An examination of Australian news coverage of Papua New Guinea

Jessica Carter

Port Moresby, 2005

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts (Media and Communications), Honours.

Supervised by Dr Antonio Castillo

Department of Media and Communications
University of Sydney
October 2010
Abstract

This thesis examines Australian news coverage of Papua New Guinea, a country with which Australia shares geographic proximity and strong historical ties. Specifically, this study examines the coverage of PNG by The Australian and The Sydney Morning Herald newspapers from January 01 until June 30, 2010.

This work aims to demonstrate that PNG is a neglected news region. This neglect – in terms of quality reporting – has produced a limited and fragmentary portrayal of PNG in the Australian media. In this context, this study observes that the majority of news stories about PNG tend to lack analysis and contextual background.

By examining the process of news framing and news values, this thesis suggests that the disproportionate emphasis on events associated with crime, chaos, disaster, and corruption has constructed PNG as a fragile, suffering and dependent society.

The key methodologies used in this thesis are content analysis, and in-depth interviews with a selected number of Australian journalists currently or previously based in PNG. The thesis forms part of a much broader examination of the changing trends in international news coverage of developing countries, particularly the Asia-Pacific.

Keywords: Papua New Guinea, news frames, news values, Australian media, foreign news coverage, international journalism, Asia-Pacific.

1 Papua New Guinea will henceforth be labelled ‘PNG’ in this thesis
Statement of original authorship

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text. I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

The University of Sydney’s Human Research Ethics Committee approved the protocol for this study at its meeting on 16 June, 2010 (reference number 05-2010 AH 00032).

Signed:

Date: 11 October, 2010
Acknowledgements

Papua New Guinea is not only geographically close to my personal experience, it is also emotionally close – my mother and all of her family come from PNG. I would like to acknowledge that important connection that, in some ways, has inspired me intellectually and emotionally to undertake this research.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the journalists interviewed for this research, who generously shared their time and experiences on working and living in Papua New Guinea. It was a pleasure to interview all of you.

I would also like to acknowledge my supervisor, Dr Antonio Castillo, for his constant encouragement and genuine interest in my topic. It really was a privilege to be supervised by someone who is so passionate about research in international journalism, and also possesses an understanding of what it means to be a journalist. Thanks also to the staff of the Media and Communications Department for inspiring me to do Honours in the first place by providing a rich and intellectually invigorating undergraduate experience. In particular, thanks to Alana Mann and Dr Steven Maras for their constant support.

I would like to thank my friends for enduring me during these months of writing and research. I’d particularly like to thank Lauren, Corina and Kels for all their feedback on my ideas and drafts, and for their friendship. And to Jane, you have been the most considerate and forgiving housemate I could have wished for. Thanks also to my Honours peers.

To Dad, and my brothers Robbie and Dan, thanks for always making me smile. And to Mum – thank you for teaching me to keep looking on the bright side. This thesis is dedicated to you and your home, PNG.
Table of Contents

Abstract 2
Statement of original authorship 3
Acknowledgements 4

Chapter 1  Introduction 6
Just a quick canoe ride away… 6
The presence of the Australian media in PNG: an Introduction 7
Australia and PNG: a history of dependence 8
Research aims 10
Chapter outline 10

Chapter 2  Literature review: constructing international news 14
News and newsworthiness: a construction 14
News values: determining what is newsworthy 16
Examining the structure of international news 19
The quality of international news 24
Global news flows and the Pacific 26
Conclusion: making news 28

Chapter 3  Methodological and theoretical approach 30
Introduction to research design 30
Content analysis 30
Interviews 34
Framing theory 36
Conclusion 37

Chapter 4  Journalists on the ground: reporting on Papua New Guinea 39
The journalistic field 40
The PNG media landscape 41
Newsroom culture: journalistic routine in PNG 46
Journalism as sense-making 49
A nose for news: journalists personal news values 51
Conclusion: the problems facing journalists reporting on PNG 54

Chapter 5  Framing PNG 56
Categories of news 56
Hierarchy of significance 59
Framing PNG 64
PNG as dangerous and dependent 67
Conclusion: PNG in Australian news 74

Chapter 6  Conclusion 75

Appendix 1 Interview questions 79
Appendix 2 Content analysis coding sheet 81
Bibliography 82
Chapter 1  Introduction

Just a quick canoe ride away...

It was in the early 1980s in Port Moresby – a short time after the Australian Government had granted self-government to Papua New Guinea – that the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s PNG correspondent Sean Dorney was pursuing a major story about government corruption.

A minister in the government of Sir Julius Chan, Prime Minister of PNG from 1980 until 1982, had been misusing taxpayer’s funds. The consensus among many local politicians and journalists was that a man of ministerial status was above investigations about corruption. Dorney collected enough information for a powerful story, but it was never broadcasted with the ABC. Instead, it was published in the Fiji-based magazine *Islands Business*, under the byline of Gerard Docerai, which was Dorney’s pen-name.

Soon after his article was printed, an ABC news executive contacted the publisher of *Islands Business*, Robert Keith-Reed, asking him for the contact details of Gerard Docerai. The ABC wanted Docerai to pursue the story.

“Why not get your own fellow, Sean Dorney, to chase it up?” Keith-Reed asked the ABC news executive. “Look, Sean’s alright for some things but this Gerard man seems to know what’s going on,” came the reply.

This story, told by Sean Dorney in an interview conducted for this thesis, reflects some of the challenges that foreign correspondents face while attempting to cover PNG. Dorney, now based in Brisbane, is one of a small group of Australian journalists who have devoted their careers to reporting on PNG and other parts of the Pacific. Dorney explains that since its independence, one of the most frequent problems he confronted while covering
PNG, was convincing his editors of its newsworthiness. “There’s this feeling in the ABC that it [PNG] can’t be important because no one else covers it” (Dorney, interview).

During the 1990s, Dorney would even go so far as to give News Limited’s Pacific reporter, Mary Louise O’Callaghan, a call to let her know when something important was happening in PNG.

If it appeared in *The Australian*, my story would definitely get a run on *AM*. […] If it didn’t appear in the papers then the chances of it getting a run elsewhere were significantly reduced. (Dorney, interview)

### The presence of the Australian media in PNG: an introduction

This thesis argues that the current relationship between the Australian news media and PNG can be described as one of neglect. However this has not always been the case.

Before self-government was granted, the Australian media treated stories from PNG as domestic news. Subsequently, there were a large number of Australian news organisations with correspondents based in Port Moresby. From World War Two until 1975, there were journalists from a range of Australian media organisations, including Fairfax, the *Herald and Weekly Times* (News Limited), the ABC, Australian Associated Press, and a large number of freelancers (Callick, interview; Dorney, interview).

Rowan Callick, the Asia-Pacific Editor for *The Australian*, was working in Port Moresby for Word Publishing prior to independence. He says that as well as the four full-time correspondents, journalists from Australia would frequently
travel to PNG for stories. During the 1970s, the ABC’s 7.30 Report also broadcast a week’s programs from PNG.

Clearly there was quite a substantial perception in the minds of people deploying newspaper and media resources that there was a strong interest [in PNG]. (Callick, interview)

However by the 1980s, not even a decade after independence, this had all changed. Only the ABC and AAP remained in PNG (Dorney, interview). Today, Australia’s media presence in PNG is still limited to those two organisations.

The ABC and AAP have one correspondent each. They are both based in Port Moresby. They are also the only two foreign correspondents in PNG. It is possible to argue that to PNG is not only a long way from Australia’s public consciousness, it is also a long way from the rest of the world’s attention.

Australia and PNG: a history of dependence

The political relationship between Papua New Guinea and Australia is a paradox, of sorts. As Australia’s only former colony, PNG is unique to Australian history. It is Australia’s closest neighbour and remains highly relevant to our political affairs – in 2010, the Australian Government developed a Joint Understanding with the PNG Government, and offered a loan of up to USD500 million to support Australia’s participation in the ExxonMobil-led PNG LNG project (‘Papua New Guinea country brief’ 2010).

Since PNG gained independence from Australia in 1975, the power imbalance created by colonialism has not disappeared. Thirty-five-years later, Australia is PNG’s largest source of imports, and its number one export market
Australia is also PNG’s largest bilateral aid donor, with A$457.2 million pledged over 2010-11 (‘AusAID: Papua New Guinea’ 2010). But despite this large-scale aid program, PNG continues to confront serious problems as a state.

PNG ranks 129th out of 170 countries in the UNDP human development index, below all of its Pacific neighbours (UNDP 1999: 110). Its political system is rife with corruption and education is a major problem (Rooney 2003: 79). Only 23 per cent of 15-19 year olds are enrolled at secondary school (UNDP 1999: 110). While Australia donates a significant amount to PNG, genuine political discussion about Australia’s responsibility to PNG is arguably dormant in Australian politics (Scott 2009), much as the idea that PNG holds any relevance as a source of news for Australians is also dormant.

Herein lies the paradox. While there may be strong historical ties and geographic proximity between the two countries, Australia’s political outlook on PNG is principally defined as one of ambivalence (Scott 2009: 3). This indecisiveness has led to periods where Australia’s international policies have failed to address the myriad of issues faced by its former colony (Scott 2009).

Tim Flannery (1998: 2) has described the nearby island of PNG as Australia’s “geological bow wave”. But while the continent of Australia may have drifted northward over the centuries to accumulate the island debris of PNG, the Australian gaze has certainly not. And this attitude is not restricted to politicians alone.
Research aims

There is almost no detailed scholarly research on Australian media coverage of Papua New Guinea\(^2\), besides Cronau’s (1995) examination of one fortnight of Australia’s reporting on the Bougainville crisis. Cronau’s (1995: 163) study argued that Australia’s coverage of PNG was shallow, sensationalised and lacking in quality. It seems that PNG is not only ignored by media and politicians, but also by academic research within the field of media and communications. Subsequently, this thesis aims to contribute to a better knowledge of Papua New Guinea within the disciplines of communications and journalism. It does so by seeking to answer the research question of how PNG is represented in Australian news media and why this is so.

The findings of this study – around the nature of media coverage of PNG and the factors affecting journalists working there – offer broader insights into the sociological, cultural and economic aspects affecting Australian foreign correspondents working in this neighbouring country. These insights also contribute to wider debates within international journalism scholarship, around changing trends in international news coverage, particularly in developing countries.

Chapter outline

Chapter 2 – Literature review: constructing international news

The arguments of this thesis are located within a broader theoretical framework of international journalism and foreign news coverage. Chapter two draws on

\(^2\) Indeed, the only detailed study that was found to examine representations of PNG in Australian media was completed by Jane Landman, titled “At home with our colonial work: ABC TV’s New Look at New Guinea”, published in *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, June 2010, Vol. 24 Issue 3, p. 357-369. However, Landman’s study addressed the remaking of government documentaries for ABC TV during the 1950s and so was not deemed relevant for this research, which focuses solely on PNG post-independence.
this literature to argue that news is a highly subjective concept, dependent on the notion of newsworthiness. It examines the factors contributing to the construction of international news, by assessing some of the different theoretical approaches used to define news values and the structure of international news.

This chapter draws on existing studies of the global news agenda which demonstrate that news flows between nations can be unequal. It assesses the role of gatekeepers, and ideological and economic factors that contribute to the uneven international news landscape. This section ends with an overview of previous research into news coverage within the Pacific region.

The literature review presents two key arguments. Firstly, that there are many factors which contribute to the construction of international news. Secondly, that global news flows are unequal and this leaves some regions neglected by media.

Chapter 3 – Methodological and theoretical approach

This study applies two key methods to answer the research question of how PNG is represented in Australian media and why this is so. The decision to use mixed methods was made to overcome the flaws inherent in any one research procedure (Denscombe 2007: 108). Through the combination of content analysis and interviews, a more rigorous and comprehensive body of research is presented.

While content analysis is often identified as either a quantitative or qualitative method, Klaus Krippendorff (2004) questions the utility of separating the qualitative and quantitative interpretations of a content analysis, arguing: “ultimately all reading of texts is qualitative” (2004: 16).
This thesis follows Krippendorff’s approach, and draws on framing theory to analyse 221 newspaper articles from The Australian and The Sydney Morning Herald published between January 1, 2010 until June 30, 2010. While it would have been ideal to examine the mediums of television, radio and internet in more detail, the time and resource limitations of a thesis project meant that this was not possible. This is for further research.

The emphasis of the content analysis is placed on newspapers because of the agenda-setting power enjoyed by the print media (McCombs 2004: 9). This is illustrated by ABC journalist Sean Dorney’s anecdote – mentioned earlier in this section – about sharing news with print journalist Mary Louise O’Callaghan to ensure its coverage in broadcast.

The interviews were conducted with six current and past journalists who have worked in PNG, some of whom have worked in PNG since before self-governement. These journalists include three ABC foreign correspondents, Sean Dorney, Steve Marshall and current correspondent Liam Fox, as well as current AAP reporter Ilya Gridneff, Asia-Pacific Editor for The Australian Rowan Callick, and freelance photographer and journalist Ben Bohane.

Chapter 4 – Journalists on the ground: reporting on Papua New Guinea

This section draws on Pierre Bourdieu’s (1998) notion of the journalistic field to discuss the autonomy of journalists covering PNG. It outlines the processes of news production, by exploring the foreign correspondents’ interaction with local journalists, and the technological and logistical factors affecting reporters there. The chapter also explores the difficulties associated with reporting on conflict, and the journalists’ personal perceptions of newsworthiness.
Chapter four explores the contribution that individual journalists make to the construction of news. It concludes that while foreign correspondents command a degree of power within their field, they are also subject to a range of other forces. This section uses the interviews with journalists to demonstrate the complicated factors involved in the construction of news.

Chapter 5 – Framing PNG

The final section of this thesis is devoted to the findings of the content analysis. The data demonstrates that PNG is portrayed in a limited and fragmentary manner by the media analysed. Importantly, it also identifies that there is minimal analysis or contextual background provided in the majority of news stories referring to PNG.

The latter half of this chapter examines the ways that news about PNG is framed. It argues that PNG is consistently framed in Australian news through an ethnocentric lens. This contributes to its construction as a place defined by violence, through the frequent coverage of crime, ‘tribal’ conflict and plane crashes. The ethnocentric framing of PNG also constructs it as dependent on its former colonial master, Australia.
Chapter 2  Literature review: constructing international news

This chapter aims to contextualise this thesis from a theoretical point of view. As mentioned in the abstract – and emphasised in the introduction – this thesis is positioned within the extensive body of existing research on international journalism and foreign news coverage. While the literature review is not exhaustive, it establishes the theoretical foundations from which this thesis commences its examination of Australian coverage of PNG. In particular, it focuses on the factors that contribute to the construction of news.

News and newsworthiness: a construction

In the “information age”, as Manuel Castells (2004) would describe the current state of global communication and highly-developed information technologies, the abundance of stories available for reporting have created an insomniac media with an insatiable appetite for news.

The question of what makes something become news has received a lot of attention from media and journalism scholars (see, for example, van Ginneken 1998; Bennett 2001; or Hannerz 2004). Within these studies, the factors that contribute to make something ‘newsworthy’ continue to create debate and conflict. As Philip Seib (2001: xiii) observes: “Judging what is most newsworthy continues to be one of the most important and difficult tasks of the news business”.

With such a menu of places and people to report on, it is little wonder that filters must be applied to select certain events and stories as newsworthy. Steve Powers and Neil Postman (1992: 11) point out that news is ultimately
what the editors and journalists decide to report on. In the light of this assertion, news is a highly subjective and ambiguous concept.

Whether or not something becomes news – or newsworthy – depends on a number of judgements made about its value, especially, whether it is important and interesting enough to gain the attention of an editor, a reporter and then, a reader. This decision takes place at the newsroom level.

At an institutional level, the media proprietor might also be tempted to intervene in the news selection process. In a media landscape dominated by commercial, privately-owned enterprises, powerful media proprietors – such as Rupert Murdoch – are notorious for their overt editorial intervention (Hackett 2006: 9).

News-making involves a selection process. By choosing certain events as news and discarding others, media organisations engage in an “imperfect exchange of information” (Bennett 2001: 20) between themselves, politicians and people, who constantly negotiate changing definitions around what constitutes news. This process of selection means that all news is a constructed version of reality (Fuller 1996).

Understanding news therefore requires interpretation, a process that Stuart Hall (1997) examines and explains in the context of culture, and social interaction. Hall (1997: 18) argues that meaning is created through shared cultural frameworks, or conceptual maps, of the world. In this way, meaning is socially and culturally determined, and the interpretation of news becomes the product of social interaction (Hartley 1982: 36).

Yet, despite news being a constructed version of reality, it is framed to appear as what is ‘right’ and ‘natural’ (Palmeri 2001). Or – to put it in the words
News values: determining what is newsworthy

News values play a crucial role in determining which events and places get reported on. News values also dictate how those events and places are reported. Norwegian academics Johan Galtung and Mari Ruge (1965) offer, perhaps, one of the “most influential” explanations of news values (McQuail 1994: 270).

The study of Galtung and Ruge focuses on testing hypotheses to determine which factors held the greatest influence on what foreign news was reported in the Norwegian press. The list of news values developed by Galtung and Ruge (1965: 65-68) include:

1. Frequency – events that unfold quickly easily fit within the timeframes of daily newspapers and broadcast programs, and are more likely to be selected than social, economic or cultural trends that occur over a long time.

2. Threshold – the scale of an event, in terms of both size and drama.

3. Unambiguity – events that are likely to be interpreted in more than one way are less likely to be covered.

4. Meaningfulness – events that resonate with cultural proximity.

5. Consonance – events that reflect the news selector’s predictions for what will happen are more likely to be run (for example, a violent protest is more likely to be covered that a non-violent protest [Halloran et al. in Hartley 1982: 76]).
6. Unexpectedness – events that are rare, but occur within the framework of meaningfulness and consonance.

7. Continuity – once an event has been covered, it is more likely to be reported on again.

8. Composition – the decision to include an event to provide a ‘mix’ of stories

Furthermore, Galtung and Ruge (1965: 68-71) propose four more news values which apply specifically to Western media outlets:

1. Reference to elite nations – this is based on the assumption that the actions of the elite have greater consequences than other nations.

2. Reference to elite people – based on the similar assumption that the actions of elite people have greater consequences than non-elite people.

3. Reference to persons – since individual people are easier to identify, events are more likely to be framed as the actions of people, rather than structures or institutions.

4. Reference to something negative – the old adage, ‘bad news sells’.

While significant, Galtung and Ruge’s list has not been exempted from criticism. This list of news values has since been critiqued for its emphasis on events rather than other news items (Herbert 2001). However, while alternative news value categories lists have been developed, Herbert (2001: 34) argues that these new categories are still essentially similar in nature to those that Galtung and Ruge developed. Furthermore, Antonio Castillo (2006: 164) has argued that most international news tends to be event-oriented rather than issue-oriented anyway.
Galtung and Ruge’s news values have also been challenged by contemporary media developments. Paul Brighton and Dennis Foy (2007) have since argued that the existence of the internet, rolling news, and spin-doctoring render Galtung and Ruge’s list obsolete. Brighton and Foy (2007: 29) proposed an updated list of news values containing the following factors: relevance; topicality; composition; expectation; unusualness; worth; external influences.

While the systematization of factors or events that contribute to the formulation of news is useful it is also important to point out that it is unlikely that any one list of news values can be used to universally describe any publication in any news environment. Instead, there are an intricate array of factors involved in the process of making and interpreting news that include journalists, editors, readers, sources, and media proprietors.

The significance of Galtung and Ruge’s list of news values is in its recognition of the way that news values operate within an inter-related framework. These connections imply the ideological influences inherent in news selection and representation (van Ginneken 1998: 30). In other words, a story is chosen not only because it possesses numerous news values, but also because of the way in which these news values reflect larger structural factors. Some of these factors include economic, social, political and geographic forces. These are forces that in turn shape the nature of coverage that one country or region receive in another country’s news media (Wu 2003: 12).

Finally, one important element should also be cited as a factor that determine what become news: ideology. The concept of ideology, rooted in the theories of Karl Marx, refers to the way that ruling economic classes legitimise their power. There is substantial scholarship to suggest that news values, particularly the emphasis on ‘elites’, are influenced ideological factors driven by
commercial and government interests (Becker 1982; Herman and Chomsky 1988; Lynch and McGoldrick 2005).

In the context of culture and communication, ideology is a way of acknowledging that there is no ‘natural’ way of being, and instead the media make sense of the world according to competing social interests (Hartley, 2002: 106). In this context, the media representations reinforce the ideologies that “form the basis for public opinion and understanding” (Mandelzis 2006).

This is not to say that audiences are passive recipients with no stake in negotiating and shaping media representations. Any discussion of economic influence on news has to acknowledge that the audiences’ appetites for stories determine to at least some extent what stories will run and their frequency. As Seib (2001: 11) points out: “To a considerable degree, the public ascribes importance to items that are presented on the news media’s menu”. Seib also speaks of a lack of “audience demand” (2001: 18) as another factor influencing news coverage. This is an idea that helps to explain, in part, the existence of neglected regions, in terms of news coverage. And in the context of this honours thesis, Seib’s view should be taken into account while examining the Australian news coverage of PNG.

Examining the structure of international news

Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky’s ‘propaganda model’ of the news structure argues that “money and power are able to filter out the news fit to print, marginalize dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their messages across to the public” (1988: 2).

Herman and Chomsky’s model has been used to explain why, for example, during the Cold War, American media were more likely to ignore pro-
US regimes that committed despicable human rights abuses, while highlighting pro-Soviet regimes’ human rights abuses (Herman and Chomsky 1988: 36).

The propaganda model insists on the media’s subordination to the interests of political and economic powers (Hackett 2006: 78). This model reflects Galtung and Ruge’s emphasis on elites. Merrill and Beer (2004: 27) also argue that the pressure of economics dictates the editorial stance of western news media everywhere. Similarly, Becker’s (1982) study argues that inequalities in access to, and power over, the media create disproportionate representations in international news. This is a useful theory for this study, as it argues that the global news landscape features a disproportionate representation of certain countries and regions, while others become neglected news regions.

The notion of unequal access and representation – the latter the main concern of this thesis – is inherent within much of the scholarship on international news coverage. It is inevitable that any process of selection will produce inequalities at various levels. Fahmy (2010: 147) argues that this disproportionate representation becomes most apparent not just in the quantity of news coverage a place receives, but also in terms of quality:

Just as a great cook cannot work miracles with poor ingredients, foreign news cannot be any better than the quality of stories upon which it is based.

A study by Anthony Giffard (2000) argues that the end of the Cold War – the period in which Herman and Chomsky’s and Becker’s studies were contextualised – resulted in major changes not only in international relations but also in the way the media covered global affairs.
Giffard observes that while the primary determinant of the global news agenda is always conflict, the Cold War period framed security issues as an East-West rivalry; while news coverage between 1991 and 2000 was characterised by a North-South paradigm. In Giffard’s words, it was “a clash of ideologies and economic interests between the have and have-not nations” (2000: 406).

A former Head of the Reuters Foundation, Godfrey Hodgson (in Franks 2006: 27), takes a similar perspective on the changes in western news coverage:

> From 1914 to 1991 international news was frightening. It could kill you. Now rightly or wrongly, people are not afraid that a new war is going to affect them. Its consequences will be borne by foreigners with ragged clothes … Western readers and viewers have no motive beyond idle curiosity to concern themselves with events abroad.

Anthony Giffard (2000: 406-7) stresses that this shift in reporting paradigms did not mean that coverage of the “south” was more sympathetic to their perspectives, demands and aspirations. Rather, he argues that developing nations were featured more frequently in terms of their support for or opposition to western policies and values.

Some media and journalism scholars argue that foreign news reporting changed again after the US 9/11 (Fahmy 2010; Franks 2006). While the volume of foreign news since may have increased, the breadth of stories covered has decreased, contributing further to a global news landscape that is oversimplified and decontextualised (Fahmy 2010: 148).
Larry Martz, a *Newsweek* reporter, shares the views of Fahmy and Franks. Martz argues that international journalism has become akin to a comic book, reporting only on dramatic events, “ZAP! POW! BANG-BANG!” (in Graber 2001: 181), leaving little room for contextual analysis or long-term issues. This is problematic indeed. As Pamela Constable, a Washington Post staff writer who has reported from more than 35 countries, said: “Knowing about the world is not a luxury; it is an urgent necessity.”

One of those dramatic events tends to be violence; this is an element associated with conflict, one of the most frequently cited news values. Conflict is one of the key news values used to determine the newsworthiness of events emerging and developing in so-called third world countries. Usha Harris (2004) argues that this is the main way news from the Pacific is framed; in later chapters this thesis will also argue the same.

The changing face of international journalism, and its relationship with key conflicts in the developed world’s historical narrative, demonstrates journalism’s long history with the very notion of conflict set the news agenda.

Becker (1982: 227) argues that media are inherently violent, insisting that the production and reception of the media perpetuates the “expression and motor of structural violence”. This claim is reflected in the words of John Hartley (1999: 231) who argues that “journalism is a violent profession; truth is violence; reality is war”.

Partly because of this uneasy relationship between the media, and the notions of violence and inequality, journalists are often criticised for their role in sustaining conflict rather than facilitating solutions (Galtung and Lynch 2010). In Majid Tehranian’s (2002: 59) words, “the envy and hatred generated by global
communication seems to have outpaced mutual understanding, respect, and tolerance”.

In response to this, scholarship and journalism peace advocates – such as Johan Galtung and Jake Lynch (2010) have called for journalists to exercise more compassion in their reporting of crises in foreign countries. This is echoed in the underpinning ideals behind journalism of engagement, journalism of attachment, peace journalism and community journalism. Each of these approaches have in common the desire to invest some sort of moral consciousness into international news reporting. Philip Seib (2002: xiv) reflects this attitude in his claim that “the job of the news media is not to try to solve all of the world’s problems, but to shake awake the world’s conscience. Good journalism can do that.”

Just what exactly constitutes ‘good’ journalism is, in the context of these alternative approaches, a certain disregard for more traditional interpretations of the notion of objectivity. Instead of the traditional “he-said/she-said reporting which just pits one voice against the other” (Jones 2009), scholars and journalists alike have argued for a greater engagement with context, issues and minority voices.

This is not to say that journalism should not report the truth, but rather, that media bias is inevitable from the moment a reporter or editor makes the decision to report one story instead of another (Lynch and McGoldrick 2005: 203). Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick (2005: 203) observe that good journalism should account for this.

Good journalism could also be associated with the ability and the intellectual capacity of journalists to engage a “reluctant audience.” As Seib (2002:26) suggests:
If the public appears uninterested in foreign news, that should be seen by journalists as a challenge to make coverage more relevant and interesting.

**The quality of international news**

Yet this notion of ‘good journalism’ operates within the broader context of a decline in international news coverage. Fahmy (2010: 147) argues that while there was a brief resurgence in the volume of foreign news after the events in America on September 11, 2001, this did not account for an increase in quality. Instead, Fahmy insists that international news has decreased in quality thanks to an oversimplification of events and a strengthened mentality that international news is only worthwhile in the case of war or natural disaster, or when “bad things happen to strange countries” (Fahmy 2010: 150).

A study conducted by the Australian Press Council (Herman et al. 2008) made similar arguments about Australian media, arguing that world news coverage in major Australian newspapers, such as *The Sydney Morning Herald*, had declined and was “patchy with little background or no context”.

This lack of background or context can be largely traced back to economic imperatives, and the comfortable relationship much of the media has with commercial imperatives. While an old argument, Keith Windschuttle’s (1988) observation remains relevant. This former media scholar – and now a controversial historian – argued that the real commodity that media sell is not actually news; rather, they sell an audience to their advertisers. In this way, news is whatever can draw the most watchers, listeners or readers, and whatever is the most cost effective for a media organisation (Merrill and Beer 2004: 34).
The quality of news coverage does indeed have a financial element to factor in (Romano 1999: 8). Gatekeepers, or those that choose what constitutes news or become newsworthy (Shoemaker 2009), are heavily influenced by economic factors. In the context of the political economy of the media (McChesney 2008) foreign news coverage demands a substantial commitment of reporters, equipment and money (Seib 2002: 19). This becomes almost unsustainable when editors perceive a lack of public interest in international news (Fahmy 2010: 151). It is clear that there are few media that are prepared to engage in costly international reporting.

Back to the gatekeeping theory, Wu (2000: 111) argues that gatekeepers tend to select events that occur closer to home, or incidents that are disruptive or feature powerful people. This is a reminder of Galtung and Ruge’s news values mentioned earlier. Wu’s comment demonstrates the link between economic decisions and news values.

Majid Tehranian (2002: 59) has argued that, thanks to technological and communication advances, we now live in a “global fishbowl in which Hollywood extravaganzas as well as starving children in Africa are displayed for all to see”. While this may be the case, certain ‘fish’ clearly get more attention than others in the vast sea of international news.

Furthermore, the quality of reporting has been reduced by the hectic commercial pressures demanding constant 24-hour news cycles and easily-digested news stories. The consequence is that major humanitarian crises have been reduced to “sound-bites lacking background and historical context” (Castillo 2006: 170), and certain places receive more attention than others. This is precisely the case of PNG, the subject of this thesis.
Global news flows and the Pacific

In 1922, Walter Lippman argued that the news media determine our cognitive maps of the world. Evidence for the agenda-setting role of the media abounds (McCombs 2004: 3), and since the media acts in some ways as our window to the ‘outside’ world, then it makes sense that it plays a significant role in shaping our attitudes towards certain places and people.

Adams (in Herbert 2001: 1) illustrates this by saying that the death of one Western European equals three Eastern Europeans, equals nine Latin Americans, equals 11 Middle Easterners, equals 12 Asians. Pacific Islanders don’t even rate a mention in his head count of which lives matter most to the media.

Despite substantial research into the decline of foreign news coverage, and the representation of developing countries in Western media, scholarly considerations of Pacific people within western media are “virtually non-existent” (Loto et al. 2006: 102).

Perhaps this is because media representations of the Pacific, even in Australian media, are also virtually non-existent. However, little attention has been paid to the Pacific region. Often, it is bundled into the loose category of “Asia-Pacific”, a diverse region including countries ranging from China, Fiji, New Zealand, Australia, Papua New Guinea and Samoa.

Rowan Callick, Asia-Pacific Editor at The Australian, knows better than most that usually, when people talk about the ‘Asia-Pacific region’, they really just mean Asia (Callick, interview).

---

3 There is a growing body of research into issues facing journalists from Pacific countries. David Robie’s Nius Bilong Pasifik (1995, Port Moresby, University of Papua New Guinea Press) and Mekim Niua (2004, Suva, University of the South Pacific Press) are just two examples. However, these do not consider the issue of the Pacific’s representation within western media (including Australia) and that is why they have not been included in the literature review.
Kingsbury (2000) argues that the Australian news media have an overwhelming sense of “cultural chauvinism” in their reporting of Australia’s near neighbours. Kingsbury (2000: 17) observes that this makes Australia a remnant of its colonial past, “an imperial outpost clinging to an unfounded sense of superiority and cast adrift in a rising sea of postcolonial states”. Cronau’s (1995) examination of one fortnight of Australia’s media coverage of Bougainville draws similar conclusions about the Australian media’s news priorities.

Stanton (2007: 2) argues that conventional western reporting requires the ‘localisation’ of news, so that readers are given a clear reference point, or mirror, for their own actions and attitudes. This desire for localised news frames in western news organisations, is reflected in Nnaemeka and Richstad’s (1980) study of news flow in the Pacific Region.

Drawing on Galtung’s (1971) ‘structural theory of imperialism’ – which was developed from their list of news values outlined in the beginning of this section – Nnaemeka and Richstad identify relationships of dominance and dependency between ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’ nations exerting power in the Pacific.

Centre nations included Australia and New Zealand, while periphery nations included Papua New Guinea, Fiji and other smaller islands with a history of colonial domination. The study found that colonial relationships exerted a strong influence over news patterns in the region.

With the exceptions of newspapers from Australia and the US, at least 20% of international news stories represented in the rest of the daily newspapers focused on the region (Nnaemeka and Richstad 1980: 244). While periphery nations tended to focus on centre nations, like Australia, those same
power-centres tended to focus on themselves or other centre nations (Nnaemeka and Richstad 1980: 250).

In particular, the percentage of news exchange differentials between Australia and Papua New Guinea was the highest recorded negative flow for all of Australia’s coverage of the region (ibid.). Nnaemeka and Richstad argue that this reflects the unequal flow of news in the Pacific region. This is largely explained by Australia’s position as an elite nation in the Pacific region. Australia is regarded as an elite nation because of its political and economic strengths, its comparatively larger size, and its relationships with other ‘centre’ nations such as the US and the United Kingdom.

**Conclusion: making news**

News – and what becomes newsworthy – is an ambiguous and ever-changing concept. Implicit in our understanding of news is the consideration that it is hardly an objective and fair representation of the world, but rather a selective and exclusive window to other places and other people.

The news selection process is driven by the choices made by gatekeepers, who seek to balance news values with commercial and practical requirements, all the while operating within a media system and journalistic practices that tend to favour a set of news values that reinforce stereotypes and unbalanced representation. In this process – regions and people – are neglected in the news agenda or are constructed as “the Other”, to borrow Edward Said’s (1979) concept. All of this equates to whether or not something is news or newsworthy.
The figure, ‘News factors in foreign news’ (Westerstahl and Johansson 1994: 73) has been included because it successfully captures the overlapping components of the news process, and the complexities that determine what makes news. The figure depicts a simplified model of the interaction between news values, such as drama and importance, and practical factors such as proximity and access. In addition this illustrates the relationship of these elements in the news process with the over-riding role of ideological factors.

This chapter has aimed to give a broad overview of key issues in international journalism scholarship. It has also demonstrated the need for more academic research into the representation of Pacific places and people in western media. The reviewed literature provides the framework for chapters four and five, which examine more closely the practical issues and realities confronting journalists working in Papua New Guinea, and the idea of neglected news regions.
Chapter 3 Methodological and theoretical approach

Introduction to Research Design

The research question of this thesis comprises two parts. Firstly, how PNG is represented in the Australian news media and secondly, why this is so. The two-pronged research question of this thesis therefore demands a multi-faceted methodological approach.

This consists of content analysis and in-depth interviews with journalists reporting on PNG. These two methods are applied in the context of media framing theory, the underpinning scholarly approach of this thesis.

The objective of this chapter is to explain the reasons that each of these methods were chosen, while also outlining the research design behind the methodological and theoretical procedures used.

Content Analysis

Content analysis has become an important method of journalism research because it is a useful tool for analysing the products of journalist activity (Kolmer 2008: 118). The first part of the research question, how PNG is represented, demanded a close examination of news media texts representing PNG.

As with many social and political issues, Australians are informed about international issues from the media. Furthermore, the media play a pivotal role in setting the agenda for what constitutes legitimate public discussion (Fraser 2007). In this sense, the way that a place or an issue is constructed by the
media has significant effects for the whole of society, both at a domestic and international level.

A preliminary content analysis was conducted at the beginning of this study. The main objective was to ascertain how much news information existed around PNG. In print media alone, in the past two years 25,499 articles were published that made reference to PNG.

Overwhelmingly, the great majority of these articles could be categorised as business and financial news. Most of these articles – 4640 stories – were about the share price movements of companies that conducted some sort of business in PNG. In other words, the articles were not so much about PNG, but made a passing reference to it.

Due to the time and space constraints of this study, the scope of the content analysis was limited to a six-month period, from January 01, 2010 until July 31, 2010. The search engine Factiva was used to access 221 articles published by The Sydney Morning Herald and The Australian.

The decision to focus on print news was made because the media news agenda is still largely set by print media. Other mediums – such as radio, blogs, television – frequently use print media as their “memory and archive and thus…precursor” (Shoemaker 1989: 25).

While a 2009 report by the Lowy Institute on public opinion and foreign policy found that 71% of respondents most ‘often’ used television to access international news (Hanson 2009: 14), there is significant research to demonstrate the influence of newspapers on which topics other media choose to cover (Butler 1998; Wanta and Hu 1993). In particular, Butler’s (1998: 36) study of the Australian news environment found that the high degree of contact

---

4 This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5 Framing PNG.
between journalists from rival news organisations meant that there is an “unobservable element of inter-media agenda setting”, with newspapers leading the way in terms of influence.

While there is evidence to show that radio plays some agenda-setting role in Australia (Butler 1998: 36), it was not possible to obtain a comprehensive sample of radio coverage as there is no readily accessible (and free) database that stores radio archives.

Although television and online archives were available, this thesis focuses solely on newspapers due to time constraints and also the problems associated with cross-platform media research. Particularly, the process of ‘unitisation’ – deciding what constitutes the unit of analysis – is a major problem for researchers dealing with the differing categories of placement, text and image across print, broadcast and online media (Keith et al. 2010; Weare and Lin 2000).

The Australian, a News Limited publication, is Australia’s only national newspaper, while Fairfax’s The Sydney Morning Herald, also a daily newspaper, targets a NSW-based readership. In the constrained and highly-monopolised Australian news environment, Fairfax and News Limited represent two of the key players (Conley and Lamble 2006: 59).

The Sydney Morning Herald shares its content with other key print news providers across the nation, including The Age and The Sun. Similarly, The Australian shares content with other News Limited news services, including The Daily Telegraph. Both The Sydney Morning Herald and The Australian are broadsheet newspapers and their language, content and style tend to reflect broadsheet values. Generally, broadsheets are associated with more in-depth coverage of events and issues, and less bias and advertising; tabloid
newspapers tend to be associated with entertainment and strong bias (Mayer 1968: 4).

The 221 articles analysed in this study were selected on the basis that they all made at least one reference to the keyword “Papua New Guinea” or “PNG”. The analysis did not include references to PNG from Obituaries (although there were a reasonably large number of these, demonstrating the strong connection between PNG and Australians who have lived there in the last century) or Letters to the Editor (there were very few of these).

In other words, the analysis only comprised text generated by journalists for the purposes of hard news stories, feature articles and commentary. All these articles were initially coded for basic identification. This identification included: the name of the newspaper, date when the article was published, page number, article length and type of article5.

The articles from The Australian and Sydney Morning Herald were also categorised according to a set of seventeen topics, ranging from sport, transport, politics and travel6. This stage of the content analysis provided a thematic overview of how PNG is framed in these two newspapers.

The content analysis also recorded occurrences of select terms and the details of quoted sources. Finally, a sample was taken of all the articles which featured PNG or one of its citizens as the key actor of the story. These were used for a more in-depth analysis, where framing theory was applied to determine the dominant ways that PNG is constructed and represented by The Australian and The Sydney Morning Herald.

5 See Appendix 2 for the content analysis coding sheet
6 Choices of categories are explained in detail in Chapter 5 Framing PNG
Interviews

Gubrium and Holstein (2001: 9) argue that the interview exists as a way of mediating contemporary life. By seeking the opinions of an individual, the researcher is able to access someone else’s observations of the world. In this way, the interviews with journalists added depth and additional layers of interpretation to the quantitative and qualitative components of the content analysis.

These interviews bring the data alive and into the context of debates within the media industry about approaches to reporting on Papua New Guinea. The aim of the interviews was to examine the news production process, including news values and news gathering, in PNG.

During the interviews undertaken for this study, Australian journalists who were currently or previously based in PNG, were asked about their role in the news-making process. The interviews focused on their news routines, the factors influencing the framing of news, time, resource and technological limitations, and the news environment of PNG.

Interviews were conducted with six key journalists reporting on PNG for Australian media\(^7\). Although the content analysis was limited – as mentioned earlier – to print media due to time and space constraints, the interviews were conducted with both print and broadcast journalists. Interviews with broadcast journalists confirmed the agenda-setting role of print news on their stories. The interviews offer additional insight into the trends affecting online, radio and television media platforms alongside print.

The interviews were planned and coded using strategies from grounded theory. Grounded theory is an approach to research which focuses on building

\(^7\) For a list of names, see Chapter 1 Introduction
theories from the data. In this sense, a grounded theory interview can be viewed as an unfolding story (Charmaz 2001: 690).

The interview process was guided by a loose set of themes rather than closed questions. Together, the interviewer and research participant examined and discussed the themes of this study. The stories that emerged gave a human perspective to the textual and numeric data of the content analysis.

Each interview lasted between 40 and 80 minutes. All the interviews were conducted via telephone or Skype in June 2010 (thus at the end of the content analysis timeframe). After the interviews, some follow up email contact continued with journalists to confirm or pursue further interpretations of the interviews.

The interviews were coded by common themes. These were used alongside the framing analysis to create a clearer picture of the issues affecting and influencing journalists reporting on PNG. The interviews sought to give journalists a voice and opinion on why PNG is reported as it is. After all, as Rosenblatt observes: “it is no longer clear that the voice of the social scientist has more claim to be heard than the voice of anyone else” (2001: 893).

The Australian journalists reporting on PNG are a small group, and the lack of priority allocated to PNG by news editors makes them something of a marginalised news community. In this way, this thesis draws on Haraway’s (1998) concept of “situated knowledges”, which emphasises the importance of incorporating the perspectives of those whose voices we hear least often into research.

A key theme which emerged from the interviews was that the journalists living in and reporting on PNG felt neglected themselves, as they struggled to get their stories accepted for publication.
Since this study examines a neglected news region, it was also fitting to choose a methodological approach that aimed to give a human voice to the reasons for this neglect. Furthermore, positive changes to the ways that media report on the developing world depend on the journalists themselves (Galtung and Lynch 2010), and as such, it makes sense to go to the very source(s) of the issue to determine how these changes can take place.

**Framing Theory**

One of the key theoretical approaches underpinning this thesis deals with news framing. Robert Entman (1993: 52) defines framing as the process of selecting some parts of perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating text. Framing theory can be used as a tool to understand how meaning is shaped, and in the context of the production and interpretation of news, framing offers an invitation to read a news story in a particular way (Van Gorp 2007: 63).

In this sense, there are many ways to interpret text and many news frames that can be used; the media and the public will accept their invitation to read or write a news story in different ways. Obviously, the polysemic nature of news frames is potentially problematic when trying to draw conclusions about a set of media texts, so this content analysis sought to identify thematic frames with a dominant meaning (Iyengar 1991). Fiske (1987) describes dominant meaning as the interpretation with the highest probability of being noticed, processed and accepted by the most people.

Additionally, this thesis takes a social constructionist approach to framing theory. This approach highlights the importance of considering the broader
social, political and cultural contexts associated with interpreting a frame, rather than the individual’s (Van Gorp 2007: 61).

The social constructionist approach emphasises that the logic and meaning of frames are primarily shaped by the beliefs, codes, myths, stereotypes and norms of culture (Van Gorp 2007: 62). It focuses less on criticising (mis)representations of people, places and events, and more on developing an understanding of “how reality comes to be constituted in human interactions and in language” (Gergen, in Krippendorff 2004: 16). This approach recognises the multiple layers of meaning brought to news texts by journalists, editors and readers alike, acknowledging that news texts “operate in the contexts of their users’ worlds” (Krippendorff 2004: 23).

Therefore, this interpretation of framing theory does not seek to ‘point the finger’ at audiences or media makers and claim that they consciously create news frames. Instead, it argues that individuals make use of cultural phenomena in order to understand the world – on one level journalists shape news within a particular frame of cultural reference, while on another level audiences adopt these frames according to their own frames of reference (Van Gorp 2007). It is precisely because of this that news frames make reported phenomena seem natural by determining what is selected, excluded and emphasised in our understanding of the world (Gamson, in Ryan 1990: 54).

Conclusion

The choice of mixed methods used to answer the research question were made to give a deeper and more textured understanding of the object of analysis (Stokes 2003: 19). As Martyn Denscombe suggests, the use of mixed research
methods has emerged as a way to verify findings and offer a more complete picture of the results (2007: 108).

Because qualitative analysis openly deals with interpretation, as opposed to quantitative analysis which deals with numbers – on the assumption that they represent hard facts – qualitative analysis is often considered “soft” (Bauer et al. 2000: 7). However, this thesis argues that all research is qualitative, and subsequently uses the triangulation of methods to verify the research findings and ensure the reliability of the study.

Qualitative inquiry places the researcher in a unique position. This is because it is located at the “lived border of reality and representation”, and it is in this context that meaning is attached to raw words and experiences to make “the things of existence” (Gubrium and Holstein 1997: 101).

This perspective, which also echoes a social constructionist approach, requires the researcher to acknowledge that all information is a construction or interpretation of reality. Thus, the interpretation of interviews and news frames lie at the intersection of fact and fiction.

In other words, the interviews with journalists are used to bring the assertions made by the content analysis to life, either confirming or denying the findings of the data. In this sense, the methodological and theoretical approached employed in this thesis are able to substantiate not only how PNG is represented but also why.
Chapter 4  Journalists on the ground: reporting on Papua New Guinea

Walter Lippman (1922: 218), founding father of framing theory, once said: “The facts are not simple, and not at all obvious, but subject to choice and opinion”. It is precisely because of this very ‘fact’ that the news is a negotiable – sometimes ambiguous – representation of reality.

The literature review sought to present an overview of the multiple factors that influence the global news agenda. In Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen Reese’s (1996) hierarchies of influence model, the very first layer is made up of the individual news workers, or journalists.

Shoemaker and Reese (1996) argue that journalists’ personal backgrounds, beliefs, and attitudes can play a significant role in shaping content. They observe that this happens so long as the journalists have enough autonomy within their workplace to affect other layers of influence in the model, such as organisational routines and external pressures.

While research into the influence of individual news workers on the final news product is still inconclusive (Correa 2010: 428), there is little argument that – as the first witnesses at the site of a story – journalists do play a highly relevant role in defining the news frame, at least in the initial news process.

This section also aims to explore some of the factors that impact on Australian journalists working as foreign correspondents in Papua New Guinea.
The journalistic field

One way to understand the news-making process is to study it from ‘within.’ This means starting with the journalists themselves, rather than simply discussing news as a product or from an institutional perspective (Russell 2010: 270).

Pierre Bourdieu’s (1998) notion of the ‘journalistic field’ is a useful starting point from which to discuss the power and autonomy of journalists operating within their field. The concept of the journalistic field proposed by Bourdieu is used to define the space of cultural production within which journalists work. This space is created and sustained by journalistic routine (Graham, in Benson and Neveu 2005: 7). A field is a sphere of action that exerts its power by structuring human action in some way (Benson and Neveu 2005: 3). In other words, the concept can be used to understand the way that various fields interact to shape an individual’s actions. Or, as Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 96) put it, “to think in terms of field is to think relationally”.

While Bourdieu sees the political and economic fields as the most powerful in a society, he still views the journalistic field as a realm of production with significant power, and a “crucial mediator among all fields” (Benson and Neveu 2005: 6). Much of Bourdieu’s argument, articulated in his book On Television (1998), focuses on the de-politicization of media as a result of heavy pressures from the economy. He argues that the market “weighs much more heavily on it [the journalistic field] than other fields” (1998: 70).

Subsequently, we must consider journalists’ role as cultural producers within the “twin markets of readers and advertisers” (Bourdieu 1998: 69). Since this creates a highly competitive environment, journalistic product – which in this discussion is news – is ultimately shaped by the ways that members of the
journalistic field interact and negotiate among themselves. Writing about two leading French newspapers, Bourdieu (1998: 5) points out that, “the essential part of what is presented in *L Express* and *Le Nouvel Observateur* is determined by the relationship between *L Express* and *Le Nouvel Observateur*”. Since journalists trade in cultural capital, which is subject to market pressures, they possess autonomy within their own field and also outside it. In the case of journalists covering foreign news, Murrell argues that they – foreign correspondents – are powerful people within their fields and enjoy a reasonable amount of autonomy (2010: 128).

While there are numerous factors that contribute to the construction of news, if journalism is the “sense-making practice of modernity” (Hartley 1995: 20), then journalists working in PNG exist at the very heart of this interpretive process. In response to this, this chapter seeks to question, what sort of autonomy do Australian journalists reporting on PNG enjoy within the news-making process, and what other actors affect their agency and power?

**The PNG media landscape**

Beyond the demands of an audience, some of the key factors influencing the news-making process are work practices (Russell 2010). PNG faces some of the technological and resource limitations experienced by many developing countries. It also experiences security problems, particularly in urban areas.

Since Australia is the only country that has permanent foreign correspondents based in PNG, the journalists employed by AAP and the ABC are confronted by a particularly unique set of workplace conditions. They also have a reasonably high level of interaction with local journalists.
Current ABC correspondent Liam Fox describes the capital, Port Moresby, as a tough place to live and work. The ABC office, based in Port Moresby, has its own satellite installed allowing live reporting from PNG to the ABC studios in Australia. Fox describes the security situation as both a resident of Moresby and as a reporter:

> We live behind a big razor wire fence, we’ve got big television cameras, [and] security guards. When you drive you’re always winding your window up, you’re looking out for car jackings or for something to happen. There’s definitely an edge to the place, living here. (Fox, interview)

While the Pacific region enjoys a “diverse and vibrant” mass communications industry (Robie 1995: 4), the availability and reliability of news services have been slow to become established (Nash 1995: 35). PNG, like much of the Pacific region, faces many difficulties in developing widespread media coverage. Papoutsaki and Rooney (2006) argue that PNG is in a state of under-communication, with limited take-up of communications technology and an urban-centred media that does not reflect the linguistic diversity of the country.

PNG is a rugged, mountainous country, with limited transport options. Port Moresby is not connected by road to the rest of the country, so all stories outside of the capital require journalists to fly there. This operation can be both costly and time-consuming, as journalists wait for the approval of funds from their employers.

The state of “under-communication” in which PNG exists has significant impacts on both local journalists and on the ability of foreign journalists to work
there. ABC correspondent Fox explains that unlike many other foreign postings, such as the United States or Europe, PNG does not have national news feeds. The limited media infrastructure outside of Port Moresby means that when news breaks outside of the capital, covering it can be difficult (Fox, interview).

These circumstances have led to the establishment of close dialogue between local journalists and Australians reporters based in PNG. Former ABC correspondent Sean Dorney says that he worked with local journalists “a hell of a lot”:

If you don’t work with the local journalists and give them a bit of respect then you’re really limiting your capacity to work. […] And one of the good things about PNG is that there really are a lot of good local journalists up there. (Dorney, interview)

The journalists interviewed for this thesis agree that there is an ‘openness’ in the Melanesian culture that makes it easy to work with local journalists. However, Ilya Gridneff, the current correspondent for AAP, points out that journalists in PNG encounter just as many, if not more, logistical problems than Australian reporters working there:

They don’t have enough resources, they’re hardly paid enough, and then there’s a lot of them who won’t ask questions, partly out of a culture of, you know, respecting the big man. (Gridneff, interview)

The practical consequences of this are that although Australian journalists might rely on local journalists to a certain extent, many stories reported by the local press need to be treated with a healthy amount of cynicism.
Fox argues that while this is often the case for a journalist working anywhere, in other locations with high intensity global news coverage there is usually also a more established news network such as Reuters or AFP which can be accessed to verify reports of breaking news. Herbert (2001: 60) argues that news networks play an invaluable role in providing information and ‘tip-offs’ to global journalists. Several of the journalists interviewed also agreed that ‘truth’ was a somewhat ambiguous concept among local reporters. As Gridneff put it, “You quickly learn that there’s three sides to every coin and you need to ring around yourself and check with the people involved” (Gridneff, interview). Former ABC correspondent Steve Marshall says that while a lot of news is mis-reported, this is not the fault of the local journalists:

“Most local reporters are based in Port Moresby, so it’s very difficult for anyone to ascertain the exact truth as to what’s gone on at an event elsewhere [in PNG]” (Marshall, interview).

The local media landscape in PNG still reflects Australia’s colonial history. The country has two daily newspapers, The National and The Post-Courier, both based in Port Moresby. The Post-Courier is the oldest and largest-selling newspaper in PNG, with a circulation of 29,819 (Rooney 2003: 80). It is owned by the South Pacific Post, a subsidiary of Rupert Murdoch’s Australian company News Limited. There is one television station in PNG, Em-TV, owned by another large Australian media company, the Nine network.

Em-TV generates little of its coverage locally, and is not available across all of PNG (Rooney 2003: 81). The state-owned National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) provides the five national radio stations, and works closely with the ABC to deliver content. In a country with more than 800 languages,
most news is in English. With 72 per cent of the adult population deemed illiterate (UNDP 1999: 112), media in PNG reaches only elite communities, such as political leaders and opinion makers (Rooney 2003: 80).

Unlike other nations in the Pacific region, PNG enjoys a relatively free media. There are no limits on foreign ownership and license control. Under these circumstances, Australian media enterprises have been able to flourish in PNG, albeit invisibly.

Although Australian organisations may dominate ownership of PNG media, the same legal freedoms do not extend to foreign correspondents working there. According to Rowan Callick, Asia-Pacific Editor for The Australian, the visa application procedure for foreign journalists wanting to report on PNG is among the most difficult in the Asia-Pacific region. He says that getting a journalist's visa for PNG is similarly complicated to getting one for North Korea, a country he has also reported on:

This really puts people off going. The Prime Minister’s older daughter decides who gets in and who doesn’t. (Callick, interview)

Dorney also says that on a visit this year, he was unable to do any reporting because he did not have time to go through the tedious process of getting a journalist's visa, which can take ‘a couple of weeks’. In addition, Dorney points out that the complicated visa process is one of the reasons that few foreign journalists travel to PNG.
Newsroom culture: journalistic routine in PNG

However for those journalists who are granted a visa, the logistical hurdles do not end there. While the role of the individual journalist has an impact on the final news product, the organisational cultures within which they are embedded also play a significant part in the news-making process (Altmeppen 2008).

One way in which organisational cultures affect journalists is in the relationship between their news organisation and the society in which they work (Altmeppen 2008: 53). Fox has found that being a foreign journalist often makes it harder for him to get interviews with government ministers and people in official positions:

I guess there might be a bit of colonial hangover on what the ABC represents, that idea of the old white masters. (Fox, interview)

Fox relates numerous situations where it has been difficult to access government and ‘official’ sources for his stories. On one occasion, he had to chase the PNG Foreign Minister for an interview for three weeks, about a report on AusAid. Another time, he spent four weeks getting an interview with the Health Minister, only to have the Minister refuse to appear on camera. On another occasion when he needed to get access a local government member, he went through thirty numbers in the phone book before someone picked up – and that was a wrong number (Fox, interview).

AAP reporter Gridneff agreed that two of the biggest problems he faced on a daily basis were “can’t make phone calls, [or] people aren’t there” (Gridneff, interview). However he also maintained that once he did make contact, PNG politicians were far more open than Australian politicians.
Despite difficulties accessing official sources, all of the journalists interviewed for this research agreed that “people who aren’t politicians or don’t have something to hide” (Fox, interview) are happy to have someone take an interest in their stories.

While PNG is linguistically diverse, the journalists consulted also said that finding people who spoke English was usually easy enough. However, the limited transport infrastructure means that stories from outside of Port Moresby are less frequent. Still, Fox says that he would travel out of Port Moresby at least once or twice a month. Gridneff, on the other hand, says that he’d travel out of the capital once a month and that he’d been to 17 of the 19 provinces of PNG in the almost three years he’s worked in PNG.

Dorney – who has spent almost twenty years in PNG and has written two books about the country – also argues that since technology has improved, the speed with which Australian journalists are expected to work has also increased. However, in PNG and much of the Pacific, the limited communications infrastructure means that there is a clash between these expectations and the practical reality facing journalists on the ground. Dorney says:

The narrow bandwidth means that you spend an inordinate amount of time on the process now. Whereas before you would have been able to spend that time chasing the story [...] now they want it on the same day. For me, I’ve basically got to finish work by lunchtime, out in the field. (Dorney, interview)

One of the biggest factors influencing the placement of foreign correspondents is cost (Herbert 2001: 61). PNG is a very expensive place to
travel to, partly because of the transport costs involved with leaving Port Moresby, but also because rent and hotels in the capital are very expensive. Callick says that mining companies buy up hotel rooms; therefore finding somewhere reasonably priced to stay is near impossible. Gridneff says that:

Hotels are commonly worse than Fawlty Towers, and often more expensive than five-star hotels in Sydney! (Gridneff, interview)

The journalists consulted for this research all agreed that expense was one of the reasons that few foreign journalists worked in PNG.

Fox explains that PNG is not “a Washington or London”, where there are stories expected from correspondents on a daily basis. Instead, stories from PNG are less frequent. Therefore the trade-off between the high costs of keeping a journalist there against the limited output expected from editors means that few news organizations are able to justify posting journalists to PNG.

The high cost of posting a foreign correspondent is a global dilemma for most Australian and other countries’ media organizations. One consequence of the increasing costs of global journalism has been the emergence of ‘parachute journalism’. This term is used to describe the trend of western news organisations sending journalists in to cover a place, but only when an event happens. Since global news is often synonymous with conflict (Herbert 2001: 60). This means that foreign places only tend to get covered when something ‘bad’ happens, contributing further to negative stereotypes of distant places.

PNG has not been affected by the parachute journalist trend. The timely visa process and high cost of sending journalists to PNG, coupled with the relatively low news value placed on the entire Pacific region, means that even parachute journalists are rarely sent to PNG.
There is something positive about this though. The limited number of journalists working in PNG are well-informed and highly experienced at reporting on issues in PNG. They are more than just correspondents working there. Among the Australian journalists interviewed for this thesis, one was born in PNG, one had married a local journalist, another had owned a small local media company. In other words, all accumulated experience and skills reporting on PNG that led them to possess high amounts of cultural capital about the place.

**Journalism as sense-making**

Hartley’s concept of journalism as ‘sense-making’ essentially locates journalism as a cultural practice. This approach to thinking about journalism requires us to consider it beyond its professional mode of production (Hartley 2008: 39). The intersection of journalism and anthropological fieldwork also provides a useful analytical perspective from which to examine journalism within a cultural framework (Bird 2010: 1).

While the notion of ‘the field’ also exists within ethnographic research, the term means something slightly different from Bourdieu’s relational spheres of action. In ethnographic methodologies, the field is the space being observed by the researcher (Bird 2010). These perspectives examine journalists as people rather than simply as producers. As previously discussed, the Australian journalists working in PNG have developed personal, emotional as well as professional connections with the place, and this has repercussions for the way that they operate as journalists.

Herbert (2001: 67) writes about the trauma that affects journalists reporting on conflict or disaster, arguing that it is the natural human response to
be affected by terrible events. Interviews with Australian journalists confirmed that PNG was often a dangerous and difficult place to report from.

Former ABC correspondent Steve Marshall received threats of violence against him and his wife after a story he did on illegal logging and mining. Marshall also says that on a daily basis, reporting as a solo video-journalist in remote areas posed certain risks:

I’ve just been in Bangkok covering the riots, and people asked me if I felt unsafe. Well it was probably more unsafe, filing [a story] out of the Highlands in PNG where you’ve got guys with M16s that are high on betel nut and marijuana, than it was in Bangkok. (Marshall, interview)

Dorney – who was deported from PNG in 1984 and later allowed to return – says that during his time there as an ABC correspondent, he investigated many stories on corruption, because there were ongoing allegations of it, particularly at a political level. Dorney describes the working conditions:

Although we got mugged a couple of times in PNG, it had nothing to do with my reporting, it was just incidental crime. But the government can be a bit difficult to deal with, it’s very sensitive. (Dorney, interview)

Dorney adds that while he never had anyone physically threaten him, he did tread carefully as a journalist.

ABC correspondent Liam Fox also mentioned the need to consider his safety when reporting on issues of corruption or conflict:
There is that factor where you weigh up whether it’s worth doing a story, or perhaps saving them up and dropping those stories when you’re about to leave the country. You do have to weigh up because the rule of law is very weak here. (Fox, interview)

Yet despite these difficulties, all the journalists felt a strong emotional connection with PNG, and had good memories of their work there. As Fox puts it:

It’s a fantastic place. The people are warm, generous. The road trips are absolutely epic and I’ve travelled to incredible places and seen things I will never forget. It’s a shame that there is this view of PNG as just being a wild, lawless place because it is spectacular and more people need to come here. (Fox, interview)

A nose for news: journalists’ personal news values

While there is a lot of research – which was reviewed in the previous chapter – into the market pressures and ideological influences which determine news values, journalists also see themselves as having a “nose for news” (Given 1907: 148), an idea which somehow naturalises the decisions made by journalists as if they were their own species. As Hartley (2008: 43) puts it, “in their own eyes, journalists are literally a tribe”.

When the journalists interviewed for this work were asked about the sorts of decisions they made in relation to ‘newsworthiness’, the responses suggested that the journalists possessed enough autonomy from their news organisations and audiences to enact the instinctual ‘nose for news’.
Fox, for example, explains that he does stories on:

The things that pique my interest, and then you just assume that other people will be interested in them. (Fox, interview)

Freelance journalist and photographer Ben Bohane took a similar approach to newsworthiness, stating:

Look, it’s an ever-bubbling cauldron of events and people and I think you develop a bit of a news sense about what’s interesting and what needs to be tackled. (Bohane, interview)

Sean Dorney argued that ABC journalists are given a large berth of autonomy for finding stories in PNG. While Gridneff, as a reporter for a news wire rather than a particular organisation, also possesses a certain amount of autonomy in what he covers, describing himself as a ‘lightning rod’ who reports literally what happened and what was said. This leaves significant space for other journalists to then “pick the quotes and concoct their own story” (Gridneff, interview).

Despite the journalists acknowledging the relative freedom with which they went about their newsgathering decisions, there was also a very strong consensus that the stories they reported were not necessarily considered newsworthy by all Australian news organisations. ABC journalists are in a unique situation since, as a public broadcasting service, the ABC has a certain obligation to run stories about PNG.

Because Gridneff’s stories are distributed across Australia – and the rest of the Pacific – he has a particularly strong sense for the types of events that are more likely to be picked up by Australian news organisations:
It’s always the ooga-booga kind of stuff, all the cliches and the neo-colonial sort of fear of the dark other, I guess. It’s always about crime, and corruption and black people being horrible and nasty to each other. And then the flip-side of that, it’s about white Australians coming in and helping and doing good. (Gridneff, *interview*)

Sean Dorney recounts that during the 1980s he shared a conversation with another journalist about reporting on PNG:

At one stage I said to him, there are some really interesting stories going on here. And he said, look Sean, I know what the Melbourne Sun want. They want rascals, tribal fights and plane crashes. And who can blame him, that’s what they were going to run. And that’s going back to 1980, we’re talking about 30 years ago. And now, the interest has narrowed even further to crime, plane crashes and the Kokoda Track. (Dorney, *interview*)

Fox also acknowledged that it’s the ‘stereotypical’ things which are more likely to get a run, such as “the shocking crime, the shocking violence, the weird cultural aspects, exotic locations” (Fox, *interview*).

There was a strong consensus among the journalists interviewed that in their daily work they tried to report on both negative and positive aspects of life in PNG, so as to avoid detrimental stereotypes about the place. However, there was an even stronger sense that they – as individuals – were somewhat powerless to alter existing stereotypes and the sorts of news values that encourage labels.
Conclusion: the problems facing journalists reporting on PNG

While foreign correspondents may possess a certain level of autonomy, even prestige, in their field, this section has examined that they are also subject to wider factors that operate within and on the field of journalism. Shoemaker’s (1991: 75) explanation is the most apt:

None of these actors – the individual, the routine, the organisation, or the social institution – can escape that fact that it is tied to and draws its sustenance from the social system.

In other words, while journalists play a significant part in the news-making process, they themselves are also subjects of a much larger system of forces and constraints on news. In some senses, journalists are ‘prisoners’ of these forces (van Ginneken 1998: 66). For the journalists interviewed for this thesis, PNG is a difficult place to report from. As they say, this is mainly due to the limited technological, transport and communications infrastructure of PNG, along with the expensive nature of working there.

It is possible to observe that most Australian media have chosen to retreat from there, leaving the country as a neglected news scenario. However, the reasons for the retreat of Australian media interest provide an insight into the nature of news itself, in particular, the structure and framework of the global news agenda.

Furthermore, the journalists interviewed in this study represent a range of voices from the small number of Australians who have lived and worked in PNG as correspondents since independence. However, they are by no means the only Australians who report on PNG and the next section will outline the results
of a content analysis, which explains the consequences of the many ‘hierarchies of influence’ involved in determining how PNG is covered in Australian media.
Chapter 5  Framing PNG

This section presents the findings of the content analysis. It is presented in two parts. The first part presents the key findings of the content analysis. The objective of this data analysis is to show patterns of news representation that emerge in the coverage of PNG within two agenda-setting newspapers, The Sydney Morning Herald and The Australian.

The second part draws on the data to examine the process of news framing of PNG by these two newspapers. The objective of this part is an attempt to understand further the consequences of the data outlined in the first section. This section aims to provide answers to the two research questions formulated at the beginning of this thesis: the how and the why of PNG news representation in the Australian media.

Categories of news

Across the six-month period, from January 1, 2010 until June 30, 2010, a total of 221 articles were coded for analysis. These articles were identified using Factiva, under the key word: ‘Papua New Guinea’ or/and ‘PNG’. Of the total articles, 81 were published in The Sydney Morning Herald and 140 were published in The Australian.

The coding categories for this study were defined across two stages of research design. Firstly, a list of possible coding categories was compiled using two relevant studies. One was Loto et al,’s content analysis study of portrayals of Pacific peoples in the New Zealand press (2006), and the other was the State of the Media report, compiled by the Media Council of PNG (2007).
Since no similar studies of Australian media coverage of PNG have been carried out, these two studies provided the breadth necessary to develop a unique coding sheet, inspired by research into PNG local press and its portrayal in foreign media. The interviews with Australian journalists based in PNG also helped to guide the coding categories. Once the coding categories were compiled, a preliminary content analysis was conducted using a small sample of 50 random articles, and from this the coding categories were finalised.

Overwhelmingly, the most common placement of stories related to PNG in the two newspapers was found in the ‘business’ and ‘finance’ news sections. Most of these stories were related to the share price movements of mining companies conducting work in PNG. Of the 62 total articles categorised as ‘business’, only three – one in *The Sydney Morning Herald* and two in *The Australian* – were not related to ‘mining stories’.

The next most common category – ‘Australian politics’ (40 articles) – was defined as any story in which PNG was mentioned as part of an Australian political event or a statement. These stories ranged considerably in terms of content. It is important to point out that numerous articles could have been categorised elsewhere – for example, a story about Australia’s proposed new mining tax could have been categorised as ‘business’ or ‘Australian politics’. In each case, the dominant angle of the story determined its final category.

The next category – ‘PNG politics’ – accounted for a total of 22 articles. These stories focused specifically on PNG’s political sphere. It is very important to note that 18 of these articles were published in *The Australian*, meaning that *The Sydney Morning Herald* accounted for just four, or 18%, of these stories.

One possible explanation for the dramatic difference in the level of coverage within this category between the two newspapers is due to the
presence of a journalist at *The Australian* in PNG. Rowan Callick, Asia-Pacific Editor for *The Australian*, has a strong personal connection to PNG – he worked and lived in PNG for eleven years.

In the interview for this thesis, Callick explained that his title as ‘Editor’ does not mean that he actually edits, rather that he covers the Asia and Pacific regions as a writer. Callick says that after China – where he also worked – PNG is the place he writes about most:

> Because I’ve got a particular interest, having lived there […] I write quite a lot […] because there’s so many stories and in my view they’re quite interesting and colourful, and no one else is writing them. (Callick, interview)

‘Sport’ accounted for 19 articles in total. The majority of these (84%) were about Australia’s National Rugby League. Other sports covered included surfing, Australian Football League and soccer. *The Sydney Morning Herald* accounted for 74% of the articles about sport linked in some way to PNG.

‘Transport’ also accounted for 19 articles. The majority of these (89%) referred to airlines and plane crashes. Other references to transport included boating and a campaign to encourage bus safety among PNG drivers. Articles about the environment totalled 11, and spoke primarily about problems associated with climate change. Articles on ‘Health’ (9 in total) focused predominantly on PNG citizens suffering multi-drug resistant Tuberculosis crossing to the Torres Strait Islands for medical treatment.

These seven most common categories accounted for 182, or 82%, of the total articles analysed. Other identified categories included ‘Pacific politics’, which included seven articles; ‘Arts and Music’, which included six; ‘Travel’ and
‘Science’, which each accounted for five; ‘Kokoda and World War 2’ and ‘Global Humanitarian Issues’ which each included four; ‘Food’, which included three; ‘History’, which included two articles; and ‘Religion’ and ‘Education’, which each had one.

![Pie chart showing distribution of topics](image)

*Figure 2: Key issues covered in The Australian and The Sydney Morning Herald

### Hierarchy of significance

On initial assessment, 221 articles published in a six-month period might suggest that PNG is not a ‘neglected’ news region at all in Australian media. As a matter of fact, a study completed in 1993 by Lowe (2000) ranked PNG at number 13 in The Sydney Morning Herald’s foreign news coverage. A total of 99 articles were identified over a year, making PNG the most reported country in the Pacific, even placing it above New Zealand, and the economic powers of France and Germany. The neglected news aspect will be discussed further later.

The 221 articles analysed for this study included any article which mentioned PNG at all. While this study initially recorded the word length of each article as a measure of the *amount* of coverage PNG received, the research
also sought to determine a more accurate way of measuring the placement of ‘PNG’ within each article. This is related to the hard news stories use of the inverted pyramid style, which orders content in a “hierarchy of significance” (Grundy 2007: 8).

The majority (54%) of articles coded were hard news stories that employed the traditional inverted pyramid style to reporting. This involves the process of giving the most information at the top, as it is assumed the reader will not necessarily read to the end (Conley and Lamble 2006: 124). Taking this into account, each article was coded on the basis of whether the whole article was about PNG. When this was not the case – when PNG was not a key actor in the article – the task was to determine how many paragraphs referred to this country. Further, the task aimed to determine whether PNG was mentioned either in the first or second halves of the story.

Figure 3 shows the ways in which PNG was referred to in the 221 articles analysed for this study. The majority of articles – see ‘A’ on figure 3 – (35%, or 77 articles) contained just one paragraph referring to PNG in the latter-half of the article. In other words, approximately one third of articles were not about PNG as such, but contained a passing reference to it near the end of the story.

The Sydney Morning Herald accounted for 43 of these articles, while The Australian had 34 articles in this category. The next greatest category (33%, or 72 articles) were articles which were entirely about PNG (see ‘B’ on the chart). They were either a hard news story, a feature, or a commentary. Of this third category, The Australian was over-represented, contributing 58 articles compared to just 14 by The Sydney Morning Herald. Again this could be at least partially explained by the presence of The Australian’s journalist Rowan Callick. The personal interest, connection and expertise that Callick has with
PNG give him a reasonable level of professional autonomy which allows him to pursue many stories that otherwise wouldn’t be covered (Callick, interview).

The remaining third represents articles which made reference to PNG in the first half of the article. Column ‘C’ illustrates the 51 articles (23%) which contain one paragraph referring to PNG in the first half of the story. In this case 33 of these stories were in The Australian and 18 were in The Sydney Morning Herald.

Column ‘D’ shows the smallest group, 21 articles (9%), which contained more than 2 paragraphs referring to PNG in the first half of the article. These articles tended to come from the ‘Australian politics’ category. These stories focused on the Labor government’s proposal to deal with asylum seekers using a ‘regional’ approach, one of the key 2010 Federal Election issues. In these articles, the story was not solely about PNG, but it was mentioned as one of the key regional ‘partners’, alongside East Timor.

Figure 3: Ways in which PNG is referred to (by comparison)
The process of categorising articles according to the ‘hierarchy of significance’ given to PNG demonstrates that roughly two-thirds of the articles analysed were not wholly about PNG. In addition, only the smallest portion of these – 9% – even made reference to PNG more than once. Of the articles – which focused on PNG as the key fact in the story – an equal amount (31 articles) were either hard news or feature/human interest stories.

Hard news articles were categorised as those that were “time-bound” (Weerakkody 2009: 155) whereas feature/human interest stories dealt with ‘softer’ news topics, such as sport or travel. A total of ten articles from both newspapers provided commentary or analysis about PNG. Eight of these stories were published in *The Australian*.

The findings show that of the 72 articles which focus on PNG, only a very small portion provided readers with explanation of key events and issues in this country. Of the ten articles offering background analysis, five focused on Australia’s relationship with PNG (particularly looking at aid donations), three examined issues in PNG’s domestic politics, and two examined mining-related issues.
Iyengar (1991) argues that news reporting is usually episodic or thematic. Episodic coverage tends to be event-oriented, while thematic coverage provides background to a more abstract public issue (Iyengar 1991: 141). Features and commentary, which aim to provide more background and context, can be interpreted as thematic coverage.

Iyengar (1991: 141) argues that episodic reporting inhibits the audience by obscuring the big picture. Furthermore, episodic reporting tends to be more fragmentary in nature. In light of this, it can be argued that although only a third of the articles analysed in this study focused wholly on PNG, 57% of those that did provided thematic coverage, offering audiences insight and background on the issues – especially political matters – facing PNG.

Yet the overwhelming majority of references to PNG occur in articles that cite it, but do not include any further explanation or details of the nation or its people. Of all 221 articles, a total of five included interviews with individuals identified as PNG nationals, and three of these were politicians, speaking in
their official capacity. Of course, this information should be digested alongside the findings of the previous chapter, which demonstrated that poor communications structure could sometimes make it difficult to obtain quotes from locals in PNG. In addition, with only two Australian correspondents working in PNG (and one works for the ABC, so his stories would not be run in either of the newspapers being discussed), few other Australian journalists would necessarily have the contacts to easily obtain interviews with locals.

Framing PNG

The findings of the content analysis reflect some of the key trends identified in the literature review on international news coverage. Of the articles analysed, there is a clear trend. This shows that – while some good quality reporting certainly exists – for the most part the news coverage of PNG is oversimplified and decontextualised. This is precisely what Fahmy (2010) identified as a growing global news trend since terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 to the US. This finding is supported by the limited amount of total coverage (33%) that actually addresses PNG in detail. Furthermore, few Australian journalists sought to access the voices of Papua New Guineans when reporting on their country.

The broader consequence of a lack of analytical and contextualise coverage of PNG is the emergence of a fragmented and partial picture of this country in the Australian media. Further, if we accept that the media play a key role in forming public opinion, it is possible to speculate that this fragmented and partial news construction of PNG is likely to influence the Australian public consciousness about its neighbour.

This lack of analysis and context in the stories about PNG shows the emergence of a society that is profoundly neglected in terms of quality news
coverage. Therefore, and coming back to one initial point made in this section, ‘news neglect’ has to be understood not only in terms of quantity but also in terms of the quality of the news coverage.

The lack of quality of news coverage is recognised by Australian correspondents in PNG. Asia-Pacific Editor for The Australian, Rowan Callick, links the problems of a decline in newspaper budgets for coverage of international news with the lack of stories providing contextual background for places like PNG. He also argues that due to the nature of news, the problem is cyclical:

When you haven’t had a story for ages from these places and a good story occurs, you haven’t got a background, you haven’t got someone who can explain it. So it [the story] just pops up, it looks weird, and they [news editors] don’t know what to do with it. And that’s a problem. (Callick, interview)

The interviews carried out with journalists for this honours thesis confirmed that only a small portion of events in PNG are considered newsworthy for Australian audiences. As ABC journalist Sean Dorney explained it:

One of our problems as Australians is that a lot of us, especially those who have an ex-European background, like to think that Australia is anchored somewhere between Ireland and North America. And to think that we’re plonked here in the Pacific – you wouldn’t believe it by reading the news, or that there’s 15 other countries in this part of the world. Because they never get reported on. (Dorney, interview)
A study conducted by Melissa Johnson (1997) found that ‘proximity’ as a news value is not measured in terms of geographic proximity, but rather the intertwined factors of economic, political and cultural proximity. This approach to the notion of ‘proximity’ explains why PNG, which has strong historical ties and geographical proximity with Australia, remains largely neglected by Australian media.

Subsequently, the stories from PNG that were reported were framed to reflect elements of economic, political and cultural proximity. One way of exploring this news frame is through postcolonial theory.

Postcolonial theory is, inherently, about the search for and the demystification of identity (Dash 2003: 233). That search for identity is ultimately defined by the relationship between colonizer and colonized, and the nations involved in this process.

Benedict Anderson’s (1983: 15) interpretation of the nation as “an imagined political community” is particularly useful. It posits the notion that nations themselves can be the consequences of news frames, and as such, the way that one nation is constructed in relation to another by its own media has significant consequences for its self-consciousness as a place, or nation.

Australia’s image of itself as a nation doesn’t overtly embrace the idea that it was a colonial power in the past, albeit for just one country. However, within the content analysis, one of the key news frames that emerged reflected a consistent reinforcement of its national identity, defined in stark contrast to the construction of PNG as one of those “places worse than ours” (Lowe 2000: 129).
This in turn reinforced Australia’s construction of itself in *The Australian* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* as somehow better than its neighbour, a practice known as ‘ethnocentrism’. While Australia has a stronger economy than PNG and greater political stability, this news frame is damaging because it promotes a particular set of cultural preferences that act to “diminish the significance of non-Western cultures” (Paterson 1998: 95), in this case, the culture of PNG.

Since news, and studies of news, are traditionally aligned by nation (Galtung and Lynch 2010: 164), it makes sense that news about foreign countries would be framed from a dominantly national perspective. Furthermore, the news frames identified reflect Galtung and Ruge’s (1965) list of news values and the emphasis on news being told from the perspective of elite nations, people and institutions. The identified news frames also reflect Nnaemeka and Richstad’s (1980) findings into the news flows between ‘dominant’ and ‘dependent’ nations in the Pacific region.

**PNG as dangerous and dependent**

This study found that PNG has been systematically constructed and framed as a dangerous place for Australians. This frame was based on references to PNG as a violent, unsafe, or unstable place for Australians living there or visiting. This reflects international news values which tend to preference disasters, accidents, conflicts or other negative stories; in the words of Luyendijk (2010: 11), “news by definition is the exception to the rule”.

As mentioned in the content analysis findings, 89% of articles categorised as ‘Transport’ featured a story about airlines and plane crashes. The prominence given to this type of story demonstrates on the first level the
media’s broad preference for reporting disasters (Vasterman et al. 2004). Secondly, in a country with limited road infrastructure, people are more likely to fly as a means of transport. Statistically, it makes sense that there is a higher chance of plane crashes.

The beginning of the coding period of this thesis heralded a plane crash in PNG. It killed six passengers. A breaking news story published in The Australian – the headline reads: ‘Pilot’s mission to honour war dead in Papua New Guinea’ (January 2, 2010) – leads with “Richard Leahy, who identifies crash sites in PNG’s jungles, is the sole survivor of a flying tragedy”. The article goes on to describe imagery laden with a narrative of adventure and historical references to Australia’s involvement in PNG in World War II. The article speaks of “the soaring green mountains of Papua New Guinea”, an airstrip “perched on the edge of a cliff”, the “charred and twisted wreckage” of the plane, and how “these mountains were death traps for the pilots fighting in World War II”.

A second article ran on the same day with the headline, “Pilot stable after nightmare PNG crash”. A follow-up article in the same newspaper on January 5, 2010, ‘Pilot saved by loose seatbelt’, identifies the six dead passengers as “four adults and two children from Baindoang village.” However, the main focus is on survivor Leahy, the expatriate Australian pilot.

The Sydney Morning Herald’s coverage of the event was comparable. The article – ‘Crash pilot was careful’– centered on the Australian pilot and includes an interview with his son. Six days after the crash, The Australian ran the following article by Rowan Callick: ‘PNG governor wants Aussie pilot charged with manslaughter’. This was the only coverage of the plane crash to interview a relative of the passengers killed. While the expensive nature of plane travel would mean that the victims of crashes are more likely to be
westerners, or Australians, the coverage focused on Australians as victims. Callick’s article was more of an exception than a rule.

The PNG airline industry was frequently covered. Most of these articles refer to the lack of safety. An article on June 4, 2010 in The Australian – ‘Short Haul’ (p.35) – announced a new airline agreement. The story reads:

The agreement, which also embraces greater co-operation on aviation safety and security, means there can now be up to 3520 seats a week...between the two countries.

Another article in The Australian on February 27, 2010, ‘CASA stymied: crash operator wins right to fly’ (p.9) focused on a “Papua New Guinea-based crash operator”. A further article in The Australian announced “new rules for mud-on-floor airlines – miner’s lift the bar on worker’s safety” (p.20) in places such as “Africa, Papua New Guinea and Indonesia”.

The coverage of plane crashes frames PNG as a place where Australians are usually the victims of this ‘dangerous country’. This is reminiscent of American journalist Mort Rosenblum’s so-called ‘coup and earthquakes’ syndrome (1979). This syndrome dictates that unless a major disaster of political upheaval occurs, developing countries have little to offer in terms of newsworthy events.

PNG was also framed as a public health and security threat to Australia. While PNG’s population does face significant problems with HIV/AIDS and other diseases, the majority of articles analysed focused on PNG health problems as a threat to Australia’s border security.

A story published in The Sydney Morning Herald on March 25, 2010 – ‘The ticking TB time bomb’ (p.19) – outlined the problems posed by PNG
nationals suffering multi-drug resistant Tuberculosis. The article refers to “a disease many people thought was conquered more than half a century ago”. The story is framed as a major public health crisis for the Australian population.

Another article in the same newspaper on the same day, ‘High hopes for drug to kill off TB’ (p.2), points out that Tuberculosis is “out of control in some neighbours, including Papua New Guinea”. The story – once again – framed PNG as a threat to Australia’s public health. In addition, the semantics of the story – “thriving...disease” and “ticking TB time bomb” – contributed to a frame of fear and danger.

News coverage of disasters, crime or threats create a social construction of invisible risks whose definitions are “manipulated, amplified, magnified, or minimized” (Vasterman et al. 2004: 107) by media representations. Vasterman et al. (2004) argue that this is because in the aftermath of an event, the media play a significant role in the struggle to define what happened, or, how to frame the problem.

ABC journalist Liam Fox argued that it can be difficult for journalists not to reinforce the negative perceptions Australians might have about PNG:

I try not to reinforce the stereotype that people have of PNG as being a wild, crazy land inhabited by savages. I try not to do that. But at the same time there’s no escaping that crime and violence are major issues here. [...] There are some absolutely horrific things that I’ve reported on in my time here and you just can’t ignore those. (Fox, interview)

As already discussed, the very nature of news requires that bad news is reported. This in itself is not the problem; rather the issue is one of balance.
While the only coverage of a place focuses on its problems and dangers, the news frames still construct it negatively, at the exclusion of the positive attributes of a place.

An example of this dilemma is evident in media reporting of PNG’s domestic sphere. As already mentioned, *The Australian* published 81% of the total articles about PNG’s politics. These accounted for a total of 22 articles out of 221. A total of 40 articles framed PNG from the angle of Australian politics; 60% of these were reported in *The Australian*, 40% in *The Sydney Morning Herald*. One of the most persistent frames in these articles was the representation of PNG as a place with endemic corruption and crime.

From Philip Seib’s (2001) perspective that good journalism should shake awake the world’s conscience, Australian reporting of PNG’s political sphere is highly important. However, the coverage of PNG again frames it as a society on its knees.


But this emphasis on crime and killing tends to stereotype PNG as a place where violence reigns. This was further accentuated by the semantics of these stories. The word ‘headhunt’ for example, is used in an article describing a PNG man being held at gunpoint. Yet ‘headhunt’ as a term has connotations of the tribal practice of headhunting, and is hardly relevant as a headline. It
could be speculated that the semantic – that tends to sensationalise the actual event – reflects Said’s notion of ‘orientalism’ (1981).

The concept of ‘the Other’ formulated by Edward Said explains the way that the western world defines itself in opposition to different cultures. Said specifically refers to Islam, but his views explain the way that knowledge of non-western groups is often formulated from within a colonial framework that proceeds from dominance and cultural antipathy (1981: 155).

The notion of ‘the Other’ is also explored in linguistics, where the idea of binary oppositions can be used to articulate the extreme polarities constructed by language, at the simplest level, an example would be us/them. Jacques Derrida (1974) argued that binary oppositions always reflect a dominant and repressed relationship of power. In light of this, it is possible to speculate that the construction in the media of PNG as a place that is different to Australia is implicit.

PNG is dangerous; we are safe. It is tribal; we are civilized. It is deviant; we are normal. These are some of the binaries that tend to emerge from the Australian news coverage of PNG. The consequence of this is that PNG is neglected – in terms of news quality – in Australian media. Only a small portion of the total articles published are well-researched and in-depth news stories.

PNG thus perpetuate stereotypes about itself, something which Duffield and Cokley (2006: 62) identify as common among international news coverage.

One frame that has emerged and perhaps requires further research is the portrayal of PNG as a country in permanent need of help by Australia. This news frame focused excessively on PNG’s inability to function as a nation, thus establishing a relationship of burden between Australia and PNG. This news
frame is also echoed in the aforementioned articles about the difficulties of the Australia-PNG aid relationship.

Here is one example, an article published in *The Sydney Morning Herald* on June 22, 2010 – ‘Gus helps PNG’ (p22) – which quotes Australian former rugby player Phil Gould. Gould is widely quoted about PNG’s potential involvement in Australia’s National Rugby League competition. The article begins by discussing PNG and its rugby team alongside comparisons to unusual and exotic animal enclosures:

> Phil Gould has coached teams out of bearpits, lion’s cages and numerous other sporting cliches, so how will he go in the jungle of Papua New Guinea?

Gould is the only source cited. He is constructed as the heroic ‘Aussie’ who has arrived in Port Moresby to rescue the citizens of PNG with a rugby league plan of action. Rugby league is already immensely popular in PNG (Scott 2009: 4), though the article does not mention this. Gould is quoted in the article linking the sport with the nation’s development:

> I don’t think it’s going to be easy and I don’t think it’s going to happen overnight but the country has to move forward and rugby league can be a big part of that.

In this news story, the leading sentence frames PNG as an exotic place, while the rest of the article also makes ambiguous references to its problems as a nation. The central element of the story’s newsworthiness is not PNG’s ability to solve these problems, but Gould’s celebrity status and the connection between Australia and PNG through rugby.
Conclusion: PNG in Australian news

However, representing the ‘other’ does not have to result in the marginalisation of foreign voices, or the fragmentation of complex ideas. When the space and resources are given to investigating PNG, quality coverage can occur. Furthermore, Castillo (2006: 170) argues that lifting the quality of international news by providing context and causes to conflicts will recapture audience attention. In the current framework of representation, where news is predominantly valued according to the impact it has on making Australians feel better about their own lives (Smith 1981; Lowe 1997), efforts to report on PNG in more balanced and open-minded frames could only be an improvement.
Chapter 6  Conclusion

This thesis attempted to examine how Papua New Guinea is represented and constructed in the Australian media. It also aimed to examine why, a query essential in order to understand the process of news representation and construction. Specifically, this study examines the coverage of PNG by The Australian and The Sydney Morning Herald newspapers from January 01 until June 30, 2010.

The thesis began by identifying the need for scholarly research into PNG’s representation in Australian news media. The introduction outlined the relationship between PNG and Australia, focusing on their shared political history. This section argues that even though PNG is no longer a colony of Australia, the relationship between these two nations still remains relevant. However, and this is a major contradiction, PNG continues to be ignored by Australian politicians and policy makers. It is also – as this thesis concludes – a society largely neglected by the Australian media.

The literature review in Chapter two initiated the discussion about factors that influence the news-making process. This section argued that news is a selective and subjective concept, driven by perceptions of newsworthiness. The chapter outlined the news values which scholars recognised as key determinants of foreign news coverage, particularly in the western world. Other factors identified as influencing the news agenda included commercial imperatives, logistical factors, and the influence of gatekeepers. These are factors that – as this thesis speculated – must to be taken into account when examining the news coverage of PNG.
Chapter two also introduced the idea that news flows among nations are unequal, reflecting relationships of dominance and dependency between states, principally between developed and developing countries. In this chapter, it is argued and inferred that these inequalities across the global news agenda extended to the Pacific region and indeed to the PNG. The section concluded by demonstrating the need for further research into foreign news coverage within the Pacific, including PNG.

Chapter three outlined the methodological and theoretical approaches of this study. It argued that the triangulation of methods was a useful way of verifying the results of the research. It took the position that all interpretation is qualitative. In this context, this section identified the rationale behind conducting both a content analysis of two agenda-setting newspapers, alongside in-depth interviews with experienced journalists who work or had worked in PNG. It is possible to conclude that this research approach provided a more in-depth and verifiable result.

Chapter three explained the relevance of framing theory to this study. Since this thesis takes the position that news is a representation of perceived reality, framing theory was a useful analytical tool for exploring the process through which news is constructed. This thesis took a social constructionist approach to framing theory. This is due to the recognition of the importance of considering broader social, political and cultural contexts within the news framing process. Based on this approach, this chapter argued and deduced that the relevance of including journalists’ voices in the discussion about framing PNG is vital to understanding the process of the collective socialisation of news frames.
Chapter four commenced with a discussion of Bourdieu’s journalistic field. As this section argues, this is a useful tool for analysing the interplay of autonomy and power among journalists and media organisations covering PNG. Drawing on interviews with journalists, this section argued that there are vast technological and logistical problems faced by overseas and local journalists covering PNG. A discussion of journalists’ personal and professional news values led to the conclusion that they are not the most powerful actors in their field. Their attempts to cover the country are affected by a range of factors. These factors included technological, logistical and financial hurdles. This section argued and concluded that these factors inhibit the amount of coverage of PNG. These observations can partly explain why Australian news media are reluctant to send journalists to PNG.

The final section of this thesis analysed the findings of the content analysis. It concluded that while PNG receives some news coverage, this is limited and lacks detailed analysis and contextual background. In addition this analysis suggests that the Australian media – at least the newspapers used in this study – frame PNG from an ethnocentric perspective that constructs PNG as a place of chaos, disorder and violence.

The significance of these findings – as it is argued in this thesis – is important. The conclusions drawn by the thesis make an attempt to fill a gap in the research about Australia’s foreign news coverage. The findings are also significant because they contribute to the much larger debates around the quality of international journalism and achieving balanced news coverage in what Tehranian calls the “global fishbowl” (2002: 59).

This study’s primary and key findings show that PNG can be considered a ‘neglected news’ region. And this ‘neglect’ is not necessarily in terms of news
quantity; but instead news quality. One of the conclusions attached to this notion of ‘neglect’ is that PNG is subject to limited, fragmented and shallow news coverage.

Furthermore, the results of the content analysis demonstrated that *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Australian* – two agenda-setting newspapers – portrayed PNG in a limited and fragmentary manner. From an ethnocentric perspective, this represents Australia as superior to its northern neighbour.

This thesis concludes with the suggestion that further research into PNG’s portrayal in the Australian media is important. This thesis tried to show that the relationship of neglect which characterises Australia’s treatment of PNG cannot be justified. It is a problem that requires a solution.

Furthermore, during the production of this thesis it became clear that there is enormous scope for further academic investigation into PNG’s representation in other Australian news media organisations. There is also scope for research into audience perceptions of PNG, which could possibly build on the arguments made in this thesis about news frames.

Research into Australia’s limited and fragmentary coverage of PNG is important because, at the very least, further investigation can build a clearer picture of how and where inequalities in news representation exist between nations. If we truly wish to inhabit a postcolonial world, then understanding more about the Australian media’s representations of “the Other” would contribute to meaningful discussions about ensuring quality journalism and more balanced coverage in the future, particularly of the Asia-Pacific region.
Appendix 1 Interview questions

As mentioned in the thesis, the interview process was guided by a loose set of themes rather than closed questions, and the list below provides an overview of the sorts of topics discussed.

The professional background and experience of the journalist
- How long have you been working in PNG?
- How did you end up in PNG? Were you sent there or did you always seek to work there?
- What other countries have you worked in? How does PNG compare to those?
- How much did you know about PNG before you arrived? How much have you learnt on the job?
- Do you speak any local languages?
- Is the social and political culture of PNG difficult to adapt to? What makes PNG a unique place to work?
- Would you consider PNG an under-reported area?

The role of the individual journalist in the news-making process
- Can you tell me about your role? For example, could you describe what happens during a typical day/week?
- What do you consider your purpose to be, as a foreign correspondent, in PNG?
- What news values do you consider most important when finding a story? How does conflict rate within these?
- How much of your content addresses business/finance news?
- How much of your content addresses crime and conflict? Would you describe PNG as a violent place?
- How difficult is it accessing locals who aren’t in official government positions?
- Do most of your sources speak English or do you work with a translator?
- Do you come up with your own story ideas?
- Any experience of having stories ideas rejected by your news organisation?

Institutional factors: time, resource and organisational limitations affecting foreign correspondents and the framing of news
- Are there any technological issues that affect your reporting (e.g. slow internet etc.)?
- Of the stories that you submit for publication, how many are actually published?
- Which mediums to do work with? How much of your time is spent writing stories for online media? How many of these stories would also be syndicated for print (or vice versa)?
- How frequently do you talk with your editor? How much influence do they have over the stories you cover?
- How do you think the news agenda for PNG fits within the broader global news agenda?
- Do you work much with other foreign journalists? With other Australian journalists?
- Do you think PNG gets the amount of media attention (in Australia) it deserves?
- How important do you think PNG is to Australians? How has this shifted over time?
- Do you think Australian audiences are satisfied with the amount of coverage they get of PNG?
- What are some of the other key problems confronting foreign journalists in PNG?

**The PNG Context**
- What is the impact of government corruption on reporting in PNG? How does it affect what you can say or cover?
- How does local law affect your work and what you can or can't cover?
- How closely do you work with local media and journalists?
- Other than Australia, which countries have bureaus in Port Moresby?
- How much does the local news agenda influence which stories you cover?

**Future**
- How secure do you think the PNG correspondent position is? Do you think your organisation will always consider it worthwhile to keep someone there?
- What factors influence this?
Appendix 2  Content analysis coding sheet

| Story Title: |
| Publication: |
| Date: |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hard news □</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feature □</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commentary □</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference to PNG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whole article about PNG □</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned in first half □</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many times? □</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned in second half □</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many times? □</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business/Finance □</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian politics □</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNG politics □</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific politics □</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport □</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport □</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health □</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment □</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kokoda and World War 2 □</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and music □</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel □</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science □</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion □</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education □</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food □</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Page number: |
| Word count: |
| Feature in thesis: Y / N |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources quoted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PNG government representative □</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNG 'expert' □</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNG 'local' □</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian expatriate in PNG □</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian government representative □</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian 'expert' □</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian 'local' □</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Notes on story category?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>________________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News frame?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>______________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>______________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>______________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bibliography


Benson, Rodney & Neveu, Erik (2005), Bourdieu and the journalistic field, Cambridge, Polity.


Bourdieu, Pierre & Wacquant, Loic (1992), An invitation to reflexive sociology, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.


‘Crash pilot was careful’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, January 5, 2010, p.9


Given, John (1907), *Making a newspaper*, New York, Henry Holt.


Grundy, Bruce (2007), So you want to be a journalist? Melbourne, Cambridge University Press.


‘Gus helps PNG’, The Sydney Morning Herald, 22 June 2010, p.22


Hanson, Fergus (2009), ‘Australia and the world: public opinion and foreign policy’, Double Bay, Lowy Institute for International Policy.


Harris, Usha (2004), Paper, presented at Economists for Peace and Security symposium, Sydney, Australia.


Rosenblum, Mort (1979), Coups and earthquakes: reporting the world for America, New York, Harper & Row.


Ryan, Charlotte (1990), Prime Time Activism: Media Strategies for Grassroots Organizing, Boston, South End Press.


‘Short Haul’, The Australian, June 4, 2010, p.35

Scott, Ben (2009), Re-imagining PNG: culture, democracy and Australia’s role, Double Bay, Lowy Institute for International Policy.


Stokes, Jane (2003), How to do Media and Cultural Studies, Los Angeles, SAGE Publications.


