  
scholar/writer  
Book editor  
Former *Guardian* Readers' Editor  
Investigative Journalist  
University of Edinburgh  
Publisher Q-news; Producer Channel 4  
University of Westminster  
Tampere University  
Universitat Autònoma  
de Barcelona

University of South Australia, Adelaide  
De Montfort University  
Concordia University, Montreal  
San Pablo University, Madrid  
Sheffield University  
Central European University, Budapest  
Ruhruniversität Bochum  
Centre for Journalism Studies,  
Cardiff University  
University of British Columbia  
University of Lincoln  
University of Windsor, Canada

**Contact:** Institute of  
Communication Ethics,  
C/O Dr Fiona Thompson,  
69 Glenview Road,  
Shipley, West Yorkshire,  
BD18 4AR, UK

**Published by:** The Institute  
of Communication Ethics  
([www.communication-ethics.net](http://www.communication-ethics.net))  
and Abramis Academic  
([www.abramis.co.uk](http://www.abramis.co.uk))

Sue Joseph

## Exploring the ethically challenging craft and construction of the journalistic memoir

Twenty years ago, the late and great William Zinsser – writer, journalist, editor, critic and academic – defined memoir simply as ‘some portion of a life’ (1998: 14-15). He also said we were living in ‘the age of the memoir’ (ibid: 3). He referred specifically to the final decade of the last century – but the surge in memoir has not ceased; in many ways, its standing in the marketplace is more robust, and seemingly, growing in both popularity and acuity.

Of course, there are exceptions to every rule and the burgeoning of this genre has led to a series of unethical representations – sometimes conflated or exaggerated moments (think James Frey, *A million little pieces*, 2003); sometimes outright falsehoods (think Norma Khouri, *Forbidden love*, 2003); sometimes delusional renderings (think Misha Defonseca, *Misha: A memoir of the holocaust years*, 1997). Or sometimes, simply one person’s account differing vastly from that of another stakeholder in the narrative (think Dave Eggers, *A heartbreaking work of staggering genius*, 2000). Additionally, there are the undercover, immersion, first-person narratives, ethically challenging but rendered just and necessary in the public interest – think Nelly Bly’s *Ten days in a mad-house* (1887); Jack London’s *The people of the abyss* (1903); Ted Conover’s *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing* (2000).

Writing in *The New York Times*, Neil Genzlinger tells us memoir is an ‘absurdly bloated genre’. He claims that, once upon a time, the writing of a memoir was earned ‘by accomplishing something ... anyone who didn’t ... was obliged

to keep quiet’ (2011). But the marketplace tells another story – memoir grabs hold of us, imparting insight about each other and, in so doing, about ourselves. For it is the resonant echo of a shared sensibility – a shared pain or grief or joy – that binds us to these narratives and to each other, creating community among the wronged, the disenfranchised, the abused, the survivors, the ill and the traumatised. Dismissed by some scholars in this neo-liberal age as too self-obsessed, such tales can still attract vast audiences around the globe.

Academic and writer Ben Yagoda begins his comprehensive history of memoir in 2009: ‘Dog memoirs were the rage... as the first decade of the third millennium shambled to its conclusion canine chronicles were just the tip of the autobiographical iceberg’ (2009: 6-7). Note his rather sardonic if not outright mocking tone. But the tone belies the text – this is a masterful wrap-up of the memoir phenomenon. Perhaps he wished only to be humorous because his book gazes seriously at the history of first-person telling, from early Christian times through to the 21st century.

Journalist and critic Thomas Larson is a self-confessed lover of memoir, fascinated by the ‘balancing act of the self in relation to the outer and inner worlds, against memoir’s thematic and temporal restrictions’ (2007: 23). He writes: ‘... memoir today has the energy of a literary movement, recalling past artistic revolutions that initiated new ways of seeing’ (2007: 21). He is not backward in aligning himself completely with the form, advocating and teaching it as both writer and reader.

Zinsser claims there are two elements which make a memoir good: the first is art; the second, craft. He writes: ‘The first element is integrity of intention. Memoir is the best search mechanism that writers are given. Memoir is how we try to make sense of who we are, who we once were, and what values and heritage shaped us’ (1998: 6). Indeed, if all authors of memoir indulged in ‘integrity of intention’ then the various memoir scandals of falsehood and deception would cease to exist.

But it is his second notion that captivates me: ‘Good memoirs are a careful act of construction.’ He calls this element ‘carpentry’. He writes: ‘Memoir writers must manufacture a text, imposing narrative order on a jumble of half-remembered events. With that feat of manipulation they arrive at a truth that is theirs alone...’ (ibid: 6).

---

Construction and carpentry. This is what journalists do – build and craft stories with words, carving narratives out of moments capturing people at their best and at their worst. So, how would memoir by journalists stand out amongst this immense and growing canon? We decided to take a look.

Find in this issue four memoir authors we believe approach the genre both with their art and their integrity of intention intact; additionally, all five memoirs discussed here are radical in conception, form and affect.

Richard Lance Keeble introduces us to Lara Pawson and her memoir *This is the place to be* (2016), writing that her work ‘mercilessly debunks the myth of the heroic journo’. Written by Pawson almost completely in one session, Keeble contextualises her text within memoir and autobiographies by other women journalists, also considering paratextual material, post-publication. He claims Pawson’s work ‘is like no other journalist’s memoir’ with highly critical appraisal of news reporting, ‘interspersed with the everyday minutiae’, creating a unique cultural space worthy of celebration.

In her paper, Willa McDonald takes us on a heart-breaking journey into the writing of the extraordinary memoir *No friend but the mountains* (2018) by Kurdish journalist and refugee Behrouz Boochani, detained on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, by the Australian government for the past five years as an illegal asylum seeker. Originally written in Farsi, Boochani messaged his narrative on a contraband smartphone via WhatsApp to translators in Australia. McDonald claims his text is testimonial literature: a prison narrative and a literary memoir. She writes: ‘... it is a powerful indictment of Australia’s immigration policies, particularly as they affect refugees and asylum seekers arriving at Australia’s north by boat from Indonesia.’

Academic Lisa Phillips undertakes a meta-study of her own memoir, *Unrequited: Women and romantic obsession* (2015). She calls this a ‘blend of memoir and reporting that featured the story of my all-consuming pursuit of an unavailable man’. She names this type of writing a ‘quest narrative’ or in her own words: ‘...first person writing that utilises reporting techniques to explore an issue of personal importance to the journalist’. But it is her polemical discussion round the ethics of her undertaking – to interview, or not to interview,

the subject of her former obsession – which illuminates. Now married (to another) and with a child, her writing is at once self-effacing and transparent, seemingly arguing with herself about her decision *not* to interview him. Ethically speaking, there is a clear imperative to minimise harm to herself by not approaching him; but at the same time, the balance of the narrative comes under the lens. But then again, the memoir is about an obsession ... it is a contentious space but one elegantly discussed and analysed.

Australian journalist Stan Grant wrote two memoirs, fourteen years apart. The first, *The tears of strangers* (2002), tells of an angry, confused young man, growing up Aboriginal amidst the tension of Australian race politics. Like Phillips, I argue this text is a quest narrative – the story of a young person trying to flee his vexed identity; vexed by ignorance and racism. His second memoir, *Talking to my country* (2016), delivers a ‘calmer, less angry but perhaps sadder’ Grant. This memoir ‘... performs as a collective and cultural remembering of the Australian First Nations and, implicitly, an advocacy manifesto to a nation still struggling with racial tensions’. Proud Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi man, Grant writes still with a simmering anger, but also expectation of a country he loves but, ultimately, cannot understand.

We hope you enjoy this special section on the journalist and the memoir.

## References

- Genzlinger, Neil (2011) The problem with memoir, *New York Times*, 28 January. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/30/books/review/Genzlinger-t.html>, accessed on 30 July 2018
- Larson, Thomas (2007) *The memoir and the memoirist*, Athens, Ohio University Press
- Yagoda, Ben (2009) *Memoir: A history*, New York, Riverhead Books
- Zinsser, William (ed.) (1998) *Inventing the truth: The art and craft of memoir*, USA, Mariner Books

---

**Richard Lance Keeble**

## ***Ethical Space:* The future**

This wonderfully bulky double issue of *Ethical Space: The International Journal of Communication Ethics* marks the end of an era. Fifteen years ago, the journal was launched by the Institute of Communication Ethics (ICE) to promote discussions and collaborations internationally between academics, professionals and activists in a wide range of disciplines concerned in some way with communication: journalism, public relations, philosophy, teaching, health studies, computer studies and so on. Over the years, ICE has organised annual conferences (the papers going into special issues of the journal) and built up a dedicated membership. It has also been associated with a long list of texts, edited by John Mair, chair of ICE, and others, on a number of important contemporary media issues (such as data journalism, investigative reporting, trust and the media, Hackgate, war reporting, coverage of the 'Arab Spring').

With the retirement of its brilliant and hard-working administrator, Dr Fiona Thompson, the executive group of ICE has decided the time is right to close down the institute. So ICE's annual conference in October 2018 in London on 'Anti-Social Media?' was to be its last.

*Ethical Space*, however, lives on! It will continue to be published, marketed and distributed by Abramis, of Bury St Edmunds. We have been extremely lucky to work with Richard and Pete Franklin, of Abramis, in recent years. Not only are they extremely charming men, but they work always at great speed and with impressive efficiency. Send them the copy for a sizeable issue of *ES* and within a few days the PDF proof will be in our email inbox. I am sure *ES* will continue to thrive in their hands.

I have also been privileged for many years to have as joint editor, Dr Donald Matheson. Donald, based in Canterbury, New Zealand, has always been there at the end of an email with sage advice and creative ideas. And with his profound knowledge of communication ethics and meticulous attention to detail, he is able to make proof reading appear an elegant and distinct art form.

As we enter a new era, we welcome Dr Sue Joseph, of the University of Technology Sydney, as a joint editor. Sue has already proved herself an amazingly committed reviews editor for the journal – and she will, I am sure, bring lots of extra energy and ideas to the *ES* table in her new role.



Richard Lance Keeble

## Lara Pawson's genre-bending memoir – *gravitas* and the celebration of unique cultural spaces

*This paper argues that it is important to consider any text in its broader cultural context: to go beyond the conventional bibliographies to incorporate such media forms as reviews and interviews with the author. Together these works are worth both analysing – and (where appropriate) celebrating for their creation of what can be defined as unique 'cultural spaces'. Central, then, to an understanding and appreciation of Lara Pawson's memoir, *This is the place to be* (2016), are not only the bibliographies on memoir writing (particularly by women and journalists) and the texts which inspired it – but also some of the reviews and interviews it inspired. The genre-bending aspects of the text will be identified and analysed. The paper will also contrast what it terms the *gravitas* and *légèreté* of cultural spaces, suggesting that the cultural space occupied by Pawson's memoir is endowed with the former.*

**Keywords:** Lara Pawson, memoir, unique cultural spaces

Lara Pawson's *This is the place to be* (2016) is like no other journalist's memoir. Pawson's background is conventional enough: she worked for the BBC World Service from 1998 to 2007, reporting from Mali, the Ivory Coast, and São Tomé and Príncipe. From 1998 to 2000, she was the BBC correspondent in Angola, covering the civil war. Her investigation into the little-known events of 27 May 1977, when a small demonstration against the MPLA, the ruling party of Angola, led to violent repression and the massacre of thousands, is covered in *In the name of the people: Angola's forgotten massacre* (2014), which was longlisted for the Orwell Prize 2015.

Inspired by Édouard Levé's *Autoportrait* (2012 [2005]), which was notable for saying things about a person that are not normally said, Pawson's memoir was written almost entirely in one session, its short paragraphs and scattered sentences deliberately avoiding conventional chronology. In terms of content and form, the memoir is entirely original. It mercilessly debunks the myth of the heroic journo. Her highly critical comments on news reporting are interspersed with the everyday minutiae, tragedy and joys of her own life, together with reflections on gender, family, identity, nostalgia, childhood and time. This paper firstly locates *This is the place to be* in the context of previous research on women's memoirs and, in particular, autobiographies by women journalists. And while Pawson's memoir is examined in detail, the paper does not consider it in isolation. The paper then builds on Pierre Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital (1973 and 1984) to propose the notion of the cultural space which incorporates the various cultural forms inspired by the text. Thus it explores some of the interviews and reviews linked to its publication, considering them essential elements of the cultural space occupied by the text.

### Memoirs by women: From the margins to the mainstream

According to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (1998: 4), women's autobiographies were rarely taken seriously as a focus of study before the 1970s, considered not appropriately 'complex' for academic dissertations, criticism or the literary canon. Since then, the place of women's memoir in the academy has changed dramatically. 'If feminism has revolutionised literary and social theory, the texts and theories of women's autobiography have been pivotal for revising our concepts of women's life issues – growing up female, coming to voice, affiliation, sexuality and textuality, the life cycle' (ibid).

Mary McCarthy's *Memories of a Catholic girlhood* (1957), the translation of Simone de Beauvoir's four-volume autobiography (in 1958, 1960, 1963 and 1964), Anaïs Nin's *Diaries* (1966, 1974 and 1976) combining self-exposure with literary experimentation, and Angela Davis's *Autobiography* (1974) (which not only exposed the depth of racism in the US but also critiqued misogyny amongst Black Power writers) were pivotal publishing moments in the development of the women's memoir. And increasingly, attention was directed at the extensive women's literary tradition that existed for centuries in the so-called 'marginal' genres: journals, diaries and the many forms of private, autobiographical writing.



In *The female imagination* (1975), Patricia Meyer Spacks uses autobiographies to explore women's 'characteristic powers of self-perception'. While, with the publication of Mary Mason and Carol Green's overview of women's autobiographies (1979) and James Olney's collection of essays on memoir (1980) a new stress was placed on the understanding of women's sense of identity as a relational rather than individuating process. As Smith and Watson comment (op cit: 10):

To what extent is women's autobiography characterized by the frequency of nonlinear or 'oral' narrative strategies unlike the master narratives of autobiography that seem to pose stable, coherent self-narratives? To what extent is it characterized by frequent digression, giving readers the impression of a fragmentary, shifting narrative voice or indeed a plurality of voices in dialogue? Is the subject in women's autobiography less firmly bounded, more 'fluid'?

Interestingly, as we shall see, Pawson takes this nonlinear and 'oral' narrative strategy to extremes.

Since the 1980s, the study and teaching of women's life writing has 'exploded' in both the UK, US and internationally with interest directed at both the history of the genre (from the early 1700s onwards) and 21st-century texts (Jelinek 1980; Nussbaum 1989; Corbin 1990; Scott 1991; Stanley 1992; Peterson 1996; Smith and Watson 2001; Cook and Cullen 2012). Conferences, professorships and the production of academic journals on the subject (such as Taylor and Francis's *Life Writing*) reinforce its position in the academy. Pedagogical studies have also incorporated strategies for handling the supervision of students writing personal trauma narratives (e.g. Joseph 2013).

#### **Memoir by women journos**

Intriguingly, Howard Good (1993), in one of the first studies of journalists' memoir, includes close analyses of the work of three women alongside those of five men. Under the chapter title 'Stunt girls and sob sisters', Good examines the memoirs of Elizabeth Jordan (editor of *Harper's Bazaar*, 1900-1913), Joan Lowell (a film actor and newspaper reporter in Boston, Massachusetts, in the 1930s) and Agness Underwood (journalist on the *Los Angeles Record* from 1928-1935, on the *Herald Express* from 1935-1962 and the *Herald Examiner* from 1962-1968). Good (ibid: 82) cites the work of Susan Stanford Friedman (1988) who, drawing on

the concepts of female identity suggested by Sheila Rowbotham (1973) and Nancy Chodorow (1978), argues that the 'self, self-criticism and self-consciousness are profoundly different for women' than for men:

The male autobiographer is psychologically and culturally grooved to present himself as separate from others, unique, an isolated being playing out on a dramatic scale his individual destiny. By contrast, the female autobiographer, Friedman wrote, 'does not feel herself to exist outside of others, and still less against others, but very much with others in an independent existence that asserts its rhythms everywhere in the community'.

Calvin L. Hall (2009) includes Jill Nelson and Patricia Raybon (along with Jake Lamarr and Nathan McCall) in his study of the autobiographies of African American print journalists. He argues (ibid: x) that they turn their memoirs into 'quasi political documents that challenge the status quo in journalism by illuminating through lived experience newsroom practices that have been detrimental to the kind of diversity that allows journalism to fully inform citizens'. Linda Steiner (1997) also incorporates a long list of US women journalist memoir-writers in her annotated bibliography. And an online bibliography on 'women as journalists, editors and authors' has 445 entries.<sup>1</sup>

But in a list of the top 30 journalism books in *Press Gazette*, the UK industry's magazine, Camilla Turner (2012) could manage to name only four by women.<sup>2</sup> The substantial *Encyclopedia of American Journalism*, edited by Stephen L. Vaughn (2009) has sections on 'Women journalists' (pp 590-594) and 'Women journalists, African American' (pp 594-600) yet memoir gets no mention at all.

#### **Origins and inspiration for *This is the place to be***

In a 3,636-word interview (via email) with Rebekah Weikal for *3ammagazine.com*,<sup>3</sup> Pawson explains the background to the book's publication:

It started life as a 20,000-word performance piece, a monologue that was experienced as a sound installation called 'Non Correspondence'. The installation was first put on at the Battersea Arts Centre in 2014. You'd walk into a room, which had three armchairs in it, and a coffee table. On the coffee table was a radio. A woman's voice was being broadcast. She was speaking the

text. I didn't tell any friends or family about it because I was strangely embarrassed. It's a very personal piece of work. I didn't want people I know to hear it.

Afterwards, she was persuaded to publish it as a book which then grew to 35,000 words. On her writing technique, she says:

I was writing under constraint, yes, in so far as I didn't allow myself to go back and edit the text. I forced myself to keep going, to keep writing down each association that came into my head. I did self censor a tiny bit – around stuff to do with my family which I felt was too private and too likely to cause upset – but apart from that I made myself stick tight to the honesty of the process. Even when I expanded it by 15,000 words or so, I did that by going through the text all over again from scratch. Each time I had another thought I wrote it down. I didn't want to shape it deliberately or plan it. I tried to stick to the constraint of my spontaneous associative thoughts. It was hard because I had so many: I could have written 100,000 words or more. But I wanted to keep it a short, sharp shot in the arm.<sup>4</sup>

Pawson lists four 'main prompts' (all of them male). Firstly, there was Édouard Levé's *Auto-portrait* (2012 [2005]), a series of seemingly random declarative sentences about the author. As Scott Esposito (2012) writes:

They seem to include every genre of thing that could be said about a person, ranging from the factual ('I have never filed a complaint with the police') to the oddly pointless ('I do not foresee making love with an animal') to the philosophical ('I wonder whether the landscape is shaped by the road, or the road by the landscape') to the bizarre ('On the internet I become telepathic') to the psychoanalytic ('Whether it's because I was tired of looking at them, or for lack of space, I felt a great relief when I burned my paintings') to the comic and confessional ('On the street I checked my watch while I was holding a can of Coke in my left hand, I poured part of it down my pants, by chance nobody saw, I have told no one').

Levé also touches on a vast range of topics: including art, childhood, politics, sex, death, depression, fears, hopes, reading, walking, nature, sartorial preferences, Spanish cafés, scruples about talking too much, rubber boots and the fear that one's vocabulary is shrink-

ing. Born in 1965, Levé was a business school graduate before turning to painting in 1991. A few years later, after a long stay in India, he destroyed most of his work and reinvented himself as a conceptual photographer and writer – influenced particularly by the work of Raymond Roussel (1877-1933) and other practitioners of 'constrained writing' techniques. His first publication, *Oeuvres* (2002) comprised a list of more than 500 imaginary conceptual projects. One was brought to fruition in *Amérique* (2006), photographs of small American towns named after great world cities (Berlin, Delhi, Rio, etc.). His final work, *Suicide* (2008) – its seemingly random structure intended to imitate the operations of human memory – was delivered to his publisher just days before he took his own life.

The second influence on Pawson was *Je me souviens* (Hachette, Paris, 1978) comprising 480 numbered statements, all beginning identically with 'I remember' by the French writer, Georges Perec (1936-1982). As Nicole Rudick comments (2014):

They were written between January 1973 and June 1977 but are pulled from the time when Perec was between ten and twenty-five years old. His aim was to unearth memories that were 'almost forgotten, inessential, banal, common, if not to everyone, at least to many'.

At the same time, he never suggests that all his statements are true: 'When I evoke memories from before the war, they refer for me to a period belonging to the realm of myth: this explains how a memory can be "objectively" false' (Perec 1978).

Perec was influenced himself by the *I remember* series (1970-1975) by Joe Brainard (1942-1994), the American writer whose work includes assemblages, collages, drawings and paintings as well as designs for book and album covers, theatrical sets and costumes. The memoir deliberately challenges the conventions mixing the banal with the revelatory. As the website *poets.org* comments on *I remember*:

Painterly in its vivid details and collagist in its hands-off juxtaposition, it is an accumulative, oblique biography, a portrait of the artist as a young man. It is much, much greater than the mere sum of its parts. ... It has that sweet, playful self-possession that pervades Brainard's work.<sup>5</sup>

The final influence was the long poem, 'The alphabet', composed by the American Ron Siliman (1946-) between 1979 and 2004 which grew to 26 volumes, beginning with 'Albany' in 1979-1980. This is how it starts:

If the function of writing is to 'express the world'. My father withheld child support, forcing my mother to live with her parents, my brother and I to be raised together in a small room. Grandfather called them niggers. I can't afford an automobile.

As John Herbert Cunningham writes:

'Albany' opens with a sentence fragment, a dependent clause shorn of dependency through the omission of that on which it should be dependent. The clause is then followed by a sentence that has no relation to what has gone before or what comes after – as do all the other sentences, which are assembled in a process best described ... as montage.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Pawson's radical transformation of the genre**

Given these influences, it is perhaps not surprising that at the core of Pawson's memoir is a deliberate debunking (through both content and format) of the myth of the heroic war correspondent.<sup>7</sup> There are no chapters. There is no logical or chronological structuring of the text, which is deliberately fragmented. One short paragraph simply follows another – separated only by space. One sentence, such as 'That evening, in that cramped north London flat, something got unlocked' (2016: 37), can be enough. Memories, reflections on reporting and the horrors of war, discussions about objectivity and journalistic ethics, explorations of class, race, gender and identity, confessions, insecurities, fears, blunt revelations about her own sexuality, celebrations of the land of Angola – all tumble out one after another in a process of instantaneous association. As Pawson comments:

Everything is relevant. Everything matters. I'm not sure that one experience trumps another because they all feed into each other, bouncing off each other to form the constellation of one's life. I think what I really love about the book is precisely that it goes everywhere. The freedom is fantastic.<sup>8</sup>

#### **The critique of journalism**

The critique goes so deep she even questions the right to report. She writes (2016: 9):

Working in different parts of the African continent for the mainstream media, particularly as a white British foreign correspondent, I worried a lot about what I should report and what I should not. Sometimes I asked myself what right had I to report at all.

Pawson constantly questions conventional notions about journalistic objectivity. As she writes (ibid: 12-13):

When I started out as a journalist I thought I understood the meaning of objectivity. But within a few months of reporting from Angola, I lost that faith and ceased to believe in objectivity even as a possibility. Yes, you can give a voice to as many sides as possible – but that's not objectivity. Today, I don't even believe that objectivity is a useful goal. It's false and it's a lie and it doesn't help people to mentally engage in events taking place around the world.

By the time she was reporting in the Ivory Coast in 2004, she had begun to question the relationship between the real and the imagination. 'And I began to engage more fully with the importance of doubt. This was the period when I started to think that perhaps the news world was not for me. It's the insistence on certainty that I most dislike' (ibid: 115). In the end, she voluntarily left the BBC: 'I couldn't carry on working in the mainstream media. I felt I was doing more harm than good and I was increasingly depressed about it' (ibid: 38).

She is constantly concerned to debunk the myth of the heroic war journo. For instance, at one point she admits to being 'a coward':

When I was living in Abidjan, I saw a man being beaten by government soldiers. I think he was being beaten close to death. I was standing on the other side of the road with five other journalists, all men. We could hear the man screaming, the whip coming down on his back. And we did nothing (ibid: 50).

On war reporting, she comments:

I can remember well the first time someone described me as a war correspondent. I felt like a fake. I dislike the label because it implies that war is something distinct from the rest of the news – that it is out of the ordinary. Yet, the whole point of war, I think, is that it is intrinsic to life. It is what we are. Britain has been at war continuously, somewhere in the world for over a century (ibid: 74).

Pawson is, indeed, keen to highlight in her narratives how the worlds of 'warfare' and 'peace' overlap. She recounts how, on two occasions, for instance, she was threatened by men with knives – once in 1992 in Johannesburg and once on the Jubilee Tube line, in London, in 1995 (ibid: 68).

Pawson also breaks with conventional journalistic practice (that requires a certain detachment) by often responding very emotionally to events. When she worked in Angola, she says, other journalists would sometimes laugh at her because she expressed her emotions so openly: 'I lost it with Peter Hain, the British minister for Africa – the so-called son of Africa if you remember – when he visited Luanda. And he voiced his support for a military solution to the conflict' (ibid: 10). A BBC inquiry later cleared her but she ends: 'Just writing this paragraph I feel the fury flooding back' (ibid: 11).

### Speaking frankly: On war and sex

Along with the fragmentary, free-form style of writing goes a bluntness. Pawson is clearly determined to break taboos and to shock – both when talking about the horrors of warfare and her own sexuality.

She remembers a soldier from M'banza Kongo, the capital of Angola's northwestern Zaire Province. She writes: 'We heard a gunshot. We ran with the crowds. There he was, on the stump of a tree. Sitting and staring. A rifle at his feet. His brains blown out through the back of his head' (ibid: 3). Later on she describes a Russian Antonov plane crashing into a Luandan slum: 'I saw part of someone's leg being dropped like a piece of wood onto a trailer' (ibid: 9). And 'Once, I saw a woman cut in half by an articulated lorry which was carrying food aid for the UN World Food Programme' (ibid: 81).

Sexual subjects are handled with similar frankness throughout. For instance, she writes: 'I'm now in my forties. I've had an abortion, two miscarriages and no children' (ibid: 8). Later, she remembers:

I was promiscuous in those days. ... Another journalist, a man I thought of as a friend, locked me in his car. He began to cry and begged me to suck him off. Just once, please, just once. There is something awkwardly comic about this memory because I couldn't understand what he was asking me to do...

I have had sex against my will twice in my life. Don't assume, as others have that I'm talking about somewhere in Africa because

I'm talking about somewhere in Europe. Somewhere called London.

On another occasion, a soldier held an automatic rifle to my chest and told me he was going to fuck me. When I said No you aren't! he lowered the gun and walked away (ibid: 27-28).

She even talks about tampons: 'The first time I used a tampon, I felt like I was trying to reinsert an expanded cork into a bottle of wine. We were in the south of France. I didn't have a clue. And the whole thing made me hate being female' (ibid: 99).

### *This is the place to be – and cultural spaces*

The French theorist Pierre Bourdieu is celebrated for introducing the notion of cultural capital (1973 and 1984). Accordingly, cultural capital operates as a social-relation within an economy of practices, comprising all of the material and symbolic goods which are considered rare and worth acquiring. The notion of cultural space (theorised here for the first time) is very different – focusing on the many cultural manifestations (past, present and future) that are associated with any cultural object. Thus, for any memoir to be understood fully, the cultural space it occupies needs to be considered, including not only bibliographies relating to memoirs, autobiographies, life writing and bibliographies in particular of women and women journalists, but also reviews of the text and interviews with the author. It might also incorporate films, art works, plays, social media follow-ups and so on, based on the text. Even this academic journal paper can be considered part of the text's cultural space. The political/economic underpinnings of the cultural forms also need to be acknowledged – particularly in relation to the ownership and organisational structures of the corporate/alternative media in question (Murdock and Golding 2005).

### *Reviews – worth celebrating*

The memoir received a particularly sensitive review by Cristina Rios in *Peace News* (2017). *PN* was established in 1936 as a voice for the pacifist Peace Pledge Union and continues today (on both on- and off-line platforms) – promoting non-violent revolution and critiquing corporate media coverage of conflict.<sup>9</sup> After briefly outlining Pawson's journalistic career, Rios comments: 'Indeed, not only does Pawson refuse to sensationalise her experiences, she also shows how violence surrounds us on a daily basis.' From the general, Rios moves to the specific:

Shortly after describing a man being almost beaten to death by government soldiers in Abidjan, Pawson confesses a desire to assault or humiliate a nazi sympathiser she encounters years later on a train from London to Liverpool. The normalisation and ordinariness of violence, in conflict and in everyday life, is peppered throughout the text to great effect, making this a discerning and incisive reflection on its nature (ibid).

Next Rios highlights, concisely and elegantly, the memoir's distinct originality in terms of both form and content:

Pawson's comments on conflict and her African sojourn are interspersed with the everyday minutiae, tragedy and joys of her own life, and combined with reflections on gender, family, identity, nostalgia, childhood and time. Written in short bursts – paragraphs and scattered sentences – which Pawson wrote almost entirely in one session, it eschews a conventional chronology in order to merge these diverse strands (ibid).

The reviewer is also perceptive in her response to Pawson's clear love for Angola: 'Her longing for Angola challenges our preconceptions of it, but Pawson is at all times nuanced in her depiction of the complexities and contradictions of life there and elsewhere' (ibid). And the final paragraph in the short review has a conclusive/coda-esque feel:

Through its chronological irreverence and its melding of themes, *This Is the place to be* succeeds in pondering life and its horrors – ordinary and extraordinary – in an unexpected and unique manner. Its ideas and images linger with the reader long after (ibid).

Such a well-composed, thoughtful review in the revolutionary pacifist *Peace News* constitutes an important element of the cultural space occupied by Pawson's memoir. There is nothing flippant or clichéd about the comments: indeed, they add to the *gravitas* of the space.

Another fascinating review (all of 1,267 words) appears on the website of the *Los Angeles Review of Books* (not to be confused with the mainstream *Los Angeles Times* book reviews section), which describes itself as 'a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting and disseminating rigorous, incisive, and engaging writing on every aspect of literature, culture, and the arts'.<sup>10</sup> Houman Barekat (2017) begins by dwelling on the addictions of the novelist Graham Greene and war correspondent Anthony Loyd to seeking out danger (and the

attendant adrenaline rushes) before citing Pawson on covering the Angolan civil war: 'It was an incredibly intense experience, one that influenced me radically. For a long time, I tried to work out how I could retrieve it. I wanted a repeat, like that absurd sensation you get when you first take certain class-A drugs' (ibid).

This sort of admission 'normally takes the form of a fleeting disclosure, duly followed by a vague sense of shame and a swift changing of the subject'. But here 'the theme resurfaces again and again in the many disparate fragments' (ibid):

Pawson recalls feeling 'a sort of lightness of being' after 9/11; later, she recalls how 'an overwhelming vigour definitely swept through me' when watching some people being killed. 'It was the same when I saw a group of children,' she writes, 'scrambling like rabbits into holes in the ground to hide from incoming shells' (ibid).

Barekat next highlights a central theme of the memoir, following it up with an astute psychological observation:

Pawson is no latter-day Marinetti when she opines: 'The whole point of war ... is that it's intrinsic to life'; the observation is all the more troubling precisely because it comes from someone whose approach to existence brims with humanity and compassion (ibid).

The review then shifts to consider the memoir's important reflections on journalistic professionalism, as Pawson 'bemoans the suffocating compromises of professional journalism, the necessity of reducing everything to a hackneyed sound bite and the impossibility of transcending the limits of the format'. Her questioning of BBC claims to objectivity, according to Barekat, are particularly apposite given the corporation's 'bending over backward to be seen as impartial in its coverage of the rising tide of racist populism in Western politics, a policy exemplified by its decision to carry a lengthy interview with the leader of the French far right, Marine Le Pen, back in November – on Remembrance Sunday, no less' (ibid).

Pawson's misgivings about the inherently exploitative nature of war journalism lead Barekat to consider the fate of the Pulitzer Prize-winning South African photojournalist Kevin Carter who took his own life at 33, apparently haunted by the horrors he witnessed in Sudan. And he makes this important political point:



Western correspondents working anywhere in the Global South are necessarily implicated, at least to some extent, in the structures of socio-economic and geo-political inequality that sustain the privations they are recording, and even someone who has embraced an adopted culture with pure and sincere motives is not entirely free from the taint of appropriation (ibid).

Her 'ruminative vignettes are sporadically punctuated by moments of disarmingly jovial whimsy'. For instance, of the Cuban doctor who sucked on a cigar while telling her she had to quit smoking immediately, she comments: 'If anything, this made me take him more seriously.' Moreover, the memoir's oddness – its nonlinear, fragmentary form – 'gives it a kind of oneiric quality redolent of experimental fiction' (ibid). The effect is heightened by an occasional riffing on the unreliability of memory:

We are invited, by implication, to speculate as to how much else was fill-in, and to reflect in turn on the authenticity of our own narratives. For all its personal candor, the spare laconicism of Pawson's prose — even when recalling harrowing acts of violence — militates against any sense of intrusiveness or therapeutic excess (ibid).

Barekat ends with a deliberately contentious, slightly whimsical generalisation: 'This is particularly important to an English readership, for we are delicate in the face of earnestness and cannot handle too much of it. Give it to us by stealth, though, and we will gladly have it.' But it's a surprising conclusion given that he imagines his audience as primarily English when the reach of the internet is global.

All the same, a progressive political aesthetic underlies the review. It performs the essential function of a review, comprising a well-structured, original, thoughtful and colourfully written reflection on the text but at the same time carrying enough *gravitas* to interest the general reader who may not go on to acquire/read Pawson's work. As Keeble stresses in his book on newspaper writing skills (2006: 246): 'The review must exist as a piece of writing in its own right. It must entice in the reader through the quality and colour of its prose. It must entertain, though different newspapers have different conceptions of what entertainment means.'

In her *Times Literary Supplement* review, Lara Feigel (2016) considers Pawson's work along-

side the posthumously published *The war on women*, by the former BBC correspondent, Sue Lloyd-Roberts. She sums up the background concisely:

For twenty years until her death from leukaemia last year at the age of sixty-four, Lloyd-Roberts made impassioned, angry films for the BBC documenting global injustice and suffering. In the lead-up to her death, she became aware that a striking number of the cases that she'd investigated had involved violence aimed specifically at women. *The war on women* documents a series of these, taking us from Gambia to Ireland, Kashmir to Bradford, asking for increased pressure to be put on governments around the world to stop turning a blind eye to the violation of basic human rights.

She moves on to consider some of the (often harrowing) cases Lloyd-Roberts championed. On Pawson, she first considers her as a both 'willing and unwilling outsider': 'Often mistaken for a boy when she was younger, she moved to Walthamstow from Hackney when it became too yuppie and left an enviable job at the BBC when she found the insider status it gave her too untenable' (ibid).

Feigel describes *This is the place to be* as Pawson's 'fragmentary inquiry into herself that uses her own experiences as a lens through which to investigate many things, but most crucially race, sexuality and violence' (ibid).

If there is a narrative here, then it's about Pawson's relationship to Angola – a country that she had never heard of as a child, and that she came to think of as home. She lived in Luanda while reporting on the war there in the late 1990s and her distrust of the phrase 'war correspondent' stems from this time because she came to see that war wasn't distinct from ordinary life.

The centrality of Pawson's meditations on violence (picked up by the other reviewers) is also captured here. Feigel writes that the memoir is principally a meditation 'on whether the violence of war can be separated from a strain of violence that seems more endemic to human life'. And she elegantly links Pawson with Lloyd-Roberts, suggesting that both women insisted:

... that the West cannot get away with separating itself from barbarity. She mentions that her only two experiences of sexual violence have happened in Britain rather than

Africa, and describes fights with potential attackers that have taken place in her own London neighbourhood (ibid).

Pawson's incredibly intense experiences while reporting the Angolan war (like 'when you first take certain class-A drugs'), highlighted by other reviewers, are also considered here. But Feigel challenges Pawson when she states that no one who has witnessed a war – 'who has seen the damage it does to people mentally and physically' – would ever wish for more hostility of this kind.

But this is a statement belied in recent decades by the regimes that have perpetuated continual conflict. It is belied all around us now and indeed is contradicted by many of Pawson's own reflections in a book whose strength is that contrary observations frequently coexist.

The review ends comparing, again, aspects of the two texts: Feigel suggests there is a danger that on reading Pawson 'we will take refuge in inaction; that exposure to complication on this scale results in a kind of existential sense of the impossibility of agency. It is no coincidence that one of her favourite writers is Samuel Beckett' (ibid). In contrast, 'Sue Lloyd-Roberts can awaken us out of that torpor. Though her book is unrelenting, it is also unignorable'.

The *TLS* review, then, usefully highlights the way in which the cultural space of a text can cross both corporate and alternative sectors – and how progressive political and aesthetic ideas can appear in the mainstream. Indeed, while the essential function of the corporate media is to propagandise in the interests of dominant political, economic, ideological and military interests (Herman and Chomsky 1988), this does not operate one-dimensionally (the system is sufficiently strong enough to incorporate challenges). Significant spaces do appear in the political and cultural sphere in which dominant ideas and interests can be challenged. And such challenges, endowed with *gravitas*, are worth celebrating.

#### *Interviews – and the pleasures of the text*

The interview can be another important feature of the cultural space of a text. It helps expand the reception of the text across media and can introduce new perspectives, new psychological depth (*gravitas*) and new 'facts'. It can help in understanding and add to the aesthetic and intellectual pleasure of the text. On his blog *rhystranter.com*, Rhys Tranter (2016)

begins an interview with Pawson by asking what motivates her to write. Until ten years or so ago, she says, she was inspired by a desire to persuade people to care about events and people around the world. More recently, her attitude has changed:

I am much less certain of why I write and often uncertain of what I am writing until it's finished. The difference is that I accept that uncertainty. I indulge it. Doubt is neither comfortable nor comforting, but it is a good creative intellectual and emotional space. Perhaps digging into doubt is my real motivation (ibid).

After they discuss the origins of the memoir (indicated earlier in this paper), the focus turns to its fragmentary nature. Pawson says she began by writing a series of spontaneous associations about her times reporting wars in Angola and the Ivory Coast but then these spilled into other parts of her life:

I like this because I've always felt very strongly that there is an ordinariness to conflict, that the everyday persists even in that environment. Similarly, peace is fraught with tension and with degrees of violence. I suppose I'm interested in the overlap between war and peace (ibid).

Pawson next acknowledges her debt to Levé, Péric, Brainard and Silliman (all men). But, interestingly, she goes on to highlight other writers who have influenced her: Kathy Acker,<sup>11</sup> Jean Améry,<sup>12</sup> Sven Lindqvist,<sup>13</sup> Mina Loy,<sup>14</sup> Claudia Rankine<sup>15</sup> and Derek Walcott.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, Tranter does not follow up by asking precisely how these authors impacted on her memoir. It would have been fascinating to know.

Pawson says that people who have read *This is the place to be* often comment to her on how it reminds them of the work of Marguerite Duras<sup>17</sup> and so she began to read Duras – with great interest.

The long interview by Rebekah Weikal for *3ammagazine.com*<sup>18</sup> is particularly useful for highlighting aspects of the text nowhere else considered. For instance, in response to an early question about how her work in radio influenced her writing, Pawson responds:

I'd say that writing for radio is all about rhythm. For several years, I was writing day in day out for BBC World Service radio. I would always read my scripts aloud, repeatedly. You have to keep the language very



tight. I'd be listening to the rhythm of each report, which often were less than a minute each – the length of a poem, if you like. I think the rhythm of my reports mattered as much to me as the content. It influences listeners even if they aren't aware of it.<sup>19</sup>

Weikal cleverly integrates her own subjectivity into the discussion which covers quite intimate issues – and it helps build trust with the interviewee – saying that one of her favourite parts of the book is when Pawson reveals she has only recently begun to think of gender 'outside the binary'. Pawson responds frankly:

I am certainly surprised that it's taken me so long to move through and hopefully beyond the binary. I felt very old when I realised this, but immediately freed as well, as if I was shedding a thick layer of skin. The crumbling of gender binaries is one of the very few aspects of life at the moment that I feel excited about, even optimistic. I'm not sure if this is to do with the book more than the people I have been lucky enough to meet and to call my friends. So much else leaves me afraid and pessimistic.<sup>20</sup>

The intimacy quickly established between interviewer and interviewee means that Pawson is often quite open about her deepest feelings. For instance, she adds:

I think it's a cathartic addendum to some of my turmoil around class, race, sexuality and identity. Spending time in two countries with war has obviously influenced me hugely, but no more than growing up in south west London as a privileged child who was sent to private school.<sup>21</sup>

When the discussion moves on to the ethics of journalism, Pawson mentions a number of reporters whom she admires: Sola Odunfa,<sup>22</sup> Ebrima Sillah,<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth Ohene,<sup>24</sup> Gray Phombeah,<sup>25</sup> Justin Pearce,<sup>26</sup> Robin White<sup>27</sup> and Obi Anyadike.<sup>28</sup> And she says she is inspired by many others in the profession, among them Lindsey Hilsum,<sup>29</sup> Anthony Loyd,<sup>30</sup> Gary Younge,<sup>31</sup> Rasna Warah.<sup>32</sup> She is next asked when she realised she could not keep her emotions out of her reporting:

There was the time when I described the Angolan President, José Eduardo dos Santos, as 'predictably paranoid' in a report. The producer in London said it was partisan and had to be taken out. I refused. They probably deleted it from the recording. Another

time, I was reporting on a demonstration against the regime and I couldn't stop myself joining in the chanting with the protesters. It was a wonderful moment, being part of this courageous group of activists. I remember the elation.<sup>33</sup>

All this extra biographical information helps us understand the memoir more deeply. Pawson is asked to elaborate on her questioning, obsessively, 'the distinctions between fact and fiction, between the real and the imagination'. She replies, quoting from her memoir (2016: 80):

With normal vision, and with perception of all kinds, there is a lot of unconscious guesswork that goes on. The brain knows what should be there and, to help us, it fills in for us, using unconscious processing and guesswork. So your eye is not the video camera you think it is. What we see is a simulation of reality.

To support her argument, she quotes the case of Jean Charles de Menezes, the 27-year-old Brazilian shot dead by police on the London underground on 22 July, 2005. Eyewitnesses reported seeing a man running away from police, vaulting over a ticket barrier and wearing a bulky jacket that concealed some sort of suicide bomb.

In fact, when the truth eventually came out, we learned that Menezes had actually been wearing a light denim shirt, had walked through the ticket barriers and only ran when he saw his train pulling into the station. How could bystanders have got the facts so wrong?<sup>34</sup>

The discussion then moves on to travel, and Pawson reveals more of her constantly questioning, sceptical attitude to life (so much an integral element of the memoir):

My earliest travel experiences, first in South Africa and then in Ghana, were extraordinary. Both countries seemed so different to the places I'd read about in texts by academics. They were almost unrecognisable. For several years, I wished I'd lived in them before studying them. To some extent, I felt that academic study had given me an illusion of knowledge that, as it turned out, I didn't really have at all. I realised how ignorant I was. But I think we always have to be cautious when we travel anywhere. First impressions are always superficial and usu-

ally unreliable. In fact, I think travel is unreliable, which is why, when I was working as a journalist, I preferred to live and work in a country, not to drop in and out. I think it's only by living in a place, by staying there and bedding down, that you start to understand it. Travel implies you are moving through a place. I'm not convinced it's a way to truly start to understand the world.

Pawson ends by saying she is currently working on a novel and travelling more in the UK:

To survive life in London today, I try my hardest to observe it as if I were an outsider as well as an insider. This may sound a little contradictory but I also take solace from something I read by Hilary Mantel: 'When you find yourself at the centre, no longer part of the radical, start digging the ground beneath your feet.' This is what I'm trying to do at the moment – and I think it can be very radical.

#### Conclusion: On a personal note

I was first inspired to check out Pawson's memoir after seeing Rios's review of it in my favourite journal, *Peace News*. I was struck by the elegance of the writing, the sensitive, concise reflections on the text and by the memoir's form and content – as described by Rios. On securing the book I was amazed by its radicalism. And searching on the web, various other reviews and interviews appeared. I found all of them fascinating and well-constructed, sensitive to Pawson's aesthetic and underlying politics. Most of them appeared in alternative media – usually ignored by the academy. Investigating the writers/artists who inspired Pawson also led me down new, somewhat obscure and wonderfully stimulating intellectual avenues.

So around *This is the place to be* grew, for me, a host of cultural forms which helped deepen my appreciation and understanding of the text. Together, they seem to form a unique cultural space in which deeply important issues – sexuality, racism, professionalism, the blurred boundaries between reality and the imagined world and so on – are explored seriously – with *gravitas*, indeed. And I wanted both to celebrate and theorise this cultural space, building on Bourdieu's notions of cultural capital. Reviews and interviews are rarely considered alongside writings and yet (as this case study suggests) analysing them can help provide crucial new insights.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> See <http://mupfc.marshall.edu/~rabe/women.htm>, accessed on 9 August 2018

<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in the *Independent*, of 24 March 2016, Lucy Scholes reviewed some 'classic newsroom books'. The first five are all by men (George Gissing, Jonathan Coe, Michael Frayn, Evelyn Waugh and Andrew Martin) – and the photograph illustrating the feature shows a busy, all-male newsroom. Tucked at the end are references to novels by three women (Annalena McAfee, Monica Dickens and F. E. Bailey) (Scholes 2016)

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/place-interview-lara-pawson/>, accessed on 2 July 2018

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*

<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/joe-brainard-i-remember>, accessed on 2 July 2018

<sup>6</sup> See <http://quarterlyconversation.com/the-alphabet-by-ron-silliman>, accessed on 2 July 2018

<sup>7</sup> See for instance, *Frontline*, by Clare Hollingworth (1990). The doyenne of war correspondents was 105 when she died in January 2017. Her great scoop was to witness the German invasion of Poland and the launch of the Second World War in 1939. The cover blurb says: 'She has been a distinguished and indefatigable frontline reporter for the *Guardian* and *Telegraph*, one of a rare species – a journalist always more interested in presenting the facts objectively than in promoting a cause or herself. She is self-reliant, brave, exhilarated under fire and immensely tenacious.' Typical of her writing style is the way she reports her first assignment in Poland: 'We came under machine-gun attack from German fighters strafing the roads, we rocked in and out of great pot-holes, we were covered in dust and after dusk we found ourselves driving without lights on an invisible road in an unknown country' (*ibid*: 210; see also Adie (2003), Bowen (2006), Hastings (2002), Leslie (2008), Sissons (2012). Phillip Knightley's seminal analysis of war reporting (2000) also succeeds in debunking many of the heroic myths. So too does the hilarious novel *Scoop* (1938) by Evelyn Waugh

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/place-interview-lara-pawson/>, accessed on 2 July 2018

<sup>9</sup> Editor Milan Rai writes: 'For *Peace News*, citizen journalism has meant activist journalism with self-reporting by large numbers of social movement activists through the years' (2010: 211). He adds that one of the purposes of *PN* is 'to search the output of the mass media with diligence and a sceptical eye, cutting through the mass of misrepresentation and fraud to discover nuggets that can help citizens to better understand – and more effectively alter – the world in which we are living and acting' (*ibid*: 217)

<sup>10</sup> See <https://lareviewofbooks.org/about/>, accessed on 9 August 2018

<sup>11</sup> Kathy Acker (1947-1997) American experimental novelist, punk poet, essayist, influenced by W. S. Burroughs, Marguerite Duras and by the Black Mountain School poets. In her fragmentary texts she blends memoir, sex, power and violence

<sup>12</sup> Jean Améry (1912-1978) Austrian writer whose work was often influenced by his experiences in the Auschwitz concentration camp. He wrote *On suicide: A discourse on voluntary death* (1976). Améry killed himself in 1978

<sup>13</sup> Sven Lindqvist (1932-) Swedish writer of over 30 books of essays, aphorisms, memoir, documentary prose, travel and reportage. His more recent works focus on the subjects of imperialism, racism, war and genocide. He has argued, controversially, that the Nazi application of the expansionist and racist principles of colonialism was significant because for the first time it was applied against fellow Europeans rather than against the distant and dehumanised peoples of the Third World

<sup>14</sup> Mina Loy (1886-1966) English poet, artist, feminist, playwright, novelist and lampshade designer. In 1946, she became a naturalised citizen of the United States and in later life continued to work on her junk collages. See <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/mina-loy>

- <sup>15</sup> Claudia Rankine (1963-) Born in Kingston, Jamaica, she is an essayist, poet and playwright. Her poems explore the unsettled territory between prose and poetry and the ways in which individuals are influenced by skin colour, economics and global corporate culture
- <sup>16</sup> Derek Walcott (1930-2017) Winner of the 1992 Nobel Prize for Literature, he was a poet, playwright and essayist, born in St Lucia. His book-length poem *Omeros*, loosely based on Homer's *The Iliad*, was published in 1990 to acclaim. It explores his dominant themes: the harsh legacy of colonialism, the beauty of the Caribbean islands, the difficulties of writing and living in two cultural worlds
- <sup>17</sup> Marguerite Duras (1914-1996) French novelist, journalist, playwright, experimental film-maker and active member of the French Communist Party. Her partly fictionalised autobiographical work *L'Amant (The Lover)* won the Goncourt Prize in 1984 and was turned into a highly successful film by Jean-Jacques Annaud in 1992. According to *britannica.com*, Duras turned regularly to a more abstract and synthetic mode, with fewer characters, less plot and narrative, and fewer of the other elements of traditional fiction (see <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Marguerite-Duras>)
- <sup>18</sup> See <http://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/place-interview-lara-pawson/>, accessed on 2 July 2018
- <sup>19</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>20</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>21</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>22</sup> A freelance, Africa-based correspondent who often appears on the BBC. See <http://frontierleaks.blogspot.com/2014/11/sola-odunfa-profile-of-one-of.html>, accessed on 10 August 2018
- <sup>23</sup> Former BBC correspondent based in The Gambia, he was appointed director general of Gambia Radio and Television Services in February 2017. See <http://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/article/ebriima-sillah-is-new-grts-director-general>, accessed on 10 August 2018
- <sup>24</sup> Ghanaian journalist and politician who has contributed to the BBC's *Letter from Africa*
- <sup>25</sup> A Kenyan-based journalist
- <sup>26</sup> Formerly a reporter in South Africa, Angola and the UK, he is currently a researcher at Cambridge University (see <https://theconversation.com/profiles/justin-pearce-247414>)
- <sup>27</sup> Born in Nottingham in 1944, MBE, he was for many years editor of the BBC's *Focus on Africa* and *Network Africa*
- <sup>28</sup> Editor at large at *irinnnews.org* (covering aid, conflict, the environment, disasters and migration)
- <sup>29</sup> International editor at *Channel 4 News*. See <https://www.channel4.com/news/by/lindsey-hilsum>, accessed on 10 August 2018
- <sup>30</sup> Award-winning *Times* foreign correspondent. See <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/anthony-loyd-dispatches-from-the-frontline-2kp0tm6sb>, accessed on 10 August 2018
- <sup>31</sup> Editor at large at the *Guardian*. See <https://www.theguardian.com/profile/garyyounge>, accessed on 10 August 2018
- <sup>32</sup> A Kenyan writer and editor. See <https://www.nation.co.ke/authors/1959272-1914582-my0lriz/index.html>, accessed on 10 August 2018
- <sup>33</sup> <http://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/place-interview-lara-pawson/>, accessed on 2 July 2018
- <sup>34</sup> <http://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/place-interview-lara-pawson/>, accessed on 2 July 2018
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1973) Cultural reproduction and social reproduction, Brown, R. (ed.) *Knowledge, education and social change: Papers in the sociology of education*, London, Tavistock Publications pp 71-112
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1984) *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press
- Bowen, Jeremy (2006) *War stories*, London, Simon and Schuster
- Chodorow, Nancy (1978) *The reproduction of mothering: Psychoanalysis and the sociology of gender*, Berkeley, University of California Press
- Esposito, Scott (2012) Review of *Autoportrait*, *The Quarterly Conversation*, 5 March. Available online at <http://quarterlyconversation.com/autoportrait-by-edouard-leve>, accessed on 2 July 2018
- Feigel, Lara (2016) Witnesses to the world, *Times Literary Supplement*, 26 October. Available online at <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/witnesses-to-the-world/>, accessed on 9 August 2018
- Friedman, Susan Stanford (1988) Women's autobiographical selves, Benstock, Shari (ed.) *The private self: Theory and practice of women's autobiographical writing*, Chapel Hill, NV, University of North Carolina Press pp 35-56
- Good, Howard (1951) *The journalist as autobiographer*, New Jersey and London, The Scarecrow Press
- Hall, Calvin L. (2009) *African American journalists: Autobiography as memoir and manifesto*, Maryland, Toronto and Plymouth, Scarecrow Press
- Hastings, Max (2002) *Editor*, London, Macmillan
- Herman, Edward and Chomsky, Noam (1988) *Manufacturing consent: The political economy of the mass media*, New York, Pantheon
- Hollingsworth, Clare (1990) *Frontline*, London, Jonathan Cape
- Jelinek, Estelle, C. (1980) *Women's autobiography: Essays in criticism*, Indiana, Indiana University Press
- Joseph, Sue (2013) The lonely girl: Investigating the scholarly nexus of trauma life-writing and process in tertiary institutions, *Text*, Vol. 17, No. 1. Available online at <http://www.textjournal.com.au/april13/joseph.htm>, accessed on 2 July 2018
- Keeble, Richard (2006) *The newspapers handbook*, Abingdon, Oxon and New York, Routledge, fourth edition
- Knightley, Phillip (2000) *The first casualty: The war correspondent as hero and myth-maker from the Crimea to Kosovo*, London, Prion Books
- Leslie, Ann (2008) *Killing my own snakes*, London, Macmillan
- Levé, Édouard (2012 [2005]) *Autoportrait* (trans. Stein, Lorin), Illinois, Dalkey Archive Press
- Mason, Mary Grimley and Green, Carol Hurd (1979) *Journeys: Autobiographical writings by women*, Boston, G. K. Hall
- Murdock, Graham and Golding, Peter (2005) Culture, communications and political economy, Curran, James and Gurevitch, Michael (eds) *Mass media and society*, London, Hodder Arnold pp 60-83
- Olney, James (ed.) (1980) *Autobiography: Essays theoretical and critical*, Princeton, Princeton University Press
- Pawson, Lara (2016) *This is the place to be*, London, CB Editions
- Rai, Milan (2010) Peace journalism in practice: *Peace News* for non-violent revolution, Keeble, Richard Lance, Tulloch, John and Zollmann, Florian (eds) *Peace journalism, war and conflict resolution*, New York, Peter Lang pp 207-221
- Rios, Christina (2017) Review of *This is the place to be*, *Peace News*, February-March. Available online at <https://peacenews.info/node/8621/lara-pawson-place-be>, accessed on 4 August 2018
- Rowbotham, Sheila (1973) *Women's consciousness, man's world*, London, Penguin
- Rudick, Nicole (2014) I remember Georges Perec, *Paris Review*, 30 July. Available online at <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2014/07/30/i-remember-georges-perec/>, accessed on 2 July 2018

## References

- Adie, Kate (2003) *The kindness of strangers*, London, Headline
- Barekat, Houman (2017) The whole point about war: On Lara Pawson's *This is the place to be*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 27 February. Available online at <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-whole-point-about-war-on-lara-pawsons-this-is-the-place-to-be/#1>, accessed on 9 August 2018

---

## Richard Lance Keeble

Scholes, Lucy (2016) Classic newsroom books: A memorable saunter down the Street of Shame, *Independent*, 24 March. Available online at <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/classic-newsroom-books-a-memorable-saunter-down-the-street-of-shame-a6950211.html>, accessed on 12 July 2018

Sissons, Peter (2012) *When one door closes*, London, Biteback

Smith, Sidonie and Watson, Julia (1998) *Women, autobiography, theory*, Madison, Wisconsin and London, University of Wisconsin Press

Spacks, Patricia Meyer (1975) *The female imagination*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf

Steiner, Linda (1997) Autobiographies by women journalists: An annotated bibliography, *Journalism History*, Vol. 23, No. 1 pp 13-15

Tranter, Rhys (2016) Lara Pawson discusses her memoir, *This is the place to be*, *rhystranter.com*, 8 September. Available online at <https://rhystranter.com/2016/09/08/lara-pawson-memoir-this-is-the-place-to-be-interview/>, accessed on 9 August 2018

Turner, Camilla (2012) List of top 30 journalism book, *Press Gazette*, 17 December. Available online at <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/press-gazettes-christmas-list-best-journalism-books/>, accessed on 1 July 2018

Vaughn, Stephen L. (ed.) (2009) *Encyclopedia of American journalism*, New York and London, Routledge

Waugh, Evelyn (1938) *Scoop*, London, Chapman and Hall

### Note on the Contributor

Richard Lance Keeble is Professor of Journalism at the University of Lincoln and Visiting Professor at Liverpool Hope University. Chair of the Orwell Society, he has written and edited 39 books on a range of media-related subjects.

## When journalism isn't enough: 'Horror surrealism' in Behrouz Boochani's testimonial prison narrative

*The journalist, filmmaker and author, Behrouz Boochani, has been forcibly detained on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea (PNG), for the past five years at the direction of the Australian government. His prison narrative, No friend but the mountains (2018), uses prose, poetry, allegory and political theory to depict the conditions the refugees and asylum seekers endure in detention. Described by his translator as 'horrific surrealism' (2018a: xxx, 2018b: 367), it was written on a smuggled smartphone hidden in Boochani's mattress and sent out bit by bit in text messages via WhatsApp to translators in Australia. Written in Farsi, the language of the oppressors of the Kurds, and translated into English, the language of his jailers, it is a powerful indictment of Australia's immigration policies, particularly as they affect refugees and asylum seekers arriving at Australia's north by boat from Indonesia. This paper examines No friend but the mountains as an example of a politically motivated text that functions not only as prison narrative but also as literary memoir and testimonial literature. It is the latest in Boochani's ongoing efforts to witness the experience of imprisonment on Manus Island, while resisting Australian government policy, and calling for the humane treatment of refugees and asylum seekers.*

**Keywords:** Behrouz Boochani, testimonial prison narrative, *No friend but the mountains*, refugees

### Introduction

The reporting of asylum seeker and refugee issues traditionally has been negative in Australia and is growing increasingly negative over time (Cooper et al. 2017: 78). While migrants have enriched much of contemporary Australian society, racism has played a significant role in Australian immigration history (Jayasuriya, Walker and Gothard 2003; Jupp 2007; Markus 1994; Yarwood and Knowling 1982). It continues to underpin immigration policy, regardless of the persuasion of the government (Bolger 2016). With the federal government in control of the media narrative, the political rhetoric, particularly since 2001, casts asylum seekers, most pointedly the 'irregular' arrivals coming by boat, as 'illegals' who threaten the social cohesion, affluence and security of the Australian way of life (Cooper et al. 2017: 78). This is despite Australia signing the *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees 1951*.

Because of Australia's location close to Asia and the Pacific Islands, and the largely unacknowledged ownership of the land by the First Peoples, Australians historically have harboured a deep fear of the alien and foreign 'Other' (Jayasuriya, Walker and Gothard 2003; Jupp 2007; Markus 1994; Yarwood and Knowling 1982). In colonial times, fears of a 'yellow peril' and invasion by 'hordes' from the north dominated Australian thinking, manifesting in the exclusionist White Australia policy that was an important ideological component for the push towards federation and nationhood in 1901 (Griffiths 2006). It was not until after the Second World War and the need for population-driven economic growth that immigration restrictions were relaxed. However, the racially selective White Australia policy continued with successive governments assessing prospective immigrants on their suitability for integrating into Australian society (Bolger 2016).

Despite the move to multiculturalism in 1973, immigration policies continued to conform to a racialised agenda where potential immigrants who were sufficiently 'westernised' and 'white' were welcome and others remained excluded (ibid). This has been underpinned post-9/11 by anti-Muslim fears. While the majority of people who seek protection in Australia arrive through authorised channels and with valid visas, a smaller number arrive by boat from countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka without proper travel documents after fleeing persecution, most often at the hands of their own governments (Refugee Council of Australia 2016; Bolger 2016). This latter group is the most



affected by the policy of mandatory detention of asylum seekers and refugees. The policy has been a highly contentious issue in Australia for almost twenty years, yet it remains in place despite successive governments of different persuasions. While its purpose is ostensibly administrative – to allow for health and security checks to mitigate risks to the community – it is kept in place as a deterrent to other would-be asylum seekers contemplating similar journeys to Australia.

Information about the conditions in the detention centres is difficult for Australians to come by. Visas are charged at \$8000, the cost is non-refundable and they are rarely granted to journalists, preventing reporters from describing conditions first-hand (Jabour and Hurst 2014). While visas to Manus Island are granted or denied by the PNG government, journalists say the responsibility lies with the Australian government (Al Jazeera 2017), which has admitted the denial of visas is one of a number of ‘operational disciplines’ needed to secure Australia’s borders and prevent intelligence being shared with ‘people smugglers’ (Karp 2016).

The Australian government has also clamped down on whistleblowers. In May 2015, the government passed a law preventing disclosure to the public of ‘protected information’ by Australian Border Force employees, including medical personnel (Killedar and Harris 2017). A two-year prison sentence was threatened for anyone working in an Australian immigration detention facility, whether on the mainland or offshore, if they disclosed what they saw while working. The secrecy laws were ameliorated in September 2016 when an amendment excluded ‘health professionals’ from the ban. A year later, the legislation was again changed allowing service workers to speak out as long as the information could not threaten Australia’s security (Coady 2017). It remains difficult, however, for service workers and media outlets to assess what the government will regard as threatening to the nation.

To challenge the government’s control of the narrative and imposition of secrecy, Behrouz Boochani has been reporting directly from detention, becoming a principal source of information for the media as well as acting as a journalist in his own right. At considerable risk, he witnesses conditions in detention, using social media prolifically and writing for media including the *Huffington Post*, the *Guardian*, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Financial Times* and the *Saturday Paper*. His is also a key source for

journalists around the world who are prevented from visiting the offshore detention centres to obtain information. His work has earned him three human rights awards: the Amnesty International Australia 2017 Media Award, the Diaspora Symposium Social Justice Award, and the Liberty Victoria 2018 Empty Chair Award as well as the Anna Politkovskaya Award for journalism. He is non-resident Visiting Scholar at the Sydney Asia Pacific Migration Centre (SAPMiC) at the University of Sydney.

For the first two years he was in detention, Boochani wrote his journalism under a false name for fear of retaliation, using a smuggled smartphone. With the help of Reporters Without Borders and Pen International, he eventually started to use his real name (Hazel 2016). At the same time, he began to realise that the language of journalism was not powerful enough to convey the suffering of the detainees ‘and to tell the history of this prison, and what Australian government is doing in this island’ (German 2017). His translator, Omid Tofighian, quotes him as saying:

With journalism I have no choice but to use simple language and basic concepts. I need to consider diverse audiences when writing news articles ... they’re for the general public so it isn’t possible to delve as deeply as I would like. And this is the problem right here. I can’t analyse and express the extent of the torture in this place... (Tofighian 2018a: xv).

Continuing the tradition of Kurdish resistance, Boochani eschews journalistic and political jargon, refusing to endorse the rhetoric of the Australian government and disdaining such terms as ‘border protection’, ‘Pacific Solution’ and ‘mandatory detention’. Instead, with the help of Tofighian, he has experimented with language and form, interweaving poetry, memoir, monologues, dreams, political theory and commentary, in the process stretching the boundaries of accepted genres while breaking free from the book’s own textual genesis, the restrictions of torture and imprisonment, and the language of Australia’s immigration policy. The turn to literature has been liberating. He says that, through literature:

... I can do whatever I like. I create my own discourse and do not succumb to the language of oppressive power. I create my own language for critically analysing the phenomenon of Manus Prison (Boochani 2018: 367).

His aim in turning to literary memoir is primarily to move 'readers to resist the colonial mindset that is driving Australia's detention regime and to inspire self-reflection, deep investigation and direct action' (Tofighian 2018a: xxxiv). By calling the Manus Island Regional Processing Centre the Manus Prison, he makes clear its purpose as a place of punishment, rather than 'processing'.

Can it be I sought asylum in Australia only to be exiled to a place I know nothing about? And are they forcing me to live here without any other options? I am prepared to be put on a boat back to Indonesia: I mean the same place I embarked from. But I can't find any answers to these questions. Clearly, they are taking us hostage. We are hostages – we are being made examples to strike fear into others, to scare people so they won't come to Australia. What do other people's plans to come to Australia have to do with me? Why do I have to be punished for what others might do? (Boochani 2018: 107).

As hostages of the government, the men on Manus Island are being mistreated for political purposes.

### Behrouz Boochani

Born in Ilam, western Iran, in 1983, Behrouz Boochani first wrote journalism for the student newspaper while attending Tarbiat Madares University, from which he graduated with a Master's degree in Political Science, Political Geography and Geopolitics. Later he wrote freelance on Middle East politics and Kurdish culture for the Iranian newspapers *Kasbkar Weekly*, *Qanoon* and *Etemaad* and the Iranian Sports Agency (Zable 2015; Hazel 2016; Pen International 2017). His writing and his membership of the National Union of Kurdish Students and the outlawed Kurdish Democratic Party brought him to the attention of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the paramilitary intelligence agency known as Sepah. In 2011, he was arrested, interrogated and forced by Sepah to give an undertaking he would stop writing and teaching Kurdish culture and language.

In 2013, when Boochani was writing for the Kurdish language magazine, *Werya*, Sepah raided the magazine's offices, arresting 11 people and imprisoning six. Boochani was in Tehran at the time of the raid. Having escaped arrest and interrogation, he drew attention to Sepah's actions and the plight of his colleagues by writing about the incident for the website *Iranian Reporters*. Consequently, he was forced

into hiding. He fled Iran on 23 May and made his way to Indonesia. From there, he paid people smugglers to join a group of asylum seekers crossing the Arafura Sea to Australia. The boat sank. Rescued by fishermen, he returned to Indonesia where he was jailed. Escaping, he attempted the dangerous sea crossing again and in July, was one of a group of 75 asylum seekers picked up by the Australian Navy. On board, he asked, legally, for asylum under Article 1 of the Refugee Convention (Zable 2015; Hazel 2016; Pen International 2017).

Boochani and his fellow asylum seekers were taken to Christmas Island, one of Australia's external territories, in the Indian Ocean, south of Java, Indonesia. They arrived only days after the Labor government under Julia Gillard decided to transfer all 'boat people' to Manus Island or Nauru, where they would be indefinitely detained (Zable 2017; Davidson 2016). After a month, Boochani was transferred to the men-only detention centre on Manus Island, in Papua New Guinea. The decision by Gillard's government to reintroduce 'offshore processing' after a hiatus of several years was in response to increasing arrivals by boat of asylum seekers with 5,175 arriving in 2011 (Australian Human Rights Commission 2012).

Although the majority of asylum seekers on Manus Island have been found to be refugees (Kenny 2017), they have been told by the Australian government that there is no possibility of their being granted entry visas to Australia. The choices for the 700 men are stark – return to the countries they fled from or remain on the island permanently. The release of the men into the Manusian community is not acceptable to many locals as the small island does not have the economy nor social supports to sustain them (Zable 2015; Hazel 2016; Pen International 2017). Boochani has indicated he cannot return to Iran, which is one of the world's most repressive countries in terms of censorship of the media, as the state controls information and news through the persecution of journalists with intimidation, arrest and jail (Reporters Without Borders n. d.). Boochani, in a 2016 interview with Inter Press Service, says:

The political situation in Iran does not change especially for Kurdish people. There are about 20 journalists still in prison there. In November, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution against the Iranian regime for violating human rights. Last year they hanged more than 1,000 people. How can I go back? (Hazel 2016).



Australia is repeatedly condemned for its treatment of refugees and asylum seekers by the United Nations Human Rights Council (Doherty 2018; Human Rights Watch 2018). The principle of non-refoulement under the Refugee Convention provides that asylum seekers and refugees cannot be sent to a place where they may be persecuted (Refugee Council of Australia 2016), yet, it is now well-documented that conditions on Manus Island and Nauru (where families with children who have arrived 'irregularly' are detained) have resulted in acts of self-harm including self-immolation, abuse, riots and deaths (Davidson 2016; Doherty 2016, Farrel, Evershed and Davidson 2016). Fifteen people are known to have died in offshore detention on Manus Island, Nauru and Christmas Island. This number includes Reza Barati, the 23-year-old asylum seeker and friend of Boochani who was killed during a riot in February 2014 (Tofhigian 2018a: xii). Although others, including Australians, were also thought to be involved, two Papua New Guineans – a guard and a former worker at the detention centre – were found guilty of his murder (Tlozek 2016).

An enquiry by the Australian Senate into the riot, in which 70 detainees were injured, found the violence was foreseeable and its cause was the failure of the Australian government in its duty to protect the detainees and to process asylum seeker claims (Griffiths 2014). Eighteen months later, the detention centre on Manus Island was closed following an earlier ruling by the PNG Supreme Court that it was unconstitutional. With no option of leaving the island except to return to the countries from which they originally fled, most of the men refused to leave in a stand-off that lasted several weeks. During that time, the power, water and food were shut off. The reasons for the stand-off were the men's fear of increasing violence from the islanders, as well as frustration at the lack of any real solution to their detention (Human Rights Watch 2018). Eventually, the PNG government used force to clear the men out. With Australian reporters mostly excluded from reporting on the incident, Boochani was one of the main sources of information, despite being arrested by PNG security during the forced closure. Since the shutting down of the Manus Island Regional Processing Centre, the men have been resettled in lower-security facilities but are still prevented from leaving the island.

#### **No friend but the mountains**

Boochani's book begins with the perilous sea voyage taken by the asylum seekers by leaking fishing boat from Indonesia to Australia. Once

picked up by the Australian Navy, they are taken to Christmas Island, where they are subjected to the initiation ritual of being stripped, body-searched and re-clothed.

A grim-looking officer gives a set of clothes to anyone who passes through the strip-and-search stage, even though the clothes do not match the size of the person in any way whatsoever. There is no choice. We have to wear whatever they issue .... they transform our bodies, they utterly degrade us (Boochani 2018: 85).

Jeff Sparrow (2018), comparing Boochani's text with Alexander Berkman's *Prison memoirs of an anarchist* (1970 [1912]) and Victor Serge's *Men in prison* (1981 [1930]), has noted 'the vignette is immediately recognisable as a key generic element of the prison narrative' in the way the humiliation is designed to strip prisoners not only of their citizenship but also of their dignity and selfhood. Says Boochani: 'No matter who I am, no matter how I think, in these clothes I have been transformed into someone else' (op cit: 97).

It is on Christmas Island that Boochani first befriends Reza Barati, whom he calls 'The Gentle Giant'. They shared sleeping quarters for a month until they were transferred to Manus Island. On Manus, the men – who have fled mountainous landlocked countries with no experience of the sea prior to this journey – are housed 'in a boiling hot and filthy cage, still traumatised by the terrifying sound of waves' (ibid: 126-127). Hoping for fair treatment under the Refugee Convention, they are instead imprisoned indefinitely with repeated statements by successive Australian governments that they will never be settled in Australia. The destruction of hope acts as a form of torture, which is exacerbated by the way power is used by the prison authorities to unsettle and destabilise the detainees through hunger, surveillance and the micro-control of their daily lives.

There is no privacy in the detention centres. The men are constantly watched via CCTV as well as by Australian and Papua New Guinean guards known as Papis. Prison routines are frequently changed, without pattern or reason beyond disorienting the detainees. Food is inadequate and insufficient, as is medical care. Contact with the outside world is restricted; phone calls are limited to three minutes once a week. Toilets overflow and the smell of excrement is overpowering. Games are forbidden, reinforcing the use of boredom as punishment. The generator regularly breaks down increasing ten-

sions. Despite the lack of food, cigarettes are distributed, even to those who don't smoke, and are used as prison currency. The detainees are required to queue for even the most basic requirements including meals, ablutions, washing powder and razors. The queues take on their own agency, encouraging violence by ensuring that the most brutish prisoners are those who dominate the scarce resources to end up with the most comfort. 'The spectacle of the prison queue is a raw and palpable reinforcement of torture' (ibid: 193).

Violence is rife. The guards, trained in prisons on the mainland, treat the detainees as if they are hardened criminals rather than people in need of sanctuary and protection. 'Without question, crime, criminal courts, jail, prison violence, physical violence and knife attacks have become part of their everyday routine and mindset' (ibid: 142). While conflict between the inmates is usually ignored (ibid: 195), the guards frequently intervene to insist that the rules of detention are followed. Describing a scene where the guards enforced the prohibition on games, Boochani says: 'It seemed that was their only duty for the entire day; to shit all over the sanity of the prisoners, who were left just staring at each other in distress' (ibid: 126).

The capricious and callous nature of the detention centre bureaucracy is demonstrated in another scene involving the use of the phones. Referring to a man he calls 'The Father of the Months-Old Child', Boochani describes an instance where the guards refuse him a phone call to speak to his father who is dying on the other side of the world. Repeated requests by the man, with the support of the other prisoners, are rejected. When he is finally allowed to make the call during his officially scheduled turn three days later, he discovers his father has died. Enraged and grief-stricken, he smashes the phones. The guards force him to the ground and then punish him by imprisoning him in Chauka, the secret high-security seclusion cells within the detention centre used to punish troublemakers (ibid: 223-232). The existence of the cells was revealed in Boochani's feature-length documentary film *Chauka, please tell us the time*, shot clandestinely on a contraband smartphone and made with Iranian filmmaker Arash Kamali Sarvestani in the Netherlands. In an act of colonial insensitivity, the cells are named after a bird, native to the island and sacred to the Manusians.

Tofighian points out that Boochani's book intends to 'expose the prison as a neo-colonial experiment' while performing as a 'decolo-

nial intervention' (Tofighian 2018a: xxvi). That colonialism underpins the policy of mandatory detention is a key theme of the text. Says Tofighian:

I don't think readers can truly appreciate the depth of Behrouz's thought and writing unless they recognise and understand the impact and consequences of colonialism on Kurdistan, Iran, Australia and Manus Island ... and also the relationship between coloniality and forced migration (ibid: xxv).

Reflecting the colonialism underpinning the prison structure, the detention system is hierarchical and made up of three tiers: the Australian prison officers at the top, the Papus (locals brought in as guards and service workers) and at the bottom the prisoners. 'The Australians' perspective is a mixture of abhorrence, envy and barbarism...' (Behrouz 2018: 136). The Papus are expected to obey orders and are paid less than the Australians. It creates a fragile alliance between the Papus and the detainees, but the alliance crumbles during the violent prison riot that ends the book where the Papus joined forces with the Australians, resulting in severe injuries for many and the death of Reza Barati.

Boochani applies the feminist theorist Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's principle of the Kyriarchal System to the way the prison is governed. She coined the term in 1992 to describe a 'theory of interconnected social systems established for the purposes of domination, oppression and submission' (ibid: 124). The principle is to turn the prisoners:

... against each other and to ingrain even deeper hatred between people. Prison maintains its power over time; the power to keep people in line. Fenced enclosures dominate and can pacify even the most violent person – those imprisoned on Manus are themselves sacrificial subjects of violence. We are a bunch of ordinary humans locked up simply for seeking refuge. In this context, the prison's greatest achievement might be the manipulation of feelings of hatred between one another (ibid: 124-125).

In another scene that illustrates the way the Kyriarchal System operates, a detainee known as 'The Prime Minister' because of his virtues and the strength of his character, is forced by the toilet queue to defecate in public. It destroys his dignity, his reputation and his ability to continue to withstand the ritual humiliations. He decides to return to the country from which he fled and where he faces persecution. The Kyriarchal System demands the men

'accept, to some degree, that they are wretched and contemptible – this is an aspect of the system designed particularly for them' (ibid: 184). Sparrow (2018) argues that for Boochani, the detention centre is merely the extreme manifestation of the Kyriarchical System that already applies in Australia and pits its citizens against each other in its anti-refugee sentiment. Pointing to the universality of the book's themes, he says its 'logic extends beyond the camp, with Manus merely one aspect of a "border-industrial complex" that functions to atomise and control subaltern classes across the globe'.

### The process of writing and translating

*No friend but the mountains* incorporates influences from Western literature, including, according to Tofighian, Kafka's *The trial* (1925), Camus's *The stranger* (1942), and Beckett's trilogy *Molloy* (1951), *Malone dies* (1951) and *The unnameable* (1953), texts which Boochani was reading at the time he was writing his book (Tofighian 2018a: xxiii). It also references 'Kurdish folklore and resistance, Persian literature, sacred narrative traditions, local histories and nature symbols, ritual and ceremony' with reference as well to Manusian 'thought and culture' (ibid). Each chapter bears a double title, underlining that it is both factual and parabolic. Poems are used throughout the manuscript with Arnold Zable (2018) recognising them as having 'the power of a Greek chorus', revealing 'the terror of imprisonment from another perspective'. To protect the men on Manus Island, Boochani has created composite characters, giving them allegorical names.

Boochani found support from a number of writers and public intellectuals who helped him to complete and publish including the poet Janet Galbraith, who facilitates the writing group Writing Through Fences; the author Arnold Zable who, with Galbraith, introduced Boochani's work to Pen International, and the academic and artist Kirrily Jordan who provided feedback on draft chapters. The refugee advocate Moones Mansoubi began working with Boochani in 2015. It was she who mostly compiled the original material sent to her by Boochani via WhatsApp messages. Once it was in a format of which Boochani approved, she sent PDFs of the full chapters to Omid Tofighian for translation (Tofighian 2018a: xvi).

There was no real-time communication to facilitate the translation process (ibid). Text and voice messages were the most reliable way to communicate because the internet connection on the island was so poor. Occasionally, Booch-

ani would directly communicate with Tofighian via WhatsApp. Later, he would text Tofighian new passages to add to the translated work. Says Tofighian: 'The full draft of each of Behrouz's chapters would appear as a long text message with no paragraph breaks. It was this feature that created a unique and intellectually stimulating space for literary experimentation and shared philosophical activity' (ibid).

At the time Mansoubi began working with Boochani, security in the detention centre was tight and the men were kept under continuous surveillance. 'Brutal' raids to confiscate smartphones and other contraband, were staged regularly in the pre-dawn (ibid: xxxiii). Boochani's first phone was confiscated. 'For two to three months he would write his book by hand and use [his friend] Aref Heidari's phone to send voice messages to Moones for transcribing' (ibid). He managed to acquire another phone which he hid in his mattress but it was stolen in 2017, suspending his ability to continue to work on the book until he could secure a third smartphone. There were other delays sometimes dragging on for weeks and months, including when the authorities suspended his communications. 'During phases of extreme securitization and surveillance he was forced to leave his phone hidden for long periods' (ibid). The forcible closure of the detention centre in October 2017 also caused a delay while Boochani turned his attention to reporting on the three-week siege.

### Boochani and the literature of resistance

The title Boochani chose for his memoir – *No friend but the mountains* – comes from a Kurdish proverb that speaks to the long history of persecution and isolation of the Kurds. The application of the proverb to the situation of the refugees and asylum seekers on Manus Island internationalises and universalises the writing. Boochani, using the tropes of testimonial literature to speak to the circumstances endured by all the men on Manus Island, is not writing as the citizen of any nation. While they share different ethnicities, he and his fellow detainees are stateless, stripped of belonging to anything except humanity at its rawest and most elemental.

The notion of testimony is an important aspect of a literature of resistance. It is literature as a response to cultural violence. As writing from personal experience, it claims a voice, makes a point, establishes a community and retrieves identity. It seeks redress for injustices and advocates the rights of marginalised communities by

speaking out about the actual circumstances of a life or lives. As the black lesbian writer Audre Lorde (1982) said: '[I]f I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive.' Refusing to be objectified, Boochani uses his writing to challenge the identities imposed on him and the other refugees and asylum seekers in detention who are stereotyped in the disempowering dominant narrative as binary opposites, either criminal or victim.

In *No friend but the mountains*, Boochani is a human being speaking through the universality of literature to policy and practices that are condemned under international agreements. According to the barrister and human rights activist Julian Burnside (2018), they are also condemned under Australian law, specifically the *Criminal Code Act, 1995* which categorises the taking of hostages as a war crime. Says Burnside:

There is no doubt that our use of indefinite detention is a breach of section 268.12. And it is strongly arguable that offshore processing as it is presently done is a breach of section 268.12 and section 268.13. ... The only difficulty is that prosecutions for these offences can only be instituted with the Attorney-General's written consent (ibid).

## Conclusion

The paradox of Boochani stepping in to fill the place of an Australian journalist writing about Australian government policy and its consequences is that he can only do it because he is an outsider communicating his own outsider status from within the subjective experience of imprisonment. He uses *No friend but the mountains* to explore that ground of subjectivity and rebel against the Kyriarchal System, not through violence but through creativity. Like the character 'Maysam the Whore' who regularly entertains the other inmates with humour and satire, singing and dancing, he uses art to disrupt the system and its violence, claiming:

[T]he only people who can overcome and survive all the suffering inflicted by the prison are those who exercise creativity. That is, those who can trace the outlines of hope using the melodic humming and visions from beyond the prison fences and the beehives we live in (Boochani 2018: 128).

Detainment strips prisoners of their autonomy and sense of self, as well as their connection to broader society, yet the act of self-narration is crucial to a person's selfhood, identity and well-

being (Eakin 1999). In writing *No friend but the mountains*, Boochani has used creativity to reassert his agency and resist the Kyriarchal System. In creative resistance lies liberation. As he tells Arnold Zable in 2018: 'In those moments, when I was writing, I was completely free ... those moments were the most exciting ... because I found myself out of the prison as a free man.'

Hopefully, the Australian government will see fit in time to give him back his physical freedom as well.

## References

- Al Jazeera (2017) Manus Island: Australia pulling the media strings, *The Listening Post*, 19 November. Available online at [www.aljazeera.com/programmes/listeningpost/2017/11/manus-island-australia-pulling-media-strings-171118083724605.html?xif=et](http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/listeningpost/2017/11/manus-island-australia-pulling-media-strings-171118083724605.html?xif=et), accessed September 2018
- Australian Human Rights Commission (2012) Face the facts (2012), chapter 3. Available online at [www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/face-facts-2012/2012-face-facts-chapter-3](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/face-facts-2012/2012-face-facts-chapter-3), accessed September 2018
- Berkman, A. (1970 [1912]) *Prison memoirs of an anarchist*, New York, Schocken
- Bolger, D. D. (2016) *Race politics: Australian government responses to asylum seekers and refugees from White Australia to Tampa*, PhD Thesis, School of Humanities and Communication Arts, Australia, Western Sydney University
- Boochani, B. (2018) *No friend but the mountains* (trans. by Tofighian, O.), Sydney, Australia, Picador/Pan Macmillan
- Burnside, J. (2018) Fear is the great threat to multiculturalism in Australia, Walter Lippmann Oration, *Daily Review*, 14 September. Available online at [www.dailyreview.com.au/julian-burnside-oration/78065/](http://www.dailyreview.com.au/julian-burnside-oration/78065/), accessed September 2018
- Cooper, S., Olejniczak, E., Lenette, C. and Smedley, C. (2017) Media coverage of refugees and asylum seekers in regional Australia: A critical discourse analysis, *Media International Australia*, Vol. 162, No. 1 pp 78-89
- Coady, D. (2017) Government to relax secrecy rules for detention centre workers in 'humiliating backdown', *ABC News* online, updated 14 August. Available online at [www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-14/government-to-scrap-whistleblower-protections-immigration-centre/8802902](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-14/government-to-scrap-whistleblower-protections-immigration-centre/8802902), accessed September 2018
- Davidson, H. (2016) Offshore detention: Australia's recent immigration history a 'human rights catastrophe', *Guardian Australia*, 13 November. Available online at [www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/nov/13/offshore-detention-nauru-immigration-history-human-rights](http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/nov/13/offshore-detention-nauru-immigration-history-human-rights), accessed September 2018
- Doherty, B. (2016) United Nations reiterates demand for Australia to close 'dire' detention centres, *Guardian Australia*, 13 August. Available online at [www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/aug/13/united-nations-reiterates-demand-for-australia-to-close-dire-detention-centres](http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/aug/13/united-nations-reiterates-demand-for-australia-to-close-dire-detention-centres), accessed September 2018
- Doherty, B. (2018) UN body condemns Australia for illegal detention of asylum seekers and refugees, *Guardian Australia*, 8 June. Available online at [www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/08/un-body-condemns-australia-for-illegal-detention-of-asylum-seekers-and-refugees](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/08/un-body-condemns-australia-for-illegal-detention-of-asylum-seekers-and-refugees), accessed September 2018
- Eakin, J. (1999) *How our lives become stories*, New York, Cornell University Press
- Farrel, P., Evershed, N. and Davidson, H. (2016) The Nauru files: Cache of 2,000 leaked reports reveal scale of abuse of children in Australian offshore detention, *Guardian Australia*, 10 August. Available online at [www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/aug/10/the-nauru-files-2000-leaked-reports-reveal-scale-of-abuse-of-children-in-australian-offshore-detention](http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/aug/10/the-nauru-files-2000-leaked-reports-reveal-scale-of-abuse-of-children-in-australian-offshore-detention), accessed 28 September 2018



- Germian, R. (2017) Film shot entirely on Manus detainee's mobile gets public screening, *In Focus*, SBS Kurdish, 12 April. Available online at [www.sbs.com.au/yourlanguage/kurdish/en/article/2017/04/12/film-shot-entirely-manus-detainees-mobile-gets-public-screening](http://www.sbs.com.au/yourlanguage/kurdish/en/article/2017/04/12/film-shot-entirely-manus-detainees-mobile-gets-public-screening), accessed September 2018
- Griffiths, E. (2014) Reza Barati death: Senate committee report says violence at Manus Island was 'eminently foreseeable', *ABC News* online, 11 December. Available online at [www.abc.net.au/news/2014-12-11/violence-at-manus-eminently-foreseeable-senate-report/5960752](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-12-11/violence-at-manus-eminently-foreseeable-senate-report/5960752), accessed September 2018
- Griffiths, P. (2016) *The making of White Australia: Ruling class agendas, 1876-1888*, PhD thesis, Canberra, Australian National University
- Hazel, A. (2016) Reporting from inside a refugee detention centre, *Inter Press Service*, December 29. Available online at [www.abc.net.au/news/2014-12-11/violence-at-manus-eminently-foreseeable-senate-report/5960752](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-12-11/violence-at-manus-eminently-foreseeable-senate-report/5960752), accessed September 2018
- Human Rights Watch (2018) Australia: Events of 2017, *World Report*. Available online at [www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/australia](http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/australia), accessed September 2018
- Jabour, B. and Hurst, D. (2014) Nauru to increase visa cost for journalists from \$200 to \$8,000, *Guardian Australia*, 9 January. Available online at [www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/09/nauru-visa-to-cost-8000](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/09/nauru-visa-to-cost-8000), accessed September 2018
- Jayasuriya, L., Walker, D. and Gothard, J. (2003) *Legacies of White Australia: Race, culture and nation*, Crawley, University of Western Australia Press
- Jupp, J. (2007) *From White Australia to Woomera: The story of Australian immigration*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, second edition
- Karp, P. (2016) Keeping journalists out of detention centres helps stop boats, says Cormann, *Guardian Australia*, 14 June. Available online at [www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/jun/14/keeping-journalists-out-of-detention-centres-helps-stop-asylum-boats-mathias-cormann-bill-shorten-election](http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/jun/14/keeping-journalists-out-of-detention-centres-helps-stop-asylum-boats-mathias-cormann-bill-shorten-election), accessed September 2018
- Kenny, M. A. (2017) Three charts on: What's going on at Manus Island, *Conversation*, 17 November. Available online at [www.theconversation.com/three-charts-on-whats-going-on-at-manus-island-87354](http://www.theconversation.com/three-charts-on-whats-going-on-at-manus-island-87354), accessed September 2018
- Killedar, A. and Harris, P. (2017) Australia's refugee policies and their health impact: A review of the evidence and recommendations for the Australian Government, *Australia and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 41, No. 4. Available online at [www.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1753-6405.12663](http://www.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1753-6405.12663), accessed September 2018
- Lorde, A. (1982) *Learning from the '60s*. Address delivered at Harvard University as part of the celebration of the Malcolm X weekend, February. Available online at [www.blackpast.org/1982-audre-lorde-learning-60s](http://www.blackpast.org/1982-audre-lorde-learning-60s), accessed September 2018
- Markus A. (1994) *Australian race relations, 1788-1993*, St Leonards, NSW, Allen & Unwin
- Pen International (2017) On Human Rights Day: Take action for journalist Behrouz Boochani, stranded on Manus Island, 7 December. Available online at [www.pen-international.org/news/on-human-rights-day-take-action-for-journalist-behrouz-boochani-stranded-on-manus-island](http://www.pen-international.org/news/on-human-rights-day-take-action-for-journalist-behrouz-boochani-stranded-on-manus-island), accessed September, 2018
- Refugee Council of Australia (2016) The Refugee Convention, 14 May. Available online at [www.refugeecouncil.org.au/getfacts/international/internationalsystem/the-refugee-convention/](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/getfacts/international/internationalsystem/the-refugee-convention/), accessed September 2018
- Reporters Without Borders (n. d.) Iran. Available online at [www.rsf.org/en/iran](http://www.rsf.org/en/iran), accessed September 2018
- Serge, V. (1981 [1930]) *Men in prison* (trans. by Greeman, R.), New York, Writers and Readers Publishing
- Sparrow, J. (2018) A place of punishment: *No Friend but the Mountains*, by Behrouz Boochani, *Sydney Review of Books*, 21 September. Available online at [www.sydneyreviewofbooks.com/a-place-of-punishment-no-friend-but-the-mountains-by-behrouz-boochani/](http://www.sydneyreviewofbooks.com/a-place-of-punishment-no-friend-but-the-mountains-by-behrouz-boochani/), accessed September 2018
- Tlozek, E. (2016) Reza Barati death: Two men jailed over 2014 murder of asylum seeker at Manus Island detention centre, *ABC News*, 19 April. Available online at [www.abc.net.au/news/2016-04-19/reza-barati-death-two-men-sentenced-to-10-years-over-murder/7338928](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-04-19/reza-barati-death-two-men-sentenced-to-10-years-over-murder/7338928), accessed September 2018
- Tofighian, O. (2018a) Translator's tale: A window to the mountain, Boochani, Behrouz, *No friend but the mountains* (trans by Tofighian, O.), Sydney, Australia, Picador/Pan Macmillan
- Tofighian, O. (2018b) *No friend but the Mountains*: Translator's reflections, Boochani, Behrouz, *No friend but the mountains* (trans by Tofighian, O.), Sydney, Australia, Picador/Pan Macmillan
- Yarwood A. T. and Knowling, M. J. (1982) *Race relations in Australia: A history*, North Ryde, NSW, Methuen Australia
- Zable, A. (2015) Iranian journalist Behrouz Boochani tells of the horrors of Manus Island: Out of sight, out of mind, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 September. Available online at [www.smh.com.au/opinion/iranian-journalist-behrouz-boochani-tells-of-the-horrors-of-manus-island-out-of-sight-out-of-mind-20150921-gjrdi8.html](http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/iranian-journalist-behrouz-boochani-tells-of-the-horrors-of-manus-island-out-of-sight-out-of-mind-20150921-gjrdi8.html), accessed September 2018
- Zable, A. (2017) 'This republic breaks all borders': A dialogue with Behrouz Boochani on Manus, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 December. Available at [www.smh.com.au/national/this-republic-breaks-all-borders-a-dialogue-with-behrouz-boochani-on-manus-20171221-h08bx1.html](http://www.smh.com.au/national/this-republic-breaks-all-borders-a-dialogue-with-behrouz-boochani-on-manus-20171221-h08bx1.html), accessed September 2018
- Zable, A. (2018) Australia's barbaric policy confronted by Boochani's prison memoir, *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 25 August. Available online at [www.smh.com.au/national/australia-s-barbaric-policy-confronted-by-boochani-s-prison-memoir-20180821-p4zyt7.html](http://www.smh.com.au/national/australia-s-barbaric-policy-confronted-by-boochani-s-prison-memoir-20180821-p4zyt7.html), accessed September 2018

## Note on the Contributor

Dr Willa McDonald is Senior Lecturer in Media at Macquarie University where she teaches and researches creative non-fiction writing and literary journalism. A former journalist, she has worked in print, television and radio, including for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Bulletin*, the *Times on Sunday*, ABC TV and ABC Radio National. She completed her doctorate at UNSW in Australian Studies. Willa's books are: *Warrior for peace: Dorothy Auchterlone Green* (2009, Australian Scholarly Publishing) and *The writer's reader: Understanding journalism and non-fiction* (with Susie Eisenhuth, 2007, Cambridge University Press). She is currently writing a cultural history of Australian journalism through the lives of some of its best practitioners.

## On being unfair: The ethics of the memoir-journalism hybrid

*A journalist who wrote an exploration of romantic obsession using techniques of memoir and reporting reflects on the ethics of her decision not to interview or contact the man who was the object of her obsession. The analysis utilises deontology, teleology and Rawl's Veil of Ignorance, along with contemporary critiques of first-person journalism and the authority of memoir, to conclude that memoir is inherently unfair and incomplete, putting it at odds with the aims and objectives of journalism.*

**Keywords:** memoir, first-person, journalism, ethics, nonfiction

### Introduction

On a cool fall morning, I met my literary agent for coffee to talk about my proposal for *Unrequited: Women and romantic obsession* (2015), a blend of memoir and reporting that featured the story of my all-consuming pursuit of an unavailable man. The agent was enthusiastic about representing the book. 'You'll be the poster child for recovery from obsessive love,' he said.

I smiled at the idea, the image of my face on a poster offering hope to women struggling with unrequited love. I would speak to them from the other side, my saga proof that obsession can end, yielding to the possibility of a better, more self-aware existence. In the years since my obsession ended, I'd earned my sane credentials. I had married and had given birth to a daughter. I'd developed a career as a journalist, a journalism professor and an author. I had bylines in *The New York Times*. I volunteered at bake sales for my daughter's school. Poster child, indeed.

The book that resulted, published in 2015, is what I call in my literary journalism classes a 'quest narrative': first-person writing that utilises reporting techniques to explore an issue of personal importance to the journalist. The journalist narrators in this subgenre seek self-understanding, but their reporting extends well beyond their own experience; the deep dive into the subject matter yields insights for a broader audience, held together by the narrative spine of the author's experience. With its emphasis on self-disclosure, the quest narrative has much in common with essays, confessional journalism and memoir, yet it also incorporates explanatory reporting, at times with service journalism aspects, meant to help readers who may be in need. I wrote *Unrequited* to understand not only what happened to me, but also to understand why and how unrequited love happens – the myriad cultural, social, psychological and historical forces involved in the paradoxical urge of wanting someone who doesn't want you back. My identity as a journalist tasked to 'seek the truth and report it' blended with my identity as protagonist/narrator to bring to light an issue of both intimate and ultimate concern.

### The quest narrative

In the rulebook of conventional reporting techniques, the quest narrative, along with most forms of first-person journalism, is a paradoxical form. The journalist is not supposed to be the story. You are supposed to keep your own preoccupations at bay and report on matters that have nothing to do with you, or at least report them as if they have nothing to do with you. Yet journalism, past and present, features plenty of reporters who jettison the enabling fiction of the omniscient invisible third person witness persona, along with creative nonfiction writers who incorporate in-depth reporting with personal narratives. How else could readers have experienced the conditions at Blackwell's Island Insane Asylum in 1887, if not for Nellie Bly's undercover first-person account of being doused with bucket after bucket of ice-cold water until she experienced 'the sensations of a drowning person' (2012 [1887]: 52)? What John Pauly called the 'personalism' of New Journalism in the 1950s and '60s brought on a new wave of writers, such as Joan Didion and Norman Mailer, whose work reflected the belief that 'personal involvement and immersion were indispensable to an authentic, full-blooded account of experience' (2008: 114). In our own time, in *Noonday demon: An atlas of depression* (2001), which I teach as a seminal example of a quest narrative, Andrew Solo-

mon took on the Herculean task of immersing himself in the medical, psychological, cultural and sociological workings of depression, while chronicling his battle with a particularly crippling form of the disease. His first-person narrator strives to make meaning out of the scourge of depression, implicitly inspiring others to do the same.

The narrator of a quest narrative maintains two identities – that of a protagonist in a memoir and that of a journalist – which are somewhat at odds when it comes to ethics. One of the most important rules of reporting – so important that it is one of the first things journalism students learn – is: get all sides of the story. Often this adage is simplified into ‘get both sides of the story’, an idea that primarily serves broadcast news shows that want to display split-screen evenhandedness. Stories of unrequited love are one of the few matters that are purely two-sided: the side of the one who loves and the side of the one who can’t, or won’t, love back. Getting both sides of my story meant contacting the man I call B. in my book, whom I hadn’t seen since 1999. Yet contacting him, even after so many years, was an emotionally fraught prospect. I feared it would send the wrong message: that the resolution to an obsession must involve the object of the obsession.

So I made an ethically complicated decision: to be unfair.

#### The choice to exclude

In the six years it took me to write *Unrequited*, I never contacted the man I pursued. I did not ask for an interview. I did not ask him to review descriptions of him and scenes he was in for accuracy. I did not email him to alert him that the book was coming out.

In this age of staying connected or – if you are old enough to have lived most of your life without social media, as I am – reconnecting with everyone in your life from preschool on, B. and I remained firmly estranged. I knew, from Googling his name and his academic discipline, that he lived and taught in the Pacific Northwest of the United States, clear across the country from my home in upstate New York. Before I started writing *Unrequited*, I recounted my obsessive pursuit of B. in the widely-read ‘Modern Love’ column of *The New York Times* (2006). Afterwards, I heard nothing from him. Either he didn’t know about the essay, which suggests he hadn’t Googled me in return (an unrequited Google?), or he did know, and preferred to keep the silence.

Everyone involved in the writing and publication of *Unrequited* – my agent, my editor, the other writers I share my work with, the reporters and editors at the publications that excerpted the book or interviewed me about it – supported my decision not to reach out to the man I had been obsessed with. Their concerns about B. revolved around making sure he could not be easily identified from the details of my story, preventing him from public exposure and protecting them from the possibility of a libel suit. Only one outlet – interestingly enough, *Cosmopolitan* magazine – was concerned with checking the veracity of my account. To publish an adapted excerpt from *Unrequited*, the magazine editor required two brief signed statements from confidantes of mine, attesting to my story’s accuracy.

One of the reasons reaching out to B. seemed like a bad idea has to do with the nature of my obsession. As I recount in the book, I took my pursuit of him much too far. I chased him, very hard, with an increasingly desperate stream of emails, phone calls (this was before texting and social media, thankfully) and pleading encounters on the campus where we both taught. One morning, I snuck into his apartment building and banged on his door until he opened it, wielding a baseball bat to protect himself and threatening to call the police. My behaviour is what I came to call ‘soft stalking’ – behaviour that falls short of most criminal definitions of stalking, but still, as is plainly obvious, totally out of line (Phillips 2015: 9-10). Surely a recovered stalker, no matter how ‘soft’, should stay away from the object of her pursuit. Yet I wrote about the object of my pursuit; if he read *Unrequited*, it would likely have a significant emotional impact on him. Even though I hid his identity from readers, he would not be anonymous to himself. He had no say in my account and no warning that the story would be out in the world.

Several months after *Unrequited* was published, B. wrote to me through Facebook. At the time, messages from people you weren’t friends with landed in a Messenger folder called ‘Other’, without the prominent red number notification. The folder was usually full of junk mail and come-ons in broken English. B.’s message sat there for several weeks before I saw it and opened it. The message: *Was there really a bat?* We began to correspond. He congratulated me warmly on the book’s publication. He’d read it, he told me, and he’d found it thoughtful and brave. But he also reprimanded me for my decision not to contact him for his perspective while



I was writing *Unrequited* or, at the very least, to let him know that it was going to be published. The words he used were: *I question your journalism ethics*.

I knew that in not getting B.'s side of the story, I had made an ethically complicated choice. But it was not an unwitting one. As a college professor, I taught journalism ethics. I used the same tools of ethical decision-making that I taught to inform my approach to writing *Unrequited*. I'd even discussed my decision with my ethics students.<sup>1</sup> My Facebook exchange with B. underscored that my decision to leave his perspective out would have its detractors – or, at the very least, this one, crucial detractor.

The analysis that follows considers the ethics of being unfair. I will review the ethical decision-making process I used and presented to my students as a first-person case study. I will also consider the challenges of ethical reflection in the quest narrative and in first-person nonfiction. The use of the nonfiction 'I' may offer the promise of intimacy and candour. But we should also be sceptical of the journalistic 'I', which Janet Malcolm called 'an over reliable narrator' who both participates in the story and has total control over how that participation is portrayed (1990: 160).

#### Rules versus ends

*Get all sides of the story* is one of the most important rules of the contemporary reporting process. Historically in the United States, the standard stems from the rise of objectivity as a dominant paradigm for professional reporting, a development shaped by the growth of reporting as a career with a distinct identity and set of professional practices, along with a late nineteenth-century intellectual shift away from partisan loyalties and toward ideas of reform, anti-corruption, empiricism and 'fact-based discursive practices'. In the aftermath of World War I, journalists, increasingly wary of the influence of propaganda and the rise of public relations, overtly asserted their independence from outside influences and prioritised fact-based, fair reporting practices (Anderson et al. 2016: 28–29).

The objectivity paradigm coexists with other forms of journalism: partisan/advocacy journalism, opinion pieces and editorials, confessional or autobiographical journalism and various forms of literary journalism. Of late, the influence of blogging and the 'microblogging' practices of social media, along with the commercial importance of viral shares and the financial straits of the news industry, has cre-

ated a climate in the information ecosystem favourable to subjective first-person takes (Fairbanks 2014). Granted, a personal narrative such as *Unrequited* is rooted in the author's perspective and focuses on the first-person narrator's experience and perspective. No one expects the story to be 'balanced' in the way an evening news segment on a controversial gun control proposal is expected to be, with sound bites from representatives of opposing views. And scholars have long questioned the extent to which this sort of practice achieves objectivity (Schudson and Anderson 2008: 93).

Yet the expectation of *getting all sides of the story* can remain part of the *process* of researching a journalist memoir, essentially a way of reporting the author's own story instead of merely remembering it. Carrying a journalist's identity into a personal narrative means that even pointedly subjective work functions in the shadow of contemporary standards of the profession. Mac McClelland, the author of *Irritable hearts*, a memoir of her experience of PTSD as a reporter covering wars and disasters, told *The Atlantic* that she received input on the veracity of her story from family members, exes, friends and others who were with her or knew her during the events she recounts. She says: 'Everything you remember, somebody else remembers it differently.' The input from 'all sides' caused her to change aspects of her account (Neuman 2014).

Employing terms of ethical analysis, it is clear the process used by McClelland, a former fact-checker at *Mother Jones* magazine, upholds a 'universal law' of the reporting process: the mandate to take into account multiple perspectives or 'sides' of a story. She transports this principle from one form of nonfiction – immersive reporting – into another, the memoir. The concept of universal law comes from Immanuel Kant's Categorical Imperative: 'I ought never to act except in such a way that I could also will my maxim should become a universal law' (2012 [1785]: 402). The Categorical Imperative, central to deontological, or duty-based, moral philosophy, is an absolute and unbending rule of behaviour that holds no matter what the circumstances. A moral act is an act that sets a standard for all to follow – if everyone did so, the world would be a more ethical place (Foreman 2010). Writers of personal narrative, accordingly, should solicit input from all relevant witnesses, confidantes, or characters (the creative nonfiction/literary journalism term for sources who appear in the narrative), no matter what the specific aims and genre of the account and no matter what the end result. In

the Kantian worldview, the outcome of a thoroughly fact-checked personal narrative would be morally right because the rule, or imperative, is right.

I teach the Categorical Imperative as many ethics instructors do, in contrast with Utilitarianism, the idea that the consequences of an action are the most important factor in determining whether it is morally right. This approach is known as teleology, from the Greek words *telos* meaning 'end' and *logos*, 'reason'. John Stuart Mill writes:

The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals 'utility', or the Greatest-Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure (2001 [1861]: 7).

Later Utilitarian thinkers, troubled by the prospect that pleasure could be interpreted hedonistically, or even justify the amorality of sadism, refined Mill's elusive notion of 'Greatest-Happiness'. Through his concept of Ideal Utilitarianism, G. E. Moore asserts that our obligation as moral beings is to act not for the outcome with the greatest pleasure, but for the highest degree of 'good in itself' (1976 [1903]: 110).

The history of journalism offers plenty of examples of rules broken for the sake of the greater good. Undercover journalism, in which reporters hide their identity or masquerade as someone they are not to report a story, entails deception in a profession of truth seeking – all for exposing stories 'in the public interest' that could not be reported otherwise: from the elaborate fabrication of the 'Mirage Bar', the tavern the *Chicago Sun-Times* set up to report on city inspectors who routinely bribed business owners (Zekman and Smith 1979), to the Ghanaian investigative journalist, Anas Aremeyaw Anas, who has exposed corruption and organised crime throughout Ghana while keeping his identity concealed behind a mask (Anas 2013). Stolen secret documents are at the centre of a good deal of investigative reporting done in the public interest, from the Pentagon Papers, leaked by Daniel Ellsberg to the *Washington Post* in 1971, to the WikiLeaks trove of classified military secrets on the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and diplomatic cables, to the Panama Papers, when journalists from all over the world released stories on a giant collection of leaked

documents revealing an extensive network of global tax evasion (Greenberg 2016). Without ends-focused rule-breaking, none of this pivotal journalism would exist.

What, then, was the greater good of leaving B.'s perspective entirely out of my reporting and writing process in *Unrequited*?

I had two clear reasons, both upholding the ethical imperative of minimising harm. The first reason was personal: I felt I needed to protect myself, as I still felt vulnerable to B. The acute phase of my obsession with him ended when he unequivocally cut off all contact with me. Not long after, I moved out of state. Even when I fell in love with a man I would eventually marry, I remained wary of the emotional impact of ever reconnecting with B. About a year after I moved away, I returned to my former neighbourhood to visit friends and unexpectedly ran into B. The brief encounter was largely positive. We had a chance to apologise to one another and wish each other well. But I also felt a faint version of the old pull toward him, and the possibility that my past obsession might be revived. I felt sure that for my sake and his, we should remain estranged.

I wasn't wrong. Reconnecting with B. over Facebook Messenger and in a single telephone conversation – at that point 17 years after we last spoke – sent me into a fragile state, a surreal reprise of my obsession. This time, I didn't pursue him or act self-destructively, but my internal struggle was exacerbated by the quiet shame of having these emotions as a wife, mother and the author of a book about romantic obsession. Inasmuch as I learned about myself – because obsessions, as I describe in *Unrequited*, also can be a goad to self-understanding (2015: 185-207) – the experience left me knowing that I had not been overly cautious in deciding not to contact B.

The second greater good was for my readership. Keeping B. out of the writing and reporting process reinforced one of the main messages of *Unrequited*: that the resolution to an obsession won't come from the object of the obsession. The journey of unrequited love is best seen as a journey of the self, pushing sufferers toward greater emotional honesty (Phillips 2015: 38) and providing opportunities for growth and change (ibid: 185-207); fundamental to this process is shifting expectations away from what the beloved will do for them and to what they can discover for themselves (ibid: 218-219).

## Other stories

*Unrequited* features interviews with other women who, like me, experienced a life-changing romantic obsession. One of the themes of these stories is the hunger for some kind of answer from the withholding other. One woman impulsively took an eight-hour train journey to confront a man who had abruptly ended their affair. Another, an aspiring country singer, showed up unexpectedly at her beloved's workplace to serenade him back into her life. Cultural narratives, from Russian Prince Nicholas's eight-year effort to win the heart of German princess Alexandra (ibid: 11) to the video for the Taylor Swift song 'You belong with me', present unrequited love as the trying prerequisite to mutual love. Psychology researchers say this misleading 'social script' suggests that if you persevere, you can win over your beloved, your yearning a guide to the unacknowledged truth buried deep inside the soul of the reluctant other (Baumeister and Wotman 1992: 140). A corollary I observed in my interviews for *Unrequited* is that people who are romantically obsessed may ostensibly accept a rejection, yet continue to seek from the rejecter an explanation to resolve the inner toil. One woman in my book would lie prostrate on the floor of her beloved's apartment, asking over and over again why they couldn't be together. Nothing he said could satisfy her.

Research into psychology and brain science suggests that contact with the withholding other aggravates obsession instead of resolving it. In brain scan studies of people who have been rejected by someone they are still in love with, photographs of their beloveds cause blood to flow to areas of the brain associated with craving, deep emotional attachment, addictive behaviour, physical pain and responding to gains and losses (Phillips 2015: 83). Experts I spoke with told me that getting over an all-consuming yearning means ending all ties and avoiding reminders to the extent possible, an increasingly difficult prospect in a social media-soaked culture. Even talking about the situation with a confidante can be counter-productive. A friend serves you better by taking you to a ball game or the movies (ibid: 208-231).

Turning away from the target of your obsession, as I learned from my reporting, offers up the opportunity for figuring out why the withholding other means so much, a process of self-examination: What expectations did we have from the person? What more important dreams and goals did the person embody, and how else can these desires be achieved? What is the unrequited lover really chasing?

In this light, the prospect of including an interview with B. in my exploration of unrequited love would send a contradictory message: that he still owed me something and I still needed something from him (ibid: 136). Not a good move for a poster child urging tactics of self-reflection and self-sufficiency. I sought instead a compromise.

## The other side of unrequited love

Instead of interviewing B., I feature the experiences of other people who had been the target of romantic obsession. Research into the psychology of unrequited love reveals that we are far more likely to sympathise with the rejected than with rejecters, who must grapple with a moral dilemma that leaves them no socially sanctioned way forward. Rejecting someone who loves you is hurtful. *Avoiding* rejecting someone who loves you is misleading. Ambivalence doesn't win you any prizes, either (Baumeister and Wotman 1992: 39-40). Yet the experiences of rejecters, who must contend with a no-win situation, are often painful. One man described watching a friend he valued become consumed with pursuing him. He hated seeing 'a person crumble like that, and become something so small' (Phillips 2015: 139).

My Utilitarian stance, then, was that the greater good would come not from seeking B.'s input as traditional journalism protocol would demand, but in steering readers away from the idea that the resolution to unrequited love needs to involve the object of desire. They are better off, as I was better off, turning away.

This argument is not a hard sell for my students, who overtly prefer Utilitarianism over the Categorical Imperative, which strikes them as quaint, inflexible and wrong. To be sure, most of them are in late adolescence, a time rife with rule breaking and Robin Hood-idealism. They also belong to a generation that is very much focused on ends over rules. The whole notion, for instance, of 'triggers' – crippling emotional responses stemming from past traumas – is based on the idea that what feels harmful, whether it is a documentary, a Greek tragedy or a comment made in class, is of paramount importance in our consideration of right behaviour. If staying away from B. prevents me from suffering and, potentially, offers an example that may help readers alleviate their suffering, surely that's the best path.

Or is it? Critiques of Utilitarianism point to the difficulties of knowing the outcome of our actions (Smith 2008: 20), a problem even

when the actions are grounded in research and expert advice. For some of the women I interviewed, reconnecting with the person they were once obsessed with was not at all detrimental. For them, real closure came in the ability to hear the other person's perspective and acknowledge the obsession as something that brought strife to both of them. And perhaps my assumptions about needing to protect myself from all contact with B. are more narcissistic than healthy.

I may have wanted to make the point to readers that I didn't need to involve B. in my life, but by writing publicly about him, I was doing exactly that. Another critique of Utilitarianism is that the focus on good outcomes can obscure the question of motives (Smith 2008: 30). In leaving B. out of my reporting and writing process, I may be shielding myself from reigniting an obsession and reinforcing a main argument of my book, but I am also being self-serving and self-aggrandising. *Unrequited* describes the tradition of creative expression inspired by romantic obsession, with works such as Kris Kraus's *I love Dick* (1997), an autobiographical novel about her obsession with a cultural critic, and Sophie Calle's *Take care of yourself* (2009), an art installation in which women of all ages respond to a breakup email from Calle's ex. The beloved's rejection is the precipitating injustice and the art created in response is 'a kind of extravagant revenge: *If you don't want me, I will make something out of us anyway*' (Phillips 2015: 194). The spurned lover gets the last word, with the affirmation of a sympathetic audience. Is a self-serving motivation necessarily morally wrong? Making something meaningful out of difficult past experiences is one of the principal reasons people write memoir.

#### Donning the veil of ignorance

To try to secure a more impartial handle on the ethics of my choices, I turn to the philosophy of John Rawls. When I teach his concept of the 'Veil of Ignorance' (1999 [1971]: 11) in my Media Ethics class, I ask the students to imagine the stakeholders in a news story sitting around a table: the journalist/writer, the sources, the publication, the audience, the publisher and the more abstract presence of the Truth. To don the 'Veil of Ignorance' as decision-makers, students must set aside their identification with a particular stakeholder, in this case the journalist, and adopt Rawls' 'original position', the fair and impartial view on justice that comes from setting aside your own self-interest (ibid: 13). The next step is to imagine, as Rawls guides, to consider the decision at hand as if they could

end up being any one of the stakeholders at the table – a kind of subject position roulette. The idea of this hypothetical condition is, as Robert Jackson describes, to 'liberate human reason, in eighteenth-century Enlightenment fashion, from experience, circumstance and prejudice' (Jackson 2005: 158). A useful supplementary tool to the 'Veil of Ignorance' is the Golden Rule: do to others as you would have them do to you (*New International Version Bible*, Luke 6: 31), as you must consider yourself as the others. The goal is for all parties to have their rights – in this case, primarily the right of expression – preserved, without causing harm to others or hindering anyone's ability to improve their position. Students have to see themselves, as one blog put it, as the hungry person in charge of cutting a pizza for a table of hungry diners, not knowing which slice you yourself will receive. You are most likely to cut the slices into equal sizes, equally benefiting everyone at the table (*Farnam Street* n. d.).

Were the subject position roulette wheel to spin, landing me in B.'s position, I would likely be unhappy with my thin sliver of the pie.

Rawls' 'First Principle' holds that a just society maximises liberty for everyone, as long as those freedoms do not unreasonably interfere with each other. Freedom of expression is key. Rawls writes:

If the public forum is to be free and open to all ... everyone should be able to make use of it. ... The liberties protected by the principle of participation lose much of their value whenever those who have greater private means are permitted to use their advantages to control the course of public debate (Rawls 1999 [1971]: 197).

This idea is reflected in the journalistic edict to seek out relevant perspectives, include a wide diversity of sources and give voice to the voiceless (Plaisance 2009: 88).

In class discussion of the ethics of *Unrequited* and the 'Veil of Ignorance', one student brought up the fact that the forum for expression is not limited to my book. In the social contract of a democratic society with a First Amendment guarantee of free expression, can't B. put forth his own perspective in the 'marketplace of ideas'? The student's comment provided an opportune transition to Rawls' Second Principle: equal liberty is not the same as equal distribution of social and economic resources, and so a social contract should heed the concerns of



those who end up with the least (ibid: 68-72). Our social contract's guarantee of freedom of expression, even in a digital era that diminishes to near zero the cost of making expression public, does not guarantee equal access to the public sphere. B., also a writer and an academic, is certainly free to tell his own story, but may not necessarily gain access to the resources I had – a publishing contract – to broadcast my message. Furthermore, the aforementioned moral dilemma of the rejecter leaves him, were he to go public, more likely to face harsh judgement.

#### ***Mea culpa* and the limits of memoiristic truth**

What about The Truth, also waiting hungrily for some pizza? Is it served properly by my account? By the Mac McClelland standard, *Unrequited* falls short. I did not fact-check my own memories. I did not think doing so was important, which sounds arrogant, unless you accept my central point about unrequited love: While the yearning feels like it is entirely about the beloved other, when the other is unobtainable the only thing you can really lay claim to is the story of your own desire, and that story's meaning. In a way, you have already lost the argument about truth, because the love you feel is not mutual – the beloved already lives a different truth. The story of yearning, in this way, is a quintessentially subjective account.

Yet B.'s charge – *I question your journalism ethics* – underscores the weakness in this supposition. Here my *mea culpa* begins. However subjective an experience of unrequited love may be, the ethics shift when the story becomes public. A memoirist/journalist should not turn away from relevant information. I did have an obligation to take into account the complexities of what happened, a truth more comprehensive than what I can recollect as a subjective being. That means giving B. the same opportunity I provided other sources: a fact-checking conversation in which we talked through the details of accounts for accuracy. I also owed B. a better effort to minimise the hurt he may have experienced in not knowing about *Unrequited* until it was out in the world. At the very least, I could have found a way to let him know that *Unrequited* was going to be published.

My ethical decision-making process, I see in hindsight, missed the possibilities of Aristotle's Golden Mean: the desirable middle between two extremes. I did not have to fly across the country to interview B. I didn't have to talk to him, or even correspond with him. I could have asked an intermediary, such as a fact-checker, to make the contact. All I owed him, was notice

that my story would go public, along with the opportunity to give his perspective on the scenes in the book that describe him.

Yet even if I had made these efforts, *Unrequited* still would be unfair.

Memoirist William Bradley recounts sharing with his mother a draft of his memoir about having Hodgkin's Disease lymphoma in his early twenties. His mother read it and told him he had remembered a pivotal scene entirely wrong. He had described himself as shocked into speechlessness after his diagnosis. She, on the other hand, recalled him yelling out in the waiting room, 'She says I have cancer!' and storming out (Bradley 2007: 202-203).

Bradley argues that veracity is critical to the credibility of nonfiction. Readers want to know what happened *really* happened. Yet his experience points to the limits of the process of verification. Mac McClelland's meticulous fact-checking may hold forth the promise of thoroughness, particularly because she has a good reputation as a reporter. This is no amateur at work. Yet no amount of consultation with sources, witnesses and confidantes can evade the fact that memory is inherently subjective. Bradley's experience of remembering an important event differently from the person he experienced it with is all too common. I have a clear memory, for example, of my father telling me, years after I began a career as a radio reporter, that he wanted to become a journalist, but his Hungarian immigrant father and his mother pushed him toward the more practical career path of dentistry. This confession has always meant a lot to me. I feel grateful, two generations away from the Old Country, to be free to become a journalist, living a dream that started a generation before me. Just the other day, though, my father told me he had never intended to become a journalist and had no clue where I got the idea. I've shared this story a number of times in the classroom and with friends. Does that mean I told a lie? What if my father is wrong – that he *did* tell me how his life didn't go quite the way he wanted, then buried the inconvenient feeling so deeply that, to him, the confession never happened?

Bradley writes that after he wrestled with his mother's version of the scene in question, he decided to pick a side: his own. He keeps his version of events, appealing for his rationale to the seminal idea of the essay, stemming from Michel de Montaigne's sixteenth-century *Essais*, which commonly translates as

'attempts,' underscoring the incompleteness of the endeavour. According to Montaigne, an essay does not provide proven knowledge. An essay is an exploration, a highly sceptical and often playful journey through trial and error and self-discovery (1993: 33-35). As Bradley puts it: 'My memoir is a record of my own unreliable and occasionally fractured mind at work. To have my memoir reflect my mother's memory of the event rather than my own would be an act of invention on my part ... detrimental to my goal of representing on the page the world as I perceive and understand it' (Bradley 2007: 210). His conclusion does not mean he made a mistake in sharing his work with his mother. But being consultative does not change the fact that authors of personal narratives choose their own side. They can't be fair.

In my case, the irony is that a distinct feature of one-sided obsession is the strenuous effort to figure out the true feelings of the beloved other, to dwell on every and any clue that *he loves me but he isn't ready; she wants me back but is too repressed/messed up/committed elsewhere to admit it*. When I was in the throes of obsession, I felt like the most driven investigative journalist on the planet, sifting through mountains of data, with the occasional hopeful clue – a promising conversation, a sexual encounter, a knowing glance. But in the end my story was a story of lack, and what lack feels like and means to me. If I had consulted B., in the end I would have had to value my own memories and subjectivity over his, as whatever he experienced or went through did not change my experience of lack.

In his 'Potter Box' model of ethical reasoning, Ralph B. Potter sees the determination of loyalties as a final stage in moral decision-making. After you have assessed the facts and values involved in the situation and worked through some modes of reasoning – such as rules-based and ends-based ethics – you have to decide where your loyalties lie (Potter 1972: 58-60). The nature of memoir dictates that memoirists – whether or not they are also journalists, whether or not they use the methods of journalism – must first be loyal to themselves; their sources' perspectives remaining secondary. In this way, a quest narrative, and any journalism/memoir hybrid, will always be at cross purposes. It's 'seek truth and report it' versus 'seek *my* truth and tell it'.

This disparity raises larger questions about the truth claims of first-person nonfiction. Readers may put a lot at stake in the idea that what

they are reading 'really happened' and recoil when fabrications are exposed, such as when investigative journalists at the *Smoking Gun* uncovered several made-up elements in James Frey's memoir *A million little pieces* (2006). Yet Bradley's example, along with my own, underscores the ways our contemporary 'reality hunger' (Shields 2010) will never be satisfied. When writers shape a narrative, they impose order onto the disarray and contradictions of remembered experience, determining what information stays in the story and what gets sloughed off. As Shields writes: 'Human memory, driven by emotional self-interest, goes to extraordinary lengths to provide evidence to back up whatever understanding of the world we have our hearts set on – however removed that may be from reality' (Shields 2010: 54). How much did this proclivity influence my understanding of myself, and the ways I shaped my own story?

My avoidance of a 'he said/she said' dilemma in *Unrequited* is only one example of the tentative authority of memoir. Yet even the journalistic aspects of the book – my reporting and its conclusions about why unrequited love happens and what to do about it – may suffer from the moral taint of the first-person narrator. In *The journalist and the murderer*, Janet Malcolm calls the 'I' in first-person journalism 'unlike all the journalist's other characters in that he forms the exception to the rule that nothing may be invented' (1990: 159). She unpacks the machinations of journalist Joe McGuinness, leading convicted murderer Jeffrey MacDonald to believe he would write about his case as a wrongful conviction. Yet McGuinness, instead, left his sympathetic pose and gestures of friendship out of the account to create a damning portrait of a cold-blooded criminal. Though the first person offers the impression of candidness, of nothing held back, journalists still have a great deal of control over their own presence in the text, while their sources do not.

## Conclusion

The image of the poster child ex-obsessive comes back to haunt me. A woman who walks through the flames of unrequited love to emerge as a wise author-advisor makes a good story, but what have I left out? Maybe I wrote *Unrequited* precisely so that B. would finally notice me, a roar to break the years of silence, daring him to reconnect? Writing these words makes me shudder. But were I to write a revised and expanded edition (a highly unlikely prospect, given that the book's sales were, in the words of my once-hopeful agent, 'weak'), I might confess, as I did in a small literary jour-

nal that put little of its content online, that the publication of *Unrequited* pushed me quite out of the frame of that poster – that for a time I felt I would carry my obsession with B. to my grave (Phillips 2017: 179).

I don't feel that way any more, but I don't feel like a poster child either. A poster child isn't supposed to find herself ethically flawed, or mull over what a good independent fact-checker intermediary would have cost, and what would have happened once the dreaded outreach was over with. Would *Unrequited*, however inevitably one-sided and unfair, be a different book? No matter. The book is written and published. The post-script is messy, messier than I can communicate in these pages. All you have here is an *essai*, an attempt to figure it out, and nothing more.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In 2001, the Institutional Review Board, now known as the Human Research and Ethics Board, at SUNY New Paltz deemed my proposal for *Unrequited* 'not human subject research' on the basis that my writing was journalism, descriptive in nature as opposed to producing quantifiable data or generalisable knowledge

## References

- A million little lies: Exposing James Frey's fiction addiction (2006)
- Anas, Aremeyaw Anas (2013) How I named, shamed and jailed, TED Talk. Available online at [https://www.ted.com/talks/anas\\_aremeyaw\\_anas\\_how\\_i\\_named\\_shamed\\_and\\_jailed/transcript?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/anas_aremeyaw_anas_how_i_named_shamed_and_jailed/transcript?language=en), accessed on 22 October 2018
- Anderson, C. W., Downie Jr., Leonard, and Schudson, Michael (2016) *The news media: What everyone needs to know*, New York, Oxford University Press
- Baumeister, Roy F. and Wotman, Sara R. (1992) *Breaking hearts: The two sides of unrequited love*, New York, Guilford Press
- Bly, Nellie (2012 [1887]) *Ten days in a mad house*, Cabin John, MD, Wildside Press
- Bradley, William (2007) The ethical exhibitionist's agenda: Honesty and fairness in creative nonfiction, *College English*, Vol. 70, No. 2 pp 202-211
- de Montaigne, Michel (1993) *The complete essays* (ed. and trans. by Screech, M. A.) New York, Penguin Classics
- Fairbanks, Eve (2014) How personal essays conquered journalism – and why they can't cut it, *Washington Post*, 10 October. Available online at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2014/10/10/how-personal-essays-conquered-journalism-and-why-they-cant-cut-it/?utm\\_term=.ecdb2879e88c](https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2014/10/10/how-personal-essays-conquered-journalism-and-why-they-cant-cut-it/?utm_term=.ecdb2879e88c) accessed on 6 September 2018
- Farnam Street (n. d.) The Fairness Principle: How the Veil of Ignorance helps test fairness. Available online at <https://fs.blog/2017/10/veil-ignorance/>, accessed on 19 September 2018
- Foreman, Gene (2010) *The ethical journalist: Making responsible decisions in the pursuit of news*, West Sussex, Wiley-Blackwell
- Greenberg, Andy (2016) How reporters pulled off the Panama Papers, *wired.com*, 4 April. Available online at <https://www.wired.com/2016/04/reporters-pulled-off-panama-papers-biggest-leak-whistleblower-history/>, accessed on 22 October 2018
- The Holy Bible* (2011 [1973]) New International Version, Colorado Springs, CO, Biblica
- Jackson, Robert (2005) *Classical and modern thought on international relations: From anarchy to cosmopolis*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan

- Kant, Immanuel (2012 [1785]) *Groundwork of the metaphysics of morals* (trans by Gregor, M. and Timmerman, J.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press
- Malcolm, Janet (1990) *The journalist and the murderer*, New York, Vintage
- Moore, G. E. (1976 [1903]) *Principia ethica*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press
- Pauly, John J. (2008) The politics of the new journalism, Sims, Norman (ed) *Literary journalism in the twentieth century*, Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Press pp 110-130
- Phillips, Lisa (2006) I couldn't get over him. Did it make me a stalker? *New York Times*, 3 December. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/03/fashion/03love.html>, accessed on 1 October 2018
- Phillips, Lisa (2015) *Unrequited: Women and romantic obsession*, New York, HarperCollins
- Phillips, Lisa (2017) Letter of recommendation: The confessions of Noa Weber, *Post Road*, No. 32 pp 178-180
- Plaisance, Patrick Lee (2009) *Media ethics: Key principles for responsible practice*, Thousand Oaks, CA, SAGE Publications
- Potter, Ralph B. (1972) The logic of moral argument, Deats, Paul (ed.) *Toward a discipline of social ethics*, Boston, Boston University Press, pp 93-114
- Neuman, Kate (2014) Book publishing, not fact checking, *Atlantic*, 3 September. Available online at <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/09/why-books-still-arent-fact-checked/378789/>, accessed on 20 September 2018
- Rawls, John (1999 [1971]) *A theory of justice*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press
- Schudson, Michael and Anderson, Chris (2009) Objectivity, professionalism, and truth seeking in journalism, Hanitzsch, Thomas and Wahl-Jorgensen, Karin (eds) *The handbook of journalism studies*, New York, Routledge pp 88-101
- Shields, David (2010) *Reality hunger: A manifesto*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf
- Smith, Ron F. (2008) *Ethics in journalism*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, sixth edition
- Smith, Zay N. and Zekman, Pamela (1979) *The Mirage*, New York, Random House
- The Smoking Gun* (2006) A million little lies: Exposing James Frey's fiction addiction, 4 January. Available online at <http://www.thesmokinggun.com/documents/celebrity/million-little-lies>, accessed on 9 October 2018
- Solomon, Andrew (2001) *The noonday demon: An atlas of depression*, New York, Scribner

## Note on the Contributor

Lisa A. Phillips is an associate professor and chair of the Department of Digital Media and Journalism at the State University of New York at New Paltz. She is the author of *Unrequited: Women and romantic obsession* and *Public radio: Behind the voices*. As a journalist with a focus on psychology-related topics, her reporting and essays have been published in *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Psychology Today* and other outlets. Email: [phillipl@newpaltz.edu](mailto:phillipl@newpaltz.edu)



## Stan Grant and cultural memory: Embodying a national race narrative through memoir

*As a journalist for more than 30 years, his face and voice are immediately recognisable. But throughout the 1990s to many in Australia – watching Stan Grant anchor a commercial television current affairs programme every night as they ate their dinner – no one could guess at his untold story. He has written two memoirs. The first is the voice of a confused, angry, perhaps fearful young man. This voice melds his personal story as quest – of family, loves, pain, career and torment – into the national race narrative. For Stan Grant is a proud Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi man and his story importantly ‘untells’ much of the white Australian history of central and south western NSW, before disclosing his own struggle with race and racism in his land. Ten years later and in response to a notorious moment in 2013 on an Australian sporting field, Grant writes a newspaper column<sup>1</sup> which attracts more than 100,000 hits on social media. He follows this with his second memoir. This voice is calmer, less angry but perhaps sadder. It performs a collective and cultural remembering of the Australian First Nations and implicitly, an advocacy manifesto to a nation still struggling with racial tensions. Through textual analysis of both texts, and with the inclusion of further epitextual material, as well as his Quarterly Essay, this paper sets out to discuss Grant’s application of life writing/memoir practice to penetrate the race debate in Australia in an attempt to effect change.*

**Keywords:** race; racism; Australia; Wiradjuri; Kamilaroi; Stan Grant; Adam Goodes; manifesto

On this day the white people are rejoicing, but we, as Aborigines, have no reason to rejoice on Australia’s 150th birthday. ... This land belonged to our forefathers. ... Give us the chance! We do not wish to be left behind in Australia’s march to progress ... we do not wish to be herded like cattle.

Jack Patten, 1938<sup>2</sup>

### Introduction

Almost 80 years after civil rights activist, journalist and the first president of the Aborigines’ Progressive Association, Jack Patten, spoke the words above to a gathering for ‘A Day of Mourning’ in Sydney, Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi man Stan Grant – award-winning journalist<sup>3</sup> – testifies that no one listened back then, nor since. In 2015, he writes: ‘...this is how Australia makes us feel. Estranged in the land of our ancestors, marooned by the tides of history on the fringes of one of the richest and demonstrably most peaceful, secure and cohesive nations on earth’ (Grant 2015).

Seemingly, people listen to Grant now. Indeed, Grant’s contribution to the topic *Racism is Destroying the Australian Dream* at an IQ2 debate<sup>4</sup> went viral when it was posted online on 19 January 2016, a week before Australia Day. In this speech, he says:

The Australian Dream is rooted in racism. It is the very foundation of the dream. It is there at the birth of the nation. It is there in *terra nullius*. An empty land. A land for the taking. Sixty thousand years of occupation. A people who made the first seafaring journey in the history of mankind. A people of law, a people of lore, a people of music and art and dance and politics. None of it mattered because our rights were extinguished because we were not here according to British law. And when British people looked at us, they saw something sub-human, and if we were human at all, we occupied the lowest rung on civilisation’s ladder. We were fly-blown, stone age savages and that was the language that was used (Grant 2015).

‘Unrehearsed and unscripted’ (Grant 2016b: 7), more than one million people now have watched his speech world-wide. But Grant writes:

... reaction and praise for the speech was far more than it deserved. It was an accident of timing: it coincided with Australia Day, a time of reflection and celebration and, for

many Indigenous people, great sadness or anger. The broadcaster and journalist Mike Carlton gave it an extra push. He called it Australia's Martin Luther King moment, referring to the American civil rights leader's 'I have a dream' speech [of August, 1963] (ibid: 7-8).

He is quick to defer to great Aboriginal activists and orators, listing: 'Charles Perkins, Gary Foley, Chicka Dixon, Marcia Langton, Jackie Huggins, Noel Pearson, Michael Mansell – and so many others who have spoken to Australian power. ... Far from being Martin Luther King, I stood on the shoulders of generations of giants' (ibid: 9). But his speech did catapult him into the spotlight – since that time, he is the go-to spokesperson about most Indigenous issues within the media. But Amy McQuire (2016) argues, in a feature on the alternative website *New Matilda*, that the impact of this speech tells us more about Australia than it reflects on Stan Grant; that it is his status as well known journalist that makes the difference. She writes:

But the height of the fever-pitch around Grant, the numerous platitudes, the push for Grant to now consider a political career off the back of a couple of speeches, says more about the state of the nation than anything he has uttered so far ... Grant's speech was great, but it was his eloquence, his position as an award-winning journalist, and his non-threatening diplomacy, that laid the foundation for this overwhelming enthusiasm from white Australia (ibid).

She may be right. Certainly Australians respond more to a well-packaged, articulate and eloquent delivery rather than sub-titled testimony from members of desert communities. Both are authentic. But one – Grant's – has a deeper and broader echo. Reach is important when discussing change effect and no one is suggesting Grant is gratuitous. Indeed, his intimate stories shared make compelling reading and demographically represent two polar opposites: his young, impoverished upbringing and his hard-earned affluence now. But even he queries his cause. Grant writes in his landmark contribution to *Quarterly Essay*:

Many Indigenous people felt that in telling my family's story, I had told theirs too. Other Australians seized on my belief that we are better than our worst. To some, I may have let white people off the hook, too readily absolved them of their sins. Yet I believe it is possible to speak to a country's shame and

still have love for that country. I can no more deny the greatness of Australia as a peaceful, cohesive, prosperous society than my fellow countrymen and women can deny the legacy of neglect and bigotry and injustice that traps so many Indigenous brothers and sisters still (Grant 2016b: 9).

With this essay he takes centre stage in the ongoing Australian race relations debate. Lam and St Guillame argue that as a young man, Grant's 'professional identity took precedence' over his personal identity and that this 'enabled him to establish the respect and prestige of a seasoned broadcaster'. But when he returned in 2012 from his long overseas stint, reporting for CNN, 'Grant's path towards advocacy, and his approach to advocacy, increasingly integrated his private identity with his public persona'. They further suggest that Grant's approach now as advocate 'offers a new mode of advocacy (one bound to the identity of the advocate)' (Lam and St Guillame 2018: 144). So, using his private stories to advocate for progress in Australia's fraught race relations with its First Nations creates a hybrid at-once intimate and political forum.

For the purposes of this paper, I am focusing on Grant's two memoirs – *The tears of strangers* (2002) and *Talking to my country* (2016a). Few other Indigenous journalists have shared their story through memoir<sup>5</sup> to date, which make his texts, written 14 years apart, a form of collective telling. I argue that the first memoir – and his first book – displays an almost spent anger splashing familial horror stories across its pages and unresolved identity. He writes:

Where do I get the conceit to excuse driving my new BMW into the black ghetto of Sydney's Redfern to talk to my 'black brothers and sisters'? How can I look them in the eye and claim them as my people? If Aborigines are poor, I am not an Aborigine; if Aborigines are coal black, I'm not an Aborigine; if Aborigines are the victims of injustice and bigotry, I'm not Aborigine (Grant 2002: 60).

These statements are polemical, and go to the heart of his conflict, for he has a successful career which gives him affluence rare among Indigenous people. As he writes in his second text:

I have moved from the fringes to the centre. I don't want to live in a country fractured by its history. I want to share in a sense of the possibilities of our nation. But nor do I

want to live in a country that shrouds its past in silence. I don't want to live in a country where the people who share my heritage, whose ancestry connects to the first footprints on our continent, too often live in misery (Grant 2016b: 10).

He adds: 'Too often I would see our identity couched in terms of suffering and poverty. The reality of my life was in the starkest contrast to where I had started and where so many indigenous people remain' (ibid: 180). This latter text narrates with a more hopeful, somehow resigned voice, where the older, more diplomatic Grant cajoles and beckons the country in its race efforts to join together, and simply do better. It feels as if he has made peace with himself; with his identity. But he still writes in 2016 that he is angry: 'It flares suddenly and with slightest provocation; it takes my breath away sometimes' and fearful: 'I have known this fear all my life. When I was young, it used to make me sick, physically ill in the pit of my stomach.' And he knows where both his anger and his fear come from, writing that he has seen them in his own father. He writes: 'It comes from the weight of history' (Grant 2016a). But I argue that despite all this, this second memoir can be seen as an advocacy manifesto with a voice that compels many Australians – and further afield – to listen. And hear.

Still, he has his critics, some from within the black communities claiming that instead of creating disquiet around race relations in the country in the name of change, Grant's forays seem to comfort white Australia. Many say that this 'moment' of astute awareness has come many times before, and more importantly, been ignored. McQuire writes of Grant's writing and speeches:

...diplomacy is seen in some of his commentary, like that on Australia Day; while acknowledging the hurt and pain felt by blackfellas on the 'day of mourning', he also sees room for recognition of 'what makes [Australians] great and what that greatness demands of us'. None of this is exactly ground-breaking, or even controversial for Australia. It does not unsettle white Australia, in fact it comforts them (McQuire 2016).

I also include other epitextual materials, supporting my arguments, particularly his *Quarterly Essay*, *The Australian dream: Blood, history and becoming* published in 2016, which, while more polemical and analytical than his memoirs, still carries between its lines Stan Grant's

own story – a First Nation collective story – creating a hybrid politically rhetorical/life-writing text.

#### **Memoir as quest and advocacy manifesto**

Using a basic definition of both terms – quest and manifesto – I argue Grant's first memoir *The tears of strangers* (2002) captures a deeply personal quest while his second memoir *Talking to my country* (2016) works as an advocacy manifesto.

Etymologically speaking, quest is derived from the 14th century: from Old French *queste*, from Latin *quaesita* meaning sought, and from *quaerere* to seek. Its generic meaning is to look or to seek something.<sup>6</sup> Grant's quest is clear in his introduction:

I live in a country where black is not a word, it's a sentence. ... I live in a country where black is not a word, it's a privilege. I'm not supposed to say that. I'm supposed to chant that statistical mantra that places me amongst the most impoverished and oppressed peoples on earth. ... I live in a country where being an Aborigine is a marketing tool (2002: 4-5).

This text is an intimate, transparent and raw account of his childhood and struggle with identity; how he feels he has abandoned his people and how he tries to resolve his issues. He writes: 'Part of this search means unlocking secrets, always painful and often tragic ... but the truth demands courage' (2002: 9). As Lam and St Guillaume write:

His view of his Indigeneity is thus at once a personal negotiation of his place as an Indigenous Australian living in modern Australia, and a reflection of the complex nature of race relations in Australia. This is because his position of success is at odds with the dominant representation of Indigenous Australians in a national mainstream media owned and controlled by white Australians (2018: 140).

On the other hand, I argue that *Talking to my country* (2016) sets a different tone. Again, etymologically speaking, manifesto is Latin in its roots. Its oldest meaning, dating back to the 14th century in English, is 'readily perceived by the senses' or 'easily recognised'. As an adjective, something that is manifest is easy to understand or recognise and, accordingly, a manifesto is a statement in which intentions and views of a person are made easy to com-

prehend.<sup>7</sup> Certainly, I argue that a speech made by Grant in 2015 to the Ethics Centre in Sydney was intended as oral advocacy manifesto and that he followed the following year with his second memoir in the same vein.

It amounts almost to a 'call to arms' in a deeply divided country: members of the Australian First Nations die one decade earlier than other Australians; at the age of forty, members of the Australian First Nations are six times more likely to go blind; Indigenous children have the highest rates of deafness in the world; Indigenous people are three times more likely to be jobless than other Australians; Australian First Nations make up less than 3 per cent of the Australian population yet account for 25 percent of Australians imprisoned for crime; for juveniles, the statistics are even worse – Indigenous make up 50 per cent of incarcerated young Australians (Grant 2015). As Grant emphasises: 'An Indigenous child is more likely to be locked up in prison than they are to finish high school.'<sup>8</sup> In this speech Grant's motif is: 'We're better than this.' Thirteen years earlier, his voice was not quite as conciliatory.

### *The tears of strangers (2002)*

The year Stan Grant was born (his parents were living in an old car on the outskirts of Griffith, in south-western NSW; his father was in jail the day he was born) in 1963, Indigenous Australians had only been granted the right to vote in the previous year – but he was still, according to the Australian census, counted amongst the flora and fauna of the country and not its citizens. That did not come until after the 27 May 1967 referendum with the answer to the question to the nation: *Do you approve the proposed law for the alteration of the Constitution so as to omit the words relating to the people of the Aboriginal Race in any state and so that Aboriginals are to be counted in reckoning the population.* The question referred to Sections 51 and 127 of the Constitution.<sup>9</sup> Section 51 was amended by removing the words: '... other than the Aboriginal people in any State...' and Section 127 was removed entirely. In the end, 90.77 per cent voted for change (National Archives of Australia).

So, growing up a little more than 30 years after the referendum, Grant begins his quest. He writes in the introduction of his aims and hope for this text:

...not to devise political solutions but to ask the hard questions. Who am I? Who are my people? Aboriginal lives have been smashed

against Australian whiteness for more than 200 years ... I hope only one thing: that one day Aborigines can be free of the all too often painful choices our blackness has forced upon us (2002: 9).

He juxtaposes the language of violence (smashed) with the language of optimism (hope) but the optimism is never quite realised throughout – the personal narrative of his childhood is one of hardship and wandering as his father searches for work to keep his family together. As he moves through the memoir, he branches out into the early colonial histories of his people, drawing on archival materials.

He paints a portrait of his father, a Wiradjuri<sup>10</sup> man, as hardworking, tenacious and tough; an itinerant worker, saw-miller and fruit picker. He writes of his father, also called Stan Grant: 'The story of my father's life is written on his body. ... He'd tell me how he'd been bashed, poisoned, stabbed, had almost every bone in his body broken and been shot at into the bargain' (ibid: 12). A former boxer, he lost the tips of three fingers sawmilling. Grant writes: 'For Dad, not being able to play guitar any more was a fair trade for feeding his family' (ibid: 13). Grant is brutally honest in his assessment of his earlier relationship with his father, claiming that he felt his father never liked him; that he was 'too soft for him' (ibid: 16). He writes that his father did not hit him often but when he did, he 'hated him' (ibid). Grant is graphic in his descriptions of his father's violence towards him, a testimony to the authenticity of the text. It is not pretty and it is no way complimentary to his father – to whom he dedicates the book: 'For my father – my hero.' Grant sets out these experiences in order to demonstrate a particular truth of what it meant to be a part of this black family in a predominantly white country. Between the lines, he infers his is not an unusual experience within black communities.

He writes of a nagging fear for his father from a very early age – a fear that he would not return one day. He qualifies quickly that this fear was not about his father deserting the family but rather that 'danger would claim him' (ibid: 16). He writes: 'There was something in those dark eyes that could burn with rage, yet at other times swim in pools of sadness' (ibid). Again, there is a juxtaposition of words, carefully selected: 'rage' and 'sadness'. Seemingly, Grant intuitively in his father at a young age the collective struggles of his people, raging against a racism that is as cruel as it is hateful, and yet fighting to maintain the most ubiquitous of impulses:

keeping his family fed and together. As he writes: 'My father was not brutal; like many of his generation he was brutalised' (ibid: 20).

Grant addresses his readers and uses this technique to embrace them; to bring them into his narrative and demonstrate this is his readers' narrative as well; this story belongs to all Australians. Somehow, implicating his readers he invites them to react. He writes:

Why am I telling you this now? If it was just family business you'd have no more right to mine than I would to yours, but this is bigger than that. This is your story and my story, the story of a country that took black lives and smashed them. It smashed their culture, their language and their families. This is my father's legacy, and the pain I've inherited. It's about what makes us black, even if you don't see it. I don't write this to condemn, but to remove the blindfold of Australia's history to reveal what it's created (ibid: 24).

By utilising second person, Grant demands the stage and our attention; switching back to first person reminds us of his personal investment; and then depersonalising the country – 'to reveal what *it's* created' [my emphasis] – removes any sense of personal accusation. He writes of family secrets and a lost sister, born on the same day one year earlier than him, whom he did not learn of until 2000. Debbie, living on an Aboriginal reserve with her husband and seven children – Grant's nieces and nephews – on the NSW north coast. His fury at learning how the family – father, mother, aunts and grandparents – kept this other secret family from him. This is his father's daughter from a previous relationship. He then learns of another daughter to his father, Debbie and Grant's older sister Donna, who died 10 days after her birth. Revelation after revelation as Grant visits his sister and her mother Barbara, and a slow dawning. He writes: 'I met my father as well as my sister. I'd seen him at his worst and I loved him more than ever' (ibid: 29).

Seemingly coming more to terms with the history of his father, and turning his eye to his mother, born Betty Cameron of a white woman and Kamilaroi<sup>11</sup> Aboriginal man, he begins her chapter with: 'I know love. Love is going hungry so that others may be fed. ... I know love because I know my mother' (ibid: 30). His writing is evocative and simple, exemplifying the basic tenets of strong family life, all the while writing about the complexities of blackness in Australia. He claims that 'Australia is a remedial

student of race; it's too easily confused' (ibid: 31). Here, he represents the country as a collective entity, a remedial student, rather than a country full of individual 'remedial' students of race, a far less accusatory stance. He explains he gets his 'whiteness' from his mother, but then: 'I get my blackness from her too. Mum's blackness transcends colour; she can be as white as you think she is and yet as black as I know her to be' (ibid: 30). Again, he uses second person unexpectedly, quickly switching back to first again. This sudden exchange of perspective is jarring but has the effect of reminding readers of his earlier conflation – this story, his narrative, did not happen in isolation. It belongs to all Australians.

He writes of the 1930s eugenic scientists who would see in his mother, no doubt with delight, the fruition of their aspirations: '...she is living proof of the fatal transience of Aboriginal blood. Here is a race that can be bred out, until none exist anymore...' (ibid: 31). He claims his mother 'tamed' his father with love. But, again, he is raw and honest; he writes of their fights, the violence: 'You bald, bony, rotten-toothed black mongrel!' (ibid) his mother would often shout at his father. Grant asks her to leave his father often. But there is revelation in this telling. He writes: 'With a conceit worthy of Oedipus, I challenged my parents' love. Now, like Oedipus, I would stab out my eyes rather than see them apart' (ibid: 32). Here Grant uses violent, self-harm language to demonstrate how wrong he was when younger; aesthetically violent language perhaps to balance and match the violence of his parent's relationship. But he qualifies this with deeper understanding: 'Theirs has been a love bigger than this country' (ibid: 32). He describes how they 'pooled their pain and shared it evenly ... my father's hands have held her world and Mum's the only person I know who's dried his tears' (ibid: 45). His tone speaks to the pathos of the family circumstances juxtaposed against this love of his parents: 'They are alone now with the snapshots of four decades of marriage ... and I see them now still loving each other, fear no longer outweighing hope' (ibid).

When his mother was born, according to legislation,<sup>12</sup> she was not black. She was fair skinned; her mother was white and her father mixed race – fair-skinned with Aboriginal facial characteristics. This was Keith Cameron, a Kamilaroi man: '...deemed too white to live on a reserve, yet too black to be accepted in town. His was a life lived on the fringes, where he was moved on at will by the police' (ibid: 33). 'Fringes' is a



term Grant uses often in both texts, almost as motif. In Australia, it is a term used to describe just how it sounds – disenfranchised people, excluded from mainstream life.

Grant reproduces poetry his mother wrote about her pain in growing up, always on the lookout for welfare men who took fair-skinned Aboriginal children away from their parents.<sup>13</sup> Grant writes: '...fair-skinned Aborigines were more easily absorbed into white society ... my grandfather managed to keep his family together only by fleeing his home town. He'd been warned. His kids were next' (ibid: 41). This text is scattered with these stories of survival, families resisting and dodging government officials, to keep together.

Grant writes of his struggle with his identity. Laying out his family history – the lives of his grandparents and parents – is his way of searching for coherence and understanding of his bloodlines. He writes: 'Aboriginal identity today is fractured, lacerated by class, gender and geography in ways we've never seen' (ibid: 5). But the central message of the text, and what he substantiates through his questing – just six words – appears a little over 40 pages into it: 'White blood doesn't make you white' (ibid: 44). Its starkness gives this sentence its power – sparse, loaded language. He follows this with: 'To imagine so renders us merely imitations of white people.' Grant claims his caramel skin and straight nose leaves him 'exposed and defenceless' (ibid). He speaks of answering the question: what nationality are you? He writes: 'Each question, each disbelieving stare, tempting me to deny the blood of my ancestors, to deny my parents. ... we've grown good at deceit, we pale-skinned, thin-lipped, straight-nosed half breed' (ibid: 49). His tone is self-blaming, ashamed, shocked and, at the same time, is a form of reaching out, of trying to explain, of desperately urging others to hear and understand.

And he remembers as a child trying to scrub himself white; taking a cake of soap and as his mother watches on: 'I rub my skin red raw, rubbed my caramel skin "white" ... but I was black ... this was the prism of race, and I was trapped in it' (ibid: 48). This image of the young Grant attempting to remove his blackness is at once poignant and shattering. Further on, he writes:

I'd like to say I grew out of wanting to wash myself white. Maybe I could invent a life in which I stood up for myself and fought against injustice, but that would be a lie.

No, my childhood snapshots are of running away, shrinking from and making excuses for being an Aborigine ... but despite our denials, our delusion or shame, in the eyes of whites we were only ever blacks (ibid: 53).

His language is self-effacing, desperate, dream-like in his hopes not to be black, as only a child could hope. But it takes Grant more than 270 pages until he tells us of a dream he held close, barely whispering it to anyone as he grew; he wanted to be a journalist: 'Such was the pattern of my childhood, a succession of towns, shacks and schools but always there was a dream, a faint hope that one day I might become a journalist' (ibid: 271). He attended more than a dozen schools by the time he was 12, and only sporadically. When he was finally old enough to leave school, the family was living in Canberra and he worked there at the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. It was here he realised 'that for an Aborigine with an education life promised more than dusty towns, loose change and sawmills' (ibid: 271). It was also here he met the young Marcia Langton, now renowned professor of anthropology and history. He writes:

... she was a young beautiful black firebrand with piercing eyes; she was angry but had resolved to fight with her mind. Marcia made me realise that a black boy could dream, and more than that, that my dream could become real ... she sat me down and told me I had choices, I didn't have to be a victim (ibid: 271-272).

Grant enrolled in the University of New South Wales, studying politics and sociology. His first job was as a trainee journalist for Macquarie Radio Network, followed by jobs at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), Channel 9 TV, Channel 7 TV, Sky News Australia and contracted to CNN International in 2001 as a Senior International Correspondent in Abu Dhabi, Hong Kong and Beijing, before returning to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. He also did a four-year stint in the federal parliamentary press gallery, working beside and learning from some of the greatest journalists in Australia at the time (ibid: 272).

Finally, he ends this memoir with deep reflection about the ending of his first marriage to journalist Karla Price, with whom he has a daughter and two sons; and about his relationship with journalist Tracey Holmes, with whom he has one son. He takes all the blame for his first marriage breakdown. He writes: '...but as Karla and I met as children we left each other

as a man and a woman ... there was a future for us, but not together. Yet our childhood love created immortality with our three beautiful babies' (ibid: 273). This marriage breakdown and subsequent relationship with Holmes became news fodder; the pair met while covering the lighting of the 2000 Olympic flame in Greece (ibid: 279). He writes: 'Love doesn't seek permission, it poses more questions than it answers. I wasn't ready for this; Tracey wasn't ready' (ibid). Still married to Karla Grant, his conflict was compounded by his deep mistrust for black people who married whites. He writes: 'In my mind they'd sold out; their love – if love it was – was treasonous. ... I was undone. Exposed. I betrayed not only my marriage but – in my mind at least – my race' (ibid: 279-280). There is high drama in his language as he enters this stage of the narrative. And a question: if it is treasonous to marry a white woman, how has he come to terms with his grandfather marrying his white grandmother? He never answers this question. Holmes is warned off him by friends. As Grant writes:

There's a challenge in mixed relationships that strikes at the very heart of Australia's primal instincts on race. We half-castes were history's shame. We were the living proof of the lie of Australian settlement. Could Aborigines really be savages, near brutes, with no legal claim to this land if the brave white settlers would sleep with us? Australia convinced itself we were the product of lust not love; love existed between white people, love existed between human beings (ibid: 280).

Here, at the climax of his memoir is how he really feels; there is a simmering anger and resentment, I would argue at the nation – again it is the collective use of the word 'Australia' – but also at himself. And this is his conflict. He is successful, affluent, lives in a beautiful house by the sea, and can afford the best for his children. There is no question that they have ever gone hungry. Grant begins this memoir with insight that it:

...is a mockery to talk of black unity, as it is to reject white people ... expressing our blackness exposes our hypocrisy. Australia has us trapped in its pervasive whiteness ... shamelessly we compete for victim status and turn pain and loss into virtues ... the old definition of Aboriginality no longer adequately serve the range of contending groups that lay claim to a black identity in Australia (ibid: 5-6).

He is polemical at the beginning. But over time his polemics lose their power in his confusions and conflicts. He ends the text angrily with:

I have grown to be wary of the meanness, the nastiness, the viciousness I've seen at the core of the Australian character. White Australia, it's always seemed to me, was not so much a policy as a prophecy ... like so many of my people, I had nursed a deeply wounded psyche (ibid: 281).

This is his truth still – a black and affluent man in a white country, which turned its collective moral compass towards him when he left his first wife and splashed centimetre after centimetre in the tabloid press about his new relationship. The couple left the country, seemingly fleeing these spotlights – and then the birth of his fourth child and third son. This birth seems to bring him to his knees. He writes:

My children inherit this country's legacy. My history, my family's history, has made them. The blood debt, the price of pain has been paid in full. The courage and love of their ancestors I hope will spare my children this nation's harsh judgement. Once, not so long ago, they would have been condemned by their blackness; now they can be proud of their heritage (ibid: 285).

In his epilogue he seems to have resolved his quest, the quest of the little boy attempting to rub his blackness from his skin: 'Black I am; black I will ever be' (ibid: 290). He writes eloquently and hopefully, for he claims to see the future in his children's hands.

#### **Talking to my country (2016)**

Fourteen years after his first memoir, Grant writes his second, but it needs contextualising. On 24 May 2013, at a Sydney Swans versus Melbourne Collingwood AFL match, a 13-year-old girl racially vilified star player and Adnyamathanha man Adam Goodes, calling him an 'ape' (Crawford 2013). For two years afterwards, Goodes was booed every time he was near the ball during matches resulting in Goodes' eventual retirement from the sport. Grant writes: '... to Adam's ears, the ears of so many Indigenous people, these boos are a howl of humiliation. A howl that echoes across two centuries of invasion, dispossession and suffering ... we see race and only race' (Grant 2015). Not long after this article appeared in the *Guardian*, it went viral with more than 100,000 views. Grant then took part in the IQ2 debate addressing the topic *Racism is Destroying the Australian Dream*. As

mentioned earlier in this article, this speech also went viral when posted online just before Australia Day 2016.<sup>14</sup> And then, a month later, his second memoir, *Talking to my country*, was published.

If in his first memoir he is searching for his identity, this second text is a manifesto to the country he both loves and distrusts. On the first page of the preface, he uses first and second person pronouns, drawing the attention of his readership and directly addressing his audience: 'These are the things I want to say to you'; 'I want to tell you about blood and bone'; 'I want to tell you of a name that should be mine, a Wiradjuri name that passed down from thousands of years of kinship – taken from us along with our language and our land'; 'And I want to tell you how I came to the name I have: Grant, the name of an Irishman, a name from a time of theft and death' (2016a: 1-2). Next, he segues into first person plural with a cynical tone:

Australia still cannot decide whether we were settled or invaded. We have no doubt. Our people died defending their land and they had no doubt ... soon we would lose our names; names unique, inherited from our forefathers. Then our language silenced. Soon children would be gone. This is how we disappear (ibid: 3).

These words are decisive and accusatory. In the following excerpt, Grant lays out a history overview not taught in schools for more than 200 years – perhaps taught by some now. This juxtaposing of first person, singular and plural, and second person pronoun is effective: initially it creates a binary between black and white; but towards the end of the preface he joins the perspectives referring to 'us', quickly jarring apart with another 'you' before returning to the collective 'us'. He writes:

So here we are: all of us in this country – our country. Tethered to each other – black and white, the sons and daughters of settlers, the more recent migrants and my people with tens of thousands of years of tradition. I have to accept you because we are so few and have no choice ... all of this is our story ... we are trapped in this history, all of us, and if we don't understand it we will remain chained to it ... above all I am what you have made me (ibid: 6).

His language is carefully selected for optimum impact. There is no doubt he is a story-teller; he is a journalist and knows how to write. He

also knows how to construct a story: short, sharp sentences, dramatic tension, narrative arc, scene-setting, themes and motifs. And in this preface there is accusation from the binary position followed by a joining with the conflation to collective 'you'. But he does set his narrative up with this preface where he uses the second person plural pronoun disrupting the binary as he writes of the Adam Goodes incidents:

In the winter of 2015 we turned to face ourselves...we were forced to confront the darkest parts of this country – black and white we are all formed by it. This wasn't about sport; this was about our shared history and our failure to reconcile it (ibid. 5).

Grant knows how to create tension within his narrative arc. He opens the first part of this text with two simple sentences, again addressing his readership: 'I want to tell you about the road that leads to my parents' house. It was here my people were murdered' (ibid: 7). It is stark in its veracity and haunting in its significance. He begins this memoir, telling his readers he has brought his youngest son (to journalist Tracey Holmes) to tell him 'the truth of our history' (ibid). He sits beside a waterhole and tells his boy of white settlers who laced it with poison, killing his people, the Wiradjuri. He writes:

Their deaths linger here. I can feel it whenever I am home. It is not hard to picture them: bodies bent and twisted; mouths open; the air filled with the stench of vomit as they coughed up the poison. Flies hover over the decomposing flesh. There is no one to bury them. Here they will stay until they sink into the earth (ibid: 13).

It is a graphic scene but it is not gratuitous. Later on he cites other places of slaughter: Waterloo Creek or Slaughterhouse Creek (100 people killed), Myall Creek (28 people killed), Poison Waterhole Creek, Murdering island, Rufus River massacre, Evans Head Massacre, the Nyngan Massacre, Murdering Gully, Campaspe Plains, Halls Creek, Fitzroy Crossing and Margaret River. He writes of his ancestors Wongamar and Windradyne, of John and Bill Grant. Grant writes:

It is so easy to walk through this country and be blind to it all. I am still surprised – although by now I should not be – at how often people tell me they just didn't know. Yet it is right there in front of us. The reminders are everywhere. It is written into our landscape (ibid: 118).

But his personal history collides dramatically with his professional life while reporting in Mongolia for CNN. He writes that much of his job is about 'our inhumanity', covering war-torn and ravaged countries around the world; 'the savagery we inflict on each other' (ibid: 146). He reported in Northern Ireland, Israel, Palestine, India, China, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Korea – and began to see and feel patterns known from his childhood; racial and invaded stories. The resonances were about invasion and conquering and fighting and defending. And he thought of his own people and their history in the hands of the white man in Australia. In Mongolia at the time, Stan Grant had what could be termed a breakdown. He was traumatised, depressed, exhausted, stressed and overwrought – but still he told no one and kept on working. He writes: 'So here I was in Mongolia. On the steppes where Genghis Khan drove his armies and fanned out to conquer the known world; here I fell under the weight of my history' (ibid: 149). It was in Mongolia that he realised this creeping illness was not about the pain and horror he had witnessed reporting around the world – it was that this pain and horror was also his, from his own country. He writes: '...these wounds were now mine. This was a story I had not told. Reporting on the suffering of others had unlocked a door to my own soul' (ibid: 155). Nightly he rang his wife and sobbed down the phone to her about what Australia had done to his grandparents and parents. He writes:

I didn't know where the war in Afghanistan or the terrorism in Pakistan ended and my world began ... all the horror of the world, all the misery and injustice, all of it collapsed into my own history; history I had thought I had left behind ... there is no doubt my state of mind was affected by exposure to the ugliness of the world: years of reporting war, death and misery. But that accumulated trauma awakened a long dormant malaise. Everything was torn open (ibid: 156-157).

Further in the text he writes of the pain of leaving Australia; how devastated he felt leaving. But how in that leaving he found freedom: 'I had been liberated by the world. Out here I was a person, a man of strengths and weaknesses ... but not a man pre-judged according to his race' (ibid: 165). There is much pathos in this narrative, not to engender pity; I believe this is a desperate appeal to a nation to read, ingest and react. Grant writes: 'There is nothing genetic that separates us; what divides us is our history – what we have done to each other in the

name of race.' He adds: 'Over time exclusion hardens into political opposition' (ibid: 179). And this is where he is now; joining the ranks of Indigenous voices advocating for justice. No longer confused or conflicted, this memoir paints a picture of a father driving his youngest son to his old home; retelling him stories told to him through traditional oral history. It can be argued that Stan Grant has learnt his story-telling technique through rigorous training on the job as a journalist; writing for space; writing for drama; incorporating news values daily, so they become second nature in the telling of anything and everything. But he comes from a long line of oral story tellers; this is how the First Nations of this country know themselves, as all humans know themselves – through story.

Grant paints evocative images throughout this text. He uses technical writing skills throughout, like juxtaposing his sleeping son in the back of his car against the stark memories of himself as a boy, in the back of his family car, driving from town to town as his father searches for work to feed them: 'This is the story of my life, a life spent looking out of a window' (ibid: 16). He traces his life through stages of growing and career. He is inspired by James Baldwin, Franz Kafka, Martin Luther King, Martin X and Te-Nehisi Coates, sprinkled throughout the text. But he addresses the complexity of the state of Australian race relations today. He writes: 'Of course, there is no "Indigenous community" – we are many and our issues myriad and diverse. But we know that we also share our fate and our connection runs deep.' He speaks of the many white Australians who 'stand with us. They have marched over bridges, stood in silent protest, wept with apology' (ibid: 214). He hopes they are the majority, adding: 'But there are bigots, those who would divide us, and if they are smaller in number their words land on us with the force of history' (ibid). Always there is the binary: them and us. His words are powerful, honest and strong, and perhaps intended with such desperation, effective. They ring with authenticity and are delivered with passion. Close to concluding this text, circularly, his words bring us back to the Adam Goodes incidents:

Yet with each high point we seem to retreat. The apology was meant to atone for the Stolen Generations. Since that day the number of indigenous children removed from their families has increased by more than 400 per cent. Two decades after a royal inquiry into black deaths in custody the number of Indigenous people locked up in Australia

has grown 100-fold. We die younger, we go blind, babies are born deaf; our communities remain in crisis. An Aboriginal man – a sporting hero – can be driven from the game he loves (ibid: 215).

There is no binary in this paragraph, carefully crafted with appalling statistics and shocking facts about the lives of Australia's First Nations today. He writes: 'I have always been torn by the sadness of my history and the beauty of my country' (ibid: 162). Beginning his narrative with his son on a road trip back to his home he finishes, driving his boy back to the city. But he evokes his people's oral traditions with hope, if not resigned hope: 'My son will sit by Poison Waterholes Creek one day and tell the story to his son' (ibid: 223).

### Conclusion

Summoning all the skills of his more than 30 years as a journalist, together with inherited traditional oral story-telling, both memoirs by Stan Grant, written 14 years apart, are eloquent, articulate, display academic prowess and a vivid narrative ability. Anita Heiss, a Wiradjuri woman, says: 'Many of us, including myself, have been saying similar things for a very long time' but 'he has the capacity to bring on board a whole lot of people who may not have thought about these issues otherwise' (Heiss quoted in Cadzow 2016). In the same article, Marcia Langton, Professor of Australian Indigenous Studies at Melbourne University and descendant of the Yiman and Bidjara people, answers the question: 'Why are people listening to him? [Because] he's a brilliant communicator. ... It's genuine. It's heartfelt. You feel yourself nodding along when he's speaking and you want to say: "Yes! Yes! Yes!"' (Langton in Cadzow 2016). Grant tells Cadzow of his white grandmother who believed her young grandson was going to make it one day. Cadzow asks: 'Why not?'

I argue that Grant's first memoir *The tears of strangers* (2002) has at its core a quest; he sets out to find and solidify his identity. In this second memoir *Talking to my country* (2016), that is exactly what he does – he writes as if he is talking, mixing perspectives, at one time embracing white Australia and others, spurning and blaming. But at all times it is as if the reader is in conversation with him. This is powerful writing, on a mission to advocate for his people, both black and white; to make white Australia hear, once and for all, and more importantly to react – the essence of manifesto.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> In the *Guardian*; won the 2015 Walkley for Coverage of Indigenous Affairs

<sup>2</sup> 'Day of Mourning', Australian Hall, Elizabeth Street, Sydney, on 26 January 1938 (Grant 2016b: 8-9)

<sup>3</sup> Currently ABC's Chief Asia Correspondent and host of the flagship current affairs programme, *Matter of Fact*

<sup>4</sup> 27 October 2015: City Recital Hall, Sydney, New South Wales; debate organised by the Ethics Centre, Sydney; 1.5 million views

<sup>5</sup> Notably, Doris Pilkington Garimara wrote her mother's story, and in so doing, some of her own story in *Follow the rabbit proof fence* (1996); she studied journalism in Perth but did not practise

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/quest>

<sup>7</sup> Definition taken from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/manifesto>

<sup>8</sup> 27 October 2015: City Recital Hall, Sydney, New South Wales; debate organised by the Ethics Centre, Sydney

<sup>9</sup> 51. The Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution, have power to make laws for the peace, order, and good government of the Commonwealth with respect to: ... (xxvi). The people of any race, other than the aboriginal people in any State, for whom it is necessary to make special laws; 127. In reckoning the numbers of the people of the Commonwealth, or of a State or other part of the Commonwealth, aboriginal natives should not be counted

<sup>10</sup> From the area of the south-west inland region of the state of New South Wales, Australia; the largest nation on the eastern seaboard

<sup>11</sup> From the area of northern New South Wales and Southern Queensland

<sup>12</sup> Aborigines Protection (Amendment) Act 1936

<sup>13</sup> 1939 Child Welfare Act

<sup>14</sup> Speech given on 27 October 2015: City Recital Hall, Sydney, New South Wales, during debate organised by the Ethics Centre, Sydney; posted on 19 January 2016

### References

- Cadzow, J. (2016) Stan Grant's challenge to Australia: How seriously are you going to take me? *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 April. Available online at <https://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/stan-grants-challenge-to-australia-how-seriously-are-you-going-to-take-me-20160406-gnzk7r.html>, accessed on 8 May 2018
- Crawford, A. (2013) Adam Goodes gutted by racial slur but wants AFL fan educated, ABC. Available online at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-05-25/goodes-gutted-but-places-no-blame/4712772>, accessed on 1 May 2018
- Grant, S. (2002) *The tears of strangers*, Australia: HarperCollins Publishers
- Grant, S. (2015) Stan Grant: I can tell you how Adam Goodes feels. Every Indigenous person felt it, *Guardian*, 30 July. Available online at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-05-25/goodes-gutted-but-places-no-blame/4712772>, accessed on 6 March 2018
- Grant, S. (2016a) *Talking to my country*, Australia, HarperCollins Publishers
- Grant, S. (2016b) The Australian dream: Blood, history and becoming, *Quarterly Essay* pp 1-80. Available online at <https://www.quarterlyessay.com.au/essay/2016/11/the-australian-dream>, accessed on 8 May 2018
- Lam, C. and St Guillaume, L. (2018) 'Grant'ing a voice: The representation, activity and agency of Stan Grant, *Celebrity Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1 pp 139-146
- Marr, D. (2017) The white queen: One Nation and the politics of race, *Quarterly Essay*, No. 65 pp 1-102. Available online at <https://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=709038899513881;res=IELLCC>, accessed on 8 May 2018



---

## Sue Joseph

McQuire, A. (2016) The viral rise of Stan Grant: Why diplomacy won't be enough for Our People, *New Matilda*, 26 February. Available online at <https://newmatilda.com/2016/02/26/the-dizzying-rise-of-stan-grant-why-diplomacy-wont-be-enough-for-our-people/>, accessed on 8 May 2018

National Archives of Australia, *The 1967 referendum – Fact sheet 150*. Available online at: <http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/factsheets/fs150.aspx>, accessed on 10 June 2018

### Note on the Contributor

A journalist in Australia and the UK for eighteen years, Sue Joseph (PhD) began working as an academic, teaching print journalism at the University of Technology Sydney in 1997. As a Senior Lecturer, she now teaches journalism and creative writing, particularly creative nonfiction writing, in both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Her research interests are around sexuality, secrets and confession, framed by the media, ethics and trauma narrative, memoir, reflective professional practice, ethical HDR supervision, nonfiction poetry and Australian creative non-fiction. Her fourth book, *Behind the text: Candid conversations with Australian creative nonfiction writers*, was published in October 2016. She is Reviews Editor and Joint Editor of *Ethical Space: The International Journal of Communication Ethics*.

T. J. Coles

## Liberal mass media and the 'Israel lobby' theory

*Do the mass media, specifically those widely perceived as liberal, support the Israel lobby theory? The Israel lobby theory posits that a small number of wealthy and influential American Jews and Christian Zionists successfully manipulate US foreign and domestic policies in the interests of the Jewish state. The theory also posits that all this is achieved at the expense of the United States. Critics argue that the theory is implicitly anti-Semitic because it reinforces the stereotype of Jews as manipulators of world events. This article uses a comparative paired sample analysis of a total of 54 articles from two mass media organisations widely thought of as liberal (the BBC and The New York Times). It suggests that, contrary to expectation, media perceived as liberal do advocate the Israel lobby theory and in doing so reinforce anti-Semitic stereotypes.*

**Keywords:** anti-Semitism, conspiracy theory, Israel, Israel lobby, US foreign policy

### Introduction

A recurrent theory within United States (US) and European (including British) political discourse posits that the Jewish state of Israel, and the Zionists who support it, successfully use a powerful lobby (broadly defined by commentators as the 'Israel lobby') to shape both US foreign and domestic policies in the interests of the Jewish state. Commentators and analysts who adhere to this theory believe that the aim of the Israel lobby is to assist and realise Israeli interests in the Middle East. The US-British invasion of Iraq in 2003, the frequent threats made by the US against Iran, and the war against Syria are cited by proponents of the Israel lobby theory (ILT) as successful Israeli lobbying.

### A brief history of the Israel lobby theory

ILT dates back to at least the 1980s. Paul Findley, a Republican Representative from Illinois, authored a book based on his negative experiences and the negative experiences of others with the pro-Israel lobby. Findley (2003 [1985]) argues that US policy in the Middle East was shaped in Israel's interests, particularly with regards to rejecting peace with the opposition, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, and more generally in supporting Israel's occupation of Lebanon (1982-2000) and the exportation of US aid to Israel, which, by the early 2000s, totalled several billion dollars per annum (ibid). By the 1980s, Findley argues, the Israel lobby was causing the US government to: a) undermine peace in the region and b) exploit the US taxpayer. The next major book on the lobby was by Edward Tivnan (1987) who argues that its biggest influence was in creating an ideological divide between right-wing elements, both within the US and Israel, and American Jews. The majority of American Jews are moderate when it comes to Israel's foreign policy. The majority do not tend to support the occupation of Palestine and/or Syria. Instead, the majority back a two-state solution, unlike the lobby which is right-wing.

ILT gained traction in the mid-2000s, after the onset of war with Iraq (2003), led by the US. Mearsheimer and Walt (2006a) published a controversial and influential working paper on what they described as 'The lobby'. An edited version of their paper appeared in the *London Review of Books* (2006b). In both pieces, the authors argue that a loose affiliation of individuals and organisations lobby US politicians at the Congressional and Executive level on behalf of Israel. Most of these individuals, the authors claim, are American Jews. Others are American Christian Evangelicals. The major element of the lobby is the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). US politicians twice-rated the Israel lobby as the second most powerful in the US, after the American Association of Retired People. Mearsheimer and Walt (2008) expanded their evidence-based theory into a book (see also Talaykurt 2011). The outcomes of the lobby, according to the authors, are that:

- 1) US 'security' interests are threatened because terrorists cite US support for Israel as justification for anti-US actions while US support for Israel alienates Arab states; and
- 2) the US wastes billions of dollars in aid to Israel.

Mearsheimer and Walt (2008) were criticised for being anti-Semitic by advocating a theory that a powerful Jewish minority pulls the strings of the US government, a claim that critics say mirrors typical anti-Semitic beliefs (Foxman 2007). Bacevich (2008: 794) repudiates the claims made by others of anti-Semitism but accepts the grievances of those making them. The Mearsheimer and Walt (2008) book inspired researchers outside the United States to document the supposed Israel lobby's actions within and against the European Union (Cronin, Marusek and Miller 2016; King 2016).

Keith Peter Kiely (2017) argues against ILT by studying the influence and non-influence of the lobby on US foreign and domestic policy during the Clinton administration (1993-2001). Kiely concludes that the lobby has only a 'seeming influence' which can be attributed to its operatives' abilities to manoeuvre within, and effectively use, 'existing themes' of US foreign policy 'to reproduce, reinforce and amplify representations of subjects and objects in ways which are compatible with their policy preferences' (ibid: 3). US-Israeli interests dovetail, says Kiely, giving the impression of a powerful lobby, but 'a strong argument can be made in favour of Israel's continuing strategic importance' to the US (ibid: 27).

Despite ILT being largely debunked by critics, this article presents evidence to suggest that mass media perceived by many to be liberal do, in fact, support ILT. Although ILT has been 'largely' debunked by critics, the crucial question still remains as to why, of all the nations, does Israel alone receive unprecedented 'aid' and military and diplomatic support, from the USA?

Mainstream media lend support to the theory in at least two ways: 1) content and 2) quantity. It is argued here that the majority of *content* of liberal mass media articles concerning AIPAC (the main organisation within the lobby) emphasise the lobby's successes and adopt nomenclature conducive to ILT. It is also argued here that the *quantity* of liberal mass media articles concerning AIPAC is biased toward ILT by a significant margin. This is perhaps surprising, given liberal mass media's reputation for opposing both anti-Semitism and conspiracy theories. It raises questions about the validity of broad assumptions concerning liberal mass media.

### Anti-Semitism

It is perhaps worth clarifying that belief in the existence and operation of the Israel lobby is

not inherently anti-Semitic. The lobby exists and operates with some success, as is documented in the media analysis sections of this article. However, many, including this author, argue that belief crosses into anti-Semitism with the theory that a small number of Jewish lobbyists successfully shape and dictate US foreign policy on everything from invading Iraq in 2003 to continuing the unprecedented military 'aid' to Israel. This author (Coles forthcoming) and others (Reich 1995: 93-98) argue that US 'aid' to Israel is, in fact, hi-tech investment which benefits US corporations. Allegations of anti-Semitism have been used, and continue to be used, to silence and shame critics of Israel's unlawful foreign policy (Finkelstein 2008).

### Methodology

This paper seeks to determine the level of support given to ILT by mass media widely perceived as liberal. *The New York Times* (NYT) is one of the most popular newspapers in the United States in terms of circulation (Misachi 2017; Statista 2018). It is also considered to be a liberal publication (Grosseclose and Milyo 2005; Naureckas 2018). Liberal in this context means that the newspaper tends to carry stories supportive of government-led democratic processes and human rights. Democratic in this sense means representative democracy and judicial and congressional oversight of executive actions. *The NYT's* perceived liberalism is gauged by measuring its content against that of other publications. The terms 'far-right', 'right-wing', 'liberal', 'left-wing', and 'far-left' are value terms (Piurko, Schwartz, and Davidov 2011; Budge 2003). We can evaluate their meanings via comparative analyses. Assuming we accept the designations of particular media as 'far-right' (e.g., *Breitbart News*, *Spearhead*), 'right-wing' (e.g., *New York Post*, *Daily Mail*), 'left-wing' (e.g., *New Statesman*, *Salon.com*), and 'far-left' (e.g., *thecanary.co*, *Z Magazine*), *The NYT* is generally thought of as a liberal-centrist publication. It does not carry an overtly prejudicial editorial policy in the way that newspapers of the far- and right-wing do. Nor does it have overtly socialistic editorial policies in the way that perceived left and far-left publications do.

The BBC's website is one of the most respected and accessed news websites in the world (SimilarWeb 2018; Ofcom 2017). Like the *NYT*, the BBC and, by implication, its online content, is accused of having a liberal bias (BBC 2007; Aitken 2012), as defined by the same criterion (i.e., comparison) as the *NYT* analysis, noted above.

ILT is based, in part, on the anti-Semitic belief that Jews are an unusually powerful and influential ethnic-religious-cultural group. Anti-Semitism is a form of prejudice. Typically, right-wing and far-right publications are predicated on prejudicial coverage and selection of certain issues (Cushion et al. 2018) biased against minorities, including criminals/terrorists, immigrants, and in coverage of race relations (Newman and Fletcher 2017: 6). Typically, mainstream liberal publications like the BBC and *NYT* denounce prejudice, contrary to the right- and far-right model. Following this logic, we expect the BBC and *NYT* to disavow the ILT. Because prejudice is a predictable outcome of right- and far-right media, we tested the hypothesis that liberal media would be likely to disavow ILT. *BBC News Online* (hereafter BBC) and *NYT* were selected as 'liberal' media. There are fewer references to ILT in the BBC about AIPAC (the most powerful element of the lobby) as there are in the *NYT*. For this reason, our BBC sample was deliberately smaller than our *NYT* sample.

ILT-related articles were sought by typing 'AIPAC' into the search fields of the websites of both media. AIPAC is the most influential part of the lobby, hence its selection as a search term. AIPAC is mentioned in 74 BBC online articles between the years 2001 (earliest mention) and mid-2018 (the latest in this study). AIPAC is mentioned in 385 *NYT* articles between the years 1982 (earliest mentioned) and mid-2018 (latest in this study). Articles counted in our BBC and *NYT* metadata included journalism, op-eds, letters to editors, transcripts of broadcasts, and paid content (e.g., death notices). Public responses to online articles where AIPAC is mentioned only in the public response (e.g., comment sections) to the given article were not included. We randomly<sup>1</sup> sampled 23 BBC online articles featuring the acronym AIPAC. We also randomly sampled 31 *NYT* articles featuring the same acronym.

Three criteria were established to determine the character of each article. Powerful (*P*) is a criterion denoting that the given article portrays AIPAC as having successful influence over US foreign and/or domestic policy on a particular issue. Not Powerful (*NP*) denotes that the given article presents AIPAC as having no or limited power. Neutral (*N*) suggests that the given article either mentions AIPAC in an unrelated and, therefore, irrelevant context or that its reporting on the influence of the lobby was balanced. Criteria were determined by a number of factors. *P* was contingent on:

- 1) adjectives (for example, the word 'powerful' was used frequently and without challenge or counter-evidence in BBC nomenclature to describe AIPAC);
- 2) success in a particular campaign (for example, AIPAC successfully lobbied to limit US arms sales to Jordan and Saudi Arabia in the 1980s);
- 3) political consequences for non-support of Israeli policy (for example, US President Barack Obama was reportedly more rhetorically hawkish when addressing AIPAC, implying that the lobby expects the executive to support war).

*NP* was contingent on:

- 1) adjectives (for example, AIPAC 'failed' in its efforts to achieve x, y, or z);
- 2) lack of success in a particular campaign (for example, AIPAC failed to persuade the Obama administration against pursuing diplomatic solutions to the Iran nuclear issue);
- 3) lack of political consequences for non-support of Israeli policy (for example, there were no consequences for the alleged George W. Bush roadmap plan with Palestine, which AIPAC opposed. The so-called road map was a vague endorsement of a two-state solution. But the reality was that each year at the UN General Assembly the US and Israel blocked the two-state solution).

*N* is contingent on:

- 1) adjectives (for example, a neutral report will either contain an equal number of words such as 'powerful' and 'failed' or not use adjectives when describing AIPAC);
- 2) a mix of successful and unsuccessful campaigning on the part of AIPAC (for example, AIPAC might be described as failing to persuade the Bill Clinton administration to act on a particular policy but succeeding in lobbying Republican members of Congress);
- 3) mixed political consequences for AIPAC lobbying (for example, the Anti-Defamation League sided with AIPAC while a new Jewish-majority lobby (J Street) was formed to moderate AIPAC's influence. J Street, for example, gives a platform to speakers who support BDS, oppose Israel's Jewish exclusivity, object to bombing Iran etc. AIPAC does not).

## Results

BBC ( $n = 23$ )  $P$  15,  $NP$  2,  $N$  6; NYT ( $n = 31$ )  $P$  14,  $NP$  4,  $N$  13. Where  $P$  denotes that the articles suggest the lobby is Powerful,  $NP$  denotes that the articles suggest that the lobby is Not Powerful, and  $N$  denotes that the articles' content on this issue is Neutral. Each denotation adheres to the methodology outlined above.

## Discussion

The results suggest that the supposedly liberal BBC and NYT are biased in favour of ILT, despite outwardly denying or downplaying the significance of the lobby (e.g., via their featuring of book reviews critical of ILT). These results contradict our hypothesis that the majority of liberal media coverage would deny or debunk ILT. This is significant, in part, because ILT is underpinned by the anti-Semitic assumption that small numbers of powerful Jews are able to manipulate successfully the foreign and domestic policies of nation states. In this respect, anti-Semitism in the liberal media considered here is more insidious than anti-Semitism in right- and far-right media because the latter is more overt and less subtle. The apparent subtlety of the implicit anti-Semitism in the BBC's and NYT's AIPAC coverage is potentially worse than the potential, overt anti-Semitism of right-wing mainstream media because the former is harder to detect and may, therefore, influence news consumers unconsciously.

## The BBC

The above results suggest that, perhaps surprisingly, the BBC's tone and content lend more weight to the ILT than do the NYT's and that the BBC's coverage is more implicitly anti-Semitic and conspiracy theory-orientated than that of the NYT.

In 2001, Israeli Prime Minister (PM) Ariel Sharon rhetorically rejected US President George W. Bush's so-called peace plan, which allegedly supported a two-state solution. 'The powerful pro-Israel lobby in Washington, AIPAC, made a thinly-veiled attack on Mr Bush's State Department which it regards as staunchly pro-Arab' (BBC 2001). After the Millennium, the Christian Right, which is traditionally Republican and supports Israel for religious-ideological reasons (i.e., political events in Israel will supposedly initiate the Rapture), began to support AIPAC. The Rapture refers to the belief, primarily among US Christian Evangelicals, that living and dead Christians will ascend to heaven upon Christ's second-coming. Converted Jews will be saved, but the rest will perish. The Christian Right was hitherto hostile towards Israel due to

religiously-motivated anti-Semitism (i.e., Jews being the supposed killers of Christ). The BBC quotes then-editor of *The Forward* (the established Jewish-American magazine), J. J. Goldberg, as saying that 'AIPAC has a lot of influence on [US] foreign policy ... They work hard to ensure that America endorses pretty much Israel's view of the world and the Middle East' (quoted in Sackur 2002). The article includes a tokenistic response from AIPAC (Sackur's paraphrase), that AIPAC 'says its main role is providing information and denies that it puts pressure on politicians to support Israel' (ibid).

The *Newsnight* (2003) article/broadcast report smears Arabs as anti-Semites by highlighting 'their' belief in the supposed conspiracy and, while citing denials by US and British officials of an all-powerful lobby, makes the inference that 'it is received wisdom in much of the Arab world that a so-called Zionist lobby has a stranglehold on American foreign policy'. The article/broadcast report makes an explicit inference that the lobby is influential, claiming that 80 per cent of the Senate received significant amounts of money from the lobby during the 2000 election campaign, implying that it helped the Republican, George W. Bush, to power. After connecting the familial dots of lobbyists and high-level US politicians (e.g., the lobbyist, commentator, and right-wing journalist Norman Podhoretz's family ties to then-George W. Bush's Middle East advisor, Elliott Abrams), the article disingenuously assures readers that there is no conspiracy. The article/broadcast also features an interview with the influential Israel lobbyist, Malcolm Hoenlein. The article does not challenge Hoenlein's statement, that the United Nations and the European Union are 'hostile ... towards Israel' (quoted in *Newsnight* 2003). For these reasons the article is included as  $P$  in our study.

In the mid-2000s, the Bush administration and AIPAC were embroiled in a spy scandal in which it was alleged US citizens had spied for Israel and passed information on to the Israeli state via AIPAC. All parties deny the allegations. Israel denied that a senior US Defense Department official spied for it and AIPAC's Josh Block denied that AIPAC had any involvement (BBC 2004). The article is considered  $N$  here because the spy allegation implies that AIPAC may be working as a foreign spy agency (which it denies) – powerful – but that the efforts were exposed – not powerful. The BBC (2005) describes the lobby as 'powerful' and cites US newspapers (NYT and *Washington Post*) regarding a Federal Bureau of Investigation



finding that two high-levels AIPAC employees were fired for allegedly passing state secrets on to Israel. The article makes explicit references to the lobby's supposed influence over US foreign policy:

The suspected spy, Lawrence Franklin, worked in the office of Douglas Feith – an official who played a key role in planning the Iraq war, along with the Deputy Defense Secretary [sic] at the time, Paul Wolfowitz (ibid).

It continues: 'Aipac was ranked alongside the National Rifle Association as one of the most effective lobby groups in Washington, often playing a pivotal role in US relations with Israel.' The article is tempered with justifications of Israel's actions in supposedly asking for state secrets, namely that 'Israel has regularly warned the US it fears Iran is developing nuclear weapons and could use them to destabilise the region' (ibid).

Despite denials from both US intelligence agencies and UN weapons inspectors that Iran had a covert nuclear weapons programme, the George W. Bush administration was hawkish about forcing Iran to accept heightened UN inspections. AIPAC was said to be supporting Bush's Iran policy, but it was not made clear in the BBC article (Reynolds 2006) as to whether or not AIPAC successfully lobbied for Bush's Iran policy or merely shared the same objective.

The BBC reports that, by 2006, AIPAC had 100,000 members. 'Jewish voters make up less than 3 per cent of the US electorate but they are an important voting block [sic]. Historically the majority of them have voted for the Democratic Party' (Miles 2006). The BBC also reports:

Clearly the pro-Israel lobby in the United States is significantly stronger than in European nations, for example. So it is not surprising that Israel receives significantly more financial assistance from the United States than from any other country (ibid).

The above is a clear example of the BBC portraying AIPAC as *P* and thus of the BBC supporting ILT.

Astier (2007) presents a review of the Mearsheimer and Walt (2008) book. Astier is 'neutral' in the sense of raising questions on both sides of the pro-/anti-lobby argument. However, within that supposed neutrality, Astier tacitly implies that the lack of response from AIPAC to the Mearsheimer and Walt claim is an

admission of its influence: 'Perhaps not surprisingly, Mearsheimer and Walt have unleashed a torrent of criticism – though not from Aipac, which has made no comment' (ibid). The article cites others who call the book dishonest and anti-Semitic. It also notes that mainstream reviews were overwhelmingly negative.

Also in 2007, the BBC returned to the earlier spy allegations. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was compelled to answer questions about the 'two defendants in the case [who] are former lobbyists for the influential [AIPAC]'. The implication is that AIPAC is powerful (Coomarasamy 2007). Ghattas's (2008) unusually prevalent use of adjectives gives the impression of a wealthy and, by implication, influential lobby: 'dramatic music'; 'lavish praise'; 'hundreds of pro-Israel lobbyists'. The article assumes that either then-US presidential candidate Barack Obama was on Israel's side or that Obama was not going far enough to appease Israel, at least by the desired standards of the allegedly more pro-Israel Republicans. The tacit question is, can Obama please the Israel lobby? By implication, AIPAC is powerful if it demands the support of a US President. As a measure of candidate Obama's supposed anti-Israeli policies, he said that, as President, 'he would talk to the leader of Iran', meaning that he would pursue diplomacy. Obama, according to the article, had to rectify this in order to appease the lobby. '[I]t's in the US that Mr Obama will be looking for votes, and in the Aipac crowd the speech seemed to have gone down well' (ibid).

As it became increasingly apparent that Obama was more popular among Americans than his Republican rival John McCain, more coverage was dedicated to the question of how much support Obama would give to Israel. The BBC's Jeremy Bowen writes:

In one of his first acts after he secured the Democratic nomination for president of the US, Senator Barack Obama told Aipac, America's most powerful pro-Israel lobby, that he would do everything in his power to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon (Bowen 2008).

With Obama as President, tensions between the US and Israel were highlighted when Israeli PM Netanyahu rejected Obama's alleged support for the two-state solution and failed to come to the United States in person. Despite apparently snubbing Obama, Netanyahu addressed AIPAC via satellite link. The implication was that, support from the US executive or not, Israeli politicians network with powerful

US advocacy groups (BBC 2009). In his address to AIPAC, Obama ignored the lobby's concerns and expressed his rhetorical support for a two-state solution. Obama was reported as giving AIPAC 'tough love' (Ghattas 2009). The former is an example of the BBC portraying AIPAC as *P* and the latter as *NP*.

By 2010, it was clear that personal antipathies between top-level US and Israeli representatives were causing friction, despite so-called facts on the ground (e.g., colonies built by Israel in occupied Palestine, US arms sales before, during, and after Israeli war crimes,<sup>2</sup> guaranteed annual 'aid', etc.) continued as normal; a crucial point omitted by the BBC. The article reporting on the tensions quoted AIPAC as saying that the political situation was 'serious' and a cause for concern. By implication, AIPAC is powerful and influential, otherwise its opinion would not be sought/included by the BBC (Sharp 2010). In the past, George H. W. Bush's Secretary of State, James Baker, and the then-present US Vice President, Joe Biden, failed to stop Israeli expansion in the occupied territories. AIPAC had advised politicians to support Israeli policy no matter what (BBC Radio 4 2010). In 2010, it was US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's turn to speak to AIPAC, 'the powerful pro-Israel lobby here in Washington. But AIPAC was quick to take umbrage with the Obama administration', says the BBC, 'warning it not to make public demands of Israel' (ibid). In the same year, Netanyahu informed Clinton that Israel would reject UN demands to cease colony building. The BBC again refers to AIPAC, to which Netanyahu made the remarks, as 'the influential pro-Israel group' (BBC 2010a). Although colony construction 'undermines mutual trust' between the US and Israel, said Clinton to AIPAC, guaranteeing 'Israel's security is more than a policy position for me. It is a personal commitment that will never waver' (quoted in BBC 2010b).

In an *N* report, the BBC says that, speaking to AIPAC, 'Mr Obama said the shape of the border should be subject to discussions between Israel and the Palestinians' (BBC 2011). Another *N* article published two years later said that AIPAC 'kept up the pressure recently by sending a letter to President Barack Obama, urging him to step up sanctions on Iran' (Ardalan 2013). A year later, US Secretary of State John Kerry warned against 'apartheid' in the occupied Palestinian territories under Israeli occupation. AIPAC 'condemned his comments as "deeply troubling"' (BBC 2014). AIPAC is quoted as saying: 'Any suggestion that Israel is, or is at risk of

becoming, an apartheid state is offensive and inappropriate.' The implication is that AIPAC's view is important enough to merit inclusion in the BBC's reporting on these matters (quoted in ibid). In a repeat of the events of 2009, Netanyahu cancelled a trip to the US and arranged to speak to AIPAC via satellite. The BBC's reporting was *N* (BBC 2016). In same year, the BBC reported that:

At his Aipac speech, Mr Trump recited a litany of what can only be considered mainstream Republican views on the Mid-East, however. He said he wants to 'dismantle' what he termed a disastrous nuclear weapons deal with Iran (Zurcher 2016).

In 2011, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) granted Palestine full membership, signalling its willingness to recognise Palestine as a sovereign state. The US and Israel withdrew from UNESCO in 2017 because it voted to recognise the importance of Jerusalem's Old City, which is Palestinian territory. AIPAC attendees 'applauded' after Israel's withdrawal (Marcus 2017), stating that for years, UNESCO had 'betrayed its original laudatory mission'. AIPAC also said that UNESCO had 'chosen instead to unfairly target the Middle East's lone democracy, Israel' (quoted in ibid).

### *The New York Times*

As noted in the results above, the *NYT* is less supportive of *ILT* than the BBC, but nevertheless tacitly advocates the theory via the quantity of its *N* and *P* coverage compared with the quantity of its *NP* coverage. In the first *NYT* article to mention AIPAC, Bernard Gwertzman (1982) says that AIPAC:

... is most active in trying to push through Congress measures providing for military and economic aid to Israel and seeking to limit the scope of military sales to Arab states like Saudi Arabia.

The article notes that AIPAC sided with US President Ronald Reagan's Middle East initiative despite being rejected by Israeli PM Menachem Begin. The article cautions that the lobby had 31,000 members and seldom deviates from official Israeli policy. How then can the lobby claim not to speak for Israeli interests? When asked about the discrepancy on this issue, AIPAC's executive director, Thomas A. Dine, said of AIPAC: 'We are an American organization, concerned with American foreign policy' (quoted in ibid). Coverage is mixed. Gwertzman (1984a)

reported that AIPAC expressed opposition to US President Ronald Reagan's proposed sale of Stinger missiles to Jordan and Saudi Arabia. It was later reported (Gwertzman 1984b) that Reagan limited the missile sales to Israel's enemies Jordan and Saudi Arabia (AIPAC as P).

By 1984, AIPAC's membership had grown to 50,000. It is 'consider[ed] the most effective foreign policy lobbying group in the capitol' (Gailey 1984). The cancellation (or limitation) of the Stinger missile sales to Israel's enemies turned out to be part of a trade-off between AIPAC and the Reagan administration. In exchange for Reagan limiting the sales of the weapons to Israel's enemies, AIPAC dropped its support for a bill requiring the American Embassy to move from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem (AIPAC as M). The article notes that previously AIPAC failed to block US AWACS radar systems sales to Saudi Arabia (ibid.). A couple of years later, AIPAC abandoned its efforts to stop the \$1bn arms deal with Saudi Arabia (NP). Would AIPAC spend its resources opposing the deal or focus its support for the bigger \$3bn aid package to Israel? The factual results and tone of the reporting (N) suggest mixed influence (Molotsky and Weaver 1986). Goodman (1987) reviews Tivnan's book, *The lobby* (1987):

The lobby's main objective since its beginnings in the early 1950s has been to assure Israel of financial assistance; today, Washington gives that small country about \$3 billion a year. The lobby's power rests largely on the readiness of American Jews to donate generously to politicians of both parties deemed to be friends of Israel and to withhold donations from those who are not friendly enough.

Shipler (1987) describes AIPAC as 'a major force in shaping United States policy in the Middle East'. Shipler also cites successful cases of anti-Arab arms lobbying by AIPAC. The author does not read between the lines, that US investment in Israel ('aid') is circuitously profitable. In the final paragraphs, the author explains the likely real reason for US 'aid' to Israel, though as noted he does not make it explicit:

In 1985, the two countries established a free trade zone, which envisions the phasing out of all tariffs and quotas. In 1986, the Administration signed an agreement on Israel's participation in research on a space-based missile defense system. Only Britain, West Germany and Italy have similar agreements. (ibid)

Only after Israel signed the 'free trade' agreement with the US did the lobby become influential. Again, the author (ibid) does not read between the lines: that the lobby is an indirect campaigning body for US investment in US-owned private industry under the cover of foreign aid. Pear (1988) does not build on the important information revealed, but under-appreciated, by Shipler (1987). Instead, Pear (1988) describes AIPAC as 'the chief lobby for Israel on Capitol Hill' and cites a letter produced by three major Jewish organisations which considered AIPAC too right-wing. These organisations opposed AIPAC's efforts to cancel arms sales to Kuwait and sabotage the Palestinian government, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation and its mission at the United Nations. AIPAC 'successfully lobbied Congress to continue providing military and economic aid to Israel, even in times of fiscal austerity' (ibid).

By the early-1990s, tensions were mounting at the political level between the new US administration, that of George H. W. Bush, and the Israeli government of PM Yitzhak Shamir. Friedman (1991) cites a 'lack of communication between Shamir and Bush'. Congress backed down over loan guarantees to Israel, which the administration supposedly opposed because of Israel's overt, continued colonisation of the occupied Palestinian territories. Friedman notes that colonies ('settlements') were built later, giving the article a neutral flavour. A scandal hit AIPAC a year later, when its president, David Steiner, was exposed on tape boasting about how he fabricated his level of influence over the new US President, Bill Clinton. Steiner admitted lying about his supposed 'deal' with the Defense Secretary, James Baker, that resulted in a \$1bn aid package for Israel. AIPAC 'was once considered the most powerful lobby in Washington', writes Friedman (1992). In the same year, AIPAC told Israel that it should not expect loan guarantees from the US if it continued to build colonies in the occupied Palestinian territories, again indicative of its weakness (NP) at the time (Cowell 1992).

In 1995, President Clinton had to decide whether or not to increase aid to Israel. The Republicans were against the aid increase for reasons of nationalism, i.e., saving treasure for domestic policies. AIPAC's job was to pressure 'some of those Democrats to vote for [the increase]', said Gerald B. H. Solomon, a Republican from New York (quoted in Seelye 1995). In 1996, AIPAC's weakness was further highlighted when the US Federal Election Commission declared that AIPAC was not a lobby. But the same article

notes the insidious supposed power of the lobby in that it fought the charge and won by 8 to 2 in the court of appeals (Lewis 1996). In 1998, 81 Senators and 150 Representatives signed a letter demanding that President Clinton not publicly confront Israel over its obfuscation of the peace talks with Palestine. AIPAC was involved, trying to find endorsements from other prominent Jewish lobbies (notably the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations) but was criticised by such groups for being too right-wing (Erlanger 1998).

Eichenwald (2001) makes the erroneous assumption that the George W. Bush administration wanted peace between Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. In response to Bush's alleged peace efforts, 50 prominent American Jews, including AIPAC members, signalled their concerns about Bush's supposed anti-Israeli stance. Gorenberg (2002) says that over the previous decades, the Israel lobby (mainly AIPAC) influenced the Christian right in the US. The mainly-Jewish Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith finally endorsed AIPAC, which it hitherto considered too right-wing. Tyler (2002) wrote that, following alleged US-Arab state efforts to work towards peace between Israel and Palestine, 70 per cent of Americans wanted President Bush to side with neither Israel nor Palestine but to be neutral. The 9/11 attacks of 2001 'shored up the instinct for neutrality' among Americans, says Tyler. However, sympathy for Israel was expressed by an additional 10 per cent of Americans after 9/11, while sympathy for Palestinians dropped 11 per cent. Tyler cites the 'evangelical right' as the new supporters of Israeli interests in the US. Until the 'war on terror', the US Christian evangelical right had been an anti-Semitic grouping (ibid). Tyler paraphrased AIPAC director Howard Kohr: 'Aipac's 55,000 members and a small army of lobbyists in Congress went to full mobilization last fall [2001] to merge the Israeli and American view of the war on terror' (ibid).

As an example of AIPAC's lack of power, Weisman (2003) reported that Secretary of State Colin Powell disturbed AIPAC by defending Bush's so-called peace plan and called on Israel to stop building colonies ('settlements') in the occupied Palestinian territories. Johnston and Sanger (2004) report on the FBI inquiry into AIPAC and alleged spying for Israel (noted above). They do so in neutral tones. Rieff (2007) says that in their early presidential campaigning, the Democrats were rhetorically anti-war. But as the election of 2008 approached, their rhetorical stance had shifted to typical hawkish-

ness. One example cited is Obama's address to AIPAC, which implies that the lobby is powerful in that it demands prospective leaders take a hawkish stance on foreign policy (ibid).

Lewis (2008) reported on the formation of a new, predominantly Jewish lobby, J. Street, which was reportedly created in order to counter AIPAC's supposed influence and reflexive pro-Israel policies. By implication, AIPAC was powerful enough to merit a counter-lobby. In an address to AIPAC as Presidential candidate, Barack Obama assured the lobby that Jerusalem should be the Israeli capital and that as President, he would do 'everything' to stop Iran from developing a nuclear weapon (Broder and Powell 2008). In 2009, it was reported that the case against the alleged spies, Steven J. Rosen and Keith Weissman, was dropped at the prosecutors' request. Lewis and Johnston (2009) note that: 'The decision to drop the case comes just days before Aipac is scheduled to begin its annual policy conference in Washington', implying that the lobby was influential in terminating the case.

In 2010, it was reported in *Letters* (NYT 2010) that not all American Jews supported Israeli policy. '[T]he rightist views of some in the North American Jewry and Jewish organizations like the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (Aipac) only add fuel to the fire.' The letter printed in the newspaper implied that AIPAC was not only influential but damaging to American Jews, given its right-wing position. A year later, with tensions mounting between the Israeli and US administrations, it was reported that President Obama informed AIPAC and other prominent, pro-Israeli lobbies, that 'permanent occupation' by Israel of the Palestinian territories was not consistent with Israel's supposed democratic principles. As a result of this supposed harshness toward Israel on the part of Obama's Democrats, a 'Republican-dominated Congress awaits [Israeli PM Benjamin] Netanyahu with open arms. So does the powerful pro-Israel lobby, Aipac' (Cohen 2011). The report suggests that the power of the lobby is mixed (N), that it is influential among Republicans who share the lobby's interests, but perhaps not among trenchant Democrats.

In 2012, Obama warned Israeli PM Netanyahu not to attack Iran. Obama told AIPAC that diplomacy was working with respect to Iran, indicating AIPAC's lack of influence over US policy (NP). A year later, AIPAC lobbied in support of Obama's plan to attack Israel's enemy Syria, apparently on behalf of Israel; i.e.,



'Netanyahu's government strongly supports an American strike to punish President Bashar al-Assad' (Rudoren and Kershner 2013). The article is neutral on the power of the lobby because it is not clear whether the lobby influenced the US decision to attack Syria or whether the attack planned by the US coincided with Israeli interests. On occasion, when reporting AIPAC's failures, such as getting Obama to pursue militarism over diplomacy with Iran, *The NYT* cites the strength of the lobby. With the exception of the group's failure to stop Reagan's exportation of AWACS radar systems to Saudi Arabia, AIPAC 'has run up an impressive record of legislative victories in its quest to rally American support for Israel' (Landler 2014).

In 2015, AIPAC failed to kill the Iran 'deal' (i.e., that Iran would cease uranium enrichment). How will AIPAC react to its failure to pressure Obama into using force against Iran? The question is left open and suggests neutrality (Hirschfeld Davis 2015). Giacomo (2016) claims that Israel's Operation Protective Edge (2014) was a 'counter attack' against rockets coming into Israel from Gaza. It further notes that US Democratic Presidential candidate, Bernie Sanders, did not attend the AIPAC 2016 meeting, unlike his Democratic rival Hillary Clinton. It is not clear from that article what influence the lobby has (N). Finally, Israeli PM Netanyahu alienated American's non-Orthodox Jews (i.e., the majority of American Jews) by working more closely with Israel's Orthodox elite. Netanyahu backed down on a Bill to give more power to Orthodox Jews in Israel after lobbying from AIPAC, suggesting N (Friedman 2017).

## Conclusion

This paper has presented evidence to suggest that at least two mainstream news organisations widely perceived to be 'liberal' are biased towards the Israel lobby theory of international relations. The BBC is clearly pro-ILT, with 15 out of 23 articles randomly sampled here suggesting that the lobby influences US policy. Only two BBC articles sampled suggest that the lobby is not influential while six are neutral. The *NYT* is less pro-ILT than the BBC but is biased toward the theory, with 14 out of 31 articles suggesting that the lobby influences US policy, compared to four that suggest that the lobby is not influential and 13 which are neutral.

These results raise questions about the validity of mainstream, liberal media reporting on issues of US-Israeli relations. While being generally supportive of Israel, these institutions support underlying and erroneous assumptions

about the power of the Jewish state, which others have deemed at best conspiracy theory and at worst anti-Semitic.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Samples were selected by the author from dates, as opposed to authors' names or headline text

<sup>2</sup> Israel has unlawfully occupied the West Bank and Gaza (as well as the Syrian Golan Heights) since 1967 militarily, meaning that everything Israel does in those territories is a war crime, especially during so-called 'incursions' which it has no right to conduct whilst remaining an occupying power

## References

- Aitken, Robin (2012) *Can we still trust the BBC?*, London, Bloomsbury Continuum
- Ardalan, Siavash (2013) Can Hassan Rouhani break Iran nuclear impasse?, BBC Persia, 21 July. Available online at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-23354420>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Astier, Henri (2007) US storm over book on Israel lobby, *BBC News Online*, 22 November. Available online at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/7104030.stm>, accessed on 13 June 2018
- Bacevich, Andrew J. (2008) John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, the Israel lobby and U. S. foreign policy *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol., 19, No. 4 pp 787-795
- BBC (n. d.) *BBC's response to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport's green paper: Charter review*, London, BBC, Available online at [http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/insidethebbc/reports/pdf/bbc\\_charter\\_review\\_audiences\\_appendix.pdf](http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/insidethebbc/reports/pdf/bbc_charter_review_audiences_appendix.pdf), accessed on 5 August 2018
- BBC (2001) Analysis: Sharon's remarks raise the stakes, 5 October. Available online at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/1581618.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/1581618.stm), accessed on 5 August 2018
- BBC (2004) Israel denies US spy allegation, 28 August. Available online at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/3607060.stm>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- BBC (2005) Israel lobby in US 'fires staff', 21 April. Available online at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/4468585.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4468585.stm), accessed on 13 June 2018
- BBC (2007) *From seesaw to wagon wheel: Safeguarding impartiality in the 21st century*, London, BBC. Available online at [http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/review\\_report\\_research/impartiality\\_21century/report.pdf](http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/review_report_research/impartiality_21century/report.pdf), accessed 11 August 2018
- BBC (2009) Israel PM moots 'fresh' approach, 5 May. Available online at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/8033827.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/8033827.stm), accessed on 5 August 2018
- BBC (2010a) Netanyahu says 'no concession' on Jewish settlements, 21 March. Available online at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/8579273.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/8579273.stm), accessed on 5 August 2018
- BBC (2010b) Hillary Clinton warns Israel faces 'difficult' choices, 22 March. Available online at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/8579766.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/8579766.stm), accessed on 5 August 2018
- BBC (2011) Obama seeks to calm Israel row over 1967 'border', 22 May. Available online at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-13493372>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- BBC (2014) Kerry warns of 'apartheid' without Middle East peace, 2 April. Available online at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-27195254>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- BBC (2016) Israel's Netanyahu rejects US 'surprise' at Obama talks cancellation, 8 March. Available online at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-35752967>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- BBC Radio 4 (2010) History lessons for US policy on Israel?, 20 March. Available online at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/from\\_our\\_own\\_correspondent/8577691.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/8577691.stm), accessed on 5 August 2018



- Bowen, Jeremy (2008) Analysis: Growing talk of Iran attack, *BBC News Online*, 6 June. Available online at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/7439431.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7439431.stm), accessed on 5 August 2018
- Broder, John and Powell, Michael (2008) Obama offers assurances at pro-Israel meeting, *New York Times*, 5 June. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/05/us/politics/05aipac.html>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Budge, Ian (2003) The standard right-left scale, *The Manifesto Project*, Essex, Essex
- University. Available online at [https://manifestoproject.wzb.eu/download/papers/budge\\_right-left-scale.pdf](https://manifestoproject.wzb.eu/download/papers/budge_right-left-scale.pdf), accessed on 5 August 2018
- Cohen, Roger (2010) Obama draws line, *New York Times*, 20 May. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/21/opinion/21iht-edcohen21.html>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Coles, T. J. (forthcoming) *Privatized planet: 'Free trade' as a weapon against healthcare, democracy and the environment*, Oxford, New Internationalist
- Coomarasamy, James (2007) Rice subpoenaed in spying trial, *BBC News Online*, 2 November. Available online at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/7076153.stm>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Cowell, Alan (1992) Israel warned again on loans, *New York Times*, 29 January. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/01/29/world/israel-warned-again-on-loans.html>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Cronin, David, Marusek, Sarah and Miller, David (2016) The Israel lobby and the European Union, *Spinwatch*, Glasgow. Available online at [http://europaforum.org.uk/en/uploads/upload\\_center/kH1JNt1qm1q.pdf](http://europaforum.org.uk/en/uploads/upload_center/kH1JNt1qm1q.pdf), accessed on 5 August 2018
- Cushion, Stephen, Kilby, Allaina, Thomas, Richard, Morani, Marina and Sambrook, Richard (2018) Newspapers, impartiality and television news, *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2 pp 162-181
- Eichenwald, Kurt (2001) U. S. Jews split on Washington's shift on Palestinian state, *New York Times*, 5 October. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/10/05/world/us-jews-split-on-washington-s-shift-on-palestinian-state.html>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Erlanger, Steven (1998) Jewish groups go to Capitol squabbling among themselves, *New York Times*, 7 April. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/04/07/world/jewish-groups-go-to-capitol-squabbling-among-themselves.html>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Findley, Paul (2003 [1985]) *They dare speak out! People and institutions confront Israel's lobby*, Chicago, Chicago Review Press, fourth edition
- Foxman, Abraham H. (2007) *The deadliest lies: The Israel lobby and the myth of Jewish control*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan
- Friedman, Thomas L. (2017) Israel to American Jews: You just don't matter, *New York Times*, 12 July. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/12/opinion/israel-american-jews-benjamin-netanyahu.html>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Friedman, Thomas L. (1991) Failing to communicate; Dispute over settlements and loan deal is symptom of a deeper U.S.-Israel strain, *New York Times*, 25 September. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/09/25/world/failing-communicate-dispute-over-settlements-loan-deal-symptom-deeper-us-israel.html>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Friedman, Thomas L. (1992) Pro-Israel lobby's leader quits over boasts, *New York Times*, 4 November. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/11/04/world/pro-israel-lobby-s-leader-quits-over-boasts.html>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Gailey, Phil (1984) Pro-Israel lobby's key power, *New York Times*, 24 March. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/03/24/us/pro-israel-lobby-s-low-key-power.html>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Ghattas, Kim (2008) Obama seeks to soothe pro-Israel lobby, *BBC News Online*, 5 June. Available online at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/7437060.stm>, accessed on 13 June 2018
- Ghattas, Kim (2009) Israeli PM faces tough talks in US, *BBC News Online*, 18 May. Available online at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/8054906.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/8054906.stm), accessed on 5 August 2018
- Giacomo, Carol (2016) Straight talk from Bernie Sanders on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, *New York Times*, 22 March. Available online at <https://takingnote.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/03/22/straight-talk-from-bernie-sanders-on-the-israeli-palestinian-conflict/>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Goodman, Walter (1987) Review: *The lobby*, *New York Times*, 30 April. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/04/30/books/books-of-the-times-546587.html>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Gorenberg, Gershom (2002) The year in ideas; Christian-right Zionism, *New York Times*, 15 December. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/15/magazine/the-year-in-ideas-christian-right-zionism.html>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Groseclose, Tim and Milyo, Jeffrey (2005) A measure of media bias, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 120, No. 4 pp 1191-1237
- Gwertzman, Bernard (1982) Leading pro-Israeli lobbyist sees a lot of value in Reagan's plan, *New York Times*, 7 September. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/09/07/world/leading-pro-israeli-lobbyist-sees-a-lot-of-value-in-reagan-s-plan.html>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Gwertzman, Bernard (1984a) Move begins in Congress to block arms sale to Jordan and Saudis, *New York Times*, 10 March. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/03/10/world/move-begins-in-congress-to-block-arms-sale-to-jordan-and-saudis.html>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Gwertzman, Bernard (1984b) Aides say Reagan is forced to limit missiles for Saudis, *New York Times*, 26 June. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/05/26/world/aides-say-reagan-is-forced-to-limit-missiles-for-saudis.html>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Hirschfeld Davis, Julie (2015) Influential pro-Israel group suffers stinging political defeat, *New York Times*, 10 September. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/11/world/influential-pro-israel-group-suffers-stinging-political-defeat.html>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Johnston, David and Sanger, David E. (2004) Pro-Israel lobby said to have been inquiry target, *New York Times*, 3 September. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/09/03/politics/proisrael-lobby-said-to-have-been-inquiry-target.html>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Kiely, Keith Peter (2017) *U. S. foreign policy discourse and the Israel lobby: The Clinton administration and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan
- King, Elvira (2016) *The pro-Israel lobby in Europe: The politics of religion and Christian Zionism in the European Union*, London, I. B. Tauris
- Landler, Mark (2012) Obama presses Netanyahu to resist strikes on Iran, *New York Times*, 5 March. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/06/world/middleeast/obama-cites-window-for-diplomacy-on-iran-bomb.html>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Landler, Mark (2014) Potent pro-Israel group finds its momentum blunted, *New York Times*, 4 February. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/04/world/middleeast/potent-pro-israel-group-finds-its-momentum-blunted.html>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Lewis, Neil A. (1996) Court again casts doubt on status of Israeli lobby, *New York Times*, 10 December. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/12/10/us/court-again-casts-doubt-on-status-of-israeli-lobby.html>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Lewis, Neil A. (2008) U.S. Jews create new lobby to temper Israel policy, *New York Times*, 25 April. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/25/washington/25lobby.html>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Lewis, Neil A. and Johnston, David (2009) U. S. to drop spy case against pro-Israel lobbyists, *New York Times*, 1 May. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/02/us/politics/02aipac.html>, accessed on 11 August 2018

- Marcus, Jonathan (2017) Why does Trump dislike Unesco?, *BBC News Online*, 12 October. Available online at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-41598991>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Mearsheimer, John J. and Walt, Stephen M. (2006a) *The Israel lobby and U.S. foreign policy*, Working Paper RWP06-011, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University
- Mearsheimer, John J. and Walt, Stephen M. (2006b) The Israel lobby, *London Review of Books*, Vol. 28, No. 6. Available online at <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n06/john-mearsheimer/the-israel-lobby>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Mearsheimer, John J. and Walt, Stephen M. (2008) *The Israel lobby and US foreign policy*, London, Penguin
- Miles, Nick (2006) Pro-Israel pressure strong in US, *BBC News Online*, 11 August. Available online at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/5258240.stm>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Misachi, John (2017) The 10 most popular daily newspapers in the United States *World Atlas*, 1 August. Available online at <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-10-most-popular-daily-newspapers-in-the-united-states.html>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Molotsky, Irvin and Weaver, Warren (1986) Arms and hard choices, *New York Times*, 25 March. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/1986/03/25/us/briefing-arms-and-hard-choices.html>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Naureckas, Jim (2018) NYT: Don't be progressive, be a 'liberal', Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, 19 April. Available online at <https://fair.org/home/nyt-dont-be-progressive-be-a-liberal/>, accessed on 11 August 2018
- Newman, Nic and Fletcher, Richard (2017) *Bias, bullshit and lies: Audience perspectives on low trust in the media*, London, Oxford, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism and University of Oxford. Available online at <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2017-11/Nic%20Newman%20and%20Richard%20Fletcher%20-%20Bias%2C%20Bullshit%20and%20Lies%20-%20Report.pdf>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Newsnight* (2003) Pro-Israel lobby on Capitol Hill, *BBC News Online*, 8 May. Available online at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/newsnight/3010371.stm>, accessed on 13 June 2018
- New York Times (International Herald Tribune)* (2010) Letters: Criticizing Israel, 13 December. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/14/opinion/14iht-edletters14.html>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Ofcom (2017) *Ofcom BBC distinctiveness research*, London. Available online at [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0026/99521/bbc-distinctiveness-research-executive-summary.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0026/99521/bbc-distinctiveness-research-executive-summary.pdf), accessed on 5 August 2018
- Panorama* (2010) Your comments, *BBC Online*, 19 January. Available online at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/panorama/hi/front\\_page/newsid\\_8468000/8468513.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/panorama/hi/front_page/newsid_8468000/8468513.stm), accessed on 18 June 2018
- Pear, Robert (1988) Leaders of 3 U.S. Jewish groups take issue with pro-Israel lobby, *New York Times*, 18 October. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/10/18/world/leaders-of-3-us-jewish-groups-take-issue-with-pro-israel-lobby.html>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Piurko, Yuval, Schwartz, Shalom H. and Davidov, Eldad (2011) Basic personal values and the meaning of left-right political orientations in 20 countries, *Political Psychology*, Vol. 32, No. 4 pp 537-561
- Reich, Bernard (1995) *Securing the covenant: United States-Israel relations after the cold war*, New York, Praeger
- Reynolds, Paul (2006) Iran faces diplomatic escalator, *BBC News Online*, 5 March. Available online at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/4777094.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4777094.stm), accessed on 5 August 2018
- Rieff, David (2007) But who's against the next war?, *New York Times Magazine*, 25 March. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/25/magazine/25WWLnlde.t.html>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Rudoren, Jodi and Kershner, Isabel (2013) Lobbying group for Israel to press Congress on Syria, *New York Times*, 9 September. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/10/world/middleeast/lobbying-group-for-israel-to-press-congress-on-syria.html>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Sackur, Stephen (2002) Analysis: America's new Christian Zionists, *BBC News Online*, 7 May. Available online at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/1969542.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/1969542.stm), accessed on 5 August 2018
- Seelye, Katherine Q. (1995) House foes talking on foreign aid bill, *New York Times*, 26 May. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/05/26/world/house-foes-talking-on-foreign-aid-bill.html>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Sharp, Heather (2010) Israel and the US: A battered friendship, *BBC News Online*, 15 March. Available online at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/8568692.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/8568692.stm), accessed on 5 August 2018
- Shipler, David K. (1987) On Middle East policy, a major influence, *New York Times*, 7 June. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/07/06/world/on-middle-east-policy-a-major-influence.html>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- SimilarWeb (2018) *bbc.co.uk*, June. Available online at <https://www.similarweb.com/website/bbc.co.uk>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Statista (2018) Average paid and verified weekday circulation of *The New York Times* from 2000 to 2017 (in 1,000 copies). Available online at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/273503/average-paid-weekday-circulation-of-the-new-york-times/>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Talaykurt, Mehmet (2011) *Position of the Israel lobby in the United States' political system: Influences of the Israel lobby on U.S. foreign and domestic policy*, Saarbrücken, Lambert Academic Publishing
- Tivnan, Edward (1987) *The lobby: Jewish political power and American foreign policy*, New York, Simon and Schuster
- Tyler, Patrick E. (2002) Mideast turmoil: Opinion shock of Sept. 11 is making Americans more supportive of Israel, polls suggest, *New York Times*, 13 May. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/05/13/world/mideast-turmoil-opinions-shock-sept-11-making-americans-more-supportive-israel.html>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Weisman, Steven R. (2003) A nation at war: The Secretary of State; As Palestinian violence subsides, Israel must stop building settlements, Powell says, *New York Times*, 31 March. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/31/world/nation-war-secretary-state-palestinian-violence-subsides-israel-must-stop.html>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Zurcher, Anthony (2016) Trump reveals unorthodox foreign policy views, *BBC News Online*, 22 March. Available online at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election-us-2016-35867961>, accessed on 5 August 2018
- Finkelstein, Norman G. (2008) *Beyond chutzpah: On the misuse of anti-Semitism and the abuse of history*, London and New York, Verso.

## Note on the Contributor

T. J. Coles is a postdoctoral researcher at Plymouth University's Cognition Institute, working on issues relating to blindness and visual impairment. His political writings have appeared in academic journals including *Peace Review* and in mainstream media, including *Newsweek*. Books include *Human wrongs* (iff Books), *Real fake news* (Red Pill Press) and *Manufacturing terrorism* (Clairview Books, forthcoming).

## Media trust and use among urban news consumers in Brazil

*Around the world, polls show a crisis in trust in civic institutions, the media foremost among them. This study explores how audiences connect ethical precepts to media credibility and trust through research in Brazil, South America's largest democracy. Original focus group data are analysed in the context of exclusive questionnaire data from the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism to understand why news consumers trust – or do not trust – their media, and the implications of those perceptions.*

**Keywords:** credibility, diversity, focus groups, media use, transparency, trust

Amid increasingly partisan discourse and within a fragmented news environment plagued by charges of 'fake news', concern about trust in the media has jumped from industry and academic circles to mainstream discourse. All over the world, people report declining levels of trust in a variety of civic entities but particularly in the media, now the least-trusted institution of them all (Edelman 2018).

Equally well-documented are declines in the use of traditional media formats and the revenue they generate. Contemporary news consumers turn to digital platforms far more regularly than to print, and social media and other digital-only providers make up a large portion of the typical news diet. Such massive changes in news consumption habits over recent years have undermined the business model that long sustained traditional news outlets, leaving many scrambling to survive.

However, relatively little current research has explored the relationship between these two declines, in trust and in usage, particularly out-

side the United States and Western Europe. This study focuses on Brazil, one of the world's largest democracies and South America's biggest media market (Carro 2016a). Building on data provided exclusively to the authors by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at Oxford University, we also draw on original focus group data gathered in Rio de Janeiro State to understand why urban Brazilians trust – or do not trust – the media, the normative concepts they invoke, and the implications of those perceptions for their consumption patterns.

### Media trust and transparency

Abundant documentation indicates trust in the media is low and falling, though there is little agreement on exactly what people mean when they say they do not trust the media. 'Distrust happens when the news fails to address the world as the public recognises it,' suggest Coleman and his colleagues (2009: 2). Kohring and Matthes (2007) propose four dimensions of trust assessment: trust in the selection of reported topics, in the selection of information included in those reports, in the way journalists have evaluated that information, and in the accuracy of their account. More broadly, Tsfaty and Cappella (2003) define trust as a consequential phenomenon: trust leads to a greater likelihood of cooperative engagement, while mistrust reduces that likelihood.

A number of factors influence perceptions of trustworthiness. Lee (2010) found that trust in the news media was affected by audience members' political ideology, trust in government institutions and fellow citizens, and economic views. Others highlight media exposure and media reliance, as well as individual traits such as news consumption habits and even religious beliefs (Golan 2010). Individual and interpersonal factors seem especially important in assessing media bias (Eveland and Shah 2003); knowledge about media ownership also appears to affect credibility judgements (Ashley, Poepsel and Willis 2010). Attempts by news organisations to emphasise their own objectivity, particularly in branding themselves as impartial watchdogs of government, have left them open to substantive challenges by both scholars and citizens (Peters and Broersma 2013).

Scholarly work related to media trust has also drawn connections with perceptions of credibility and, conversely, of bias. Credibility has commonly been used as a benchmark of trust: unsurprisingly, those who believe the media to be credible seem more likely to rely on the

media than those who do not (Wanta and Hu 1994), though the relationship is not necessarily a strong one (Kouisis 2001). The advent of the internet spurred comparison of the credibility of information provided online and in legacy outlets (Flanagin and Metzger 2007; Johnson and Kaye 1998). More recent studies have explored the perceived credibility of various online information sources, notably social media (Carr et al. 2014; Johnson and Kaye 2014; Westerman, Spence and van der Heide 2014) as well as other platforms and formats (Clerwell 2014; Neuberger 2014).

The ethical notion of transparency, which has gained traction in the digital age (Karlsson 2011), is similarly fuzzy, encompassing motives for covering particular information in particular ways on the one hand, and processes of selecting and gathering information on the other (Craft and Heim 2009). Scholars have defined it variously as involving 'truthful disclosure before and during an act as well as after it has been taken' (Singer 2007: 84) and as a demonstration of 'the processes by which facts, situations, events, and opinions are sorted, sifted, made sense of, and presented' (Ziomek 2005: 4).

Regardless of what, precisely, people are seeking when they call for greater transparency, the notion has been clearly connected to concerns about media bias as well as to scepticism about the value of objectivity as a journalistic norm or goal. 'Transparency subsumes objectivity,' Harvard technologist David Weinberger (2009) writes. 'Anyone who claims objectivity should be willing to back that assertion up by letting us look at sources, disagreements, and the personal assumptions and values supposedly bracketed out of the report' (para. 9).

Without transparency, he adds, objectivity becomes arrogance – and foolishness. Karlsson (2011; 2010) highlights the role of digital communication in fostering an increased orientation toward openness, though Chadha and Koliska (2015) suggest news outlets are seeking to appear more credible through limited and strategic use of transparency – but stopping short of actually offering substantive insights into journalistic processes.

### The Brazilian context

The present study focuses on media trust as well as use in Brazil, a nation whose media have had a vital role in shaping and reshaping power structures over many decades, functioning as 'a crucial site for social, political, and ideological struggles' (Matos 2008: 4). After a newspaper

heyday in the 1950s, broadcast television has dominated media usage. Television remains the most important news source for the population overall, although overtaken by online sources among urban Brazilians (Carro 2016a).

Since the military dictatorship ended in the mid-1980s, legacy media in Brazil have been pulled towards commercialism and professionalism on the one hand, and political and social inclusion on the other (Matos 2008; Porto 2012; Waisbord 1996). Brazilian journalists give considerable weight to their public-interest role as government watchdogs (Mellado et al. 2012) – though a key motivation may be to drive sales in an increasingly consolidated environment (Waisbord 2000). In general, media market expansion has been integral to expanding democratisation of Brazilian society (Votmer 2013), but the period also has been characterised by a concentration of ownership and by 'ideological biases, simplifications of debate and limited inclusion of these new publics' (Matos 2008: 233).

Brazil's legal framework has also historically been conducive to ownership concentration. Four family-owned groups currently enjoy an 89 per cent market share of the print media, including giant publishing enterprises operating out of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro (Moreira 2016). These conglomerates – including the O Globo group, which owns *O Globo* newspaper and has extensive other Brazilian media holdings, and Grupo Folha, which owns *Folha de São Paulo* – exert considerable influence on the direction of public debate. Their massive media properties in the two dominant cities are highly influential in setting the agenda for coverage in regional and other smaller metropolitan newspapers and broadcasters (Abramo 2007).

The past few years have been especially difficult for Brazil and its media. Although the nation weathered the 2008 global economic crisis in relative prosperity and stability, the situation deteriorated dramatically in the 2010s. The disclosure of corruption and a money-laundering scandal involving the Petrobras powerhouse led to massive street protests in 2013, generating turmoil that ultimately culminated in the controversial impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff and her departure from office in 2016 (Garcia 2016). Much of the media coverage of the crisis, particularly in dominant newspapers such as *O Globo*, was out of sync with popular sentiment, generating considerable public displeasure (Nassif 2013) and a general perception of media bias. Indeed, observers



have connected the upheavals to a perception that the Brazilian media not only failed to provide people's basic needs but even seemed to work against those needs (Fontes 2015). The same media conglomerates that supported the military regime a generation ago (Matos 2008) have more recently been widely seen as amplifying the voices of political elites and legitimising Rousseff's impeachment (Damgaard 2018).

As the turmoil escalated in 2013 and 2014, Brazilian newspapers lost almost 9 per cent of their circulation (Associação Nacional de Jornais 2015); only one in 27 Brazilians read a newspaper in 2014, down from one in 10 in the 1950s (ibid; IBGE 2014). In 2015, as the Brazilian economy endured its worst downturn in a quarter century and questions about credibility swirled around the legacy media, nine of the nation's 10 largest-circulation newspapers lost readers, and 1,400 media practitioners lost their jobs (Carro 2016b). Though the national press remains influential today, especially among elites, many readers and advertisers have migrated to digital media (Carro 2016a); an estimated 116 million Brazilians, roughly two-thirds of the population, are now connected to the internet (Simões Gomes 2018), while only 3 per cent of the nation's citizens cite newspapers as their preferred information source (SCS 2017).

Social media are enormously popular as alternative information sources. In the first five years after its Brazilian office opened in 2011, Facebook attracted more than 83 million users; nearly three-quarters of urban dwellers used it to access news by the end of 2015. In addition, 100 million Brazilians – nearly half the nation's population – used the WhatsApp messaging app (Carro 2016b). Other online media also have gained ground in Brazil since the turn of the millennium (Harlow 2017), a trend again accelerated by the recent turmoil. Digital-native media start-ups have emerged, including Midia Ninja, Ponte and Agência Pública (Maisonave 2016). As in the United States, Europe and other parts of Latin America, many of Brazil's alternative media are seen as associated with particular social and civic movements (Harlow 2017). And as elsewhere, many continue to struggle to secure audiences and financial stability.

#### **Brazil media and trust**

Within this contentious environment, the matter of media trust in rapidly changing Brazil has attracted attention. In the rest of this section, we briefly outline information from diverse public opinion polling organisations, followed

by a closer look at an extensive data set provided to the authors by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

Brazilians are more likely than media consumers in other countries to say they trust the media. About 58 per cent of the Brazilian respondents in a 2016 Reuters Institute study said they trusted the news 'most of the time', putting Brazil behind only Finland (65 per cent) and Portugal (60 per cent) among the 26 countries surveyed. Moreover, 56 per cent of Brazilians reported trusting news organisations in 2016, and 54 per cent said they trusted journalists – the highest level among any of the countries studied (Carro 2016a; Newman 2016). However, only 36 per cent also said they believed the Brazilian media were free from undue political influence and 35 per cent considered it free of undue business influence (Carro 2016b).

Other public opinion surveys in Brazil have yielded broadly comparable results. A survey conducted by Edelman (2016) around the same time as the Reuters Institute survey showed that 54 per cent of Brazilians said they trusted the media. However, that number represents a drop of nearly 20 per cent over a five-year period – and it declined further to 43 per cent by 2018 (Edelman 2018). Surveys conducted by the Brazilian government (*Pesquisa Brasileira de Midia* 2017; 2016; 2015) have also addressed levels of trust in news across multiple platforms; findings indicate lower levels of overall trust than suggested by the international studies, with distrust of digital media particularly pervasive.

Brazilians also report that they are prepared to pay for online news content: 22 per cent of the respondents to the Reuters Institute study said they paid for news, the third-highest percentage among the countries surveyed. That said, the average annual payment amount was among the lowest – only the equivalent of \$14.20 a year, mostly involving one-off purchases (Carro 2016b).

#### **Reuters Institute's survey on news consumption**

Before turning to our focus group data, we offer a closer look at the survey data gathered by the Reuters Institute. The Institute's *Digital News Report* constitutes the largest ongoing comparative study of news consumption around the world (Levy 2016). The word 'trust' appears 284 times in the 2016 report – more than twice as often as in 2015 (134 mentions) and six times more frequently than in 2014 (just 47 mentions). Moreover, the 2016 report



included a separate section devoted to issues of trust, based on closer examination of data from the United States and five European countries. Findings indicate no gender differences, but those under age 35 are less trusting than older news consumers. Political beliefs also are linked to trust in the news (Newman et al. 2016).

Additional focus groups data from the Reuters Institute indicated that trust in the news is strongly tied to trust in particular media brands. Long-standing legacy brands are more likely to be seen as primary news sources, with newer players thought of as secondary sources or 'guilty pleasures', even when they have a large reach (Newman et al. 2016: 94).

Although the institute published overviews of these findings, the more fine-grained data needed to provide context for our study were not made public. Institute colleagues shared their data from Brazil with us. Their questionnaire was completed by 2,001 Brazilians in 27 urban areas, including Rio de Janeiro. It encompassed questions about interests (business news, political news and so on), sources and platforms, along with demographic information and a host of other topics, including three of interest here: trust in the media, payment for news and frequency of news access. Tables 1 and 2 provide Reuters Institute data related to trust and payment for news in print and online media, respectively.

Table 1 suggests a trend: as trust in news increases, so too does the likelihood to pay for print news. Conversely, the number of people who do not pay for print news is higher among those who either are neutral toward or disagree with statements related to trusting news, news organisations or journalists. Relatively few people pay for online news, which makes interpretation of the Table 2 data more tentative. However, the general trend seems to hold: The more people trust the news, the more willing they are to pay for it, even online.

The institute's data are even clearer in relation to perceptions of outside influence on the media. They show widespread belief that the Brazilian media are influenced by government or commercial pressures. Yet those who believe the media are independent of such influence are notably more likely to pay for print news and for online news – and much less likely when they believe the media to be shaped by either entity.

**Table 1: Trust and payment for news in print in Brazil**

A total of 1,042 respondents (52 per cent) said they had not paid for a printed newspaper in the previous week, while 931 (47 per cent) said they had paid.

*Data provided by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.*

**I think you can trust most news most of the time**

Have you paid for a printed newspaper in the last week?	Strongly disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Strongly agree
No	64 (62%)	214 (62%)	229 (60%)	457 (49%)	77 (32%)
Yes	37 (36%)	128 (37%)	143 (37%)	456 (49%)	167 (68%)

**I think you can trust most news organisations most of the time**

Have you paid for a printed newspaper in the last week?	Strongly disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Strongly agree
No	63 (71%)	226 (64%)	240 (56%)	451 (50%)	62 (27%)
Yes	23 (26%)	121 (34%)	179 (42%)	445 (49%)	164 (73%)

**I think you can trust most news journalists most of the time**

Have you paid for a printed newspaper in the last week?	Strongly disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Strongly agree
No	60 (69%)	239 (67%)	275 (59%)	400 (47%)	68 (29%)
Yes	24 (28%)	113 (32%)	184 (39%)	444 (52%)	166 (71%)

**News media in my country is independent from undue political or government influence most of the time**

Have you paid for a printed newspaper in the last week?	Strongly disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Strongly agree
No	251 (62%)	245 (57%)	262 (59%)	221 (41%)	63 (37%)
Yes	152 (37%)	184 (43%)	172 (39%)	315 (58%)	180 (63%)

**News media in my country is independent from undue business or commercial influence most of the time**

Have you paid for a printed newspaper in the last week?	Strongly disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Strongly agree
No	239 (63%)	270 (59%)	266 (57%)	231 (42%)	36 (24%)
Yes	139 (36%)	178 (39%)	188 (40%)	311 (57%)	114 (76%)

**Research questions**

Our own data, gathered from three focus groups of urban news consumers in Brazil, provide further insights into the nuances of media trust in Brazil and the relationship between trust and economic imperatives. Informed by our interrogation of the Reuters data, as well as context provided by the literature, this study addresses the following research questions:

**RQ1:** How do urban Brazilians describe their perceptions and attitudes about the media?

**RQ2:** What reasons do urban Brazilians offer for trusting or distrusting the news?

**RQ3:** How do these views relate to expressed willingness to consume and to pay for news?

## Method

This study draws on data from three focus groups conducted by the lead author in December 2016 in the state of Rio de Janeiro. This large urban area, home to 6.5 million people, was selected to produce data from a population comparable to those surveyed by the Reuters Institute. The largest and most dominant Brazilian media company, Globo, also is based in Rio and was referenced frequently by participants.

A total of 17 Brazilian news consumers, selected using a snowball sampling method with the goal of obtaining age and gender diversity, were included. Nine women – four in their 30s, one in her 40s, two in their 50s, and two in their 70s – participated. Three of the eight men were in their 50s, two in their 20s, and one each in his 30s, 40s, or 80s. None was a specialist in the media nor had worked in the news.

Participants were invited to discuss their views and experiences related to news consumption and payment; their perceptions of trust and the factors they considered important in assessing the trustworthiness of news content; historical or current events that affected these assessments; and their perceptions about contemporary media controversies involving fake news.

The conversations lasted from 35 to 70 minutes. All participants were guaranteed confidentiality and signed a consent form indicating their agreement to take part in the research, in line with the human subjects protocol required by the authors' institution. Focus group sessions were recorded, transcribed and translated from Portuguese to English. NVivo software helped the researchers identify key themes and concepts relevant to the topics indicated by the research questions.

## Findings

### *Consumption and payment patterns*

Our focus group participants reported that they consumed news several times a day, describing it as 'fundamental' and 'essential'. Older participants tended to think mostly about legacy print and broadcast outlets, while younger Brazilians reported more digital-only sources in their news diets. A majority said they did not pay for print or online news, in line with the questionnaire data described above; half said they had a subscription in the past but no longer had one. Participants generally cited free access to online or broadcast information as a key reason why they no longer paid for any news content.

**Table 2: Trust and payment for news online in Brazil**

A total of 1,528 respondents (76 per cent) said they had not paid for online news in the past year, while 440 (22 per cent) said they had paid.

*Data provided by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.*

#### **I think you can trust most news most of the time**

Have you paid for online news content in the last week?	Strongly disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Strongly agree
No	87 (83%)	285 (83%)	301 (79%)	705 (76%)	149 (61%)
Yes	16 (15%)	54 (16%)	74 (19%)	202 (22%)	93 (38%)

#### **I think you can trust most news organisations most of the time**

Have you paid for online news content in the last week?	Strongly disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Strongly agree
No	76 (85%)	295 (83%)	338 (79%)	687 (76%)	132 (58%)
Yes	10 (11%)	52 (15%)	83 (19%)	201 (22%)	94 (42%)

#### **I think you can trust most news journalists most of the time**

Have you paid for online news content in the last week?	Strongly disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Strongly agree
No	75 (86%)	304 (85%)	368 (78%)	637 (75%)	144 (61%)
Yes	11 (13%)	46 (13%)	91 (20%)	200 (23%)	91 (39%)

#### **News media in my country is independent from undue political or government influence most of the time**

Have you paid for online news content in the last week?	Strongly disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Strongly agree
No	354 (87%)	351 (81%)	348 (78%)	371 (78%)	104 (68%)
Yes	50 (12%)	73 (17%)	88 (17%)	162 (20%)	67 (30%)

#### **News media in my country is independent from undue business or commercial influence most of the time**

Have you paid for online news content in the last week?	Strongly disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Strongly agree
No	331 (87%)	378 (83%)	354 (76%)	392 (71%)	73 (48%)
Yes	46 (12%)	67 (15%)	101 (22%)	148 (27%)	78 (52%)

However, the focus groups also revealed other rationales for payment decisions. Some participants said they paid for news out of habit or as part of another buying decision, such as paying for cable television in order to watch sports but then also watching news shows. Among those describing payment as a habit was the man in his 80s who said he was simply accustomed to buying a paper. Others said they consumed a range of paid media sources – including newspapers, cable TV, and magazines – because they valued being informed.

Findings also show changing consumption patterns associated with reactions to the coverage provided by specific outlets, rather than habit or convenience. As described above, the political and financial crisis in Brazil has left the nation in turmoil, exacerbating public anger and social unrest. The conservative position maintained by much of the media throughout the crisis alienated news consumers. A woman in her 70s explained:

I've never watched TV Globo news again since it started the debate on Dilma's impeachment. I found the way they faced this issue really exaggerated. I was tremendously irritated.

Similarly, a man in his 50s said he cancelled his *O Globo* newspaper subscription because he disagreed with its reporting of the political and economic upheaval. 'It began to bother me in such a way that I could not read virtually anything, the news was so biased,' he said. This participant said he had had a daily subscription in 2014, reduced it first to Thursday-to-Sunday, then cancelled it a year later. 'Today, I prefer reading indicators and facts alone and interpret them by myself,' he said. 'There is no columnist I trust reading.'

Another man in his 50s also said he had cancelled his *O Globo* subscription in 2015 for political reasons. 'I radicalised,' he said. 'I felt I had to react.' But he said he had re-subscribed a year later, feeling 'hemmed in' by the lack of other acceptable news options. He said he found online news 'difficult' and television news overly scripted. Besides, he said: 'I really missed reading the newspaper. It is a dynamic instrument of information. I like that.'

Participants recalled press censorship in the 1960s when some Brazilian publications overtly supported the military government. 'Our parents' generation grew up during the dictatorship, when there was no right to argue, no

alternative sources,' a woman in her 30s said. 'The truth was absolute.' But others said not all outlets had fallen in line, yielding what a man in his 50s described as 'a bigger diversity of chroniclers' and making today's media worse in comparison.

### *Perceptions of media bias*

Focus group participants who said they distrusted the media discourse frequently cited what they saw as biased coverage of the crisis. One woman in her 30s said that as events unfolded, she realised that the forces in play were not made clear from the start. As examples, she cited a media campaign around labour regulations, lobbied by the industry sector and advocated by the government that gained power after Rousseff's impeachment. Perceived political leanings also evoked suspicions. 'Politics is more often misrepresented,' said one focus group participant. 'I distrust political themes more than others,' another added.

Respondents also cited perceived economic biases, which they described in three related but distinct ways. One involved a perception that media coverage of economic issues was ideologically slanted. Another involved concern about agenda-setting effects created by the selection and prominence of particular subjects. 'It is a matter of how they choose what is important,' said a man in his 30s. 'The way they select political or economic topics, or instead a picture of a pretty cat, is what makes them biased.'

The third concern related to media ownership. The fact that Brazilian news media are today largely in a few private hands, as described above, bothered some participants, who felt 'the big traditional media follows the interests of elites too much'. A man in his 50s said an economically driven agenda meant informed readers had to critically reflect on why the media were interested in some topics and not others.

The findings, then, suggest that distrust is linked in large measure to audience perceptions of political and economic biases of the news, a concern aggravated by the national crisis. But focus group participants believed that perceived biases also had other causes, including ideology, a tendency toward interpreting the news rather than simply reporting it impartially, a lack of adequate context, and fragmentation of content. 'They pick fragments that interest them,' said a man in his 20s. 'Sometimes they are not even lying; they are just constructing according to what they are interested

in showing. Then we have to be careful and try to look at the bigger picture of what they are talking about.'

#### *Transparency and diversity*

As described above, media observers have placed increasing emphasis on the need for transparency as a way to foster trust in a digital age. Transparency is seen as important not only in relation to reporting or editing methods but also to journalistic perceptions about what news is and how it should be conveyed to the public. A focus group participant in her 30s summed up this perspective in calling for more clarity about the ethical principles followed by news outlets: 'I am not sure if the media should be biased or neutral,' she said. 'But they should have a better ethics code. They should have more criteria about the way they report.'

In Brazil, emerging journalistic and activist organisations have begun to challenge the traditional media view that objectivity and impartiality are incontestable values, instead urging not only greater transparency but also informed analysis and even overt advocacy. Our focus groups indicate the Brazilian public has taken note of new digital initiatives such as those highlighted above. 'In the alternative media, their ideology is clear,' a man in his 30s said. 'In the corporate media, it is more difficult to see it. Their news is presented as "normal" or "natural" although it is not.' A younger man agreed. Naming a popular online outlet that described itself as presenting 'analytical content', he explained that he trusted it more 'because it is a type of text construction that is clearer. It is not fragmented. You can see where they collected the information from'.

Asked how the media in Brazil might become more trustworthy, a number of participants also cited a desire for diversity – in the number of viewpoints, media sources and people producing content. 'We need a diversity of sources, so we don't feel hostage,' a man in his 50s said. 'Diversity of opinions, ideological diversity, gender and race diversity: this is what makes news to be trusted.' A man in his 30s agreed, explaining: 'When you don't see any diversity, you simply lose trust.'

#### *The internet and the rise of 'fake news'*

A final set of focus group insights related to perceptions about the internet and the pervasiveness of misinformation online. Overall, participants appreciated the expanded range of content and voices. 'I felt a big improvement, because before we didn't have a choice.

Today, we have variety,' said a woman in her 70s. A man in his 50s contrasted the limited media options of the past with the 'range of good sources and journalists giving credibility to information online' today.

However, participants had misgivings about the proliferation of bogus information and the commensurate potential to be misled. Although there are more sources, participants said that finding trustworthy ones remains difficult; they expressed concern about the speed, volume and nature of digital content in general and social media content in particular. 'I don't call this news,' said a man in his 30s. 'I call it gossip.' A woman in her 50s likened the internet to 'a broken telephone'.

Other participants recounted personal experiences. A woman in her 30s said she had received a WhatsApp message saying a controversial far-right candidate had been elected the most honest politician in the world. 'I laughed,' she said. A man in his 50s said he feared that misinformation 'intentionally grown' or spread via social media could drive public opinion:

Some are extremely fake. Others distort the message with a political interest behind it, and people share it. In Brazil, social media has a very strong effect.

Yet focus group participants also pointed out that the internet had increased transparency in event coverage. When everyone has a mobile phone, mainstream constructions of news are easily challenged by citizens posting textual or visual content online. Participants cited recent street protests as examples. 'The media cannot hide [the protests] anymore,' a man in his 50s said. 'Who guides the news? It is not only the traditional media. They cannot just ignore what is going on and being said on the internet.'

#### **Discussion and conclusion**

Building on the literature and on unique access to detailed findings from the 2016 Reuters Institute study of trust in the media, this study used original focus group data to offer fresh insights into urban Brazilians' perceptions about their news media. Our three research questions explored attitudes about the media, reasons for trusting or distrusting the news, and the relation between audience views and willingness to consume and pay for news.

Focus group participants supported the survey findings that Brazilians are heavy news consumers, indicating that they access news

several times a day and believe it to be important. Although most do not currently pay for news, many did so in the past. Part of this shift is due to the ubiquity of free information, but this study indicates more subtle issues related to distrust stemming from perceptions of economic and political bias. Comments suggested a direct association between decreased trust and decreased spending on the news.

Focus group participants also raised a host of ethical concerns that have been at the heart of academic and industry criticism, related to impartiality, transparency, diversity, and the selection and presentation of content. Each relates to trust in nuanced ways. On the one hand, our participants criticised what they saw as overtly ideological coverage that undermined trust. Attempts by news organisations to brand themselves as impartial watchdogs of democracy have long been open to challenge (Peters and Broersma 2013). Our study suggests that in Brazil as elsewhere, attempts to sell an objectivity that cannot be delivered serve merely to create a gap between expectations and reality, with negative implications for the economics as well as the practice of journalism.

However, our focus group findings also suggest that greater pursuit of impartiality is not necessarily the best response. Importantly, several participants cited greater diversity of views as an optimal route to greater trust. Increasing the number of news sources and news providers, to better represent the different perspectives in Brazilian society, was highlighted as a way to provide vital context to contemporary issues and events.

But the factors behind public trust in Brazilian media go beyond normative issues commonly referenced in Western studies, emphasising the need for context in considerations of communication ethics. A long national history of continuous upheavals has progressively damaged the Brazilian public's relationship with the media. Consequences of media support for the military government a generation ago still reverberate, manifested in a new wave of resentment during the latest crisis and, more recently, in fresh controversy over widely distrusted coverage of candidates in the 2018 presidential election (Henningan 2018). The concentration of media ownership among the nation's richest families results in less diverse viewpoints and also is galling in its own right.

The internet adds more complexity. It provides a low-cost and democratic environment for

alternative media outlets, and thus a home for new ideas and perspectives, which focus group participants saw as a positive development. Many expressed trust in such outlets, particularly in light of their ideological transparency. At the same time, participants also raised concerns about the lack of online controls, leading to low-quality content that diminishes overall credibility.

That said, although focus group participants talked about these digital-only news sources, their conversations were dominated by discussion of the mainstream media. Traditional Brazilian media, then, have an enormous opportunity but also face an enormous challenge. The opportunity lies in their brand association with reliable information; the challenge comes from the fact that many people do not see them living up to their reputation or their potential. A sense of disappointment, even betrayal, came through in our focus group discussions. In a time of crisis, people want to be able to turn to the mainstream media to learn what is happening and what they can expect next; when they do not find it, they turn away, not infrequently in anger. Yet they have significant misgivings about the most readily and cheaply available alternative source, the internet. At the moment, many of these news consumers seem to be drifting, with troubling implications for a massive democracy that urgently needs to find its collective way forward.

News companies around the world are increasingly seeking to brand themselves as trustworthy civic assets amid the spread of unreliable online information. Our findings suggest an optimal emphasis in this pursuit should not be on 'objectivity', a distrusted concept for which counter-examples can be readily found, but rather on transparency and diversity. Our focus group participants indicate that these ethical values should receive more concerted attention from news organisations hoping to be seen as more trustworthy – and to translate that perception into larger audience numbers and stronger audience relationships.

Like all studies, this one has several limitations. One is that we were unable to field our own survey of public opinion about the media in Brazil and, therefore, had to rely on secondary data, gathered more than a year before our focus groups, to examine how media trust related to news consumption and payment patterns. Our focus groups were of significant help in probing for the causes and implications of those linkages, as well as a host of interrelated con-



cerns about the media; however, focus groups are an inherently subjective method and can only unveil the views of those who take part, shaped by their interpersonal dynamics. Moreover, we gathered views from people who lived in just one of Brazil's urban areas; although Rio is a media capital, half a dozen other cities also have populations greater than 2 million.

Nonetheless, we believe this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between trust and the future stability of legacy media outlets, a relationship that other work has rarely explored empirically. Our findings suggest that a lack of consumer trust, if not addressed, is likely to intensify the media's financial crisis. For ethics scholars, this study points towards the need for work that incorporates a range of factors influencing perceptions of trust and transparency, on the one hand, and the impact of perceived bias on the other.

The study also highlights opportunities for further exploration of the concept of diversity, not only among news providers or even in the voices being heard but also regarding the nature of news itself. News consumers know that trustworthy news is not one-dimensional. But we have much to learn about the complex interaction between credibility and multi-dimensionality in a contemporary news environment.

## References

- Abramo, Claudio (2007) Brazil: A portrait of disparities, *Brazilian Journalism Research*, Vol. 3, No. 1 pp 93-107
- Ashley, Seth, Poepsel, Mark and Willis, Erin (2010) Media literacy and news credibility: Does knowledge of media ownership increase skepticism in news consumers?, *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, Vol. 2, No. 1 pp 37-46
- Associação Nacional de Jornais. (2015) Circulação diária. Available online at <http://www.anj.org.br/circulacao-diaria-2/>
- Carr, D. Jasun, Barnidge, Matthew, Lee, Byung Gu and Tsang, Stephanie Jean (2014) Cynics and skeptics: Evaluating the credibility of mainstream and citizen journalism, *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 91, No. 3 pp 452-470
- Carro, Rodrigo (2016a) *Brazilian newspapers: The risk of becoming irrelevant*, Oxford, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Available online at: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/our-research/brazilian-newspapers-risk-becoming-irrelevant>
- Carro, Rodrigo (2016b) Brazil, *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2016*, Newman, Nic, Fletcher, Richard, Levy, David A. L. and Nielsen, Rasmus Kleis (eds) Oxford, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism pp 82-83. Available online at <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Digital-News-Report-2016.pdf>
- Chadha, Kalyani, and Koliska, Michael (2015) Newsrooms and transparency in the digital age, *Journalism Practice*, Vol. 9, No. 2 pp 215-229
- Clerwell, Christer (2014) Enter the robot journalist: Users' perceptions of automated content, *Journalism Practice*, Vol. 8, No. 5 pp 519-531
- Coleman, Stephen, Anthony, Scott and Morrison, David E. (2009) *Public trust in the news: A constructivist study of the social life of the news*, Oxford, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Available online at: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/risj-review/public-trust-news-constructivist-study-social-life-news>
- Craft, Stephanie and Heim, Kyle (2009) Transparency in journalism: Meanings, merits and risks, *The Handbook of Mass Media Ethics*, Wilkins, Lee, and Christians, Clifford G. (eds) New York, Routledge pp 217-228
- Damgaard, Mads (2018) Cascading corruption news: Explaining the bias of media attention to Brazil's political scandals, *Opinião Pública Online*, Vol. 24, No. 1 114-143.
- Edelman (2016) Global results, *2016 Edelman Trust Barometer*. Available online at: <http://www.edelman.com/insights/intellectual-property/2016-edelman-trust-barometer/global-results/>
- Edelman (2018) Global report, *2018 Edelman Trust Barometer*. Available online at <https://www.edelman.com/trust-barometer>
- Eveland, William P. Jr. and Shah, Dhavan V. (2003) The impact of individual and interpersonal factors on perceived news media bias, *Political Psychology*, Vol. 24, No. 1 pp 101-117
- Flanagin, Andrew J. and Metzger, Miriam J. (2007) The role of site features, user attributes, and information verification behaviors on the perceived credibility of Web-based information, *New Media and Society*, Vol. 9, No. 2 pp 319-342
- Fontes, Malu (2015) Manuel Castells: A comunicação em rede está revitalizando a democracia, *Fronteiras do Pensamento*, 11 May. Available online at <http://www.fronteiras.com/entrevistas/manuel-castells-a-comunicacao-em-rede-esta-revitalizando-a-democracia>
- Garcia, Giselle (2016) Entenda a crise econômica, EGC Agencia Brasil, 15 May. Available online at <http://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/economia/noticia/2016-05/entenda-crise-economica>
- Golan, Guy J. (2010) New perspectives on media credibility research, *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 54, No. 1 pp 3-7
- Harlow, Summer (2017) Recognizing the importance of alternative media, *Journalism Studies*. Available online at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1461670X.2017.1364139>
- Henningan, Tom (2018) Fake news again sours Brazilian politics as election looms, *The Irish Times*, 30 August. Available online at <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/fake-news-again-sours-brazilian-politics-as-election-looms-1.3611539>
- Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE) (2014) Estimativas de população. Available online at <https://www2.ibge.gov.br/home/estatistica/populacao/estimativa2014/>
- Johnson, Thomas J. and Kaye, Barbara K. (2014) Credibility of social network sites for political information among politically interested Internet users, *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, Vol. 19, No. 4 pp 957-974
- Johnson, Thomas J. and Kaye, Barbara K. (1998) Cruising is believing? Comparing Internet and traditional sources on media credibility measures, *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 75, No. 2 pp 325-340
- Karlsson, Michael (2011) The immediacy of online news, the visibility of journalistic processes and a restructuring of journalistic authority, *Journalism*, Vol. 12, No. 3 pp 279-295
- Karlsson, Michael (2010) Rituals of transparency: Evaluating online news outlets' uses of transparency rituals in the United States, United Kingdom and Sweden, *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 4 pp 535-545
- Kohring, Matthias and Matthes, Jörg (2007) Trust in news media: Development and validation of a multidimensional scale, *Communication Research*, Vol. 34, No. 2 pp 231-252
- Koussis, Spiro (2001) Public trust or mistrust? Perceptions of media credibility in the information age, *Mass Communication and Society*, Vol. 4, No. 4 pp 381-403
- Lee, Tien-Tsung (2010) Why they don't trust the media: An examination of factors predicting trust, *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 54, No. 1 pp 8-21

- Levy, David A. L. (2016) Foreword, *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2016*, Newman, Nic, Fletcher, Richard, Levy, David A. L. and Nielsen, Rasmus Kleis (eds) Oxford, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism pp 4-5. Available online at <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Digital-News-Report-2016.pdf>
- Maisonave, Fabiano (2016) Revitalizing journalism in Brazil, *Nieman Reports*, January 8. Available online at <http://niemanreports.org/articles/revitalizing-journalism-in-brazil/>
- Matos, Carolina (2008) *Journalism and political democracy in Brazil*, New York, Lexington Books
- Mellado, Claudia, Moreira, Sonia V., Lagos, Claudia and Hernández, Maria E. (2012) Comparing journalism cultures in Latin America: The case of Chile, Brazil and Mexico, *International Communication Gazette*, Vol. 74. No. 1 pp 60-77
- Moreira, Sonia Virginia (2016) Media ownership and concentration in Brazil, *Who owns the worlds media? Media concentration and ownership around the world*, Noam, Eli M. and the International Media Concentration Collaboration (eds) Oxford, Oxford University Press pp 606-633
- Nassif, Luis (2013) Mal-estar no Globo: Manifestações chegam à redação GGN. Available online at <http://jornalggn.com.br/blog/implacavel/mal-estar-no-globo-manifestacoes-chegam-a-redacao>
- Neuberger, Christoph (2014) The journalistic quality of Internet formats and services: Results of a user survey, *Digital Journalism*, Vol. 2 No. 3 pp 419-433
- Newman, Nic (2016) Overview and key findings, *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2016*, Newman, Nic, Fletcher, Richard, Levy, David A. L. and Nielsen, Rasmus Kleis (eds) Oxford, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism pp 7-29. Available online at <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Digital-News-Report-2016.pdf>
- Newman, Nic, Fletcher, Richard, Levy, David A. L. and Nielsen, Rasmus Kleis (2016) *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2016*. Available online at <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Digital-News-Report-2016.pdf>
- Pesquisa Brasileira de Mídia 2014* (2015) SECOM. Available online at <http://observatorioidaimprensa.com.br/download/Pesquisa-BrasileiradeMidia2014.pdf>
- Pesquisa Brasileira de Mídia 2015* (2016) SECOM. Available online at <http://www.secom.gov.br/atuacao/pesquisa/lista-de-pesquisas-quantitativas-e-qualitativas-de-contratos-atuais/pesquisa-brasileira-de-midia-pbm-2015.pdf>
- Pesquisa Brasileira de Mídia 2016* (2017) SECOM. Available online at <http://pesquisademidia.gov.br/#/category/bulseye>
- Peters, Chris and Broersma, Marcel (2013) *Rethinking journalism: Trust and participation in a transformed news landscape*, London, Routledge
- Porto, Mauro (2012) *Media power and democratization in Brazil: TV Globo and the dilemmas of media accountability*, New York, Routledge
- Secretaria de Comunicação Social (2017) *Pesquisa Brasileira de mídia 2016: Hábitos de consumo de mídia pela população brasileira*, Available online at <http://www.secom.gov.br/atuacao/pesquisa/lista-de-pesquisas-quantitativas-e-qualitativas-de-contratos-atuais/pesquisa-brasileira-de-midia-pbm-2016.pdf/view>
- Simões Gomes, Helton (2018) Brasil tem 116 milhões de pessoas conectadas à internet, diz IBGE, G1 Economia, 21 February. Available online at <https://g1.globo.com/economia/tecnologia/noticia/brasil-tem-116-milhoes-de-pessoas-conectadas-a-internet-diz-ibge.ghtml>
- Singer, Jane B. (2007) Contested autonomy: Professional and popular claims on journalistic norms, *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1 pp 79-95
- Tsfati, Yariv and Cappella, Joseph N. (2003) Do people watch what they do not trust? Exploring the association between news media scepticism and exposure, *Communication Research*, Vol. 30, No. 5 pp 504-529
- Voltmer, Katrin (2013) *The media in transitional democracies*, Cambridge, Polity
- Waisbord, Silvio (2000) *Watchdog journalism in South America: News, accountability, and democracy*, New York, Columbia University Press
- Waisbord, Silvio R. (1996) Investigative journalism and political accountability in South American democracies, *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, Vol. 13, No. 4 pp 343-363
- Wanta, Wayne, and Hu, Yu-Wei (1994) The effects of credibility, reliance, and exposure on media agenda-setting: A path analysis model, *Journalism Quarterly*, Vol. 71, No. 1 pp 90-98
- Weinberger, David (2009) Transparency is the new objectivity, *Joho the Blog*, July 19. Available online at <http://www.hyperorg.com/blogger/2009/07/19/transparency-is-the-new-objectivity/>
- Westerman, David, Spence, Patric R. and van der Heide, Brandon (2014) Social media as information source: Recency of updates and credibility of information, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Vol. 19, No. 2 pp 171-183
- Ziomek, Jon (2005) *Journalism, transparency and the public trust: A report of the eighth annual Aspen Institute Conference on Journalism and Society*, Washington, The Aspen Institute

### Note on the Contributors

Flávia Milhorance is a Brazilian independent journalist with more than ten years of experience as a reporter and editor. She has contributed to media outlets in Brazil and abroad, including the *Guardian*, BBC Brazil, *O Globo*, the *Intercept Brazil* and *Mongabay News*. She holds an MA in Financial Journalism from an Erasmus joint programme with City, University of London (UK), and Aarhus University (Denmark).

Jane B. Singer is Professor of Journalism Innovation at City University of London, where she also serves as research lead for the Department of Journalism. Her research explores digital journalism, including changing roles, perceptions, norms and practices. Recent publications include 'Theorizing digital journalism' for *The Routledge Handbook of Developments in Digital Journalism Studies* and 'Fact-checkers as entrepreneurs' for *Journalism Practice*.

## Balancing instrumental rationality and value rationality in communicating information: A study of the 'Nobel Older Brother' case

*Guo Yingsen – referred to as the 'Nobel Older Brother' – provoked an intense discussion in the Chinese social media after the discovery of gravitational waves was announced on 11 February 2016. The controversy, which lasted for more than a month following that announcement, was about supporting a dream or opposing science. It also involved debates on the professional quality of and techniques for disseminating information. This entire episode demonstrated that in the desire to attract the audience's attention, the media's focus was on instrumental rationality. It also resulted in tarnishing the media's credibility and was condemned by public opinion. This pilot study shows that communicators can gain the trust of audiences and achieve good communication effects when they take a humanistic approach when reporting the facts – that is, when they give value rationality precedence over instrumental rationality.*

**Keywords:** value rationality, instrumental rationality, humanistic care, the facts, attention economy

### Case study

On 11 February 2016, American and European scientists in astronomy announced that they had detected gravitational waves, which served to confirm Einstein's predictions. The event was promoted for a week in the Chinese media and caused a sensation. At first, the audience in

China was interested in this scientific research. Later, it turned its attention to a folk science enthusiast Guo Yingsen who, at that time, was not directly involved in gravitational wave research.

Guo is a folk science enthusiast from China's Liaoning Province. He graduated from junior high school and was a laid-off worker. When the previously mentioned announcement was made, he was dedicated to physics research. Guo said that he even saw the appearance of an UFO one night in August 1994 at the shore of the Hun River in Liaoning Province. From then on, he became fascinated with UFOs and researched various physics topics for more than ten years. In February 2011, Guo attended the TV reality show *You*, which was a job-hunting television programme broadcast by the Tianjin TV station. He wanted to find a job so that he could finance his research. During his TV appearance, he showed the results of his research, claiming that his new discoveries deserved a Nobel Prize in physics. After that, many netizens called him the 'Nobel Older Brother'. On the TV show, he was frequently interrupted by the TV host and the invited guest critics. They thought that Guo's theories were far-fetched notions.

On the *You* programme, Guo and Fang Zhouzi discussed the new theory of physics. Fang, a popular science writer, was a guest contributor, and his highly critical remarks caused great controversy. Fang said that he did not understand Guo's so-called new theory. Guo responded: 'I invented a couple of new theories. In fact, objects will move faster than the speed of light.' As Guo continued, he was interrupted again by Fang Zhouzi who said: 'I saw his introduction and found that he just graduated from junior high school. I think that he might have not been a very good student even then. He only remembers a few terms, and then begins to mess with them.' In response, Guo wanted to use mathematical expressions to elaborate on his own theory. However, once again, he was interrupted by Fang, who continued to ridicule him: 'This is your own invention,' he stated. 'No physicist in this world can understand it. Present it to the world and receive a Nobel Prize for your invention. If your invention can be proven, then we would not need to learn physics.'

Guo vowed to publish papers in foreign academic journals. Fang advised him to give up on that ambition, stating that his theory would not be accepted in China nor be published in foreign journals. Most of the guest participants

in the programme concurred with Fang's view, but some admired Guo's spirited arguments and his willingness to pursue his dreams.

Eight days later, on 19 February 2016, a number of social media marketing accounts issued a provocative article titled: 'China lost the Nobel Prize, the laid-off worker's first mention of gravitational waves five years ago was ruthlessly suppressed by judges' ridicule. Now they owe him an apology.' A video of Guo's appearance on the programme was attached, showing how the other participants sneered at him. The social media marketing account named 'Ke Dai Biao Yuan Yuan' was the first publisher. Her Weibo post was forwarded more than 150,000 times, with more than 60,000 comments (Ji and Zhang 2016).

In China, there are social media marketing accounts called the 'Online Water Army'. This phrase refers to the hordes of people who are paid to post comments on the internet. They belong to internet public relations businesses. Those businesses rely on sensationalism for attracting audiences and making a profit. When the controversy arose, the 'Online Water Army' disseminated misleading messages, which led the audience to believe that Guo had discovered gravitational waves earlier than American scientists did. Guo's video could even be accessed through the official Weibo of *People's Daily* and the Weibo account of the movie star, Yaochen. Their social media posts resulted in further media reports, which prompted social media users to repost the content available on the marketing accounts. These audiences were irritated at the host and critics on the *You* programme. They thought that, due to their reaction to Guo's work, China had lost the chance of being considered the first to detect gravitational waves. At the same time, they condemned the discourtesy and lack of professionalism on the programme.

However, two social network reports had the effect of changing the public's opinion. Guokr Web, a social networking website that focuses on science and technology topics, posted an article titled 'We should respect our dreams, but Nobel Older Brother's dream was blind imagination' (Sun and Xu 2016). Zhihu Web, which is an online quiz community website, subsequently reposted one of the articles. In the repost, it added a new headline: 'Look at the real face of Nobel Older Brother who called himself discoverer of gravitational waves' above the original heading: 'How to evaluate the Weibo report on Nobel Older Brother Guo Yingsen.' The repost

said that Guo's theories had never been proven mathematically and reminded the audience that Guo himself had claimed that 'mathematics was useless in the internet age' and that 'true science did not need mathematics' (Zhihu Daily 2016). After reading the reposts, many netizens realised that they had been misled by the social media. They could now appreciate that Guo might not be a real scientist, prompting them to conclude that the claim 'China lost the Noble Prize' was untrue (Baidu Post 2016).

Some blamed the social media marketing accounts, such as Ke Dai Biao Yuan Yuan, for the hype surrounding this incident. At the same time, since they realised that folk science enthusiasts would hardly become real scientists, they felt that Guo should give up his unrealistic dreams. Most of the social media users also blamed the speculation promoted by the marketing accounts and the impolite behaviour of the *You* programme host and panelists for this controversy. The majority of these users thought that the primary issue was not the Nobel Prize, but rather than everyone had a right to freedom of opinion and expression – and the right to pursue their dreams. They argued that Chinese citizens needed this innovative spirit, and innovators should be encouraged to pursue their dreams (Sohu netizens 2016).

In this case, the *You* programme and social media marketing accounts such as Ke Dai Biao Yuan Yuan, were good at generating media spectacles and attracting attention, but their kind of behaviour in disseminating information was condemned by the audience. This case study shows that communication effects should not be gained at the expense of value rationality. If value rationality is disregarded, the credibility of communication is jeopardised. This important problem for the field of media ethics is examined in this analysis where the imbalance between instrumental rationality and value rationality is addressed. But first, as background, a theoretical statement needs to be made on how to balance the two when disseminating information.

### **Balancing instrumental rationality and value rationality**

In *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*, German sociologist Max Weber established a criterion for living based on ethical principles (2006 [1905]: 19). Individuals guided by these rules are obligated to take responsibility for their actions, both in their professional and private lives (ibid: 97). The capitalist spirit, for example, means that work is considered a sys-

tematic and rational pursuit of lawful incomes (Weber 2006 [1995]: 102). In developing this concept, Weber drew upon the ideas of American political figure Benjamin Franklin. He recommended Franklin's ethical principles that not only included shrewd business conduct but also a spiritual temperament, such as diligence and thrift, punctuality, fairness and honesty. A competent business sense, according to Franklin, included knowing how to minimise costs while maximising profits and thus embodied what Weber called 'instrumental rationality'. Spiritual temperament, which focused on ethical principles and the value of life, represented value rationality (Weber 1997 [1922]: 56). Weber contended that instrumental rationality and value rationality were two aspects of human behaviour that could not be separated.

In his *Economy and society*, Weber developed the concepts of value and instrumental rationality further. For Weber, 'value rationality' means that someone focuses on such social values as fairness, justice, loyalty and honour; this person is not motivated by means and results. On the other hand, in 'instrumental rationality' people evaluate actions by their maximum impact. Instead of giving prominence to people's emotional and spiritual well-being, those following instrumental rationality pursue utilitarian ends (ibid: 56).

Weber's model for social science, applied to communication studies, means for instrumental rationality that communicators emphasise the purpose and means of communication in order to achieve their own goals by meeting their audiences' expectations. In contrast, those pursuing value rationality emphasise ultimate values, and generally do not consider the methods and effects of disseminating information (ibid: 57). Value rationality, in the context of information dissemination, considers the types of topics that should be communicated in order to maximise the social significance of the disseminated content. Instrumental rationality, on the other hand, determines what means of communication will maximise profits. In Weber's view, combining both approaches yields the maximum benefit.

Instrumental rationality and value rationality are two integral aspects of behavioural motivation. Value rationality provides a spiritual guide for instrumental rationality which, in turn, gives practical support for value rationality. When instrumental rationality has precedence, communicators pay too much attention to their immediate interests and the technicalities of

reports, without giving due consideration to their social responsibilities. When people focus on value rationality and overlook the methods and practices communicators use, it will lead to a degrading of the readability of news reports. As a result, information that is disseminated may be misleading because of the communicators' excessive pursuit of instrumental rationality, which results in giving up basic values and spiritual requirements for a utilitarian purpose. If communicators put too much emphasis on value rationality and do not pay attention to communication skills, the content they produce will never capture the audience's attention. Consequently, the audience will neither comprehend nor value the information received.

### **Imbalance between instrumental rationality and value rationality**

The imbalance between instrumental rationality and value rationality in the dissemination of information in the *You* programme can be summarised basically as the unilateral development of instrumental rationality and the decay of value rationality. That is, the communicators' main objective was capturing the audience's attention, which is contrary to the value rationality of humanistic care, truth and impartiality. These issues are discussed below.

The value rationality of information dissemination requires that communicators respect humanity. Because media outlets operate in the public arena, ideally communicators should show regard for the subjective status and various traits of individuals in their audiences, as well as consider the spirit and intentions of different groups in their audiences. In the controversy discussed in the preceding sections, most audiences objected to the disrespectful attitude of the *You* programme toward Guo. They thought that the way the show was organised to highlight dramatic conflict, with the organiser at the centre permitting disrespect for the interviewee, showed a lack of humanistic care. Even those in the audience who disagreed with Guo's claims about his theories, felt that he should be respected as a person and allowed to express his views.

Value rationality requires information to be true and truth is the lifeblood of the media. However, when the controversy arose, social media marketing accounts promoted sensationalism, since it increased their ratings and promoted advertisers' interests. Thus, the social media gave precedence to instrumental rationality. The social media network communicated distorted news stories, including the original



video and falsified messages, in order to create controversy in public opinion. They disseminated false news, and ignored the bottom lines of both science and ethics because that improved their ratings. Some audiences were unaware of the truth, or were emotionally provoked by the false claims, so they too became false news communicators by forwarding such posts on social media.

Social media marketing accounts ignored the principle of truth so that they could attract more audiences by communicating false messages. In the short term they gained attention, but they were rejected by the audience once the truth was revealed. The value rationality of information dissemination requires that communicators question, investigate and verify information before disseminating it. However, since this is a resource-intensive process, communicators guided by instrumental rationality forwarded the messages without considering their veracity.

At the start of the controversy, social media users blindly followed the information trend, thus perpetuating the false information. Searches on the topic 'Nobel Older Brother' on Weibo yielded 181 million accounts, while revealing that the original post of the 'Nobel Brother' event was forwarded by up to 15 million Weibo users. From 11 February to 19 March 2016, the event generated 1,186 reports, even though only 104 original reports were posted, resulting in a 91 per cent repetition rate (Hui Ke Database 2016). Moreover, analysis of the Weibo social network chains revealed that the marketing accounts, the movie star's account, and the official Weibo of traditional media were the key points from which the false information spread (Tencent 2016).

Since the controversy was reported by websites, newspapers, and other mass media, this prompted further discussions on the topic. The trend of excessive forwarding not only resulted in generating a false opinion climate, but also caused one-sided interpretation, thus neglecting facts and hindering the potential for the diversification of public opinion. The value rationality of information dissemination requires that information should be objective, impartial and rational. Communicators of excessive instrumental rationality not only presented conflicts but actively promoted them. The stigmatising of Guo by the TV host and guest critics caused some protest and indignation. According to Wang (2015), stigmatisation in society typically stems from socially dominant groups

using biased evaluations to labeling vulnerable groups negatively. In the incident discussed above, Guo was labeled by the *You* programme host and critics as 'not having graduated from junior high school', 'laid-off worker' and 'mental patient' (*southcn.com* 2016, para. 4).

While the labels may be true, they still represent a biased assessment and are hurtful to those who are not well educated or have not had the opportunities to realise their full potential. The disrespectful remarks of the show's host and participants angered audiences. Thus, the audiences labeled Fang Zhouzi as 'idiot' and 'junky', while referring to the host as 'ill-mannered' (see WeChat account subscription 'entertainment new gossip' 2016, para. 1.4). In sum, the audiences reacted to what they deemed insulting behaviour by behaving in the same way. The value rationality of information dissemination requires that communicators present the truth through a variety of relevant sources, and allow the disputing parties to engage in dialogue. Excessive emphasis on instrumental rationality often leads to perpetuating implied bias.

In this controversy, the media's transmission bias was typical. Guo's theory might not be true, but he was never given the opportunity on the TV show to present his views and to respond to the accusations. Instead, he was repeatedly interrupted or silenced, and his theory was labelled unscientific. During the *You* show, Guo was required to be silent as a disadvantaged voice, while the guest critics could speak as a dominant voice, leading to a 'spiral of silence' (Noelle-Neumann 2013 [1980]). The audiences, unsatisfied with the programme producers' tough attitude, condemned and criticised the host and panelists through social media. Most of the panelists and the host maintained silence toward the criticism and only Fang wrote a lengthy blog to refute it. This time, the netizen audience had a strong voice, whereas those of the *You* programme were inferior. Gradually, the sound of netizens became louder and louder, while the guests of the programme became more silent, creating an 'anti-spiral of silence' in the social media (Dou 2012). This feedback phenomenon showed that the audiences were strongly dissatisfied with the one-way communication promoted by the media.

In addition to the social media response, Guokr Web – a technology interest network – published an article titled: 'The dream can be respected, but the inane comments should be mocked' (Sun and Moogee 2016). The article's author claimed that Guo's theory was wrong,

but stated that even though his dreams were to be respected, his inane comments should be ridiculed. However, the comments to which this assertion pertained were not discussed. Thus, the judgement put forth in the article was not based on the analysis of Guo's theory, and consequently provoked Guo's opposition. Guo replied: 'How did you know I was crazy? You have never seen me!' (Wen 2016: para. 1). In another response, the online quiz community, Zhihu Web, forwarded an article written by Di Han, under the sensational title: 'Look at the real face of "Nobel Older Brother" who called himself discoverer of gravitational waves' (Zhihu 2016). Di Han is an active user on the Baidu Post Bar. The Post Bar is an online community that internet users interested in the same topics use to communicate and help each other. Di Han originally wrote the article with the title: 'How to evaluate the Weibo reports about "Nobel Older Brother" Guo Yingsen' (Han 2016). In the article, the author included a large number of Guo's statements, which he subjected to a detailed analysis. However, when the Zhihu Web forwarded the article, it did so under the title: 'Look at the real face of "Nobel Older Brother" who called himself discoverer of gravitational waves.'

This new title was eye-catching, but it was ambiguous and misleading for the audience, as Guo never claimed to have found gravitational waves. If the content of the report had been verified through objective reporting and dialogue, and given a more accurate title, it would not have led to more controversy and misunderstanding. As one Tencent commentator said: 'If A does not respect B, and makes B remain silent, then A cannot conclude that B is wrong. Communicators should distinguish attitude from science' (Tencent 2016, para. 10).

#### **Imbalance between instrumental rationality and value rationality**

The negative side of losing rational value in the dissemination of information is not only reflected in this case, but is also evident in such areas of communication as sensational titles, false news, homogenisation, stigmatisation, communication bias, vulgar and faulty reports. Why is there an imbalance between instrumental rationality and value rationality in some communications? Here it is argued that imbalance is mainly caused by the strong incentive of attracting attention and making profits in a fiercely competitive market, and by bad professional qualities, as discussed below.

#### **External reasons**

At present, the demand for information exceeds the supply in the media market. Communicators make performance assessment criteria according to quantitative indicators, such as clicking, listening, or viewing rates, in order to stand out amid increasingly fierce competition, by grabbing the audiences' attention and gaining advertising revenue. Based on this rigid quantitative index, some communicators regard instrumental rationality as more important than value rationality. As a result, they strive to meet the audience's psychological requirements and attract users' attention through fabrication, being a maverick, taking quotations out of context, specious reporting, presenting or generating conflict, disseminating content that incites, quickly reporting news without verification, pandering to the audience, and so forth (Yan 2015). As the case study indicates, in the short term, audiences are attracted by sensational information; however, in the long term, the information will be revealed as lacking in substance and the audience will lose faith in the communicators.

#### **Internal reasons**

In addition to pressure from the market environment, communication personnel's deficient information literacy can also lead to an imbalance between instrumental rationality and value rationality. This imbalance should be understood as an imbalance between market criteria and journalistic professionalism, and also as a lack of professional skill. Communicators who give precedence to instrumental rationality ignore news professionalism and focus solely on profits. In the case study, the Sina-Weibo marketing accounts that lacked journalistic professionalism ignored the truth and only focused on the news market response, which prompted them to spread a false news story. Professionalism is the most important aspect of journalism in the Western media. The Western news concept, for the most highly regarded media, focuses on 'open and fair' assessment of facts, emphasises social responsibility and reflects value rationality (Shen 2002).

On the other hand, for market-driven journalism, profits are the main driver of the news production process. Communicators disseminate unusual news stories to attract the target audiences that are valuable for advertisers, at a minimal cost, but with great potential for financial benefit to the stakeholders (Shen 2002). Although China is different from the West, professionalism can be also used as the standard for evaluating Chinese news prac-

tices. In the Guo Yingsen case, communicators put the market-driven cart before the horse of journalistic professionalism. Their behaviour manifested the decay of value rationality and the expansion of instrumental rationality which resulted in chaos and controversy.

### Practical skills are weak

If there are limited communication skills, communicators find it difficult to balance instrumental rationality and value rationality, since value rationality requires verification of sources and reporting in a responsible, impartial and professional manner. For example, the *You* programme producers decided to make Guo a negative example, and made sure to promote the view that an ordinary person's invention does not deserve closer analysis (*southcn.com* 2016). However, the disrespectful communication did not yield the intended goal, causing criticism instead. The official Weibo of the *People's Daily* forwarded the video of Guo in the *You* programme with a comment: 'Please respect others' dreams.' Even though the official Weibo of the *People's Daily* later deleted the post, it did accelerate the event's influence. Most media focused on reporting the controversy, and their reproducing the news story added to the anger and confusion. Consequently, they hindered both the diversity of opinion and the expansion of quality reporting.

### Balancing instrumental rationality and value rationality

The imbalance of instrumental and value rationality in the dissemination of information obstructs all forms of public communication. Establishing a mechanism of balance between value rationality and instrumental rationality in public information is essential. Balance requires that information not only meets the needs and requirements of audiences, but also generates a profit. Following and applying Weber, there are several important factors in achieving balance.

### Value-oriented mechanisms

The media need to establish a set of value-oriented operations by which value rationality precedes instrumental rationality (Chen and Cui 2012). In this model, communicators represent news stories that follow legal and professional standards. By attracting the audience's attention, and also making the audience gain valuable information, they achieve a win-win situation in terms of both the social and economic benefits of communication. In the *You* programme case, many communicators knew how to pursue the instrumental rationality of

communication. They reduced reproduction costs and attracted attention through conflict. However, the majority of the audience decided that respecting people should be a minimum requirement of communication (Wen 2016). Gu Zexu, a Tencent columnist, evaluated Guo Yingsen from a humane perspective. As he put it: 'Perhaps the theory of Guo is completely false and absurd, but he is still worthy of respect and honour. His devotion to scientific research and "fantasy" in contemporary Chinese society both have an especially precious value' (Kuang 2016, para. 2). From this case, it becomes clear that the trend toward increasing instrumental rationality and reducing value rationality needs to be reversed. Truth, humanity and non-violence are the core principles of media ethics promoted by Clifford G. Christians and his colleagues (Christians 2010). These principles are also the baselines of value rationality. Placing greater emphasis on value orientation versus instrumental value should be the goal of all communicators. The goal will be attained when value rationality is required by management and given priority by journalists. But even if the value building is done systematically, it will be a long-term process.

### Professional mechanisms of information production

The second link in the information transmission chain is the establishment of an information production mechanism. Speaking the truth is the most important standard. Respecting facts and not distorting the story increase the value of disseminated information. Communicators should only report facts and do so accurately. This requires verification of sources, positive dialogue with the interviewees, using direct quotations, background information, objective facts, and other supporting material.

### Investigation and verification

According to the famous editor of the *London Times*, John Delane (1817-1879): 'The responsibilities of journalists are the same as those of historians, who are in a desperate search for the truth' (see Xie 2011: 80). Investigating and verifying the facts, and communicating factual information are the only means to ensure authenticity in reporting. In the Guo Yingsen case, journalists in Beijing's *Youth Daily* sought the truth by online observation, investigation and interviews with all the relevant sources. Finally, they published the article, 'A suspected network spreader behind the Nobel Older Brother' and tried to disclose the truth of the Guo Yingsen event (Ji and Zhang 2016). In this article about the electronic spread of the *You*

programme, the journalists used evidence to eliminate doubts. Their analysis was based on information they verified, and the authors did not jump to conclusions about unknown circumstances. Thus, their article represented the awareness and skill of reporting professionally.

In addition, reports on *ifeng.com* (2016) relied on facts and objective reasoning. These journalists used a variety of fact-checking methods, including analysing the literature, consulting experts, clarifying the issues, and eliminating false news and rumors, to ensure that their reporting was impartial and the audience could have a comprehensive understanding about the event, especially Guo's theories.

### Opposition coexists

Max Weber's social action theory focuses on a series of concepts about contradictions and opposites, such as rationality and irrationality, practical experience and concepts, realistic limitation and infinite knowledge, interpretation and understanding, and belief and knowledge. From Weber's political realism perspective, these concepts are deeply rooted in life and society, as individuals are always presented with choices and face opposition. Although opposition causes tension because of differences, trends, and hostilities in social existence, Weber contended that opposition is not a synonym for conflict. In his view, opposition can evolve into conflict because it is at the root of conflict, but opposition and conflict can coexist with balance and cooperation (Zhu 1990: 24-25).

In Cao's (2016) article, 'Respect for dreams, but more respect for science', this coexistence was highlighted, as the author claimed that we should respect Guo's dream, while acknowledging the distinction between dreams and science. Cao proposed that people who love science should treat the science community in the right way, that is, not belittling those who are not official members of it. His analysis, based on coexisting opposition, was praised by readers. One Weibo user, for example, commented: 'To respect science is important, but to respect personal dignity is more important' (Weibo user 2016, para. 3).

### Find the source

Another factor in achieving balance is identifying the source of information. This identification is helpful for finding the truth about the roots of the problem; and when the problem's roots are analysed, the issues can be addressed meaningfully. In the article, 'Reflections on

the cultural roots of folk scientists' Gu (2016) pointed out the limitations in the thinking of some folk science fans. Gu contended that these thinking defects in folk science originated from two Chinese cognitive dispositions. The first disposition is that ancient Chinese people invented many technologies by practical experience. It has been recognised that it is difficult to establish general logical deductive systems from the results of such inventions. For Gu, the other disposition is that Chinese culture had entered goes into 'Numbers-Thinking' too early. Chinese 'Numbers Thinking' has never developed into mathematical thinking, nor has it formed rigorous logical thinking grounded in empirical evidence. Based on his analysis of these cultural foundations, Gu concluded that people should not be misled into engaging in scientific research using purely experiential thinking.

### Effective dialogue

Dialogue is another important strategy for implementing balance. It is a way to realise the ideas of 'open-market' and 'self-correction' which were put forward by John Milton in his *Areopagitica* (1958 [1644]). By the 'open market of viewpoints' Milton meant the fostering of an environment of open and free public opinion. For Milton, if truth and fallacy were allowed to compete in a free and fair contest, the audience would be able to use its judgement in joining the contest, and in doing so would spot the flaws in the fallacies and correct them. Following Milton's tradition, Habermas (1988) argued that communication must satisfy four conditions for effective dialogue: understanding, truthfulness, sincerity and correctness.

The report, 'A suspected network spreader behind Nobel Older Brother', was designed to provoke dialogue and met the requirements of effective communication (Ji and Zhang 2016). This report prompted the various parties involved to conduct a dialogue so that facts could be verified and the report made credible. And another example of dialogue was the news story, 'Nobel Older Brother claims that he exceeds Einstein' (Yang 2016), which was followed two days later with the online report, 'Fang Zhouzi responds to the demand of making an apology to Guo.' In these programmes, netizens insisted that the *You* programme group disrespected Guo and owed him an apology. Fang Zhouzi described the way Guo used the mechanics theory of Yin-Yang and also the eight diagrams which proved his ideas were unscientific. Fang said: 'Every netizen cursed at me and thought that I made China lose the

Nobel Prize. I wondered if netizens insisted that I should apologize to Guo, then who should make an apology to me?' (*southcn.com* 2016).

These reports about Guo and Fang formed a kind of dialogue that helped improve balance and find the truth. Similarly, in the article headlined 'The dream can be respected, but the inane comments should be mocked' in the Guokr Network (Sun and Moogee 2016), the authors thought that Guo's comments were inane. After that, an article appeared with the headline: 'Guo Yingsen shouted to Guokr Network: You badgered me with nonsense' (Wen 2016). This article included Guo's response to the network's evaluation of him. Despite the inflammatory headline, both of the articles indicated that there was a dialogue that promoted the balancing of the news story.

### Full administrative mechanisms

As outlined above, in the process of information production and dissemination, media professionals should look for ways to improve reporting quality in order to achieve Weber's balance. In China's media market, a significant proportion of the reporting staff are young and inexperienced. Media managements need to establish a monitoring mechanism in which experienced journalists can guide their young colleagues. For example, experts on the subjects being considered for coverage could assess their importance, and give advice on the feasibility of interviews, in order to avoid incompetent reporting. They could also examine the news content and predict the possible issues that will arise from the dissemination.

At the same time, while journalists work on striking the right balance between instrumental rationality and value rationality, media administrators should do so also. Their recommendations can be translated into evaluation indicators for the news staff. These evaluation indicators should not only include the quantitative indexes of coverage, clicks, ratings and so on, but also the social effects, that is, qualitative indicators such as veracity, balance, humanity and justice. Managements should set up internal and external verification systems. Evaluation indicators that are especially meaningful would not only cover media management and media staff, but also establish channels for the audience to provide feedback on false or improper reports. If the audience and netizens discover mistakes, stigma, and bias – and even if it includes hostile responses – the staff involved should be criticised and educated.

### Conclusion

Communicators who follow Weber, balance value rationality which reflects social benefits with instrumental rationality which reflects economic benefits. Since media practices in this technological age give precedence to instrumental rationality, to achieve balance the media should emphasise value rationality and demonstrate how this emphasis makes for reporting that is both valuable and attractive. Following on from Weber's framework for achieving balance, the media must cultivate the professionalism of their staff by enhancing their communication skills, stressing social responsibility as their moral duty and educating the staff to serve the public with information services for socially sustainable development.

This pilot study examines whether Weber's rationality theory is relevant for complicated cases in today's non-Western news media. It proved to be significant as a standard of media effectiveness, with the series of media events following the *You* programme demonstrating by the negative response that instrumental rationality without balance is ineffective in directing public discussion. Close observation of the media strategies produced a list of suggested procedures and policies for achieving balance. From this Weberian review of practices based on this case study, hypotheses can be developed for further systematic research of the international news media.

Many thanks to Professor Clifford Christians for his editorial assistance.

### References

- Baidu Post Bar (2017) Don't talk about Guo Yingsen can receive the Nobel Prize, *Baidu*, 5 June. Available online at <http://tieba.baidu.com/p/4364180638>, accessed on 20 April 2018
- Cao, B. (2016) Respect for dreams, but more respect for science, *Science and Technology Daily*, 22 February. Available online at [http://digitalpaper.stdaily.com/http\\_www.kjrb.com/kjrb/html/2016-02/22/content\\_332085.htm?div=-1](http://digitalpaper.stdaily.com/http_www.kjrb.com/kjrb/html/2016-02/22/content_332085.htm?div=-1), accessed on 10 March 2016
- Chen, Y. and Cui, J. (2012) The leading cause and balance mechanism of instrumental rationality and value rationality in academic evaluation, *Journal of Tsinghua University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)*, Vol. 66 pp 143-149
- Christians, C. (2010) The ethics of universal being. Ward, J. A. Stephen and Wasserman, H. (eds) *Media ethics beyond borders: A global perspective*, New York, NY, Routledge pp 6-23
- Dou, G. (2012) Analysis of the 'spiral of silence' and 'against the spiral of silence' in the column of *You*. *Science and Technology Information*, Vol. 30 pp 231-232
- Gu, J. (2016) Reflections on the cultural roots of folks. *Liberation Daily*, 15 March p. 13. Available online at [http://newspaper.jfdaily.com/jfrb/html/2016-03/15/content\\_179827.htm](http://newspaper.jfdaily.com/jfrb/html/2016-03/15/content_179827.htm), accessed on 21 March 2016
- Habermas, J. (1988) *Communication and social evolution* (Boshu, Zhang, trans.) Chongqing, Chongqing Press



- Han, D. (2016) How to evaluate the reports on Weibo about 'Nobel Older Brother' Guo Yingsen? Zhihu, 20 February. Available online at <https://www.zhihu.com/question/40562381>, accessed on 25 February 2016
- Hui Ke Database (2016) All the reports about Guo Yingsen in China from February 19 to March 19. Available online at [http://edu.wisearch.wisers.net/eduws/index.do?Srp\\_restore=discard&new-login=true&resetAll=true?](http://edu.wisearch.wisers.net/eduws/index.do?Srp_restore=discard&new-login=true&resetAll=true?), accessed on 21 March 2016
- Ji, W. and Zhang, Y. (2016) 'Nobel Brother' video was popular online, there were suspected spreaders behind the event, *Beijing Youth Daily*, 26 February. Available online at [http://news.youth.cn/sh/201602/t20160226\\_7676098.htm](http://news.youth.cn/sh/201602/t20160226_7676098.htm), accessed on 26 February 2016
- Kuang, F. (2016) Who respects folk scientists' dreams? *Southern Metropolis Daily*, p. AA23, 26 February. Available online at [http://epaper.oeeee.com/epaper/A/html/2016-02/26/content\\_12572.htm](http://epaper.oeeee.com/epaper/A/html/2016-02/26/content_12572.htm), accessed on 26 February 2016
- Noelle-Neumann, E. (2013[1980]) *Spiral of silence: Public opinion – the skin of our society*, Vol. 1 (Dong Lu, trans.) Beijing, China: Peking University Press
- Milton, J. (1958 [1644]) *Areopagitica* (Zhichun, Wu, trans.) Beijing, Commercial Press
- Shen, H. (2002) News concept and marketing concept: Two kinds of news production concept in the contemporary American, *Journalism Bimonthly*, Vol. 72 pp 18-22
- Sohu netizen (2016) The comments on the article titled We should respect our dreams, but Nobel Older Brother's dream was a blind imagination, *sohu.com*, 21 February. Available online at [http://www.sohu.com/a/59813375\\_383720](http://www.sohu.com/a/59813375_383720), accessed on 26 February 2016
- southcn.com (2016) Fang Zhouzi responded to the apology event: Guo Yingsen never touched on the topic of mechanics of Yin-Yang and the Eight Diagrams, *southcn.com*, 24 February. Available online at [http://news.southcn.com/community/content/2016-02/24/content\\_142883136.htm](http://news.southcn.com/community/content/2016-02/24/content_142883136.htm), accessed on 26 February 2016
- Sun, Z. and Moogee (2016) The dream can be respected, but the inane comments should be mocked, *guokr.com*, 21 February. Available online at <http://www.guokr.com/article/441210/?4404571343=&page=5>, accessed on 26 February 2016
- Sun, Z. and Xu, L. (2016) We should respect our dreams, but Nobel Older Brother's dream was a blind imagination, Weibo, 21 February. Available online at [http://weibo.com/ttarticle/p/show?id=2309403944906681894561#\\_0](http://weibo.com/ttarticle/p/show?id=2309403944906681894561#_0), accessed on 26 February 2016
- Tencent (2016) 'Nobel Brother' event: The media become the ignorance of the accomplices, *Tencent*, 24 February. Available online at <http://view.news.qq.com/original/intouchtoday/n3445.html>, accessed on 12 March 2016
- Wang, C. (2015) Stigma reversal and netizen group identity crisis in the event of the reversal of public opinion, *Journal of Hunan University of Science and Technology (Social Science Edition)*, Vol. 18, No. 6 pp 123-127
- Weibo user (2016) To respect science is important, but to respect personal dignity is more important, 22 February. Available online at <https://s.weibo.com/weibo/>, accessed on 12 March 2016
- Today's topic column of Tencent network (2016) 'Nobel Brother' is entirely unrelated to gravitational waves and folk science is not science, *Tencent*, 21 February. Available on <http://view.news.qq.com/original/intouchtoday/n3442.html>, accessed on 12 March 2016
- Weber, M. (1997 [1922]) *Economy and society*, Vol. 1 (Rongyuan, Lin, trans.) Beijing, China, The Commercial Press
- Weber, M. (2006 [1905]) *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*, Vol. 1 (Yu, Xiao and Chen, Weigang, trans.) Xi'an, China, Shanxi Normal University Press
- WeChat Subscription 'Entertainment new gossip' (2016) Expose inside story of gravitational waves event of Guo Yingsen in the *You* programme five years ago, *sohu.com*, 22 February. Available online at [http://www.sohu.com/a/59946301\\_378918](http://www.sohu.com/a/59946301_378918), accessed on 26 February 2016
- Wen, Y. (2016) Guo Yingsen shouted to Guokr network: You badgered me with nonsense!, *news.k618.cn*, 22 February. Available online at [http://news.k618.cn/dj/201602/t20160222\\_6757068.html](http://news.k618.cn/dj/201602/t20160222_6757068.html), accessed on 26 February 2016
- Xie, Q. (2011) Research on the authenticity of news, *Theory Observe*, Vol. 4 pp 80-81
- Yan, D. (2015) The basic dimension of the construction of new media ethics: Responsibility ethics, *Journal of Social Science of Hunan Normal University*, Vol. 4 pp 145-153
- Yang, X. (2016) Nobel Older Brother claimed that he exceeded Einstein: The programme group owed me an apology, *Chinese Business Morning View*, 22 February. Available online at <http://news.huaxi100.com/show-228-743096-1.html>, accessed on 26 February 2016
- Zhihu Daily (2016) Look at the real face of 'Nobel Older Brother' who called himself discoverer of gravitational waves, *Zhihu*, 22 February. Available online at <http://dudu.zhihu.com/story/7899532>, accessed on 25 February 2016
- Zhu, Yuanfa (1990) *An introduction to Weber's thoughts*, Taipei, Yuan-Liou Publishing Company

## Note on the contributor

Lili Ning, a former journalist, is an associate professor at the Institute of Literature, Dali University; a doctoral candidate at the School of Journalism and Communication, Tsinghua University, and a visiting scholar at the Institute of Communication Research, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. email: lilining001@gmail.com

## Dumbs gone to Iceland: (Re)presentations of English national identity during Euro 2016 and the EU referendum

*This paper analyses (re)presentations of English national identity during the 2016 UEFA European Football Championships which were held in France between 10 June and 10 July of that year. Set against the backdrop of Britain's referendum regarding membership of the European Union, the tournament took place during a time of heightened debate about English national identity. Employing inductive textual analysis and drawing on Anderson's (2006) concept of imagined community, Hobsbaum's (1983) notion of invented traditions and Guibernau's (2007) strategies for the construction of national identity, England's three most popular newspapers, the Sun, the Daily Mail and the Daily Mirror, were examined. While the papers' narratives employed familiar tropes which referenced England's past history and employed militaristic metaphors and the 'us' and 'them' cliché, there was also demonstrable uncertainty regarding the articulation of 'English' (and 'British') national identity.*

**Keywords:** England, Euro 2016, football, media discourse, media sport, national identity

### Introduction

Due to the referendum on the UK's continued membership of the European Union (EU), the 2016 UEFA Football Championship (Euro 2016) was played during a period of heightened debate about English national identity. On Thursday 23 June, three days after England's final group match against Slovakia, the

referendum took place with 51.9 per cent voting in favour of 'Brexit' – for Britain to leave (or exit) the EU. Hobolt's (2016) analysis of the vote showed a deeply divided nation split along demographic lines with young graduates living in large multi-cultural cities voting to 'Remain' whereas those living in the English countryside and northern post-industrial towns voted in large numbers to 'Leave'. There was also a geographical split with England and Wales voting to 'Leave' while Scotland and Northern Ireland voted to 'Remain'.

Although some commentators, such as Gapper (2014), have argued that 'The era of the Fleet Street tabloids, the populist and fear-some emblems of British culture and politics, is over', research conducted by Loughborough University (2016) showed that the press played a prominent – and partisan – role during the referendum campaign. Less than an hour after the result was announced, Tony Gallagher, editor of the *Sun*, told the *Guardian*: 'So much for the waning power of the print media' (Martinson 2016) which was indicative of the feeling that, despite declining sales and falling revenues, newspapers still had a significant impact on the result (Seaton 2016). This study seeks to examine the narratives employed by the three best-selling English newspapers: the *Daily Mail*, the *Sun* and the *Daily Mirror* (Ponsford 2016) and their Sunday counterparts in covering the England men's football team during Euro 2016. While it must be acknowledged that these newspapers articulate a particular form of Englishness, they had a combined readership in excess of four million at the time of the referendum<sup>1</sup> and, therefore, provide fertile ground for exploring the manner in which the articulation of English national identity reflects both the real and imagined versions of Englishness during Euro 2016 in the context of the build-up to and aftermath of the EU Referendum.

### (English) national identity, football and the media

A nation is, as described by Anderson, an 'imagined political community' (2006: 6). In Anderson's conceptualisation, nations are inherently *limited* because no nation identifies with the entire human race, and even the most populous have geographical boundaries beyond which lie other nations from which they are separated. They are also *sovereign* because the conceptual roots of the nation can be traced back to the age of Enlightenment and the French Revolution when the sovereign state and the concept of liberty began to usurp and replace supposedly divinely-ordained dynasties and feudal-

ism (ibid: 6-7). Nations are imagined, Anderson argues, because even people living in the smallest will never meet or know the majority of the rest of the population in that nation 'yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (ibid: 6).

This perception of a unique national community is created through cultural phenomena such as a shared language, a mass education system and mass media which both create and relay narratives concerning the nation's culture (Gellner 1983). According to Womack et al., 'national identity is thus the product of discourse' (2009: 22) or, as Stuart Hall put it: 'National cultures construct identities by producing meanings about "the nation" with which we can *identify*' (1996: 613, italics in the original). This discursive national culture is compromised of what Hobsbawm refers to as 'invented traditions' which he defined as:

A set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and or norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past (2012: 1).

Wherever possible these invented traditions, which can range from national anthems, flags and emblems to the British monarch's Christmas broadcast, are associated with an idealised past. For example, in Britain, 'the war is taken to evoke the British at their best, the qualities of Churchill's "island race". This ... helps construct a sense of nation and nationality ...' (Cesarini 1996: 69). They are, in turn, bolstered through discourses articulated by both politicians and journalists. Guibernau (2007) outlined five strategies which, she argues, the state employs to construct and disseminate a definitive national identity in an attempt to unite its citizens.

- Firstly, the image of nation is defined and represented in stories about the dominant ethnic group within the nation's borders and reinforced by stories of that group's common history and culture.
- Secondly, this shared history, culture and sense of belonging is reinforced through the use of national symbols and rituals.
- Thirdly, a clearly defined set of civic rights and duties are created at the same time establishing who is entitled to those rights and is thus accepted as a citizen and who is not.

- Fourthly, a nation's identity is made distinct and reaffirmed through the creation of common enemies, thereby separating out and distinguishing the national identity (us) from the identity of other nations (them).
- Finally, the media and education systems are utilised to disseminate the above, namely: the image of the nation; its shared history and culture; its civil rights and duties, and its distinction from the common enemy thereby defining what it is to be a 'good citizen'.

As Guibernau argues, by 'strengthening a sentiment of belonging to an artificial type of extended family, the nation' (ibid: 169), this shared notion of national culture and history supersedes other social identities such as class, race and gender. Because of this, 'individuals identify with and ... regard as their own the accomplishments of their fellow nationals' (ibid). Hobsbawm expresses a similar sentiment and directly applies the idea to sport which, he argues, is 'uniquely effective' in instilling feelings of national belonging (2012). Few, if any, cultural events provide a more fertile environment for the communal expression of national identity than mediated sports events such as a football World Cup or European Championships. Thus, any national football team (which, lest we forget, begins each match by singing its national anthem) becomes a powerful symbol of the relevant nation because, to repeat Hobsbawm's oft-quoted phrase: 'the imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people. The individual, even the one who only cheers, becomes a symbol of his nation himself' (ibid: 143).

#### **British bulldog or English lion?**

When James VI of Scotland became King of England in 1603 he declared that he was not King of England and Scotland but King of Great Britain. However, it was not until the Act of Union in 1707 that the term 'Great Britain' was formally adopted (Kumar 2003a). Cesarini draws out the development of this process of 'forging a nation', arguing that the confused history of British citizenship means that British national identity has never been clearly defined and in many respects 'was formed in opposition to foreign countries that were considered repressive and "backward"' (1996: 61). Crucially, this notion of 'Britishness' became synonymous with a mythologised 'Englishness' that dominated the Celtic nations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (Fulbrook and Cesarini 1996: 212) which, in turn, 'clung to their national

identities as a kind of compensation ...' (Kumar 2003a: 187).

Consequently, following the loss of the *British* Empire, *English* national identity which, unlike Scottish, Welsh or Northern Irish identity, was intrinsically associated with that Empire was hit by crisis (Kumar 2003a; Nairn 2003). In the years before the 2016 EU referendum, scholars of English national identity argued that this crisis was reinforced by political devolution of the Celtic nations (Bryant 2003), scepticism about politics in general (Kenny 2014) and also increased integration with Europe (Wellings 2012). So it is little surprise that since the early 1990s, perceived internal and external threats such as Celtic devolution and greater European integration have, in turn, led to a heightened awareness and articulation of English national identity of which football and, in particular, the men's national team has become a fulcrum. One example of this revival of populist English nationalism is the manner in which since the Euro 96 football tournament England fans have increasingly displayed the (English) flag of St George instead of the (British) Union flag, an action 'seen by many as a positive re-affirmation of an English nationalism in response to the collapse of a coherent British identity' (Carrington 1999: 76). The notion of Englishness has been further reinforced in opposition to the perceived threat of 'radical Islam' in the aftermath of both the 9/11 attacks in America in 2001 and the 7/7 bombings in London in 2005 (Garland and Treadwell 2010).

### Hold the back page!

The cultural representation of a nation state's identity through mediated sport is described by Rowe et al. (2000) as the 'sport-nationalism-media' troika. The potent emotive and dramatic mix provided by sport (and in the context of this study football) means that English newspapers do not just report on matches and their results. Instead, 'the football Press plays a part in the production of a shared set of experiences or in the establishment of an "imagined community"' (Crolley and Hand 2001). Coverage of the sport has become an extension of the country's norms and values providing a representation of the perceived characteristics of English national identity (Crolley and Hand 2002: 19). This mediation of football plays a crucial role in reproducing and amplifying key characteristics associated with fans and their clubs, cities or countries, in turn helping to develop a wider collective identity among the group (Boyle and Haynes 2000: 13). Blain et al. refer to this as a 'form of discursive paralysis' (1993: 64) in which

sports journalists construct images of their own country's national identity (autotypification) and that of other nations (heterotypification). Therefore, and crucially in the light of the 2016 EU Referendum, football match reports and related articles 'may be read, partly at least, as weaving a story about how Europeans interact with each other and how they reflect upon their own national, regional and group identities' (Crolley and Hand 2002: 2). This content is aimed at what Blain and O'Donnell (2000), citing Umberto Eco, call 'The model reader': a constructed, idealised figure partially extrapolated from actual readers – in essence an individual representation of Anderson's (2006) 'imagined community'. However, the football press does not simply passively reproduce existing societal attitudes, nor do its readers passively receive the content. Instead, they are both 'part of a tripartite structure consisting of readers/viewers who are interpreting the world(s) represented or implied, and those who are doing the representing' (Rowe et al. 2000: 121).

This interaction is complicated by the fact that those producing the texts (the journalists) and those consuming them (the readers) may not necessarily have the same political agenda, share the same socio-economic backgrounds nor be of the same race and/or gender. The producers' interpretation of the meanings embedded in the texts may be different from the consumers' interpretation of the same meanings. Therefore, sports-media texts are polysemic and do not possess a fixed, single meaning (Kennedy and Hills 2009: 21) but are, instead, a site for negotiation of socio-cultural identity. For the purpose of this paper, the focus is on the (re)presentation of that identity by the English tabloid print media *not* the readers' interpretation of that (re)presentation.

### 50 years of hurt

The 1966 World Cup, which was both hosted and won by England, has become '... a powerful, self-sustaining myth that has been wired into the nation's collective consciousness' (Silk and Francome 2011: 265). One of the key elements of the 'myth of 1966' (Critcher 1994: 86) was nostalgic nationalism which 'conjures up the supremacy of Britain on the international stage and an acceptance and enactment of mythical English "values"' (Silk and Francombe 2011: 264). Weight argues that victory for England in the final over Germany cemented the Germans as 'an opponent' (2002: 457) while at the same time compensating for England's decline since the Second World War, making the England men's football team a touchstone

for the health of the nation. Colley and Hand (2002) have drawn out the manner in which the 'denigration of the Other' has become more prevalent in English football reports during the second half of the 20th century at the same time arguing that representations of English national identity and, in particular, the England men's football team, draw on a range of perceptions which 'derive from and feed into wider assumptions in the national imagined community dating from the imperial era that serve to define "Englishness"' (Crolley and Hand 2002: 31).

In many respects this reached a peak in coverage of the 1996 UEFA Football Championship (Euro 96). Maguire et al. (1999) and Garland and Rowe (1999) found that English national identity was defined by both the Second World War and England's 1966 World Cup triumph. The tabloid (and to a lesser extent broadsheet) press coverage invoked English national symbolism and employed 'us' and 'them' rhetoric which drew heavily on the aforementioned conflict in both its narratives and imagery, particularly in the build-up to England's semi-final defeat to Germany. By far the clearest example of this was the *Daily Mirror's* declaration of 'football war' on Germany in a front page which used pictures of England players Stuart Pearce and Paul Gascoigne in World War Two army helmets along with the headline 'ACHTUNG SURRENDER: For you Fritz, ze Euro 96 Championship is over' (*Daily Mirror*, 24 June 1996 as quoted in Maguire and Poulton 1999: 25).

Analysis of the 1995 Rugby World Cup found similar coverage of the England team. Reportage employed national stereotypes in adversarial 'us' v. 'them' narratives in which players were 'highly visible embodiments [of England] – they are "patriots at play"' (Tuck 2003: 180–181).

Various studies have found that many of these narrative techniques were in evidence in the coverage of the England men's football team at subsequent tournaments. These included the invocation of the memories of British military successes (Alabarces et al. 2001) and the use of military metaphors and the negative characterisation of 'traditional enemies' (Garland 2004). Vincent et al. (2010) found that 40 years after the 1966 World Cup, the discursive construction of English national identity at the 2006 World Cup drew heavily on invented traditions and previous military successes and had '... barely moved beyond the shadow of the Second World War' (2010: 219). Similar narratives, particularly

surrounding the Second World War and the 1966 World Cup victory, were also in evidence during the coverage of the last European Championships in 2012 (Euro 2012) (Vincent and Harris 2014). However, Kennedy found that in marked contrast to what had come before the newspaper discourses generated since the 2010 World Cup and, in particular, in the run-up to and during the Euro 2012 tournament, were 'uncharacteristically muted' (2014: 276). They were, he argued dominated by a narrative of 'low expectations' mirroring the wider societal preoccupation with austerity which was part of a long-term 'complex and largely non-linear dialectic of decline and renewal' (2014: 281).

### Methodology

To solicit data for the research, a qualitative discourse analysis was undertaken of three English so-called 'tabloid' newspapers: the *Sun*, and the *Daily Mail*, the country's two best-selling daily papers which both sit on the right of the political spectrum, and the *Daily Mirror*, the third bestselling paper which sits to the left of the political spectrum, plus their Sunday counterparts. The newspapers were chosen because of their popularity, their extensive coverage of football, and because tabloid newspapers produce more race-focused sports stories than their broadsheet counterparts (Law 2002). They are also characterised by the national stereotypes that they employ which articulate and reinforce myths and perceptions of national identity (Garland 2004). Furthermore, the *Sun*, in particular, but also to a lesser extent the *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily Mail*, have been the subject of a range of earlier research on the narratives employed in media texts focused on the England men's team at major international football tournaments (Garland 2004; Vincent et al. 2010; Vincent and Harris 2014). Mirroring such previous research in this paper will make comparisons easier, which is important as the concept of (English) national identity is fluid and changes over time and in relation to the contemporary socio-cultural environment (Crolley and Hand 2002: 25).

Hard copies of the newspapers were analysed for a period of 40 days from 2 June, the day of England's final warm-up 'friendly' match and eight days before the tournament's start, until 11 July, the day after the tournament final. The newspapers were read twice and articles and comment pieces which included text and/or photographic imagery concerning:

- (1) the England men's team both on and off the pitch;



- (2) England supporters both at the tournament and in England or elsewhere; and
- (3) English national identity in the context of Euro 2016 were subject to coded content analysis.

The articles were organised by newspaper and date. The transcripts were re-read twice with the aim of identifying dominant and/or contradictory narratives. To facilitate this a constant comparison methodology using two levels of coding – open and axial – was used to inductively interpret the emerging themes and relationships (Corbin and Strauss 2015; Cresswell 1998). The codes which emerged from this process were subsequently interpreted using Guibernau's strategies of national identity, Anderson's concept of an imagined political community (2006) and Hobsbawm's notion of invented tradition (2012). Barthes (2006) argues that the myth does not need to be deciphered or interpreted to be understood or to be effective. On the contrary, if the ideological content of the text is obvious the myth ceases to have power – it stops being a myth. Therefore, myth only works when the denotative meaning of a text and its underlying socio-cultural connotations blur into one. This methodology allowed these dual interpretations to be unpacked by first identifying the denotative meaning of the articles examined and secondly by identifying their social meaning. The aim of the paper, therefore, is not to define 'Englishness' or English national identity but to examine how this national identity is articulated in the tabloid press at a particular moment in time against a backdrop of major socio-cultural flux (the EU membership referendum), through the coverage of the country's men's football team at a major international tournament.

## Results

### **'Fuck off Europe – we're all voting out'**

Guibernau (2007) argued that the construction of national identity united citizens around stories regarding the dominant ethnic group which drew upon a sense of shared history and were reinforced through the use of nationally recognised symbols. In the context of Euro 2016, the papers focused on white, Anglo-Saxon fans and their performance of Englishness, which was anchored in the nation's idealised common heritage. Typical of this theme was a *Daily Mirror* article headlined 'To-knight is the night Hodgson starts Crusade' which featured fans enacting a playful parody of an idealised version of Englishness in which they greeted England boss Roy Hodgson while 'dressed up

as Crusaders ... decked out in chainmail and St George's cross tabards' (11 June: 7). Several scholars (e.g. Vincent and Harris 2014; Vincent et al. 2010) have noted that the increased articulation of English nationalism in the 1990s was mirrored by the 'resurrection' (Heffer 1999: 33) of the flag of St George into English football during the 1996 European Championships, held in England, and subsequent tournaments during which the flag became 'a powerful statement of national pride and solidarity' (King 2006: 250). The flag was also in evidence during coverage of Euro 2016. On the day of England's first match, team captain Wayne Rooney was pictured on the back pages of all three analysed papers in front of the flag of St George (the *Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail*, 11 June 2016). The following day Rebecca Vardy, the wife of England striker Jamie Vardy, was pictured in a Cross-of-St-George vest top in the *Sun* (12 June) to advertise her tournament diary.

However, the cultural significance of the flag of St George was complicated by its association with England fans who engaged in violence in the two days leading up to the team's first match, against Russia, as well as on the day of the game itself. Many of these fans were pictured draped in the flag or in front of St George cross flags which they had attached to the walls of local bars. Poulton has argued that in the English media's coverage of football hooliganism 'As soon as trouble breaks out, almost all distinctions between the violent, xenophobic minority and non-violent majority is lost in the media coverage that emphasises the behaviour of the former. Consequently, the majority loses all sense of identity, voice and presence' (2001: 124). At Euro 2016, this meant that those fans whose behaviour fit the 'hooligan' narrative were soon foregrounded at the expense of those fans whose behaviour was, by contrast, relatively benign. However, this (re)presentation of the England hooligans as typical of all England fans meant that their aggressively xenophobic performance of Englishness complicated the signifiers they were associated with, such as the flag of St George.

Furthermore, as well as singing songs about the IRA and German bombers being shot down – familiar refrains from previous tournaments (Vincent and Hill 2011) – the fans regularly sang 'Fuck off, Europe – we're all voting out' (Gysin 2016), a crude articulation of the campaign to 'Leave' the EU. This meant the flag of St George and associated symbols, such as the Crusader costume, became antagonising symbols of English national identity. Their ambiguous and con-

tested meanings were evident in several stories in which anxiety about the extremes of English nationalism were both articulated and rebutted. Two days before Euro 2016 began, the *Daily Mail* featured a story about a blog post on the BBC's *iWonder* website which questioned whether the 'Crusader' costumes worn by some fans might offend Muslims. The newspaper quoted Conservative MP Philip Davies saying: 'I don't think an England supporter dressing up as a crusader is offensive to anyone other than these do-gooders. It's ludicrous.' The article also quoted several fans who claimed the BBC piece would only spur them on to wear the costume – 'anything to annoy the BBC PC Brigade' (8 June: 14).

Garland and Treadwell have outlined how the English Defence League (EDL), a high-profile group formed in 2009 and opposed to radical Islam, with loose links to the English football hooligan milieu, has adopted the flag of St George, incorporating it into their own insignia as well as clothing that they sell. Garland and Treadwell argue that the EDL's adoption of the flag is 'loaded with symbolism' (2010: 29) due to its historical links to the Crusades – a conflict between Christian Europe and Islam – and 'in many ways ... this flag as a symbol encompasses much of the message of these groups' (2010: 29). Gimson et al. argue that this link with the EDL has meant the flag has become 'toxified' (2012: 6) with 24 per cent of people associating the flag of St George with 'racism' (2012: 2). This association was evident in a separate story later in the tournament, on the day before the EU referendum, in which the *Sun* told how a father-of-two had been branded a 'pathetic racist' for adorning his car with England flags (22 June: 17).

#### **Launching the Varmarda**

Guibernau (2007) argued that a national consciousness is created through narratives which disparage foreigners thus creating common 'enemies'. These narratives draw upon 'invented traditions' (Hobsbawm 2012) and due to the legacy of the British Empire they are often 'imbued with military metaphors and references' (Crolley, Hand and Jeutter 2000: 110). In the 'tabloid' press this is done by 'bludgeoning the readership with exaggerated insular, parochial, "little Englander" "us vs. them" ideologies' (Vincent and Harris 2014: 233). Before England's first game at Euro 2016, the *Sun* (9 June: 5) sent Lee Chapman, a lookalike of the England player Jamie Vardy, to 'see off [a] Russian sub' that had sailed towards the English Channel. Under the headline 'VLAD'S BOYS

THINK IT'S ALL DOVER...', the article echoed narratives identified by Vincent and Harris in their analysis of the coverage of Euro 2012 which were employed to 'capture the interest of the English "imagined community"' (2014: 229), which is 'English and, with few exceptions, white' (Crabbe 2004: 700), as opposed to the country's wider multi-ethnic population. The words 'think it's all Dover' drew upon the famous BBC commentary of Kenneth Wolstenholme during England's 1966 World Cup final victory in which he said: 'Some people are on the pitch ... they think it's all over... It is now!' as Geoff Hurst scored the final goal of the game. At the same time, the headline evoked the popular World War Two song '(There'll be bluebirds over) the white cliffs of Dover' sung by Dame Vera Lynn. Furthermore, Chapman was 'dressed as Lord Nelson' and was said to be leading a 'VARMARDA' – a play on the name of the England forward, Jamie Vardy, which evoked memories of the English navy's victory over France and Spain at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, and the English navy's defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588.

The wider coverage of the England team drew on nostalgic myths rooted in the Second World War. England's match against Wales was referred to as 'The battle of Britain' by both the *Daily Mail* (16 June 16: 96) and the *Sun* (June 15: 61). On the day of the game, Martin Samuel, of the *Daily Mail*, referred to the conflict again, claiming that 'the Phoney War is over' – a reference to the period after Britain declared war on Germany in 1939 but before the two countries engaged in combat. However, the militaristic narratives never reached the xenophobic heights of the Euro '96's 'Achtung Surrender' rhetoric. This may have been, as Vincent et al. (2010) noted in their analysis of the coverage of the 2006 World Cup, due to England's poor early performances and a draw that meant that, apart from Wales, they did not meet any of their historic on- (or off-)field rivals.

#### **St George slays the Dragons**

In 1998, fulfilling a manifesto pledge, New Labour established the devolved Welsh Assembly (as well as the Scottish Parliament and Northern Ireland Assembly). At the same time as giving the Celtic nations a louder political voice, some argued that the move led to the 'death of Britain' (Kumar 2003b: 7) with which English national identity had been synonymous. This, in turn, according to some commentators, led to a heightened desire among the English to formulate a cultural identity distinct from that of their Celtic neighbours (Gibbons and

Malcolm 2017). Thus, the nationalistic 'us' vs 'them' tone of the papers' coverage reached a crescendo during the build up to, and immediate aftermath of, England's second group game against Wales.<sup>2</sup>

This antagonism was articulated explicitly in a *Daily Mirror* article concerning the comments of England midfielder Jack Wilshere which was headlined 'THEY DON'T LIKE US AND WE DON'T LIKE THEM' (14 June: 60). The coverage of the game drew heavily on both countries' 'invented traditions', with the *Daily Mirror* (16 June: 69) billing it as 'Lions vs Dragons'. Crolley and Hand (2006) have argued that the lion became a key signifier of English patriotism and national identity following the exploits of King Richard I, otherwise known as Richard the Lionheart, during the Crusades in the 12th Century. The Football Association (FA) adopted the three lions (drawn from Richard I's heraldic emblem) as their logo and regularly refer to the England men's team as 'Lions' (and the women's team as 'Lionesses'). This symbolism gained wider resonance during Euro '96 thanks to the song *Three Lions (Football's coming home)*, released by comedians David Baddiel and Frank Skinner along with Ian Broudie of the *Lightning Seeds*, which became a popular fan anthem. During Euro 2016, the team and individual players were referred to as 'Lions' (the *Sun*, 14 June: 48 and 49) with the most overt example being published on the day of the England-Wales match when the *Sun* used a picture of England captain Wayne Rooney's face superimposed on to the head of a lion. In the accompanying article, headlined 'FREE LIONS: Come on Roy, get 'em roaring', the paper implored the England manager, Roy Hodgson, to 'make us proud' (16 June: 68).

In a similar manner the papers referred to the Welsh team as 'Dragons' or 'The Dragon' (e.g. the *Sun*, 16 June: 60; *Daily Mirror*, 15 June: 63) drawing on that country's national symbol, the red dragon, which was first referenced in the ninth century text *Historia Brittonum* and was incorporated into the Welsh flag in 1959, eight years after it first featured on the crest of the Football Association of Wales. After England's victory, the *Sun* declared 'ST GEORGE SLAYS THE DRAGONS' (17 June: 9), a reference to England's patron saint who supposedly fought and killed a dragon. Crolley and Hand suggest that, for sports journalists, the Lionheart attitude of the English encoded within the symbolic representation of the lion seems to embody 'both the identity of the English people and the desired spirit of the England team' represent-

ing an 'overt communication of courage and pride' (2006: 20).

The overarching narrative constructed around the game focused on which of the two (British) teams demonstrated these characteristics most passionately. For example, in the *Daily Mirror* on the day before the game, James Nursey wrote about how Welsh player Gareth Bale insisted 'Wales had more pride and passion than their English counterparts' (15 June: 62 and 64). In the event England came from behind to win the match 2-1 courtesy of an injury-time goal from Daniel Sturridge. The *Sun* greeted the victory with the headline 'ROAR PASSION', pointedly asking: 'How was that for pride then, Gareth?' (17 June: 88) while the *Daily Mirror* declared the England team a 'PRIDE OF LIONS' (17 June 17: 70-71) and the *Daily Mail* captioned a picture of Sturridge celebrating as a 'Lion's roar' (17 June: 96).

#### *Patriots at fair play*

Guibernau (2007) noted that national identity is reinforced by a clearly defined set of civic rights afforded to a nation's citizens as well as duties and responsibilities expected of them. This means that in their roles of 'patriots at play' and 'embodiments of the nation' (Tuck 2003) the England players and their coaches are held to a certain standard of behaviour and level of achievement. Vincent et al. argue that one of the ways in which this is articulated is through the ethos of fair play, which they argue is 'one of the defining features of English sporting identity' (2010: 212) which is frequently constructed in opposition to the supposed 'cheating' of foreign players.

This theme was identified in several articles before the tournament. For example, in a *Daily Mail* article headlined 'I'd never tell my players to dive, insists Hodgson' (6 June: 73), Matt Lawton detailed how the England manager 'has insisted he will not encourage his players to employ the dark arts to succeed' as he did not 'think it was part of our culture'. Hodgson's stance was contrasted with that of England player Eric Dier – who, it was pointed out, had been brought up in Portugal – who suggested 'England needed to be more "streetwise".' Writing in the *Sun* about Hodgson's comments, Neil Ashton wrote that 'English football is renowned for honour and integrity' and that 'the dark arts can be left to the dirty rotten scoundrels' (6 June: 58). It is notable that, by contrast, the *Daily Mirror*, which unlike the *Sun* and *Daily Mail* took a pro-EU stance during the referendum, did not devote as much space to

the story, nor offer any editorialised comment about it.

After England lost to Iceland in the competition's second round, a defeat the *Sun* labelled 'the most humiliating in the nation's history' (28 June: 1), this scrutiny intensified. None of the papers' post mortems offered detailed analysis of the long-term structural problems within the English game such as, for example, the impact of the competing demands of the Premier League, England's top football competition. Instead, the narratives were anchored within the long-term 'discourse of renewal and decline' (Kennedy 2014: 281). The result came just three days after the United Kingdom voted to leave the EU and, although the long-term political and economic ramifications of the vote were unknown, the tone taken reflected the papers' stances on the referendum and whether or not they felt leaving the EU would increase the country's fortunes.

Following the resignation of England manager Roy Hodgson, Dave Kidd, the chief sports writer of the *Daily Mirror*, wrote: 'In keeping with recent events, an England without a functioning government, opposition, nor any future plan, no longer has a manager for its national football team either' (28 June: 54-55). Thus for the *Daily Mirror*, which had campaigned to remain within the EU, the anxiety about the uncertain future of the England team mirrored anxiety about the future of the United Kingdom in the aftermath of victory for the 'Leave' campaign. By contrast, the pro-Leave *Daily Mail* published a brief, light-hearted editorial which implied that Iceland's unexpected victory was comparable to the unexpected victory of the 'Leave' campaign:

In the week after the referendum, this paper salutes the people of a proud seafaring island in the North Atlantic, who refused to be cowed by 'expert' predictions and emerged victorious against opponents who threw millions at their campaign. Well played, Iceland. And oh dear, England! (29 June: 16).

The sports journalists 'spoke as if a still great nation was being betrayed by the bunglers and shirkers who ran, or were, its football team' (Wagg 1991: 222). The *Daily Mirror* reported on a press conference the day after England's defeat in which Hodgson said he was not sure why he was in attendance while Martin Glenn, the FA's chief executive, said he was 'not a football expert' under the headline 'WE DON'T KNOW WHAT WE'RE DOING' (29 June: 64) which

evokes the terrace chant of disgruntled football fans 'You don't know what you're doing!' This mirrored invective aimed at politicians on both sides of the Brexit argument. For example, the *Sun* took aim at chancellor George Osborne for his economic warnings during the campaign in an article headlined 'YOU IDIOT, GEORGE' (28 June: 8-9), while the *Daily Mirror* criticised Boris Johnson, a prominent 'Leave' campaigner, for failing to attend a debate on the referendum result under the headline 'No-show BoJo [a] political pygmy' (28 June: 6-7). Although the focus was on Hodgson, the manager, and members of the Football Association, the players were also subject to criticism which renewed the narrative developed in the build-up to the game against Wales about whether they demonstrated the right 'spirit' or demonstrated enough 'pride'. For example, ex-England player-turned-pundit Jamie Carragher claimed that the players were 'too soft', arguing that 'We think we are making them men but actually we are creating babies' (*Daily Mail*, 29 June: 74).

### History Boyos

While the England players were castigated for their perceived failure as 'patriots at play', Wales, who unexpectedly reached the semi-finals before losing to the eventual champions Portugal, were (re)presented as heroes. Euro 2016 was the first international men's football tournament finals in which another Home Nation team<sup>3</sup> had progressed further than England since the 1978 World Cup (when Scotland qualified but England failed to). With the absence of England, which had become synonymous with the formation and maintenance of British identity (Gibbons and Malcom 2017; Kumar 2003a, 2003b), the Welsh team became the embodiment of Britain, albeit framed within the context of England's failure. The Welsh were compared favourably to England in a *Sun on Sunday* article headlined 'Wales v Wallies' which looked at 'How Dragons got it right 'n Lions lost the plot' (3 July: 68).

The following day, the *Sun* claimed that whatever happened in Wales' semi-final they would 'be crowned the best of British ... to further humiliate England' by overtaking them in the FIFA rankings (4 July: 56). And, despite their defeat, the 'Welsh heroes' were declared to be the 'Pride of Britain' (the *Sun Goals*, 7 July: 1; *Daily Mirror*, 7 July: 62 and 63). Furthermore, the Welsh team were encoded with the quintessential characteristics usually reserved for the English players. After their quarter-final victory over Belgium, the *Sun's* chief football reporter, Neil Ashton, wrote of the Welsh team's 'pride



and passion and enthusiasm' (7 July: 58). Similarly, the *Daily Mirror's* chief sports writer, Dave Kidd, wrote that Wales had 'been everything Roy Hodgson's flops were not in France. Confident. Courageous. Cunning. Thrilling. And winning' (2 July: 69).

## Conclusion

The aim of this research was to examine how the English popular press (re)presented English national identity through its coverage of the country's men's national football team and the team's fans immediately before and during Euro 2016 in light of the fact that the tournament coincided with the run-up to and aftermath of the EU membership referendum in the UK. The study found that where English national identity was (re)presented the newspapers's coverage adhered to Guibernau's (2007) framework for creating a national identity by employing 'invented traditions' (Hobsbawm 2012) that drew on the country's heritage and culture to speak to and reinforce an 'imagined community' (Anderson 2006).

In various ways the findings in this study support those of previous research dating back to the early 1990s which have analysed the articulation of 'Englishness' through coverage of the England men's team (e.g. Wagg 1991; Garland and Rowe 1999; Maguire, Poulton and Possamai 1999; Garland 2004; Vincent et al. 2010; Vincent and Harris 2014) thus showing that 'the sport-nationalism-media troika is no passing fad' (Rowe et al. 1998: 133). Journalists utilised a tried-and-tested formula which employed language that reached back into the shared mythical past of the dominant ethnic group. This language was often overtly militaristic, referencing the Second World War in particular but also the victories of Admiral Nelson and the Armada as well as the 1966 football World Cup success. 'Us' and 'them' narratives were constructed around England's opponents, in particular Wales, which provided the newspapers' readers 'a "fantasy shield" to cement and unify national sentiment for the imagined community' (Vincent et al. 2010: 219).

Furthermore, these narratives clung to outdated monocultural notions of English national identity with no acknowledgement of the country's ethnic diversity. As Blain et al. argue, there was reliance on the language of nationhood in which 'the will to construct a historically continuous account of ... national character prevails against the contrary indications of everyday experience' (1993: 192). Given that Blain et al. drew this conclusion more than 20 years ago, it might seem as if there is 'nothing

new' to report. But these findings are useful in emphasising which narratives endure in the formation of national cultures in general and English national identity in particular.

However, Euro 2016 took place at a time of social and political flux in England (and Britain) when the meaning of 'Englishness' was hotly contested between those at ease with the country's multi-cultural population and its place within a united Europe and those who sought to limit immigration and leave the EU. Sports writers may have been re-employing formulaic narratives used in the past but they did so with less confidence. It was no longer clear whether symbols which had been used as positive expressions of 'Englishness' in the past, such as the flag of St George, continued to be benign representations of patriotism or had instead become racialised articulations of an insular English national identity.

Underpinning this crisis of identity was a 'new realism of low expectations within the wider political and cultural economy' (Kennedy 2014: 285) which dealt a further blow to the confidence with which 'Englishness' was expressed. Following England's defeat to Iceland the sense of national humiliation mirrored the wider socio-economic and political uncertainty created by the referendum result. And, as the Welsh team progressed to the tournament semi-finals the 'us' and 'them' invective employed about Chris Coleman's Welsh team gave way to a feeling that England, once uniquely synonymous with Britain, was no longer the best of British.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> According to the circulation figures for March 2016, the *Sun* sold 1.7m. copies, the *Daily Mail* sold 1.5m. copies and the *Daily Mirror* sold 784,000 copies

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that this match took place on the same day as the murder of Jo Cox, the Labour MP for the constituency of Batley and Spen. Thus the coverage of the game, particularly at the front of the newspapers, was almost certainly less extensive than it might otherwise have been

<sup>3</sup> The so-called home nations are England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

## References

- Alabarcas, P., Tomlinson, A. and Young, C. (2001) Argentina versus England at the France '98 World Cup: Narratives of nation and the mythologizing of the popular, *Media, Culture & Society*, Vol. 23, No. 5 pp 547-566
- Anderson, B. (2006) *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origins and spread of nationalism*, London, Verso
- Barthes, R. (2006) Myth today, Storey, J. (ed.) *Cultural theory and popular culture: A reader*, Harlow, Essex, Pearson Education pp 293-302
- Blain, N, Boyle, R and O'Donnell, H. (1993) *Sport and national identity in the European media*, Leicester, Leicester University Press



- Blain, N. and O'Donnell, H. (2000) European sports journalism and its readers during Euro '96, Roche, M. (ed.) *Sport, popular culture and identity*, Oxford, Meyer & Meyer Sport pp 37-56
- Boyle, R. and Haynes, R. (2009) *Power play: Sport, the media and popular culture*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press
- Bryant, C. G. (2003) These Englands, or where does devolution leave the English?, *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 9, No. 3 pp 393-412
- Carrington, B. (1999) 'Football's coming home' but whose home? And do we want it? Nation, football and the politics of exclusion, Brown, A. (ed.) *Fanatics, power, identity and fandom in football*, London, Routledge pp 101-123
- Cesarini, D. (1996) The changing character of citizenship and nationality in Britain, Cesarini, D. and Fulbrook, M. (eds) *Citizenship, nationality and migration in Europe*, London, Routledge pp 57-73
- Corbin, J. and Strauss, A. (2015) *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*, London, Sage
- Cresswell, J. W. (1998) *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*, London, Sage
- Crabbe, T. (2004) *englandfans* – A new club for a new England? Social inclusion, authenticity and the performance of Englishness at 'home' and 'away', *Leisure Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1 pp 63-78
- Crolley, E. and Hand, D. (2001) France and the English other: the mediation of national identities in Post-War football journalism, *Web Journal of French Media Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1
- Crolley, E. and Hand, D. (2002) *Football, Europe and the press*, London, Frank Cass
- Crolley, E. and Hand, D. (2006) *Football and European identity: Historical narratives through the press*, London, Routledge
- Crolley, E., Hand, D. and Jeutter, R. (2000) Playing the identity card: Stereotypes in European football, *Soccer & Society*, Vol. 1, No. 2 pp 107-128
- Critcher, C. (1994) England and the World Cup: World Cup willies, English football and the myth of 1966, Sudden, J. and Tomlinson, A. (eds) *Hosts and champions: Soccer cultures, national identities and the USA World Cup*, Aldershot: Arena pp 77-92
- Fulbrook, M. and Cesarini, D. (1996) Conclusion, Cesarini, D. and Fulbrook, M. (eds) *Citizenship, nationality and migration in Europe*, London, Routledge pp 209-217
- Gapper, J. (2014) The market has written a requiem for the tabloids, *Financial Times*, 25 June. Available online at <https://www.ft.com/content/b6e43e54-f8a3-11e3-befc-00144feabdc0>, accessed on 23 October 2017
- Garland, J. (2004) 'The same old story?' Englishness, the tabloid press and the 2000 football World Cup, *Leisure Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1 pp 79-92
- Garland, J. and Treadwell, J. (2010) 'No surrender to the Taliban!' Football hooliganism, Islamophobia and the rise of the English Defence League, *Papers from the British Criminology Conference 2010*, Vol. 10 pp 19-35
- Garland, J., & Rowe, M. (1999) War minus the shooting? Jingoism, the English press, and Euro 96, *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, Vol. 23, No. 1 pp 80-95
- Gellner, E. (1983) *Nations and nationalism*, Oxford, Blackwell
- Gibbons, T. and Malcolm, D. (2017) Nationalism, the English question and sport, Gibbons, T. and Malcolm, D. (eds) *Sport and English national identity in a 'Disunited Kingdom'*, London, Routledge pp 1-16
- Gimson, A., Jolley, R., Katwala, S., Kellner, P., Massie, A. and Miranda, R. (2012) *This Sceptred Isle: Pride not prejudice across the nations of Britain*, British Future. Available online at <http://www.britishfuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/BritishFutureSceptredIsle.pdf>, accessed on 20 February 2018
- Guibernau, M. (2007) *The identity of nations*, Cambridge, Polity
- Gysin, C. (2016) New battle of Marseille, *Daily Mail*, 11 June p. 8
- Hall, S. (1996) The question of cultural identity, Hall, S., Held, D., Hubert, D. and Thompson, K. (eds) *Modernity: An introduction to modern societies*, Oxford, Wiley pp 595-634
- Heffer, E. (1999) *Nor shall my word. The reinvention of England*, London, Weidenfield and Nicholson
- Hobolt, S. (2016) The Brexit vote: A divided nation, a divided continent, *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 23, No. 9 pp 1259-1277
- Hobsbawm, E. J. (2012) *Nations and nationalism since 1780: Programme, myth, reality*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press
- Kennedy, E. and Hills, L. (2009) *Sports, media and society*, Oxford, Berg
- Kennedy, P. (2014) 'Sometimes you go into competitions with little or no expectations': England, Euro 2012 in the context of austerity, *Soccer & Society*, Vol. 15, No. 2 pp 272-289
- Kenny, M. (2014) *The politics of English nationhood*, Oxford, Oxford University Press
- King, A. (2006) Nationalism and sport, Delanty, G. and Kumar, K. (eds) *The Sage handbook of nations and nationalism*, London, Sage pp 249-259
- Kumar, K. (2003a) *The making of English national identity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press
- Kumar, K. (2003b) Britain, England and Europe: Cultures in contra-flow, *European Journal of Social Theory*, Vol. 6, No. 1 pp 5-23
- Law, I. (2002) *Race in the news*, Basingstoke, Palgrave
- Loughborough University (2016) *EU referendum 2016. Media analysis from Loughborough University Centre for Research in Communication and Culture*. Available online at <https://blog.lboro.ac.uk/crc/eu-referendum/uk-news-coverage-2016-eu-referendum-report-5-6-may-22-june-2016/>, accessed on 13 October 2017
- Maguire, J., and Poulton, E. K. (1999) European identity politics in Euro 96: Invented traditions and national habitus codes, *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, Vol. 34, No. 1 pp 17-29
- Maguire, J., Poulton, E. and Possamai, C. (1999) The war of the words? Identity politics in Anglo-German press coverage of Euro 96, *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 14, No. 1 pp 61-89
- Martinson, J. (2016) Did the Mail and Sun help swing the UK towards Brexit?, *Guardian*, 24 June. Available online at <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/jun/24/mail-sun-uk-brexit-newspapers>, accessed on 13 October 2017
- Nairn, T. (2003) *The break-up of Britain: Crisis and neo-nationalism*, Melbourne, Common Ground
- Ponsford, D. (2016) Bulks helped *Times* and *Telegraph* grow their print circulations year on year in March, *Press Gazette*, 21 April. Available online at <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/bulks-help-times-and-telegraph-grow-their-print-circulations-year-year-march/>, accessed on 1 June 2016
- Poulton, E. (2001) Tears, tantrums and tattoos: Framing the football hooligan, Perryman, M. (ed.) *Hooligan wars: Causes and effects of football violence*, London, Mainstream pp 122-140
- Rowe, D., McKay, J. and Miller, T. (1998) Come together: Sport, nationalism, and the media image, Wenner, L. (ed.) *MediaSport*, London, Routledge pp 119-133
- Seaton, J. (2016) Brexit and the media, *The Political Quarterly*, Vol. 87, No. 3 pp 333-337
- Silk, M. L. and Francombe, J. (2011) All these years of hurt: Culture, pedagogy and '1966' as a site of national myths, Wagg, S. (ed.) *Myths and milestones in the history of sport*, London, Palgrave Macmillan pp 262-286
- Tuck, J. (2003) The men in white: Reflections on rugby union, the media and Englishness, *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, Vol. 38, No. 2 pp 177-99
- Vincent, J. and Harris, J. (2014) 'They think it's all Dover!' Popular newspaper narratives and images about the English football team and (re)presentations of national identity during Euro 2012, *Soccer and Society*, Vol. 15, No. 2 pp 222-240

- 
- Vincent, J. and Hill, J. (2011) Flying the flag for the En-ger-land: The *Sun's* (re) construction of English identity during the 2010 World Cup, *Journal of Sport & Tourism*, Vol. 16, No. 3 pp 187-209
- Vincent, J., Kian, E. M., Pedersen, P. M., Kuntz, A. and Hill, J. S. (2010) England expects: English newspapers' narratives about the English football team in the 2006 World Cup, *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, Vol. 45, No. 2 pp 199-223
- Wagg, S. (1991) Playing the past: The media and the England football team, Williams, J. and Wagg, S. (eds) *British football and social change: Getting into Europe*, Leicester: Leicester University Press pp 221-239
- Weight, R. (2002) *Patriots: National identity in Britain 1940-2000*, London, MacMillan
- Wellings, B. (2012) *English nationalism and Euroscepticism: Losing the peace*, Bern, Peter Lang
- Wodack, R., de Cillia, R., Resign, M. and Liebhart, K. (2009) *The discursive construction of national identity*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, second edition

### Note on the contributor

Roger Domeneghetti is a lecturer in journalism at Northumbria University. He is the author of *From the back page to the front room: Football's journey through the English media*. He has more than 20 years' experience working as a journalist for a variety of local and national print and online publications.

## 'An eye in the eye of the hurricane': *Fire and fury*, immersion and ethics in political literary journalism

*One of the first reviews of Fire and fury (Wolff 2018) appeared via Twitter, '@realDonaldTrump: I authorized zero access to White House (actually turned him down many times) for author of phony book!' President Trump's emphasis on access highlights the literary journalism method of immersion in the controversial book's construction and ethics. Immersion requires a journalist to spend time with a subject, 'eating with them, traveling with them, breathing their air' (Conover 2016: 11). This paper discusses Wolff's immersive techniques alongside Gay Talese's feature 'Frank Sinatra has a cold' (1966) together with the work of Joe McGinniss (1969) and Hunter S. Thompson (1973). It critiques Wolff's relationships with key political strategists within the immersive literary journalism framework that requires a consideration of a 'special set of ethical questions' (Conover 2016: 60). Whilst Wolff maintains he adopted an observer immersive stance and removed himself from the text, he does not seem to have followed Talese's rigour in verification with all minor characters (Green 2013), pivotally the former British Prime Minister, Tony Blair. This, combined with non-disclosure of participation in key scenes and the volatile, reactive 'fake news' environment of the White House, resulted in suggestions of ethical transgressions in the wider media as well as those quoted in the book.*

**Keywords:** Trump, immersion, literary journalism, Hunter S. Thompson, Michael Wolff

@realdonaldtrump: I authorized zero access to White House (actually turned him down many times) for author of phony book!

I never spoke to him for phony book! Full of lies, misrepresentations and sources that don't exist. Look at this guy's past and watch what happens to him ...!'

Trump's tweet responding to Michael Wolff's *Fire and fury: Inside the Trump White House* (2018a) was followed by a lengthier 'cease and desist' letter to Wolff's publisher, Henry Holt and Company, demanding retraction of already released material and an apology. The three-page rebuttal by the publisher's lawyer, Elizabeth McNamara, centred around the line: 'As Mr. Trump knows, Mr. Wolff was permitted extraordinary access to the Trump administration and campaign from May 2016 to this past October...' (ABC News 2018).

The emphasis on access by both President and publisher highlights the importance of the literary journalism method of immersion in the controversial book's construction and ethics. Literary journalism adopts fictional techniques and deep research, especially immersion, to tell a non-fiction story. Immersion requires a journalist to spend time with a subject, 'eating with them, traveling with them, breathing their air' (Conover 2016: 11).

Despite the stream of tweets from Trump suggesting otherwise, Wolff's key subject relationship was with political strategist Steve Bannon, rather than with the President, and it appears that Bannon saw Wolff's immersive strategy as a potential for legacy-making rather than betrayal – as prominent political commentator Jake Tapper suggested during an interview about Wolff on *Late night with Seth Meyers* (2018). Tapper's criticism mirrors Janet Malcolm's view of the subject's inevitable reaction after publication that 'relegates the relationship with the journalist to the rubbish heap of love affairs that ended badly and are best pushed out of consciousness' (1990: 4).

Whilst considering the subject as legacy-making, Conover's 'special set of ethical questions' for immersion is particularly relevant. Conover reflects:

A special set of ethical questions can arise upon publication. People will ask themselves, as they read, *did the writer treat the subject fairly?*...Where immersion writers find their worst trouble, I believe, is over questions of honesty and betrayal, of dissembling and deception (2016: 59-61, italics in the original).

### Immersion: Observation and participation in political literary journalism

Immersion has a rich history in political literary journalism. For instance, there's Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and loathing on the campaign trail '72* (2005 [1973]), described as 'the least factual' and 'most accurate' account of the 1972 US Presidential campaign by Democrat strategist Frank Mankiewicz (Wenner and Seymour 2007: 173) due to his subjective writing style. And Joe McGinniss immersed himself in Nixon's campaign advertising team in 1968 and revealed the sophisticated marketing of a leader to the electorate in his *The selling of the President 1968* (1969).

Political immersive journalists are often privy to what Brian McNair defines as interpersonal political communication – the dinner parties, the high-level meetings with sources and seeing negotiations behind closed doors (2003). Their narratives are more intimate, observational and revealing when this interpersonal communication is transformed into non-fiction narrative powered by plot, character and stylistic techniques.

Literary journalist Ted Conover (2016) also sets out two distinct parameters for immersive methodology along a spectrum of observer to participant, depending on the author's involvement.

The participatory end is exemplified by Hunter S. Thompson who called his immersion in the 1972 election year with Democrat George McGovern's campaign as 'an eye in the eye of the hurricane' (2005 [1973]: 16), an apt metaphor for the all-seeing journalist at the centre of the storm. Thompson decided to 'get as close to the bone as possible, and to hell with the consequences' (ibid: 14). Thompson and editor Bill Cardoso coined the new style gonzo 'to signify stories where the reporter's perception of events was more important than the story itself' (Bradfield 2018).

The opposite observer stance is exemplified by Gay Talese's *Esquire* profile 'Frank Sinatra has a cold' (2003 [1966]) in which the journalist methodically writes about what he observed, watching the singer and his entourage, but never actually speaking to or interviewing Sinatra. Wolff situates himself on this detached observer end in this way:

[Trump's] non-disapproval became a kind of passport for me to hang around — checking in each week at the Hay-Adams hotel,

making appointments with various senior staffers who put my name in the 'system,' and then wandering across the street to the White House and plunking myself down, day after day, on a West Wing couch (2018b).

Wolff emphasises his passivity by 'plunking himself down' and tries to be a 'fly on the wall' (2018a: x). But his purely detached, observer stance claim can be challenged since it emerged post-publication that Wolff co-hosted the dinner party with Steve Bannon and Roger Ailes, Trump confidant and future Fox News head, that opens the book, moving him closer to being a participatory journalist. And this throws up a range of associated questions relating to transparency. Peter Richardson further compares Michael Wolff's lack of balance to Thompson rejecting objectivity (2018) while Stephen Winson suggests *Fire and fury* is a kind of 'buttoned-up, elite, red wine and the best parties version of gonzo journalism' (2018: np).

### The political subject: Naïve or knowing?

Whether participatory or observing, all journalists have to ask themselves: 'How do I get inside?' to gain access to their immersive story (Walters 2015). In the interview on *Late night with Seth Meyers*, Jake Tapper criticised Wolff for 'beat sweetening' to gain Bannon's trust, 'offensively' platforming Bannon in an interview and writing about Trump with the all-important flattering picture before his White House entry (Tapper 2018). Tapper's view raises the question: were White House staff, particularly Wolff's key subject, Bannon, as naïve as Malcolm suggests subjects tend to be? Matthew Ricketson describes Malcolm's critique as 'a hand grenade into media' (2006) and suggests that almost all journalists feel uncomfortable or insulted by the seduction/betrayal dynamic in their relationships with sources as framed by Malcolm.

In a more recent analysis, Ruth Palmer suggests that Malcolm's argument fails in her extensive analysis and 83 interviews with 'victims; heroes; experts; non-professional representatives of movements, organisations or causes; or people in human interest stories of all kinds' (2016: 580). Those with media experience or training were excluded. Palmer found that 'interactions with journalists are not everything: events and effects matter' (ibid: 581). A survivor from the 'Miracle on the Hudson' river plane crash in 2009 told Palmer that the trauma of the initial event far outweighed being in the newspaper (ibid). Another interviewee, who sued a religious group, found negative comment streams

and social media post-publication distressing, more so than the initial reporting of the lawsuit.

Preparing for her first meeting with Joe McGinniss about his later book *Fatal vision* (1983), Malcolm was 'curious about what would develop between me and a journalistically knowledgeable, rather than naïve, subject' (op cit: 7-8). But Malcolm found the journalist, McGinniss, wanted to 'play the role of subject' (ibid: 8). Tapper alludes to a similar dynamic in his assessment of Wolff at the White House, stating to Meyers that the Trump team 'fell for it' (op cit).

Wolff admits that Trump's non-disapproval of his presence became a gap he exploited to maximise his access, and the White House media strategy that Wolff dealt with was starkly different to the media control that Wolff experienced in his dealings with the Obama administration (Wolff 2009). Yet this does not address the dynamics of Wolff's relationship with Bannon. Wolff is described as a 'grotesque Boswell to Trump's Johnson' (Martin 2018) but it is Bannon who is Johnson. It is, therefore, plausible that throughout the course of Wolff's 200-day immersion, Bannon saw his own days at the White House were numbered and became increasingly prepared to leave his own version and legacy as Trump's master maker – just as possibly strategist Harry Treleaven did in allowing McGinniss to witness the planning and filming of Nixon's 1968 advertising campaign.

The executive chairman of the right-wing online publication, *Breitbart News*, before joining Trump as his strategist, Bannon fully exploited social media in both positions so was well aware of the power of the soundbite and controversial commentary. Bannon has since apologised but has not refuted any quotations and, in March 2018, commented that he 'did not regret' being part of the book.<sup>2</sup> Here, there's a suggestion of Malcolm's view of vanity in the subject (1990: 3). Jake Tapper similarly told Seth Meyers that allowing Wolff such close access spoke to the 'vanity of the White House' (Tapper 2018), as did Trump's outrage after the book was published.

One of the most controversial comments in *Fire and fury* is attributed to Trump's Deputy Chief of Staff Katie Walsh, who says working with Trump was 'like trying to figure out what a child wants' (2018a: 113). Walsh, who had 'robust political experience' (*Newsweek* 2018), denied making the statement. But like Bannon,

anticipating her fast approaching resignation, she, too, perhaps wanted to leave a record of her own making to counter disparagement upon departure. Malcolm observes:

...of course, at bottom, no subject is naïve. Every hoodwinked widow, every deceived lover, every betrayed friend, every subject of writing knows on some level what is in store for him, and remains in the relationship anyway, impelled by something stronger than his reason (1990: 8).

Both Bannon and Walsh seemingly allowed Wolff easy access, thus accounting for their lengthy direct quotations in the book. Bannon relished relating what he witnessed to Wolff and commenting on other players, particularly 'Jarvanka' – Ivanka Trump and husband Jared Kushner. There's a natural 'off-the-cuffness' in Bannon's talk. After hearing that Ivanka and Jared made a deal that Ivanka would have first shot at running for president before Jared, and be the first woman president, Bannon reacted: 'They didn't say that? Stop. Oh come on. They didn't actually say that? Please don't tell me that. Oh my god' (2018a: 69).

Yet many of Trump's direct quotations are from press conferences, appearances such as the inauguration (ibid: 42-45) and his first address to CIA staff (ibid: 49-51) or derived from press interviews and tweets. Wolff's interactions with Trump are as part of a public crowd, rather than close immersion, as with Bannon. Wolff told NBC that he interviewed Trump, but cryptically added that perhaps Trump did not know it was an interview. But he said: '...it was certainly not off-the-record' (2018). Similarly in 1968, McGinniss's dialogue and insights largely come from Harry Treleaven and to a lesser extent Treleaven's colleagues such as Roger Ailes. Nixon is observed and his conversations are quoted in filming, but he remains throughout a distant figure.

#### Least factual, most accurate

Mankiewicz credits Thompson as knowing more than the Washington press pack, telling Jann Wenner: 'I thought Hunter better understood what was really happening' (Wenner and Seymour 2007: 163). Whilst Thompson's inflammatory speculation that McGovern's opponent, Ed Muskie, was taking an obscure Brazilian stimulant to cope with campaign pressure (2005 [1973]: 144) can't be ignored, Mankiewicz's 'least factual' assessment references Thompson's gonzo, subjective first person style.



Significantly, *PolitiFact's* Angie Drobnic Holan notes of *Fire and fury*: 'Is it accurate? Many details are simply wrong. Whether the larger narrative is true is a different question' (Holan 2018). Reviewer Bruce Wolpe similarly observes: '... the point is, it reads like it could well be true ... a titanic cinematic-kapow settling of scores... and scramble for strategic pinnacles in Bannon's endless fight to change Trump, capture the Republican Party, control the political narrative, and eviscerate his enemies. And when that's done, he can attack the Democrats' (2018). To navigate these issues, Wolff's author's note stresses that he was constantly presented with competing versions of events by sources, some untrue, and 'that looseness with the truth, if not with reality itself, are an elemental thread in the book' (2018a: x). But questions around attribution and veracity remain.

Malcolm uses 'enemy infiltration' (1990: 25) also to describe the journalist's efforts to blend in with their surroundings. McGinniss does not detail what he wears in *The selling of the President 1968* but it is likely he adopted the Nixon team's *Mad Men* dress and lifestyle. And Thompson's Levis, loud shirts and sunglasses deliberately eschewed the 'bank teller' (2005 [1973]: 39) look of other Washington journalists. But Wolff's sartorial style was well suited to the White House, so he could easily become 'part of the furniture'.

In his author's note, Thompson claims: 'I could afford to burn all my bridges behind me' and the result was he was treated like a 'walking bomb' (2005 [1973]: 14-15), as the campaign intensified, especially as his initial series of *Rolling Stone* articles were coming out regularly. Yet Mankiewicz recalls that Thompson held back on stories if asked (Wenner and Seymour 2007) and he withheld newsworthy quotes because he realised the subject, McGovern advisor William Dougherty, did not know he was being taped. Thompson writes:

What follows is a 98% verbatim transcript of that conversation. The other two per cent was deleted in the editing process for reasons having to do with a journalist's obligation to 'protect' his sources – even if it means sometimes protecting them from themselves and their own potentially disastrous indiscretions (2005 [1973]: 271).

Wolff later says his off-the-record agreement over the dinner ended with Ailes' death in May 2017 and Bannon's subsequent permission to quote him (Borchers 2018). Should Wolff have

honoured Ailes' request? This is an ethical question relating to the protection of sources beyond the grave. Jake Tapper was primarily concerned with those still living; he told Seth Meyers: 'Certain journalists are happy to burn sources and run away after the story is done. ... Bannon isn't denying he said those things in the book, [but] I can't believe he said them thinking they were going to be in the book' (2018).

The legacy argument suggests that Bannon either gave Wolff approval to quote him at will from the outset but more likely, permitted attribution after leaving the White House in August 2017. Anticipating the criticism, Wolff raises the issue of on- and off-the-record in his author's note, that suggests Bannon gave permission later:

These challenges have included dealing with off-the-record or deep background material that was later casually put on the record; sources who provided accounts in confidence and subsequently shared them widely, as though liberated by their first utterances; a frequent inattention to setting any parameters on the use of a conversation; a source's views being so well known and widely shared that it would be risible not to credit them; and the almost samizdat sharing, or gobsmacked retelling, of otherwise private and deep-background conversations. And everywhere in this story is the president's own constant, tireless and uncontrolled voice, public and private, shared by others on a daily basis, sometimes virtually as he utters it (2018a: x).

The varying 'outs' to attribution listed by Wolff could well have led to misattribution of sources who understood their conversations were off-the-record, to outright claims of fabrication. Former British PM Tony Blair denies ever meeting Wolff or knowing Wolff was privy to his conversation with Jared Kushner regarding a job offer. Wolff emphatically claims he heard the conversation from his perch on the couch (see Brockes 2018), sparking a refuting tweet from the Tony Blair Institute:

...this story is a complete fabrication. Michael Wolff has never been present at any conversation between Jared Kushner and Mr. Blair. He neither sought such a role from Jared Kushner nor was offered one. And we note that many people have had the same experience with Michael Wolff.<sup>3</sup>

Immersion invariably involves journalists being privy to private conversations. Wolff places his couch in the 'thoroughfare' of the West Wing anteroom, where: 'everybody passes by. Assistants – young women in the Trump uniform of short skirts, high boots, long and loose hair, as well in situation-comedy proximity, all the stars of the show...' (2018b).

Should Wolff, having heard the conversation, have approached Blair for comment afterwards? Should he have 'got off the couch' and disclosed he had overheard a newsworthy conversation that he intended to report? In the confines of the White House, Blair would not have reasonably anticipated a journalist in ear-shot unless told otherwise. But leaks are a crisis within the White House communications so the possibility of dissemination of that information is also likely.

Whilst working in an entertainment rather than political context, Gay Talese follows up with subjects who are unaware a journalist is watching when immersed with Sinatra's entourage (1966), even when the scene occurred in a bar. After observing Sinatra's altercation with a pool playing script writer, Harlan Ellison, over his boots – a key scene in the profile – (2003 [1966]: 23) and describing it in his notes, Talese asks Ellison for his telephone number and interviews him about the encounter to verify his quotations and gain an insight from Ellison's point of view (Green 2013).

Talese distinguishes interviewing pivotal 'minor characters' such as Ellison, who are attributed dialogue for instance, from those he terms 'decorations', such as the two blonde women sitting with Sinatra at the bar in the opening scene of the profile (Green 2013) whom he does not approach for further information.

In the Wolff scenario, Blair is clearly more than decoration in a scene, so in keeping with Talese's immersive principles, Wolff should have approached Blair for comment. Interestingly, Conover advises that in immersions:

It's up to the writer to remind him [the subject of his presence]. There are various ways one can do this: pull out the notebook and say, 'Is that *on-the-record*?' Or repeat aloud the thing just said and then ask, 'Is that *something I can quote*?' (2016: 63, italics in the original).

Foreshadowing Blair's public denials, Conover further warns:

It's not fair to let a person put his guard down and not remind him what's going on. And if you don't do it, and you later quote him saying something he'll regret, he may respond with anger and even deny that he said it (ibid).

'Pulling out the notebook' seems incongruous when Conover is known for going undercover in prisons (2001 [2000]) and travelling incognito with itinerants (1984) and immigrants (1987). But Conover explains he approached the prison superintendent before publication of *NewJack* (2016: 147) as an example of his ethical practice. McGinniss, Thompson and Wolff all identified themselves as journalists when they immersed so following Conover's ethics, and Talese's example, Wolff should have approached Blair for comment at the time or some time before publication. Wolff denies any agreements were broken but also, like Thompson, emphasises his outsider status:

Various defenders of bureaucratic journalism have charged that I somehow misrepresented my intent – that I was an actor pretending to be complicit or sympathetic with the White House; and that, having received confidences from top government officials, I then broke off-the-record agreements and reported these secret griefs. I did not – or did not have to. This White House was that porous and chaotic. But, really, so what if I had, if that is the way to the real story? Doing that, or, if many did that, it might undermine the interests of institutional journalists – those who need to return each day. Fair enough. But I'm not on that team (2018c).

In a wider review of *Fire and fury*, Frank Senso, Director of the School of Journalism and Public Affairs, George Washington University, praises the 'narrative urgency' of Wolff's writing style but he questions whether quotations from unnamed sources are verified. Moreover, he calls for Wolff to publish his on-the-record interviews to counter 'fake news' claims by the current administration (*CNN Opinion* 2018).

#### **Narrative presence and transparency**

As previously mentioned, post-publication, Wolff provides contextual background to the construction of scenes that he witnessed – such as the dinner with Bannon and Ailes that opens the book – and to overhearing Jared Kushner and Tony Blair, in an attempt to defend the integrity of the book. The question of what he directly observed is repeatedly raised in cri-

tiques of *Fire and fury*. As Talese shows in 'Frank Sinatra has a cold', the journalist does not have to disclose their presence in the story for it to be an effective, compelling and verifiable narrative. John Hartsock quotes Gay Talese:

But as Talese observed of the New Journalism, the degree of involvement by the author is relative: 'It permits the writer to inject himself in the narrative as he wishes, as many writers do, or to assume the role of the detached observer, as other writers do, including myself' (2000: 200-201).

Truman Capote, author of *In cold blood* (1965), also resisted using the first person narrative style, referring to himself as a 'journalist' when writing the scenes in which he visits murderers Perry Smith and Richard Hickock in prison. But he is still criticised for not disclosing himself, given his deep involvement in the story (Hartsock 2000: 201). Similarly, Wolff once refers to a journalist 'trying to offer some comfort' in the scene with Trump confidant Hope Hicks fretting about the upcoming White House correspondent's dinner (199), suggesting he is navigating his presence in the scene.

McGinniss does not disclose his presence to the reader until chapter three of *Selling of the President*, when he uses the first person to give background to how he came to witness the filming of Nixon. He continues to sparingly use first person throughout the book. In doing so, McGinniss maintains an 'I was there' reassurance to the reader lacking in Wolff's account of scenes. But as he tells Janet Malcolm (1990), he aimed to be as unobtrusive as possible.

Thompson's consistent first person in *Fear and loathing '72* more clearly exposes journalistic manoeuvres for the reader, and his direct participation in events and interactions that occur throughout the campaign. In February, Thompson meets McGovern in the urinal and asks a difficult question regarding a key supporter's sudden about turn. Thompson shows McGovern's vulnerability and his own awkwardness at the inappropriateness of the setting:

By chance I found George downstairs in the men's room hovering into a urinal... 'Say... ah... I hate to mention this,' I said. 'But what about this thing with Hughes?' He flinched and quickly zipped his pants up, shaking his head and mumbling something about 'a deal for the vice presidency' (2005 [1973]: 67).

Hartsock notes that all literary journalists, covert in their presence or not, 'still reflect in the comparison a more flagrant shaping consciousness' (Hartsock 2000: 201) than traditional news journalists who strive for objectivity. However, the first person shows the reader that the journalist is present for the narrated scene. For Wolff, dealing with volatile actors already prone to issuing denials and charges of 'fake news', including himself in the scene such as the dinner party with Bannon and Ailes may have helped limit claims of fabrication.

Another ethical issue for political immersive journalists is transparency in both the story's predetermined angle and the journalist's political affiliation. Malcolm notes no journalist wants to give their angle away; McGinniss tells her that he instead 'compartmentalised his conflicting attitudes towards MacDonald' (1990: 33). When MacDonald sued McGinniss for breach of contract, it emerges that other journalists researching the MacDonald murder trial wondered if McGinniss planned to write a negative story from the outset, like *the Selling of the President 1968* exposé: 'That is to say, to be in his presence and in his confidence for a number of months and then run it up his butt sideways' (Malcolm 1990: 25).

McGinniss tells Malcolm that during researching *Selling of the President 1968*, he felt no need to disclose to the Nixon team he was a Democrat voter, and intended from the outset to expose the campaign as 'sinister and malevolent' (ibid: 10-11). There's a clear element of investigation in the political immersion McGinniss undertakes and he justifies his subterfuge as public interest. But McGinniss's continued assertions to MacDonald of his belief in his innocence to maintain the relationship, despite being convinced of his guilt, is more complicated as Malcolm so precisely unpacks (1990: 9).

Thompson's first person, participatory gonzo style is the most transparent of the political immersions discussed. Thompson is clear he is a Democrat but, showing critical distance, is at times scathing and frustrated with McGovern, particularly in the early part of the campaign and the final loss. In 'February', Thompson writes:

...I found myself wondering – to a point that bordered now and then on quiet anguish – just what the hell it was about the man that left me politically numb, despite the fact I agreed with everything he said. I spent two weeks brooding on this, because I *like* McGovern... (2005 [1973]: 79).

Returning to Wolff, he tells NBC's *Meet the Press*: 'I have no particular politics when it comes to Donald Trump. This is about human nature' (Wolff 2018d). He then tells the *Hollywood Reporter*:

I just wrote what I thought and what I heard. That's one thing about the book: there really aren't any politics in the book. I have no side here. I'm just interested in how people relate to one another, their ability to do their jobs and a much less abstract picture of this world than whatever the political thesis may or may not be (2018).

### Conclusion

In political immersive journalism, the interpersonal political communication is central to the narrative. Wolff is unconcerned he is unlikely to receive such access to the White House ever again, just as before him, McGinniss and Thompson considered themselves outsiders to the Washington press corps. But questions are still raised around attribution and transparency that link to Conover's view that immersion requires a special set of ethical questions.

Despite the concealment of his political bias, McGinniss does not feel he defrauds his subjects, and notes that, upon publication, the ad team 'reacted with outrage or wry amusement depending on their sense of humor or degree of passion as Nixonians' (Malcolm 1990: 11). *The selling of the President* is one of the first real insights into the dark arts of political spin, and McGinniss's lack of transparency, it can be argued, serves the public interest.

As a narrative of the Trump White House, *Fire and fury* is also, arguably, in the public interest, for it rips open the inner workings of the presidency. But ethical criticism from media peers overshadows the text's potential importance far more than a thin-skinned President's tweets.

It is dubious that Steve Bannon is so naïve as not to recognise the ramifications of allowing Wolff such close access to his daily life in the White House. Instead, it makes sense to draw on Malcolm's acknowledgement that, aside from any feelings of betrayal, the subject has their own motivations; that Bannon was legacy making in his attribution permissions. There is the possibility that Katie Walsh, more cautious than Bannon, is misattributed or misquoted as she claims. But given her experience, it is questionable that she does not clarify her attribution permissions directly with Wolff. At the end

of the author's note, Wolff comes to a similar view:

For whatever reason, almost everyone I contacted – senior members of the White House staff as well as dedicated observers of it – shared large amounts of time with me. ... In the end, what I witnessed, and what this book is about, is a group of people who have struggled, each in their own way, to come to terms with the meaning of working for Donald Trump. I owe them an enormous debt (2018a: xi–xii).

Ironically far from burning his bridges, Thompson remained in touch with both Mankiewicz and McGovern after the election (Seymour and Wenner 2007) suggesting, perhaps because of his transparency, a mutual respect that remained long after the campaign. But as shown by Gay Talese, a literary journalist does not have to write in first person to be ethical. Accordingly, given the nature of the immersion in a White House that continually claims fake news, Wolff would have benefited from Talese's verification rigour. Further, although Wolff claims he adopted an observer stance, this is questionable because of his direct involvement in scenes such as the opening dinner party with Ailes and Bannon. Employing Thompson's first person gonzo approach would have more clearly signposted what Wolff did, and did not orchestrate and what he witnessed from his West Wing couch perch. This would enable him to explore more fully and freely characters such as Bannon. This would also help him to create a transparent narrative that, beyond an outraged President's tweets, would protect Wolff from the wider accusations of betrayal and fabrications that inevitably followed publication.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> 5 January 2018, 1.52pm

<sup>2</sup> See <https://ew.com/books/2018/03/22/steve-bannon-fire-and-fury-no-regrets/> and, accessed on 26 August 2018

<sup>3</sup> @InstituteGC, 25 February 2018, in response to the *Andrew Marr Show* @Marr Show 'I have to say Tony Blair is a complete liar' #marr. See *Guardian* (2018) *Fire and fury* author and Tony Blair accuse each other of lying, 25 February. Available online at <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/feb/25/fire-and-fury-tony-blair-michael-wolff-trump-white-house>, accessed on 1 July 2018

### References

- ABC News (2018) Attorneys for *Fire and fury* publisher push back against Trump team's cease and desist letter, 8 January. Available online at <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/attorneys-fire-fury-publisher-push-back-trump-teams/story?id=52217633> accessed on 1 July 2018
- Borchers, Callum (2018) It's almost as though Michael Wolff is trying to make journalists look bad, *Washington Post*, 10 January. Available online at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2018/01/10/its-almost-like-michael-wolff-is-trying-to-make-journalists-look-bad/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.7be5e5022249](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2018/01/10/its-almost-like-michael-wolff-is-trying-to-make-journalists-look-bad/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.7be5e5022249), accessed on 1 July 2018

- Bradfield, Scott (2018) Journalism's Lord of Misrule, The gonzo philosophy of Hunter S. Thompson, *newstatesman.com*, 9 May. Available online at <https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/books/2018/05/journalism-s-lord-misrule-gonzo-philosophy-hunter-s-thompson>, accessed on 1 July 2018
- Brockes, Emma (2018) My problem with *Fire and Fury*? The behind the scenes toadying it took, *Guardian*, 12 January. Available online at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jan/11/wolff-fire-and-fury-administration-author> accessed July 2018
- Capote, Truman (1994 [1965]) *In cold blood*, New York, Vintage International
- CNN Opinion (2018) Fact-checking Michael Wolff, 8 January. Available online at <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/01/08/opinions/michael-wolff-donald-trump-roundup-opinion/index.html>, accessed on 1 July 2018
- Conover, Ted (1987) *Coyotes*, New York, Random House
- Conover, Ted (2001 [2000]) *NewJack: Guarding Sing Sing*, New York, Random House
- Conover, Ted (2001 [1984]) *Rolling nowhere*, New York, Random House
- Conover, Ted (2016) *Immersion: A writer's guide to going deep*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press
- Green, Elon (2013) Annotation Tuesday! Gay Talese and 'Frank Sinatra has a cold', *Neiman Storyboard*. Available online at <http://niemanstoryboard.org/stories/annotation-tuesday-gay-talese-and-frank-sinatra-has-a-cold/>, accessed on 1 July 2018
- Hartsock, John (2000) *A history of American literary journalism*, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press
- Holan, Angie Drobnic (2018) A fact checker's guide to *Fire and fury: Inside the Trump White House*, *PolitiFact.com*, 9 January. Available online at <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2018/jan/09/fact-checking-read-fire-and-fury-michael-wolff/>, accessed on 1 July 2018
- Hollywood Reporter (2018) Michael Wolff reflects on a wild week: I have no side here, 6 January. Available online at <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/michael-wolff-reflects-a-wild-week-trumps-anger-i-have-no-side-q-a-1072106>, accessed on 1 July 2018
- Kramer, Mark (1995) Breakable rules for literary journalists, *Neiman Storyboard*. Available online at <http://niemanstoryboard.org/stories/breakable-rules-for-literary-journalists/>, accessed on 1 July 2018
- Malcolm, Janet (1990) *The journalist and the murderer*, New York, Alfred Knopf
- Martin, Jonathan (2018) From *Fire and fury* to political firestorm, 8 January. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/08/books/review/michael-wolff-fire-and-fury-trump-white-house.html>, accessed on 12 August 2018
- McGinnis, Joe (1969) *The selling of the President 1968*, New York, Trident Press
- McGinnis, Joe (2012 [1983]) *Fatal vision*, New York, Penguin
- McNair, Brian, (2003 [1995]) *An introduction to political communication*, New York, Routledge
- NBC (2018) Full Michael Wolff: Meet the press with Chuck Todd, 8 January. Available online at <https://www.nbcnews.com/meet-the-press/video/full-michael-wolff-trump-white-house-facing-25th-amendment-kind-of-stuff-1131256387787>, accessed on 1 July 2018
- Newsweek (2018) 'Who is Katie Walsh?', January 4. Available online at <https://www.newsweek.com/who-katie-walsh-former-trump-deputy-chief-staff-was-only-pro-white-house-770506>, accessed on 1 July 2018
- Palmer, Ruth (2016) *The journalist and the murderer* revisited: What interview subjects reveal about a modern classic, *Journalism*, Vol. 18, No. 5 pp 575-591
- Richardson, Peter (2018) Michael Wolff and Hunter S. Thompson, *peter-richardson.blogspot.com*. Available online at <http://peter-richardson.blogspot.com/2018/02/michael-wolff-and-hunter-s-thompson.html>, accessed on 1 July 2018
- Ricketson, Matthew (2006) Reassessing Janet Malcolm's *Journalist and the murderer*, *Australian Journalism Review*, Vol. 28, No. 1 pp 219-226
- Seymour, Corey and Wenner, Jann (2007) *Gonzo: The life of Hunter S. Thompson*, New York, Little Brown
- Sims, Norman (1984) *The literary journalists*, New York, Ballantine Books. Available online at <http://normansims.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/The-Literary-Journalists.pdf>, accessed on 1 July 2018
- Tapper, Jake (2018) Jake Tapper shares his thoughts on Michael Wolff's book, *Late night with Seth Meyers*, 12 January. Available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L51U-KIVay0>, accessed on 1 July 2018
- Talese, Gay (2003 [1966]) Frank Sinatra has a cold, Lounsberry, Barbara (ed.) *The Gay Talese reader*, New York, Bloomsbury pp 18-63
- Thompson, Hunter S. (2005 [1973]) *Fear and loathing on the campaign trail '72*, New York, HarperCollins
- Walters, Patrick (2015) Cracking a closed culture as an immersion journalist, *Teaching Journalism and Mass Communication*, Vol 5. No. 1. Available online at <http://aejmc.us/spig/2015/cracking-a-closed-culture-as-an-immersion-journalist/>
- Winson, Stephen (2018) Fear and loathing in the White House '17, *Medium*, 6 January. Available online at <https://medium.com/@analogine/fear-and-loathing-in-the-white-house-17-8f617077ef61>, accessed on 1 July 2018
- Wolfe, Tom (1975 [1973]) Seizing the power, Wolfe, Tom and Johnson, E. W. (eds) *The new journalism*, New York, Picador pp 38-51
- Wolff, Michael (2009) The power and the story, *Vanity Fair*, July. Available online at <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2009/07/wolff200907> accessed on 1 July 2018
- Wolff, Michael (2018a) *Fire and fury: Inside the Trump White House*, New York, Henry Holt and Co.
- Wolff, Michael (2018b) You can't make this s...t up: My insane year inside Trump's White House, *Hollywood Reporter*, 4 January. Available online at <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/michael-wolff-my-insane-year-inside-trumps-white-house-1071504>, accessed on 1 July 2018
- Wolff, Michael (2018c) Michael Wolff's *Fire and fury* diaries, *Hollywood Reporter*, 11 April. Available online at <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/features/michael-wolffs-fire-fury-diaries-what-media-still-gets-wrong-trump-1100978>, accessed on 1 July 2018
- Wolff, Michael (2018d) Michael Wolff on *Meet the Press*: Donald Trump 'not a good father', *realclearpolitics.com*, 7 January. Available online at [https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2018/01/07/michael\\_wolff\\_on\\_meet\\_the\\_press\\_donald\\_trump\\_not\\_a\\_very\\_good\\_father.html](https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2018/01/07/michael_wolff_on_meet_the_press_donald_trump_not_a_very_good_father.html), accessed on 26 August 2018
- Wolpe, Bruce (2018) *Fire and fury* review: Michael Wolff confirms the worst fears about Donald Trump, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 January. Available online at <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/fire-and-fury-review-michael-wolff-confirms-the-worst-fears-about-donald-trump-20180122-h0m0d2.html>, accessed on 1 July 2018

### Note on the contributor

Dr Kerrie Davies is a lecturer at the School of the Arts and Media, UNSW, Sydney, Australia, and the author of *A wife's heart* (2017), a work of auto/biography about poet Henry Lawson's wife Bertha Lawson.



Gitte Meyer

## The science communication challenge: Truth and disagreement in democratic knowledge societies

*Condescending attitudes towards citizens have become dominant in both journalism and the social sciences, according to Gitte Meyer. Here she explains how her concerns over these trends led her to write her latest book, The science communication challenge: Truth and disagreement in democratic knowledge societies.*

A political manifesto about Danish environmental policies dominated the front page of *Politiken*, an important Danish daily, on 12 May 2018. The manifesto presented well-known arguments: it is a myth, generated by misleading statistics, that Denmark is a green nation. The average Danish citizen generates much more CO<sub>2</sub> than most people in the world. A range of environmental problems, global warming and food insecurity are threatening the globe. Danish politicians should take the lead to ensure a future with fewer cars, less air travel and less meat eating. Politicians should make sustainability, health and climate their priorities, rather than economic growth ...

All this represented a legitimate and relatively coherent argument, but certainly not a new one. So why did the manifesto hit the front page? It did so because the signatories were 301 Danish academics – spanning a wide array of academic fields, from climate research to social science, literary studies and theology – who used their academic status to give force to their argument.

The signatories did not consider themselves to be making a political argument but to lay

bare – as representatives of the world of knowledge – the facts as they were. They ended with a demand that politicians should take scientific knowledge seriously and act upon it. In a follow-up, representatives of the group characterised the proclamation as an act of science communication.

Science communication? The writing of my most recent book, *The science communication challenge: Truth and disagreement in democratic knowledge societies*, has been fuelled, to a large degree, by concern over the kind of academic self-perception displayed by the signatories of the proclamation. It would have been a fine expression of civic engagement had they signed with their names, in their capacity as Danish citizens or, indeed, if they had signed as academics while emphasising that they were offering an interpretation, open to debate, of various findings and conclusions from the natural and social sciences. They did, however, neither of those things.

Instead, drawing without restraint on the authority of science, they presented themselves as knowers. The follow-up made it even clearer by bluntly making the case that academics at large, regardless of their speciality, are more qualified to evaluate knowledge claims than other citizens, regardless of the topic. Effectively claiming to be in possession of the scientific truth about political issues – seen as technical problems waiting for correct, scientific solutions – the proclamation made no room for exchange among different points of view. However, such exchanges, carried out by politically equal citizens, constitute the very soul of political life in the classical sense.

### The transportation paradigm

A related lack of distinction between (technical) scientific and (practical) political issues is a founding feature of the dominant science communication paradigm. Tailored to suit strict science, it is aimed at the transportation of exact knowledge from knowers to non-knowers. It is a legitimate purpose and likely to work well in the proper context. However, as the use of approaches and methods from the sciences has been expanded to ever less exact questions of a practical-political nature – the so-called happiness science is an extreme example – the transportation paradigm has been allowed to expand correspondingly.

Suited to exact questions, it does not know how to deal with inexactness. Suited to searches for truth and correct solutions, it does not recog-

nise disagreement about issues that do not fit into a scheme of true versus false. Suited to teaching in the sense of knowledge transfer, it addresses pupils as immature beings but does not incorporate a mature citizens' category. Originating in a logic that takes bad politics to be the opposite of science and good politics to be the application of science – seen as a limitless enterprise – it has no substantial idea of politics as a kind of activity which is qualitatively different from science. There is no aim of opening up issues for discussion. Rather, closure is the overall aim.

At the end of this expansion lies the sad day when two of the great achievements of civilisation – modern science and modern democratic politics – have completely devoured each other, leaving humankind with the choice only between varieties of technocracy. It is to prevent that from happening that I have suggested the introduction of a political category of science communication in the shape of civilised discussions among different points of view about science-related political issues.

The suggestion is based on a distinction between the technical and the practical – roughly corresponding to the scientific and the political – which has gone out of fashion together with the Aristotelian view of human and political life as *praxis*. It is the beauty of the distinction, and of the corresponding idea of practical reason (*phronesis*), that it operates with a qualitative difference between technical-scientific questions or problems that can be answered correctly and solved and, on the other hand, practical-political questions and problems that can only be resolved by way of exchange, from one case to another. Thus, no science versus politics dichotomy is assumed. There is a room for science and a room for politics as two distinct – although increasingly interrelated – kinds of human activity, one looking for true and correct answers to exact questions, the other dealing pluralistically with questions and challenges that cannot be answered that way.

Knowledge societies, I argue in my book, need politics in the latter sense to remain democratic. Citizens who, with respect to political issues, consider themselves – and are considered by journalists – to be more equal than other citizens constitute a threat to the political life of modern democracies. The view of academia as a fraternity of alpha citizens undermines the very societal conditions that made modern science possible as an intellectual endeavour in the first place. The coffee house component

of its heritage appears to have been mislaid in some unused pocket. Its rediscovery is a matter of urgency.

### A task of integration

Hannah Arendt and Aristotle, in particular, taught me about the classical concepts of *praxis* and *phronesis* some time after I, almost two decades ago, concluded 25 years of journalistic practice and joined the world of academe. The move was motivated by the fact that my profession was becoming standardised. Moreover, instead of addressing a public of co-citizens with a capacity for reason, I was suddenly expected to address masses of consumers with no such capacity. On top of that, equally worrying changes were taking place within my journalistic speciality – science- and technology-related topics and issues: The scientists I worked with seemed less and less interested in contributing to debates. Now they simply craved visibility. I wished to better understand what was happening and why.

Why had politics become a term of abuse? Why did claims about being somehow above politics apparently grow stronger the more science expanded into the realm of politics? And, along corresponding lines, why did the ideal of the completely objective scientific expert experience a revival precisely at a time when the presence of particular interests in scientific projects about complex issues was gaining momentum and called for critical attention? Why were polarisation and demonisation so significant features of science communication? And why, at the same time, had communication about science come to be perceived simply as a sort of technical operation of knowledge dissemination – in order to enlighten or, more often than not, driven by advertising or crusading motives?

Reading, writing, researching, writing, discussing, writing and teaching – often wondering whether my escape route had led me directly into the lion's den – I have come up with some tentative answers. They are summarised in the book which focuses on the whys of science communication – that, of course, includes the ethics – and deals only sparingly with science communication know-how.

Today's overall science communication task, as I see it, is one of integrating science, as a human endeavour, into a much wider societal context and to inspire a continuous discussion, open and open-minded, about how it is possible to know what about which issues when and why.

Modern science was born centuries ago in rebellion against former knowledge authorities. It is high time it learns how to deal, in a spirit of pluralism, with its own position as a knowledge authority and a pivotal societal institution, complete with financial interests. As the use of scientific approaches and methods has expanded far beyond the domain of exact questions, it might seem prudent to learn from the communicative traditions of those academic fields that, by convention, have been concerned with inexact questions and, therefore, have had to develop communicative modes suited to curbing exaggerated knowledge claims: the humanities. Learning from the arts and letters tradition would imply an emphasis on moderation, on the making of reservations, and on allowing space for and inviting exchange with other interpretations. There is a lot to learn and a lot to unlearn.

#### Understandings of the public

Academic arrogance probably constitutes one of the most significant obstacles to science communication of a pluralist vein about science-related political issues. It is an oddity that decades of rather strong numerical increase of academics seem to have been accompanied by an increasingly marked identity among academics as members of an elite. Working with scientists and other academics as a young journalist in the 1980s, I did not experience anything like it. Since then, it has been growing upon us.

Personally, I have shocked a good many PhD students by telling them that they were no less ordinary than other ordinary citizens. It did not help that I clearly valued the role of the citizen as a role that comes with co-responsibility for public affairs. They were unable to stomach the message and perceived it as an affront. Somehow, they had learned to think in terms of 'scientists and citizens' or even 'scientists versus citizens' – standard phrases from the science communication discourse – and they were disinclined to adopt the role of citizen. Citizens, to them, were 'average', 'common'. Academic certificates were taken to serve, one way or another, as antidotes to such features. I have come across that attitude even in an undergraduate who had barely completed two years of study.

Such condescending understandings of the modern public or citizenry have become dominant also in the profession of journalism and frequently form the background of social scientific studies. Not least because they may come with self-fulfilling qualities, I have devoted a chapter of the book to tracing their possible

background and discussing their possible implications.

Will anybody read it? Will it come to any use? I do not know. I simply wanted the book to come into existence, so that one day it might be read and might come to some use. Having decided to leave the Danish academic hierarchy and return to a life of independent writing and scholarship, it seemed right to sum up observations and reflections from more than four decades of preoccupation with the science-society relationships. I would hate to see science and politics destroy each other. To do nothing and escape into quietism would not do any good. Better to do one's bit by saying one's piece. Having done so, it is there for the taking.

#### Note on the Contributor

Gitte Meyer practised as a journalist, focusing on science and technology-related issues, for 25 years before turning to academic work. Her PhD (2004) concerned the journalism-science relationships and her research has been equally divided between two interconnected fields: the science-society relationships and different traditions of journalism. She was most recently employed as a Senior Researcher at the Center for Civil Society Studies, Copenhagen Business School. In October 2017, she returned to a life of independent scholarship and writing. Her latest book is *The science communication challenge. Truth and disagreement in democratic knowledge societies*, London and New York, Anthem Press, 2018.

**Journalism after Snowden: The future of the free press in the surveillance state**

Emily Bell and Taylor Owen, with Smitha Khorana and Jennifer R. Henrichsen (eds)  
Cambridge University Press, 2017 pp 326  
ISBN 9780231176132

In May 2013, former US National Security Agency (NSA) analyst and private contractor Edward Snowden flew to Hong Kong with a cache of classified NSA documents tucked into his luggage. There he met three journalists who, throughout the next eight days, worked with him to sift through the information contained in the leaked documents and determine what was important for the public to know and what was not.

By 5 June 2013, the first news stories emerging from the Hong Kong meetings started to break in newspapers around the globe. It was revealed that the NSA had been secretly making records of nearly every phone call in the United States (p. 2). Moreover, the agency had surveilled citizens around the globe, including nations' leaders and human rights groups. In the US, the Obama administration maintained it had surveilled only foreigners. But Snowden's leaked NSA documents told a different story.

These and other revelations reinvigorated a global conversation about surveillance, and fired up further debate around state power, oversight and accountability. Like the Pentagon Papers 30 years earlier, the case of investigative reporter James Risen and the 2010 indictment and later conviction of his (then) CIA source Jeffrey Alexander Stirling (pp 91-93), the ongoing spectacle of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, holed up in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, and the imprisoning – originally for 35 years – of WikiLeaks source Chelsea (then Bradley) Manning, the event became another defining moment in modern journalism.

Indeed, highlighting the challenges faced by journalists in the digital age makes this book such an important and practical volume for the craft. Add to this that among the editors and writers of the book are the very journalists who worked with Snowden from the start and those who helped shape the stories released from the NSA cache, first for the *Guardian*, then the *Washington Post* (p. 1), and you have a volume of outstanding relevance and credibility.

In what reads at times like a spy thriller, the book examines the challenges facing journalists at an extraordinary time for the profession – when, as Snowden, says: 'Many more publishers [are] competing for a finite, shrinking amount of attention span that's available' (p. 61) – around the whistleblower's fate and the ramifications and implications of his leaks.

The book is divided into four parts, together with an effective introduction and postscript, each chapter using the Snowden leaks as a *leit motif* around which issues are debated. Part 1: 'The story and the source' covers events surrounding the Snowden leaks and features an overarching recollection by former editor-in-chief of the *Guardian*, Alan Rusbridger. There is also a reflective piece by the freelance journalist who worked closely with Snowden from the outset, Glenn Greenwald, and an excerpt from a conversation with Snowden himself by Tow Center director Emily Bell (and, in part, Smitha Khorana), conducted remotely in December 2015.

On June 9, after the stories first started appearing – and in accordance with Snowden's wishes, stated at the outset – Greenwald went public with the whistleblower's identity (p. 39). The US government branded him a criminal and terrorist, while some media outlets dubbed him a 'fame-seeking narcissist' (p. 38). In Chapter 3 'The surveillance state', Greenwald argues that Snowden's motivations were more altruistic and that he could have sold the material to the highest bidder or passed it to America's enemies, but didn't.

'He, instead, did exactly what you want a whistleblower to do,' writes Greenwald, 'which is to come to journalists at well-regarded media institutions and ask them to go through the material very carefully and vet it and publish that which is necessary to enable his fellow citizens ... to learn about what is being done to their privacy (pp 35-36). With the Chinese government threatening to hand him over to US authorities (p. 37), Snowden was forced to flee Hong Kong, initially to seek refuge in Ecuador, but ending up in Moscow (p. 6).

Meanwhile, action from ostensibly 'friendly' governments and their intelligence communities came swiftly as well, culminating in 'the astonishing spectre of three senior staff members of the *Guardian* newspaper who were compelled to smash their own computers containing leaked documents under the watchful eyes of officials from one of the United Kingdom's intelligence agencies' (p. 291). The move was ineffec-

tive, as the documents were already copied and stored at *ProPublica* and the *New York Times*.

In 'Part 2: Journalists and sources' (pp. 83-158), academics, journalists and digital security specialists outline an emerging body of work aimed at helping journalists function effectively when 'criminal hacking and state surveillance challenge journalists to better protect the identities of confidential sources in an age of ubiquitous digital records' (p. 85). As senior reporter at *ProPublica* Julia Angwin notes in Chapter 7: 'Digital security for journalists', the identity of the secret source 'Deep throat' in the 1972 Watergate scandal, took 33 years to be revealed. By contrast, when state secrets were divulged to the *Guardian* and *Washington Post* by Snowden in 2013, it took NSA just 48 hours to identify him as the source. Angwin's point is that in today's world where almost everything leaves a digital trace (p. 114), there are fresh and daunting challenges for journalism: Can a journalist protect their source? How many reporters are digital-secure? If not, what are the risks? The chapter is a pragmatic standout in this second part and develops several must-know strategies for a digital world.

Part 3: 'Governing surveillance' debates the political, policy, institutional and physical infrastructure of surveillance, including a brief history of leaks by New York University journalism professor Clay Shirky, in which he pares down the enormity of change in a networked age to 'the heightened leverage of sources and the normalisation of transnational news networks' (p. 166). Other chapters probe laws framing the keeping and leaking of secrets, as well as giving a snapshot of the 'brave new world' of surveillance and cyberwarfare.

Part 4 'Communications networks and new media' asks how the digital ecosystem is challenging the notion of a free press? If journalists must embrace social media as a tool, how do they at the same time hold to account the companies that profit from such platforms. Moreover, what happens when the Fourth Estate no longer owns the means of production nor controls distribution? What exactly are the surveillance capabilities of governments and private corporations? And should journalism participate in, even profit from, surveillance?

The introduction may have more effectively put the Snowden case into context by briefly canvassing other leaks of recent times, such as Manning's and those of WikiLeaks; instead, these leaks are mentioned as the book progresses.

Indeed, the book suffers (in minor fashion) from a sectionalised approach in that the story comes in bits and pieces with coherence lent only by the carefully-chosen section topics. At the same time this makes it convenient to dip in and out according to interest.

Together, the questions posed by *Journalism after Snowden* may boil down to one: in the digital age, what is journalism? Alan Rusbridger answers in fine style near the book's beginning, when he says: 'You are a journalist. You are not part of the state or the government. Your job is disclosure, not secrecy. You stand aside from power in order to scrutinize it' (p. 24).

Glenn Morrison,  
Charles Darwin University,  
Alice Springs

**Trauma, shame, and secret making: Being a family without a narrative**

Francis Joseph Harrington,  
Routledge, New York, 2018 pp 190  
ISBN 9781138231177

This is a scholarly text combining psychological traumatology and autoethnography to provide an account of the impact of familial trauma across three generations. Focusing on his maternal lineage, Francis Joseph Harrington explores more than 100 years of familial history to question if trauma has lingered in him and his sister as a consequence of prolonged narrative suppression in the lives of his family; repression of memories and trauma, and the resultant secrets and silence.

Utilising an interdisciplinary approach to his research and writing, Harrington explores the fields of ethnography, medicine, anthropology, sociology, social work, neuroscience, philosophy, psychology and psychiatry – as well as lived experiences of trauma – through his inquiry into the impact of intergenerational trauma and secret making. Largely, this book is a detailed



and informative account of Harrington's personal discovery of traumatology, as he walks us through the literature and research he assimilates on his journey in learning about trauma, and how he applies this scholarly information to three generations of familial history to understand the impact of trauma and silence on the psyche.

The pragmatic structure of the book provides an easy-to-follow historical and scholarly development of our understanding of trauma and its impact, spanning from 1876 to the present day. The six time periods also place each generation of Harrington's family into their historical setting. Each of the six time periods Harrington focuses on are further divided into three chapters: the first exploring trauma theory (this is a historic and scholarly account); the second considering how this theory relates to Harrington's familial experiences; and the third presenting a personal account, a role Harrington refers to as 'participant observer' (p. 51) throughout the text. This chapter is perhaps best seen as an auto-ethnographic exploration incorporating the use of memories, storytelling techniques, as well as archival research and fieldwork interviews. Yet though all of this, Harrington focuses more on the mental health and experiences of his family members, rather than himself.

Opening with the period of 1876 to 1909, Harrington outlines the beginnings of trauma research, focusing on Pierre Janet's inquiry into hysteria (pp 1-28). He then moves into the 1910 to 1945 period, looking at combat-related trauma and Abram Kardiner's inquiry into the neuroses of war (pp 29-58). Part three looks at the post war period of 1946 to 1979 and the impact of war trauma on veterans, families and their children (pp 59-90). Harrington then recounts the period of 1980 to 1999, when post-traumatic stress disorder is identified and how the technological advance on the 1960s and 1970s allowed for a shift in focus from behavioural to cognitive research and therapy (pp 91-120).

Part five looks at developments in traumatology and neuroscience from the year 2000 and beyond, focusing on neurobiology and the development of epigenetic research related to intergenerational transmission of trauma (pp 121-150). Though a strong chapter, I was surprised by the absence of references to Professor Rachel Yehuda, Director of the Traumatic Stress Studies Division at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine, New York, who is an eminent scholar of epigenetics and intergenerational trauma transmission.

The final section of the book, part six (pp 151-178), focuses on trauma recovery and our social commitment to reducing childhood trauma, including an afterword focusing specifically on the clergy sexual abuse scandal (pp 179-183). The latter is an important inclusion given Harrington's past as a priest in the Archdiocese of Toronto (where he began to work with children and families adapting to stress). Acknowledging 'the suffering individuals and families have experienced as victims of sexual abuse by members of the Catholic clergy' (p. 179), he provides a candid account of his own failure to see the magnitude and endemic nature of child abuse within the Church.

Questions of ethics and reconstruction of events are raised by chapter five, 'Rose and her children: Aileen (1910-1983) and Leonard (1914-1971)', in which Harrington includes the story of his maternal grandmother, Rose, in the historical context of Abram Kardiner's exploration of the traumatic neuroses of war (pp 41-50). In this chapter, Harrington reconstructs events of Rose's life, which would not be a problem given his archival research; however, he also produces accounts of what Rose was feeling and the reasoning behind her actions, none of which he can know for certain and for which no supporting evidence is presented. Despite this, the writing is presented as fact rather than Harrington's own theorising.

In chapter six, Harrington writes that the remaking of Rose's narrative 'was challenging enough given her commitment to silence; it was, however, a relatively safe endeavor to undertake' (p. 51). Such recreation of a character's feelings, emotions, psyche, the attribution of feelings to actions, are all the author's assumptions; further, it is unscientific and may also be Harrington's personal projections.

Chapter 15 brings its own issues as Harrington seems too eager to assign mental health diagnoses to his family members and to himself. This is evident when Harrington calls himself and his sister, Mary Anne, 'dissociators' without describing a single time he or Mary Anne dissociated. Furthermore, his writing in this chapter makes the inadvertent suggestion that isolation equals dissociation (p. 144).

Harrington also proposes a presence of abulia – 'loss or impairment of will power' (p. 17) – in Mary Anne because she 'could not act on the opportunity to be with her niece; she could not pick up the phone and make the call' (p. 144). This is another example where Harrington gen-

erates reasons behind a character's actions from his own assumptions and then assigns a medical diagnosis to the character. Mary Anne may simply not have wanted to be with her niece. This does not signify abulia: this is not simply not wanting to do something, but is 'an inhibition of will by which a person is unable to do what he actually wishes to do' (Prince 1906: 15).

Moving through the six sections of the book provides a myriad of brilliant sources on trauma, as well as the recounting of other people's research. For example, Harrington spends almost five pages recounting Dr Ruth Lanius's conference talk, 'The impact of early life trauma: Clinical and neurobiological perspectives', presented at the International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation in 2013 (pp 123-127), and applies them to his own familial experience, without adding new information to the field of trauma. As a result, this book is a useful collection of already published scholarship and studies for students and academics, rather than a book that presents new information, research findings or theories in relation to psychological traumatology.

#### Reference

Prince, M. (1906) *The dissociation of a personality*, New York, Longmans, Green & Co.

**Anna Denejkina,  
University of Technology Sydney**

#### Advertising and promotional culture

P. David Marshall and Joanne Morreale,  
Palgrave Macmillan, 2018 pp 266  
ISBN 9781137026231

This book examines advertising over a period of almost 350 years – from the extravagant claims of the purveyors of elixirs in the seventeenth century and the P. T. Barnum circus promotions of the first half of the nineteenth century, to viral campaigns and the blurred boundaries of advertising today in techniques such as 'native advertising'.

Along the journey through pre-modern, modern and postmodern advertising, the authors examine the close interrelationship between advertising and culture including the appropriation of culture as well as the infiltration of promotion into popular culture.

Their analysis includes 11 case histories of noteworthy advertising campaigns throughout the past century, including promotion of the Volkswagen Beetle as 'the people's car' and its global expansion to become an automotive giant; Nike's promotion to become a dominant sportswear brand; controversial advertising such as promotion of cigarette brands including Camel, Lucky Strike and Marlboro; Dove's 'Real Beauty' campaign in the early 2000s, which the authors refer to as part of a 'pinkwashing' movement by corporations (p. 196), and the ground-breaking digital advertising campaigns of Howard Dean, candidate for the Democratic Party nomination in 2004, and future US President Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012.

However, this is more than a book of advertising case studies. The authors manage to deliver an analysis that serves two functions equally well. First, it is an authoritative historical review of the changing forms of global advertising – albeit mainly focused on contemporary Western societies – with insights into the objectives and strategy of many noteworthy campaigns. As such, it will be a useful addition to the reading list of undergraduate courses in advertising and marketing and also media history.

In addition, this text also explores the wider and deeper influences of advertising in society. For instance, it goes behind Nike's advertising to examine the company's globalisation strategy that drove its marketing approach in the 1990s and early 2000s, including its 'outsourcing' of production to factories in developing countries that eventually led to controversy because of the

use of 'sweat shops'. The authors present considerable research data to support their critical analysis. For example, they report that by 2013 Nike did not actually manufacture any shoes, with 42 per cent of the famous brand sports shoes produced by contractors in Vietnam, 30 per cent manufactured by contractors in China, and 26 per cent manufactured by factories in Indonesia (p. 137).

They also examine the relationship between advertising and design, such as the successful global campaign of IKEA to produce and advertise products based on a postmodern aesthetic (a broadening beyond the rules and values of modernism) and bring 'designer' furniture and homewares into everyday living.

The book includes recent research and critical analysis including a study of the destruction of the authenticity of the Volkswagen brand following revelations that the company had systematically breached emission laws for diesel vehicles. Other major issues examined include advertising to children and the use of celebrities in advertising. For example, the authors examine how 'snap, crackle and pop' became part of the morning breakfast routine of billions of families around the world through the advertising campaigns of Kellogg's – part of food advertising that has arguably contributed to the obesity epidemic of today as children and their parents were encouraged to gobble up sugary, manufactured cereals instead of traditional breakfast fare.

While comprehensive in many respects, the analysis stops short in a few areas – for example, the links between advertising and health problems faced in the Western world such as obesity and lung cancer are skirted around. While the analysis is not celebratory of advertising as some other texts are, its critical focus is through a soft focus lens when it comes to some of the major dysfunctions of advertising. It is interesting also that it does not discuss the key role of 'jingles' in advertising – their appropriation of and contribution to popular music – that are surely major features of promotional culture and key to how advertising has become not only part of, but welcomed into, our lives.

The authors discuss 'adbusters' and culture jamming techniques applied to advertising when it has offended popular taste or special interests, sometimes referred to as *subvertising* (Cortese 2008). However, they do so only briefly, and in discussing advertising to children and controversial issues such as promotion of smoking,

the authors do not discuss regulation and self-regulation, both part of the counter-balancing of promotional culture and a limitation on its spread throughout contemporary societies – albeit with limited success.

The book also contains a few errors, although these are not substantial. For instance, in discussing the 2008 Obama campaign, the authors cite 'Jo Rospars from Blue Digital' (p. 160). Joe Rospars (a man), was a founder of the firm *Blue State Digital*.

Four main themes are identified in the analysis. The authors describe these as 'imagining the future' (advertising helps individuals imagine and value themselves); 'tribalism' (advertising helps people belong to imaginary groups because of affiliation with a product, such as wearing branded clothing); 'the attention economy blur' (the leading role of advertising in creating an economy based around winning attention); and 'presumption/participation' (the luring of people into actively distributing and even co-creating advertising).

The latter theme is perhaps the most significant of all concepts presented in this book. Beyond using advertising for imagining a better self (identify construction) and even tribalism through self-branding, this analysis reveals a pinnacle of influence of advertising in convincing 'the people formerly known as the audience' (Rosen 2006, para. 1) to become active participants in spreading and even creating promotional culture. It could be said that today we are all in advertising.

## References

- Cortese, A. (2008) *Prococateur: Images of women and minorities in advertising*, Lanham, MA, Rowman and Littlefield
- Rosen, J. (2006) The people formerly known as the audience, *PressThink*, 27 June. Available online at [http://archive.pressthink.org/2006/06/27/ppl\\_frmr.html](http://archive.pressthink.org/2006/06/27/ppl_frmr.html)

**Jim Macnamara,**  
**Distinguished Professor of Public Communication,**  
**University of Technology Sydney**

**Breaking news: The remaking of journalism and why it matters now**

Alan Rusbridger

Canongate, 2018 pp 464

ISBN 9781786890931

Alan Rusbridger is the quiet giant of modern British journalism. Like it or loathe it, he and the *Guardian*, which he edited, set the agenda for two decades. Phone hacking, WikiLeaks, Snowden, the Panama Papers et al, the 'Graun' was at the heart of most of the biggest stories. Now he has written a memoir (of sorts) and a manifesto for the future of journalism. It is a cracking read as you would expect of a great writer. This is a tome that all should buy (yes!), read and digest. It is a manifesto for the modern media.

As Rusbridger/the *Guardian* changed the way we perceive journalism, making it international, digital, inclusive and more, so this book should change the way we view what we call 'journalism'.

By definition, every journalism lecturer is teaching historical truths. One week out of a modern newsroom and you are out of date. Keeping up with the New World requires hard work, stretch and imagination. Reading this book is a good start.

On the positive side of the Rusbridger register, he led the *Guardian*, blinking, into the digital future with first Australian and then American editions until it became the third most-read news website in the English language. It was garlanded for its exclusives and won a coveted Pulitzer Prize (the first for a British newspaper) in 2014. British award juries were more churlish. I have served on many where they barely disguise their hatred of the paper. The scars of phone hacking run deep.

Rusbridger, like John Birt at the BBC but with more humanity, saw the future and it was digital. Simply, the internet was going to transform journalism and lead to the (near) death of print as a platform. Purely a matter of time, 'Dead Tree journalism' was simply in the intensive care ward. His view, bolstered by the intellectual cover provided by Emily Bell – then of his paper and now at Columbia University – was very prescient.

Right long term, less so in the short term.

The days of industry bodies claiming 'print will come back' seem a long time ago. They were

whistling whilst the Titanic sunk. Some still do in a rather desultory way. Where, now, is the *Oldham Evening Chronicle*? The editor of that esteemed rag once told me of his approach to digital: 'I just bung the paper on the net but keep the good stories back for the paper.' Not a wise move. He is now serving time in the salt mines of North Lancashire.

Transformation took bravery and it took money. News and digital labs were set up to run alongside and away from the print *Guardian*. Whisper it gently but some of them manned by non-journalists, computer programmers even! Cue mutual suspicion. They were co-sited on different floors, even different buildings initially. Eventually the two became totally integrated in the digital newsroom and Rusbridger adopted a policy of 'digital/web first' for all news. Free with no pay wall.

Therein lies the rub. Free news at the point of delivery! That set the market price at zero. It led to the *Guardian/Observer* bleeding money as the anticipated new flow of digital advertising revenue did not arrive in time to make up for lost print. Indeed, that point has only just been reached in 2018. Much of the new revenue has been gobbled up by the Silicon Valley internet giants – not the 'legacy media'. Many of them have moved from the intensive care ward directly to the graveyard.

From that small acorn of Guardian Unlimited, the first online iteration, the 'paper' has expanded to the huge digital treasure trove it is today – full of content and good journalism, full of comment as well as sacred facts, full of innovations like data blogs and data journalism and longer form video plus multi-national editions making it truly 24/7. It is a gargantuan enterprise. The Rusbridger newsroom at its peak had more desks than the main BBC one.

It is hard to remember a time before the Guardian Online. Also, hard to remember the last time I bought a print copy. Circulation of that is down to less than 140,000 in July 2018. Digital is now at 25 million monthly hits in the UK alone. The legacy of AR is the slow death of the *Guardian* in print.

Continuing on the not-so-positive AR ledger side, his digital path ate up the reserves of the Scott Trust which 'owns' the *Guardian*. The £600m. legacy of owning and selling *Auto Trader* (a wonderful investment and a cash cow. Rusbridger talks of giving thanks to used car dealers each and every day for keeping the *Grauniad*

going!) was depleting year by year. Fleet Street sages, already up in arms over the *Guardian's* exposés of their dirty phone hacking laundry and the Leveson Inquiry which followed, were getting ready to jump on the paper's grave with some glee. 'Free news!' they said. 'It will never work!'

Rusbridger, who displays a surprising commercial savviness in this book, ignored the premature obituaries and continued to innovate ... and to spend. Solvency was just around the corner, he promised. It was a long corner. He left on a high in 2015 after winning the Pulitzer Prize for the Snowden revelations. That had required resolve with the British government arriving at the paper to smash up laptops with dangerous subversive info on them. Such crassness was to no avail in the new world. Fortunately, digital copies existed in the US and elsewhere where governments were less ham-fisted. Snowden saw the light of day worldwide. Now AR is the head of house at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, still innovating, still disrupting the status quo.

Post hoc, there has been somewhat of a thrashing of Rusbridger's reputation at the paper and wider afield. He lost the chairmanship of the Scott Trust – his reward for the long editorship – after a battle and a period of deadlock. Rusbridger was made to take the main blame for the annual losses – and a palace coup installed Alex Graham in his seat.

Now Rusbridger is just a contributor from down the M40. That is a pity. His lasting achievement is there in cyberspace for all to see. The paper has survived on all platforms; thrived on some.

Rusbridger also offers lessons for all journalists on how to adapt to the brave new world of the web. British newspapers have been woeful in their embrace of the internet. Woeful and wrong. Too little, too late. The audience and the advertisers have long drifted from them to the net. With the odd exception (e.g. the *Daily Mail*), only niche publications such as the *Financial Times* and the *Economist* have truly survived the digital tsunami by lassoing their audiences behind a pay wall. *The Times* and *New York Times* too. Rusbridger may have been wrong.

Facebook and Google are the new Masters of the Advertising Universe. They have eaten the lunches of the legacy media *tout court*. The cadaver with little revenue and lost jobs is all that remains. Little strategy, little imagination. Where is the *Oldham Chronicle* now? In the newspaper graveyard that is where. Hundreds of other publications lie there waiting.

America has fared little better with only *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* truly holding their heads above the digital tide; one by a clever semi-porous paywall, the other thanks to a very wealthy sugar daddy – namely Amazon. Most have drowned. In July 2018, the *New York Daily News* announced the retrenchment of half of its journalists, the latest chapter in the not-so-slow death of US city journalism.

So, what is there to learn from Rusbridger's *Guardian* glory days? Good journalism always shines through but needs imagination, will power and money. It also needs to be realistic. Some of Rusbridger's innovations like open journalism – the creation of online communities – were, perhaps, an idea too far and expensive ones too.

You always need to find a way to pay. Rusbridger never solved that conundrum and his successors only just have – at the price of rowing back in scale, range and ambition, simply begging from readers and losing jobs in the process. But none of that takes away from Rusbridger's greatness as an editor. Buy this book, read it on any platform you can find. Pass it on to your students.

It is an important text: a bright light on to a very foggy future.

**John Mair is the editor of twenty six books on journalism. The latest, *Anti-social media?* (with Tor Clark, Neil Fowler, Raymond Snoddy and Richard Tait) was published by Abramis on 26 October**



### **Shooting the messenger:**

#### **Criminalising journalism**

Andrew Fowler

Abingdon, Oxon and New York, Routledge,  
2018 pp 244

ISBN 9781786890931

Since 9/11, governments including those of the USA, the UK, France and Australia, have introduced tough, intimidating legislation to discourage the legitimate activities of a probing media, so greatly needed after the Iraq War of 2003 proved that executive government could not be trusted.

This is the central (impressively argued) thesis of Andrew Fowler's massively researched, original and important book, *Shooting the messenger*. The focus constantly shifts – from Iceland, Australia, Brazil, Paris, London, Rome, New Zealand and Washington. Fowler, an award-winning investigative journalist with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, interviews leading figures in the field such as NSA whistleblowers Edward Snowden and David Rosenberg, reporter turned academic Dr Paul Lashmar, journalists Nick Davies and Duncan Campbell, founder of the freedom of speech organisation GlobalLeaks, Fabio Pietrosanti, and former Australian attorney general Gareth Evans.

In the hard-hitting Introduction, Fowler highlights an example of what he describes as 'an overly cautious media' (p. 2). Two reporters at the *New York Times* learn (long before Snowden's revelations) that President George W. Bush has secretly signed an executive order – of dubious legal authority – lifting all restrictions to permit the NSA to spy on the US public. They contact the White House to give Bush, who was running for re-election in 2004, a chance to comment. And he demands they not run the story because it was 'against the US national interest' (ibid). The newspaper's editor, Bill Keller, agrees. The story is carried only one year later. Fowler compares this to the events 46 years previously when the *New York Times* published the top-secret Pentagon Papers – which revealed how successive governments had deceived the American people over the Vietnam War – but told the White House nothing in advance. Back in 1971, *The Times* 'stuck to its journalistic principles'. Now, the newspaper 'caved in' (ibid).

Edward Snowden was so appalled by *The Times*'s handling of the NSA's secret, global surveillance programme that he contacted, instead, lawyer turned journalist Glenn Greenwald (who had

defended the work of WikiLeaks in the face of sustained attacks from the media and politicians in both the US and UK) to handle the extraordinarily complex and sensitive information buried in his leaks (p. 4).

#### **Unprecedented crisis for the media**

Fowler stresses that Snowden's revelations came at a time of unprecedented crisis for the media. Despite all his calls for a reduction in the powers of the security services before he became president, Obama presided over the largest number of whistleblower prosecutions in the country's history. Bradley/Chelsea Manning was tortured and jailed after revealing US state crimes to WikiLeaks; Snowden was forced into exile somewhere in Russia to escape arrest on charges under the US Espionage Act of 1917. And WikiLeaks founder, Julian Assange, remains holed up in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London fearing extradition to the US. In Paris, journalists at *Le Monde* had their phones repeatedly tapped by the country's intelligence services. In Australia, new laws demanded that telecommunications companies hold the metadata of all phone calls for two years on behalf of intelligence and police agencies 'exposing journalists and their sources to being tracked by the very organisations it is their responsibility to hold to account' (p. 6).

All this may appear to be painting a bleak picture. But Fowler's Chapter One starts us on a positive note – outlining the many ways in which Iceland has become 'an island of hope' in the global struggle for press freedom – its Modern Media Initiative providing unique protection for journalists and whistleblowers (p. 15). As a result, in 2016, Iceland hosted 'the biggest financial scoop in the history of journalism', the Panama Papers, in which the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists disclosed massive tax avoidance and money laundering throughout the world (p. 19). The mood suddenly shifts in the next chapter – titled 'Heart of Darkness' – when Fowler examines in detail the propaganda strategies of the US, UK and Australian governments – and the lying over weapons of mass destruction in the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. In the States, vice-president Dick Cheney and Richard Perle, policy adviser to the defense secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, set up the Office of Special Plans to manufacture 'evidence' to support the case for war against Iraq; in the UK, Operation Rockingham performed a similar function. And David Rosenberg, who worked at the Pine Gap spy base near Alice Springs for 18 years, tells Fowler that advanced Orion satellites had been directed

at Iraq 'probing for even the slightest shred of evidence that Saddam possessed WMDs' (p. 28). Nothing showed up.

Chapter Three focuses on how the corporate media in the US, UK and Australia banged the drums for war. In particular, Fowler dissects the work of Judith Miller, of the *New York Times*, and the Australian freelance Paul Moran both of whom became, effectively, spokespersons for Ahmed Chalabi and his rabidly anti-Saddam Iraqi National Council. Even the BBC's prestigious *Panorama* programme, on 23 September 2002, was duped as it reported: 'In the last 14 months, several shipments, a total of 1000 aluminium centrifuge tubes, have been intercepted by intelligence agencies before they actually reached Iraq' and suggested they could be used for nuclear weapons' production (p. 35). Any newspaper or politician that broke ranks suffered savage attack. When former British Labour minister Clare Short revealed that the US had bugged the conversations of UN secretary general Kofi Annan 'the howls of condemnation from the right wing press were resounding' (p. 37).

Fowler clearly deeply admires Edward Snowden and the chapter in which he narrates the tense drama of the *Guardian's* eventual decision to publish his revelations on 6 June 2013 is titled 'The truth teller'. At the same time, he is somewhat critical of Alan Rusbridger, editor at the time of the *Guardian*, who is shown as dithering – and leaving the major decisions to his colleague Janine Gibson (p. 57). 'Though Rusbridger had a demonstrable zeal for investigative journalism, he also had a barely concealed contempt for Greenwald. Explaining the perils and potential of the internet age to a Sydney audience in December 2014, Rusbridger commented that Greenwald was an activist and said he would find it hard to get a job as a journalist in the US. It was meant as a criticism but it could well have been taken as a compliment' (p. 54). Thereafter, the *Guardian's* coverage of the Snowden leaks became very 'managed' and 'safe', Rusbridger revealing that he had at least 100 meetings with Whitehall officials to check no seriously damaging secrets were being published (p. 58).

#### ***Guardian* editor castigated for 'caving in'**

Fowler also castigates Rusbridger for 'caving in' to an intelligence services' order that the computers holding the Snowden files be destroyed. Indeed, on 20 July 2013, two GCHQ officials watched as two *Guardian* staffers drilled into the computers' hard drives ripping them to

pieces. On one level the event was theatre/farce since the *Guardian* had taken care to lodge copies of the Snowden files with the *New York Times*. But on another level, as investigative journalist Duncan Campbell stresses in an interview, the government had succeeded because, afterwards, the newspaper effectively stopped reporting Snowden. 'If they didn't want to publish, why didn't they invite others to use the material?' he asks. Paul Lashmar also says it's 'unfortunate' that Snowden handed over his files to just two people, Glenn Greenwald and Laura Poitras. With Greenwald later forming the online website, *The Intercept*, to continue publishing the Snowden files – and other investigations into the secret state – they had become, in effect, a 'personal fiefdom' (p. 63).

One of the many strengths of the book is that it shifts beyond the US and UK to focus on other countries. For instance, the scandal unearthed by the alternative French website, *Mediapart*, in July 2010, surrounding the political machinations of France's richest woman, Liliane Bettencourt, is examined in considerable detail. When *Le Monde* journalist Gérard Davet followed up the report, exposing the close relationship between Bettencourt's wealth manager and Éric Woerth, treasurer of President Sarkozy's party, the UMP, the Direction centrale du renseignement Interieur (DCRI: the equivalent of MI5) demanded copies of Davet's telephone bill from the telecommunications provider and hacked his mobile phone. When this became known, *Le Monde* accused the head of DCRI of breaking the law protecting journalists' sources – and won! The newspaper has now set up a secure drop box so that whistleblowers can directly and anonymously contact its journalists (p. 102).

The spotlight then moves to Brazil where WikiLeaks revealed that the NSA had selected 29 key government phone numbers for intensive interception (p. 114). As part of the BRICS group – with Russia, India, China and South Africa – of developing nations on the rise, Brazil had recently signed an agreement with France to buy four nuclear-powered submarines, giving its already substantial navy a massive reach throughout the South Atlantic and beyond. And in May 2010, huge gas and oil fields had been discovered in the ocean off the coasts of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Not surprisingly, Petrobras, Brazil's state-owned petrochemical giant, featured prominently in the NSA revelations. Fowler argues: 'According to much of the available evidence, stealing trade secrets and helping the US economy to beat competition from foreign companies is exactly where the

US intelligence community expends much of its effort' (p. 117). He continues: 'It is hardly a new concept. Nations have been spying on each other for commercial and trade advantage for centuries, but what is different now is the scale of the espionage and the public denial of the agencies' real purpose' (ibid).

The investigative journalist, Duncan Campbell, is an important source throughout the book so it is not surprising that his involvement in the 1976 revelations about the UK government's signals intelligence organisation, GCHQ, in the alternative magazine, *Time Out*, is covered in some detail. After Campbell, reporter Crispin Aubrey and former intelligence corporal John Berry were arrested, they were charged under the Official Secrets Act. But when news leaked that the prosecution had vetted the jury, the judge abandoned the trial. At a second trial, the three were found to have breached Section 2 of the Act but received non-custodial sentences while the Section 1 charges were dropped completely 'though he [Campbell] remains the first and only British journalist in the UK to face trial for espionage' (p. 135). A victory of sorts, then, for journalism. But the state was merciless in its response, tightening up the official secrets legislation and removing the 'public interest' defence.

Continuing his meticulous analysis of intelligence-related scoops, Fowler moves to France where *Le Monde's* Edwy Plenel revealed the activities of a secret spying outfit being run by President Mitterrand and French intelligence's later involvement in the bombing of the Greenpeace ship, *Rainbow Warrior*, in New Zealand's Auckland Harbour on 10 July 1985 (p. 140). In the resultant court case, a number of officials were fined – but the top politicians escaped entirely. And in Australia during the 1980s, the *National Times* and *The Eye* were part of a 'newly assertive media' confident in revealing uncomfortable state secrets in the public interest (p. 147).

#### **Global clampdown on media freedoms post 9/11**

The final chapters outline the various strategies governments across the globe have adopted to clamp down on media freedom since 9/11. In the US came the Patriot Act; in the UK, the Anti-Terrorist Crime and Security Act provided for the 'blanket surveillance of the entire population' (p. 157). In France, the 'Law on Everyday Security' not only directed the storage of digital meta data done by the telecommunications companies for a year 'but also required that the government have access to encryption keys'

and placed restrictions on the use of encrypted software (p. 158). In Australia, legislation in 2015 forced telecommunications companies to store metadata on all citizens for two years. In an attempt to assuage journalists' fears that their sources were vulnerable to exposure, the government offered a 'compromise': to gain access to journalists' data, security and police agencies would need a Journalist Information Warrant, signed off by a judge. 'But it would be no normal court: any hearing would be held in secret and the journalist would be kept unaware of the request to look through their metadata. They would be represented, without their knowledge, in the secret court by an advocate appointed by the government.' Moreover, public disclosure of the existence of a warrant would be punishable by two years' imprisonment (p. 168). In France, President Sarkozy had, in 2008, given the DGSE (the equivalent of the NSA) the authority to tap the undersea cables carrying much of telecommunications traffic into and out of France (p. 169).

On a more critical note, mistakes do appear. For instance, during his coverage of the Watergate scandal, Fowler says *Washington Post* reporter Bob Woodward revealed the deputy director of the FBI, Mark Felt, as the celebrated 'Deep Throat' secret source (p. 94). Rather, Woodward and his colleague Carl Bernstein were both taken by surprise when Felt independently revealed his identity, suddenly, in *Vanity Fair* (of all places) on 31 May 2005. Felt was in his nineties (he was to die a few years later) and the piece was written by his attorney, John D. O'Connor. But the publication served a useful purpose: it stopped all speculation about the identity of 'Deep Throat'. But what if there were more than one 'Deep Throat'? And if so, which other outfits in the US were conspiring to dislodge the president? And why? Other basic errors crop up: the Falklands conflict is said to have started in April 1981; it was April 1982 (p. 138). The great Australian investigative journalist Phillip Knightley is inexplicably spelled Philip Knightly (p. 128). Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) is said to have warned 'of the perils of communism' (p. 46). Rather, as Orwell was at pains to stress, it was a warning about the perils of authoritarianism – in both the West and East. Martin Moore is said to be involved in the Police (rather than Policy) Institute, at King's College London (p. 80).

In his discussion of Glenn Greenwald's involvement in the creation of *The Intercept* website (p. 63), it may have been good to highlight the controversial role of Pierre Omidyar, the billionaire eBay founder and PayPal board member,

---

in funding the operation. According to Sibel Edmonds, the FBI whistleblower currently running the investigative website, *NewsBud*, an NSA leaker has revealed close ties between the NSA and the PayPal corporation.

#### **Reasons for (cautious) optimism**

Fowler's conclusion is stark: 'Unless there is a concerted effort by the West to abandon the surveillance state into which we are all being drawn, it is highly likely that the journalism that relies on dissent to expose the great injustices perpetrated by governments, particularly when they hide behind the cloak of national security, will be journalism of the past' (p. 232).

But perhaps he could have stressed more that beyond the gaze of the corporate media, a massive alternative, progressive global public sphere is bursting with ideas and media activities challenging the powers of big business and the secret state. For instance, there's [anti-war.com](http://anti-war.com), [antonyloewenstein.com](http://antonyloewenstein.com), [consortiumnews.com](http://consortiumnews.com), [counterpunch.org](http://counterpunch.org), [johnpilger.com](http://johnpilger.com), [lobster-magazine.co.uk](http://lobster-magazine.co.uk), [mondediplo.com](http://mondediplo.com), [newmatilda.com](http://newmatilda.com), [peterdalescott.net](http://peterdalescott.net), [tomdispatch.org](http://tomdispatch.org), [wagingnonviolence.org](http://wagingnonviolence.org), [whowhatwhy.com](http://whowhatwhy.com), [wsws.org](http://wsws.org). And activist, engaged academics/intellec-  
tuals and journalists play crucial roles in many of these media projects. There are, indeed, reasons for (cautious) optimism.

**Richard Lance Keeble, Professor of Journalism  
at the University of Lincoln and Visiting  
Professor at Liverpool Hope University**





## Subscription information

Each volume contains four issues, published quarterly.

### Annual Subscription (including postage)

<i>Personal Subscription</i>	Printed	Online
UK	£50	£25
Europe	£60	£25
RoW	£75	£25

### *Institutional Subscription*

UK	£175
Europe	£185
RoW	£200

*Single Issue - Open Access*   £300

Enquiries regarding subscriptions and orders should be sent to:

Journals Fulfilment Department  
Abramis Academic  
ASK House  
Northgate Avenue  
Bury St Edmunds  
Suffolk, IP32 6BB  
UK

Tel: +44(0)1284 700321

Email: [info@abramis.co.uk](mailto:info@abramis.co.uk)