Talanoa and Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action: Journalistic Practices in the Tropical Pacific

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Abstract

Western journalism educators can learn from Pacific island communication practices to improve ways of sharing knowledge across the tropics. Often Western journalists reporting on events in the tropics do so through a lens of parachute journalism. This paper analyses current Western journalism and communication practices in the Pacific and draws on concepts relevant to general communication such as *talanoa* and Habermas's 'Theory of Communicative Action' (1989).

Three key points are argued in this paper: firstly, that traditional communication practices in the South Pacific and Pacific region more generally, are alive, well, and highly relevant to Western journalistic practice; secondly, that parachute journalism has a high potential to damage communication practices in the South Pacific; and finally, that Western journalism education should embrace concepts such as *talanoa* in order to be better informed in policy and knowledge-based decision making processes in the South Pacific.

As discussed through examples of the communication of issues of social justice and indigenous rights, innovative communicative approaches which take into consideration oceanic knowledge, along with applicable Western theoretical paradigms, have significance and merit for future media and communication professionals and educators.

Introduction

The first United Nations International Day of the Tropics was celebrated on 29th of June 2016. This Australian government led collaboration between James Cook University and the State of the Tropics alliance "provides an opportunity to take stock of progress across the tropics, to share tropical stories and expertise and to acknowledge the diversity and potential of the region" (State of the Tropics, 2016). The International Day of the Tropics is recognition that the tropics are taking a more prominent role in global development.

The tropics are growing both geographically and in population (Harding, 2011). This region is home to 122 of the world's 196 nations, and "almost half of the world's population call the Tropics home" (State of the Tropics, 2014, p. XI). Twenty-two of the 122 nations of this zone which encircles the world are in the Pacific region, and despite the vast geographical distances separating these Pacific island states and nations, they are increasingly taking on a leadership role.

The 2014 State of the Tropics Report notes that communication is a key component in developing the tropics:

> The rapid growth of information technology [and communications] … has facilitated social and economic development and global coordination of business, trade, governance and security on an unprecedented scale (State of the Tropics, 2014, p. 417).

Technological advances have led to higher numbers of mobile phone services and greater internet access for many people in the Pacific and South Pacific region. However, despite this rapid growth, Western journalists (that is, journalists from parts of Oceania, including Australia and New Zealand, as well as from Europe and north America) are still often unaware of South Pacific cultural practices and sensitivities which they tend to ignore and/or misunderstand.

The Pacific concept of *talanoa* means 'talk' or 'discussion' in Fijian, Tongan and Samoan. Oral storytelling, chanting, drawing, and the production of diverse artefacts are all ways of recording history for future generations in the Pacific – as, indeed they are for many other indigenous cultures around the world. This is in contrast to Western journalism which records history in a more linear form of facts and history in both written texts and on social media platforms.

Robinson and Robinson (2005) define *talanoa* as a Pacific island form of dialogue that brings people together to share opposing views without any predetermined expectations for agreement:

> *Talanoa* is a traditional Pacific Island deliberation process that goes round in circles; it does not follow a straight line, aiming towards a final decision like many Western processes. It involves a lot of repetition, which it is believed can lead to avoidance of issues. As the concept of *talanoa* has no time restrictions, it can lead to problems and conflict between 'slow' and 'fast' thinkers, with some people arriving at a

decision more quickly than others. However, this does provide the opportunity for "slow thinkers" to be engaged in the discussions (2005, p. 25).

Some journalists, predominantly from Western countries, tend to ignore these traditional oration practices, preferring instead to report on Pacific events only at times of natural disasters or political unrest. This is commonly known as parachute journalism.

Parachute journalism typically occurs when "a reporter from another country is rushed to the scene of breaking news – most commonly in another country – to report on what's happening straight away for the benefit of audiences back home" (Zelizer & Allan, 2010, p. 107). Critics of parachute journalism see the "strategy is more to do with infotainment than news value" and that "reports tend to be superficial, and all too frequently inaccurate; the journalist in question typically lacks preparation, expertise or local contacts to provide a sufficient in-depth treatment" (Zelizer & Allan, 2010, p. 107). In the world of breaking news, ignoring or disrespecting cultural sensitivities is often common practice. For example, parachute journalists frequently arrive with little preparation in the aftermath of a cyclone, earthquake, tsunami, or coup, and have a tendency to report on the events with predictable (and often misplaced or inappropriate) sensationalism, focusing only on the devastation or conflict.

Parachute journalists also demonstrate a predisposition to focusing on the elite, disaster myth discourse, and/or good verses bad storylines, without showing any form of cultural understanding of key events or post-disaster practices within the specific context of the country, community, village or *kastom* group. In this paper we explore whether there is a way to 'combine' Western and Pacific journalism practices that will lead to more culturally sensitive and accurate communication practices. Given the growth of communication in the tropical Pacific, as well as around the entire tropical belt of the world, this is especially significant in the education of journalists for the future.

Academics have previously suggested ways to connect the two different practices by engaging with storytelling and bolting together Western and Pacific journalistic practices. However, we argue that adding Western practices onto Pacific journalistic practices, without addressing the underlying challenges and cultural differences, merely clouds the problem. In this paper, we are calling for a new way of marrying Western and Pacific journalistic practices; one that acknowledges cultural traditions and sensitivities. This paper aims to identify key components of Habermas's approach to the 'public sphere' and 'communicative action' and will suggest that by combining these theories with Pacific concepts such as *talanoa*, it may be possible to gain a better understanding of journalism practices for professionals and educators in the Pacific region. Such an approach may further prove valuable to other tropical locations.

The paper begins with a discussion of Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action (1987) and its potential application to a Pacific island context, before outlining the notion of *talanoa*. We then examine the Western journalistic practice of parachute journalism in coverage of the South Pacific and conclude with some recommendations.

Habermas and the Theory of Communicative Action in a Pacific Island Context

Leading European theorist, Jürgen Habermas, is well known for his work on the 'public sphere' and his theories of 'social development' and 'communicative action'. His work is of relevance when examining media (cf., Rosen, 1999; Calhoun, 1992; Fraser, 1990; Garnham, 1990), and in particular journalism. According to Habermas (1987), collectively structured societies, in which people share the same goals and in which decisions are made in common interest are driven by communicative rationality. In these societies, writes Habermas:

> Communicative action serves to transmit and renew cultural knowledge; under the aspect of coordinating action, it serves social integration and the establishment of solidarity; finally, under the aspect of socialisation, communicative action serves the formation of personal identities (1987, p. 137).

Communicative action touches upon a number of themes. However, in short, it implies that idealised human activities, communication, and interaction follow a model defined by the scope of an agreement, in comparison to other kinds of social actions. The emergence of communicative action plays a crucial role in the development of a society.

Habermas argues that societies do not only develop through 'technological' modes of action, but also through symbolic interactions, or 'communicative action'. Habermasian scholar, McCarthy, explains:

> The rationale behind this approach is that language cannot be comprehended apart from the understanding that is achieved in it. To put it roughly, understanding is the immanent *telos* or function of speech. This does not, of course, mean that every actual instance of speech is oriented to reach understanding. But Habermas regards "strategic" forms of communication (such as lying, misleading, deceiving, manipulating, and the like) as derivative; since they involve the suspension of certain claims (especially truthfulness), they are parasitic on speech oriented to genuine understanding" (McCarthy, 1978, p. 287).

Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action categorically distinguishes between two modes of 'societal rationalisation'; the 'system' and the 'life-world'.[1] The world of 'system' is ruled by strategic actions, the main goals of which are the success of 'plans'. On the other hand, the life-world is the product of communicative action, of exchanges made towards a mutual purpose.

'The system', refers to regimented structures, and established patterns of communication (or strategic communication). Put simply, the system can be divided into two sub-systems: money and power, according to which external aims the system imposes on agents (Finlayson, 2005). Habermas distinguishes between 'social integration' (inherent to the life-world) and 'system

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[1] He notes that societies have become gradually industrial or 'industrially advanced' and that there has been an "expansion of the technical control over nature and a continual administration of human beings and their relations to each other by means of social organization" (Pantham, 1986, p. 191), a continuing theme in critical theory.

integration' (inherent to the system) in society. He also recognises the contribution of the system to social life, but nevertheless emphasises the dangers it represents for social life. Dangers in this context are those that can disrupt and diversify away from the 'regulations' of the 'system', such as time limitations of meetings based on the fact that 'time is money'. Such disruptions have the potential to disturb 'unregulated' and communicatively active and/or competent spaces that pertain to the 'life-world'.

'The life-world', for Habermas, refers to fundamental beliefs and traditions, to shared goals (fundamental to the way people live), and to the devotion among people belonging to the same society. By contrast, some actions are more 'functional' and are not (or only partially) linked to the symbolic interactions of the life-world, these actions are not concerned with collective commitments or shared goals, and therefore pertain to a 'functional system' matrix.[2]

This theory is based on the concept of 'communicative reason', also developed by Habermas. In fact, Habermas distinguishes communicative rationality from instrumental rationality or strategic rationality. For the purpose of this paper, the critical point of Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action is the differentiation that he makes between communicative action on one hand, and instrumental and strategic action on the other. Instrumental action is the result of strategic reasoning, a 'calculation' of what are the best means to a given end, and, in contrast, communicative action is a more genuine way of interaction based on the appreciation and acceptance of 'validity claims'. McCarthy explains:

> Habermas appears to adopt the following research strategy: he uses the analysis of consensual speech as a basis for his analysis of speech that is oriented to achieving understanding and moves from there to the analysis of derivative (strategic) and defective (deformed) modes of speech. He uses the results of this analysis of speech actions to work out a general notion of communicative action (one that includes non-verbal action) with the aim of providing a suitable basis for social inquiry (1978, p. 288).

Habermas's Theory of Communicative action suggests that a communicative competent space (see also the notion of 'ideal speech situation' discussed later in this paper) could be established under certain conditions – that is, limiting regulations inherent from the 'system' and turning towards a communicative style more inherent from the 'life-world' where the act of communicating may be more informal, with genuine aims and often no agendas.

It is significant here to mention the importance of the 'oral tradition' and 'oral transmission' in sharing knowledge in Pacific societies. As Zelizer argues, there is a need in the Pacific to pay

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[2] Elliott (2009) writes: "it follows from this analytical separation of system and life-world that one must distinguish processes of administrative and economic rationalisation from distortions inflicted upon the symbolic texture of everyday life" (2009, p. 167). The life-world conceptualises the everyday world shared by people in a society, the informal and "unmarketised domains of life" (Finlayson, 2005, p. 51). The life-world comprises notions such as family, culture, political life (outside of organised parties), and it is in these 'unregulated' spheres that 'communicative action' takes place. In the life-world, "coordination of action takes place primarily by way of communicative action and depends on the action orientations of individuals in society", while "system coordination, in contrast, operates by way of functional interconnection of action consequences and bypasses the action orientations of individual agents" (Cooke, 1994, p. 5).

serious attention to the emergence or re-emergence of indigenous values and Pacific epistemologies. Zelizer states:

> Key was the work of Jürgen Habermas…whose notion of the public sphere complicated long-standing notions about how journalism served the public. Seeing news and conversation as elements necessary for democracy, Habermas reacted against technocratic rationality in arguing to reposition the public within the framework of a community. (2004, p. 161)

However, previous attempts to deploy Habermas's theories in the Pacific region, in particular his theory of 'communicative action' have been very limited. Mark L. Berg's (1991) deployment of Habermasian theory in the context of the Western Caroline Islands (Western Pacific region), claims to "evaluate the adequacy of Habermas's account of an idealised archaic society by comparing it with a real archaic society, the pre-World War I Western Caroline Islands" (Berg, 1991, p. 397). Berg's discussion is useful because it challenges Habermas's claims to universal applicability, grounding the theory in an historical era and, usefully, for the purposes of this paper, a location.

Berg claims to "use Habermas to correct Habermas" (1991, p. 409), arguing that Habermas's theory needs amendments.[3] Berg's unique discussion raises several relevant issues, but does not lead to a complete dismissal of Habermas's theory or to its inapplicability to a fruitful Pacific deployment. In this paper we argue that Habermas's theories might need either adjustments or amendments when employed in the South Pacific region in the context of examining journalism practices. We propose that Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action is an effective way to challenge issues of elitism, parachute journalism and disaster myth discourses in the South Pacific region. In the following section of the paper we take a closer look at *talanoa* and similar Pacific communicative practices, before outlining alternative ways for journalists and journalism educators to tentatively re-frame Pacific island communication practices using the Habermasian Theory of Communicative Action and *talanoa* to seek the application of such a 'combination' in Western journalism education

Talanoa focus

The concept of *talanoa* is an outstanding example of a traditional Pacific practice compatible with the criteria by which communicative action occurs as it is oriented to reach consensus, and close to the idea of an 'ideal speech situation', the structure of which is "immunised against repression and inequality in a special way" (Habermas, 1984/1981, p. 26).

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[3] "Western Caroline Islands, as they were before World War I, were an historical archaic society since they exhibited a kin-based social structure with prestige accorded to older descent groups, matrilineal clans on fourteen island groups and patrilineal groups on Yap; since they all exhibited a subsistence economy supplemented by an established trading network based in Truk and maintained by low island sailors; and since shared mythic beliefs were indeed essential to a traditional life-world.… But one communication tradition, the one accompanying the tribute network and based on an indigenous Yapese model, exhibited an appropriation of the speech situation itself by middlemen.… Two obvious changes ought to be made to Habermas's ideal archaic society.… A place should be made for the role of a spirit-world alongside the three worlds Habermas adopts from Popper.… Under conditions offering little scope for material development, as in the case of the Western Caroline prior to World War I, the life-world ceases to be a passively legacy from the past" (Berg 1991, p. 409).

Sitiveni Halapua, Tongan scholar and Director of the Pacific Islands Development Program at the East-West Centre, University of Hawai'i, who deployed the idea of a 'contemporary use of *talanoa*' in Fiji and Tonga, stated during an interview for the *SGI Quarterly* in January 2007:

> If you give people the opportunity, and they know you respect their voice, they will tell you their stories; that is a universal human phenomenon.[4]

This suggests that 'ideally', and probably only 'ideally', some traditional Pacific practices offer an adequate platform and/or setting for communicative action to occur as these practices emphasise common goals, shared values, common decision-making and collective effort.

The description of *talanoa* made by Halapua in the above interview also reverberates with Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action, according to which "the conditions of discourse and rational-consensus…. rest on the supposition of an ideal speech situation characterised by an effective equality of chances to assume dialogue roles" (McCarthy, 1978, p. 325).

In Fiji, following the May 2000 attempted *coup d'état*, a number of *talanoa* were conducted in 2003 in order to "bring together political opponents, religious leaders, former hostages and coup sympathisers in an effort to rebuild national unity" (Robinson & Robinson, 2005, p. 2). In other words, in response to the political instability Fiji was experiencing, Halapua was given the task to develop a process of dialogue that could correspond better to the values of Pacific culture. "Halapua researched a range of Western literature, but could not find a holistic open-process that would fit the criteria given him. He turned to traditional, Pacific ways and came up with the idea of *talanoa*" (Robinson & Robinson, 2005, p. 17).

Therefore, Halapua's initiative was to try to develop a 'contemporary use' of *talanoa* in Fiji,[5] which he saw as a good alternative to Western forms of deliberation, a forum in harmony with Pacific values where everyone could be heard. The process of *talanoa* is based on strong customary rules. It is centred on 'open-style' deliberation, on respect between the participants and their differing views, on tolerance, and the protocols and the ceremony preceding it are as important as the *talanoa* itself.

One is here forcefully reminded of Habermas's description of a communicatively competent space in which "the competence to use language interactively is a pre-condition of the ability to mark a third distinction fundamental to the definition of any speech situation: the distinction between what is (*Sen*) and what ought to be (*Sollen*)" (McCarthy, 1978, p. 282).

When *talanoa* is used as a dialogue for conflict resolution between two people or two opposing groups, a third person will facilitate the session. Sitiveni Halapua who led the process of

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[4] Talanoa Talking from the Heart: Interview with Dr. Sitiveni Halapua, available at:
http://www.sgiquarterly.org/feature2007Jan-4.html

[5] Fijian *Talanoa* Statement on National Unity, December 1, 2000. Retrieved from
http://pidp.eastwestcenter.org/pidp/info/tall.htm

talanoa in Fiji was also the moderator of the *talanoa* sessions in Fiji, but the *matanivanua*[6] is the one carrying out these various tasks during several traditional talks and ceremonies such as the traditional *talanoa*. Thus, Halapua's process of *talanoa* conceptualises a 'set of forums', a 'public body' consisting of private individuals and aimed at engaging – and ideally resolving – conflicts inherent to, originated in, and created by, what Habermas refers to as 'the system'. In this light, the idea of *talanoa* can prove compelling, especially in the context of Pacific societies because it not only implies public debate, transparency, and openness; but also because, like the notion of 'public sphere', it implies that the state would be, to a certain extent, accountable to some sort of "citizenry" (Fraser, 1990, p. 59) that could significantly limit its authority and its abusive ruling.

In addition, the findings of research on participatory dialogues conducted by the United Nations and promoting alternative ways of communication "Towards a Stable, Safe and Just Society For All" states:

> The *talanoa* Interactive Dialogue is similar to the reflective and appreciative inquiry discussions…. The advantage of this style of dialogue is that participants relinquish fixed positions and build and rebuild their own perspectives through mixing their views with the views of others. This style of dialogue emphasizes mutual and reciprocal participation, along with the identification of commonalities and the promotion of a spiritual understanding of shared meaning (United Nations Publication, 2007, p. 91 - 92).[7]

The concept of the *matanivanua* in Fiji also carries interesting possibilities for the purpose of this paper. The *matanivanua* is one of the key components of the *vanua*[8] and although very few people, especially among the non-Fijian population, know of its deeper meaning, it is a

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[6] *Matanivanua* refers to the traditional messenger, orator, herald, or negotiator in Fiji. Unpublished speech given during the PINA Pacific Media Summit 2009, and recorded during a conference session untitled 'Shooting the messenger, Intimidation, and violence against Pacific media practitioners', Port Vila, Vanuatu, July 27, 2009.

[7] It could be argued that the *talanoa* process in Fiji was an unsuccessful deployment (witness the 2006 coup and later developments), and it is very probable that not all Pacific values and concepts can be beneficial to the challenges faced by contemporary societies in the region. To anticipate this thought, this paper suggests that the failure of the *talanoa* process in Fiji almost certainly lies in what Habermas referred to as 'systematically distorted communication'. 'Systematically distorted communication' occurs…when communication breaks down. Manifestations of 'systematically distorted communication' "can be conceived as the result of a confusion between actions oriented to reaching understanding and actions oriented to success" (Habermas, 1987, p. 332). However, it is also important to note that systematically distorted communication can also be brought subtly and ingeniously by individuals or groups who evoke universal values in the aim only to advance their own interests (e.g. wrong evocation of tradition to cover a Big Man's corruption). As, Gitlin (1998, p. 169) wrote, "If democracy requires deliberation, then equal access to the terms of deliberation becomes central to the entry of persons into the social world of democracy". This also raises the issue that specific rhetoric used in a certain cultural context and which is 'universally' understood and correctly interpreted by the members of this specific context could be interpreted totally differently by 'outsiders'. The main concern being whether or not this specific rhetoric is used as a mere means to achieve actions in end. Halapua also argues: "It is important to remember that *talanoa*, as nothing more than a process, cannot be theoretically or practically characterised by the social criteria of 'failure' and 'success'" (Halapua, 2010, personal communication). Despite Halapua's modesty with reference to *talanoa*, this paper attempts to show how the concept and process can be re-framed or re-theorised by reference to Habermas's theory.

[8] *Vanua* literally means 'land' in Fijian. However, as Fiji's leading theologian, Dr Ilaitia Tuwere (2002) points out, in a broader sense it also encompasses several things such as "earthly turf, flora, and fauna of a given place, rivers and mountains, fishing ground (*vanua ni qoliqoli*) and much more. It can also be used for one's country or village" (2002, p. 33).

crucial concept that cannot be ignored when examining Pacific media – and especially Fijian journalism.

Matanivanua literally means 'eye or face of the land'. *Matanivanua* are the traditional heralds and messengers in the Fijian culture, chosen representatives providing a link between the Chiefs and their people, and between the different villages. As Netani Rika (2009) notes:

> Today the role of *matanivanua* remains significant in ceremonies and general communication, which is such an integral part of our culture.... This role is not peculiar to Fiji. There are cultures throughout the Pacific, which have not dissimilar systems of diplomacy, message bearing and communication.... Our role as journalists is, in a way, similar to that of these ancient Pacific messengers who provide a vital line of communication between all people, regardless of status (Rika, 2009).

Theologian Ilaitia Tuwere also explained that the role of the *matanivanua* is more complex than a simple messenger, he is "a mediator who sets in motion the principle of 'relationship' or relatedness.... He speaks and listens, represents, reconciles, mends broken relationships, negotiates, introduces, announces and so on" (Tuwere quoted in Huffer & Qalo, 2004, p. 95).

Such modes of communication in the South Pacific reveal the role oration plays in containing conflict in the region, whereas one could argue that Western journalism in the South Pacific inflates conflict through their lack of knowledge of, and practice in, cultural sensitivities.

Western journalistic coverage of the South Pacific

Journalism, as understood in the west (e.g. with its agendas; twenty-four hour news cycles, soundbites and short interviews, or air time) is often considered in the South Pacific as a Western imposition that arrived with missionaries and colonisers, and that challenged or replaced pre-existing forms of communication and oral traditions of storytelling. In this regard the social imaginary of the tropical Pacific, reflects the ancient notion of tropics as the 'Torrid Zone' – a zone filled with climatic disasters and uninhabitable by humans (presumably European). Classicist ideologies viewed the tropics or Torrid Zone as a danger ridden region encircling the world. Harding (2011) notes "Pliny the Elder wrote of the Torrid Zone as a place of great horrors. Fifteenth century Indian geographers wrote of the tropics as a place like that between the living and the dead. Even into the 19th and early 20th centuries, the tropics were considered a dangerous place" (2012, p. 2). This Western narrative of the tropics, including the Pacific, as torrid, uninhabitable, and prone to climatic disaster, still pervades numerous news stories about the South Pacific, especially through parachute journalism.

Parachute journalism can be categorized in two ways. Firstly, as infotainment that focuses intently on only one or two aspects of a story without communicating or working with local journalists and stakeholders (cf. Randall, 2000), for instance, through news footage repeating the same images after a tropical cyclone. Secondly, parachute journalism can be used to reflect geopolitical relations between the journalist's home region and the country the journalist has parachuted into, for example, in reports of a Pacific country that has poor relationships

with the home country of the journalist, there is a strong likely hood that the Prime Minister or governor will be blamed (Randall, 2000). Parachute journalism tends to categorise Pacific island events into three main categories or themes, those of: 'disaster', 'resilience' and 'good versus bad'. For example, Western media coverage of major weather events in the Pacific, and further to other tropical regions, is often framed as a disaster discourse. Furthermore, disaster discourse, as a social construct within news media, can also be frequently used to leverage criticism at the government of the day. Randall, notes how "a modern need for an instant explanation, and immediate villains, pressures journalists into trying to point the finger of blame, sometimes long before all the principal facts are known" (2000, p. 114). Other examples of disaster reporting can be found as veiled criticism of Pacific island politics using natural disasters to make comments about a particular political leader. Reports include narratives that focus on political leaders, often dictators, curtailing freedom, and obstructing access to information for rescue teams or to emergency funding. Davis notes that "demonising the dictator is the dominant narrative of much of the regional media [oceanic region], and especially a clique of so-called Pacific specialists in Australia and New Zealand" (cited in Robie, 2013, p. 49). What becomes more problematic is the closer journalists are to a given news event in terms of national and public interest, the further they are from applying professional news values (Nossek, 2004). In the wake of these biases, foreign journalists often leave unreported everyday stories that have relevance and significance for the local communities and their overseas diasporas.

The emergence of parachute journalism in the news industry on a global level can be explained as a direct consequence of decisions made with reference to editorial resources and priorities. Foreign correspondents are very expensive to newsrooms, and so is the running foreign bureaux with associated high costs for supporting staff working in these satellite outposts (e.g. translators, fixers, drivers, etc.). Hamilton and Jenner (2004, p. 304) noted "it is not unusual for a newspaper to budget well over $250,000 a year to support a foreign correspondent". Moore (2010, p. 31) also points out that "A basic foreign bureau, without capital expenditure, will cost – on average – $200-300,000 a year. … Bureaux in war zones can cost a lot more. Even sending a reporter, with a translator and/or fixer, to a foreign country for a single story can cost £5-6,000 a trip". Mills and Brunner (2003), along with other commentators (cf., Erickson & Hamilton, 2006) argue that journalists sent on overseas assignments and lacking solid training run the risk of turning grave news developments into no more than entertainment.

Therefore, as a move away from infotainment, the inclusion of everyday events would allow parachute journalists to provide a competent communicative space in which information is not only driven by news values, the twenty-four hour cycle, or commercial pressures (all pertaining to the 'system'); but would also provide their Western audience with information that can include a solid understanding of external factors and the wider implications of these events. This information finds context in the 'life-word' where communicative reason will provide parachute journalists with a greater understanding of the local subjects and how to convey the issues these people face in an appropriate way, back to their Western audience. This would also significantly reduce the risks of creating clichés of Pacific countries,

communities, and people, and contribute to the development of more responsible and informed parachute journalism. For example, some scholars argue that parachute journalism also has the potential to enhance foreign news and international affairs coverage (Erickson & Hamilton, 2006, p. 34). Erickson and Hamilton state that parachute journalism can be justified as being able to cover events not mentioned in wire or news agency reports.

On a further interesting note, David Robie (2005) observes that although "South Pacific media is generally projected as embracing Western news values with the ideals of 'objectivity' and 'facticity' being paramount…. the reality is far more complex. In many respects, Pacific media have more in common with other developing nations…. Some, argue that unique forms of media language are evolving in the region, while others assert that a unique style of Pacific journalism is emerging" (Robie, 2005, p. 86).

In acknowledging these 'unique forms' of journalistic practice in the South Pacific, as well as the increasing role of Pacific island nations and states in shaping Oceania, we argue that here lies an opportunity to retrain future journalists into ways of incorporating both Western and Pacific journalistic practices. In other words, could Western journalists on overseas assignments, narrow the cultural and socio-economic gaps in knowledge standing between themselves, and local journalists and populations?

Cautiously combining *talanoa* and the Theory of Communicative Action

Cautious parallels can therefore be drawn between the traditional messenger, mediator and negotiator role of the *matanivanua*, and the role of modern journalists in Fiji – and more generally the Pacific. Both the traditional messenger and the journalist symbolise a 'link' between the people and the 'authorities' whether in a traditional or contemporary context. Journalists' interview people, listen to them, represent their views and opinions, even if sometimes they do not agree with the message these opinions bring up. They clearly, as do the *matanivanua*, "set in motion a principle of relationship and relatedness" (Tuwere, 2002, p. 72) within the society, between their audience, the people, and the authorities – or any other social, political or economic institution.

Robie applies Halapua's idea of *talaona* into a journalistic framework to develop a communication approach explored in a Pacific context. Robie's paper, *The talanoa and the tribal paradigm: reflections on cross cultural reporting in the Pacific* applies the philosophy of *talanoa* as a "tool for more effective reporting in the region" (Robie, 2013, p. 45). The aim is to try to marry the fourth estate idea of journalism, which is representing the political and powerful, with the tribal practice of *talanoa* to unpack and provide balanced reporting of the Pacific region.

One possibility is drawing on the principle of 'development journalism' which involves going beyond the journalistic reporting technique of asking 'who', 'what', 'where', 'why', 'when' and 'how'. Development journalism is "more concerned with the 'how, why' and what now? questions addressed by journalists" (Robie, 2013, p. 327). Development journalism is similar

to investigative journalism only with a "focus on the condition of developing nations and ways of improving" (Robie, 2013, p. 328). Robie argues that "whilst journalists generally accept the notion of the fourth estate and media working in public interest, in the Pacific there is a critical fifth dimension underpinning the so-called Pacific way; this is occupied by the indigenous culture and tradition" (2013, p. 52). The Pacific protocol of *talanoa*, could very likely be a component of this fifth dimension, the fifth leg of a traditional wooden ceremonial and community bowl – each leg representing the five estates of power. By adding a fifth analytical 'leg' – that is the Pacific Way (and its protocols, such as *talanoa*) – journalism in the Pacific could become a 'cultural storytelling' pillar with the potential to "counter-balance all other forms of power, including news media" (Robie, 2013, p. 45). Robie concludes that "answers are needed for the questions: Why, how and what now? Journalists need to become part of the solution rather than being part of the problem" (Robie, 2012 p. 227); and that the "talanoa approach…opens the door to far more constructive, yet also more robust, discourse about the nature of Fiji and Pacific politics, media and journalism" (Robie, 2013, p. 53).

Although Robie's suggestion of a fifth 'cultural pillar' has merit, it raises interesting questions. Robie merely adds a cultural dimension onto an existing Western media paradigm of power and politics. Instead of tagging additional analytical tools onto the current paradigm with a cultural dimension, we argue that Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action is a far more effective way to challenge issues of elitism, parachute journalism and disaster myth discourses in the Pacific region.

Based on the issues outlined above, our contention is that there is no need to add to the current Western model to understand Pacific journalism, but rather, what is needed is the development of a better understanding of Pacific islanders. Including the Habermas concepts of life-world and social integration to engage with local cultures and journalists will improve established patterns of communication in the South Pacific. It is our recommendation that journalists move away from parachute journalism where the reporter lacks crucial understanding of the socio-cultural context in which he or she reports stories, and rather work with local journalists and media representatives to avoid the layering of Western journalistic practices onto a non-Western traditional media paradigm. Neither does adding to the *talanoa* model offer a resolution, for it simply adds to the underlying problem that Western journalists insert their often highly western-centric journalistic paradigm onto a non-Western media model. Instead, we suggest that there is a need for an effort in combining both South Pacific general communication practices and protocols with an applicable Western journalism model than can complement local practices, including media practices.

Conclusion: The Rapidly Growing Tropics and New Educational Approaches

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the United Nations acknowledgment of an International Day of the Tropics is evidence of the growth and recognition of this region around the world. Furthermore, Pacific island nation-states are playing a growing role in Oceania and the wider global scene (cf., Van Fossen, 2005). Advances in communication technologies across the tropical Pacific will increasingly open up the region to Western influences. Western

journalists should be prepared if they wish to avoid offending or misrepresenting South Pacific cultures, and can do so through an awareness of how South Pacific 'life-world systems' inform systems of communicative reason.It is thus vital that we understand the diverse socio-cultural needs (including indigenous protocols and ways of doing) of the Pacific in order to develop courses and programmes that will allow for a harmonious growth of Western journalists parachuting into the South Pacific region to fulfil their stories, so they can carry out their assignments ethically without disrupting the local ways of doing. In the case of the South Pacific these local ways include *talanoa* and *matanivanua,* as well as *vaka viti* in Fiji, and *Fa'a Samoa* in Samoa.

We propose here a new way of approaching communication and journalism education that will offer Western journalism educators the opportunity to learn from Pacific island communication practices in order to improve ways of sharing knowledge across the tropical Pacific. Additionally, it is our hope that similar case studies in other parts of the South Pacific or the tropics worldwide may offer further examples of the ideas discussed in this paper and will offer suggestions and recommendations for further research in the field of media and communication education.

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