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## “Image of a Nation: Australian Press Cover of PNG”

**Martha Ginau & Evangelia Papoutsaki**

**Martha Ginau** is the Research & Training Officer for HELP Resources, an NGO operating from Wewak, Papua New Guinea. She holds a journalism degree from Divine Word University. She is currently conducting research on behalf of ISIS on women and conflict in Bougainville.

**Evangelia Papoutsaki**, PhD is a Senior Lecturer at the School of International Communication, Unitec, Auckland, NZ and Research Associate of the Pacific Media Centre, AUT, NZ. She was previously the Head of the Journalism Department at DWU, Madang, Papua New Guinea. She was the co-founder and co-editor of the DWU Research Journal, *Contemporary PNG Studies* and co-editor of a research based volume on *Media, Information and Development in Papua New Guinea* (DWU Press, 2006).  
[epapoutsaki@unitec.ac.nz](mailto:epapoutsaki@unitec.ac.nz)

# **Image of a Nation: Australian Press Cover of Papua New Guinea**

## **Abstract**

This article looks at the Australian press cover of Papua New Guinea. It argues that the coverage is negative and inadequate and contributes to the country's negative image in Australia. No previous study has been carried out on this topic in this context. The research was based on a content analysis of randomly selected articles from the Australian Press over a period of three months in 2004 and a survey of four groups (foreign correspondents to PNG, journalists from the PNG mainstream media, PNG government media information services and political analysts). This study is based on the argument of Western media's negative coverage of developing countries and involves some of the old arguments that have been debated between the developed and the developing world.

People depend on the mass media for information about international affairs (Brewer, Graf & Wilnat, 2003). In that capacity, media play an important role in shaping mass perceptions of other nations. Developing countries have been arguing for decades that the exclusive use of western news values, by developed nation's media when reporting on them, has resulted in a negative and biased coverage, focusing mostly on conflict and disaster (Hurst, 1988).

The overall image of a nation has proved to be vital for its place in the international stage. Having limited promotional resources of their own, Pacific islands depend heavily on the image of them portrayed by others (Crocombe, 2001, p 279). Therefore, they are vocal about whether they are accurately and adequately portrayed by their bigger neighbours, Australia and NZ.

Reflecting this, the South Pacific Forum governments complained, in a 1990 media workshop in Rarotonga, that foreign journalists were uninformed about the region, culturally insensitive, overbearing and showing little respect for the traditions or customs of the Pacific nations, hence the negative coverage (Sasako, 1992, pp100-101; Solomon, 1992, p124). Successive PNG governments have claimed that the Australian media coverage of PNG is negative, resulting in some cases of the government expelling foreign correspondents from the country.

This article is looking at Australian press representations of PNG as a developing country and as a weaker island neighbour in a dependency relationship with Australia. According to the 2006 Morgan 'End of Year' survey, newspapers are the first place Australians look when seeking 'important news from the Asia Pacific region' (Mogan, 2006). Newspapers, therefore, are instrumental in shaping Australian public opinion on their pacific neighbours.

## **I. PNG, Australia & the Media**

This research reflects to a large extent the sensitive relationship between PNG and Australia. The latter has consistently been Papua New Guinea's largest development partner and has delivered budget aid for more than two decades following independence (Windybank & Manning, 2002, p10). AusAID currently directs development assistance to projects and programs agreed on by both countries, in specific sectors such as infrastructure, health and education.

A recent assessment by AusAID indicated that since PNG attained independence in 1975, Australia has provided more than A\$14 billion as official development assistance to Papua New Guinea (AusAID, 2003, p xi). This dependency has caused a lot of resentment on both sides, in terms of who decides how the funds are allocated.

No similar studies have been done so far in the field of Australia media coverage of PNG. However, it is possible to draw some evidence from the coverage of Bougainville by the Australian media. Cass (1992) argued that *The Australian* newspaper in its coverage of the Bougainville conflict lacked depth and focused on the crisis from Australia's own interests and a conviction that the former colony could not really look after itself. Other researchers pointed out that even though journalists got into Bougainville during the crisis, the coverage was uneven (Cronau, 1994; Denoon & Spriggs, 1992).

Dorney argues that, with few exceptions, the Australian media pays scant attention to Australia's former colony unless there is high drama, such as during the Sandline crisis in March 1997, or a disaster relief effort, such as when the Australian Defence Force played a high-profile role during the drought induced famine of 1997-98 (1998, p15). He adds that the rest of the time it is the bizarre and tragic, especially violent crime involving expatriates, that fill the limited agenda.

According to Patience (2005), PNG has a public relations problem in terms of its image abroad. Dorney (1998) and Patience argue that the PNG government is partly responsible for PNG's image problem by making it difficult with their regulations on entry visas for foreign journalists to come. This is not helping the perceptions of foreign journalists who continue to display a lack of understanding of PNG in their negative coverage.

Australian media's attitude contributes to this negative coverage. Hurst pointed out, for instance, that they have been accused of being insensitive towards cultural characteristics of countries in the Asian region (1988, p 56). The Australian press asserts that it could not abandon its traditions of a free press to avoid offending another country (ibid).

Commenting on the Australian media, a number of scholars argued that news organisations place journalists in other parts of the world, particularly in Asia and the Pacific, precisely to seek Australian perspectives on Asian affairs, to prioritise and interpret foreign events in ways most Australians can understand (Knight, 1994; Ramanathan & Loo Giap Seng, 1993).

However, studies have also found that both the Western and the Third World media have the tendency to give each other more negative than positive coverage (Beaudoin & Thorson, 2001; Brewer, Graf & Wilnat, 2003; Chaudhary, 2001). Third world media are also very negative of themselves and some academics suggest that this is due to the Western training their journalists receive (Robie, 1995; Pamba, 2005; Hester, 1987; Moore, 1992). PNG media has been accused of being overly negative in its coverage of PNG issues and many foreign correspondents take their tips for news stories from the local media (Papoutsaki & Rooney, 2006)

## **II. Methodology**

The *main hypothesis* is that western media's coverage of developing countries is mostly negative and the Australian press coverage of PNG could be used as an example.

The research is based on a *content analysis* of randomly selected newspaper articles and a survey of key media specialists and officials. *Survey questionnaires* were specifically designed for each of the four groups including past and present foreign correspondents to PNG (for both press and broadcast media), media personnel from the mainstream media in PNG, media personnel from government departments and political analysts specialising in international relations in PNG. The information provided by this survey helped contextualise the content analysis results and contributed to a better understanding of the issues involved.

A random selection of forty articles was taken from both daily and weekly newspapers (*The Australian, Courier Mail, Sunday Mail, Mercury, Herald Sun, and The Advertiser*), covering the period of March to May 2004 and using the Factiva search program. The sampling was based on articles from the first and the third weeks of each month and looked at articles that directly related to PNG. Five criteria of analysis were selected and were adopted from Galtung & Ruge (1965, p72): *mode, focus, type, news values and source*.

*Mode* determined whether the story was positive or negative. In deciding whether an article was positive or negative, the overall tone of the article was looked at, the headline and the connotations used in the article.

*News values* were the selection criteria that determined which events were worthy of becoming news (Westerstahl & Johansson, 1994) according to the Australian press. News values vary according to whether the media are in the developed or developing world (Robie, 1995; Hester & Lan, 1987; Kunczik, 1992). Timeliness, proximity, personality, unusual and odd events, human interest and conflict are the main news values belonging to the first world (Wu, 2003; Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Ostgaard, 1965).

In order for people to understand and appreciate news from other countries, it is imperative for them to be cognizant of different cultural values and constraints Chaudhary (2001). Therefore, culture cannot be separated from news values (Chaudhary, 2001; Maletzke, 1970; Chamberlain, 1985); the same can be argued of language, which as an expression of culture carries some associations, connotations, or values with it (O'Shaughnessy, 1999, p34).

*Source* looks at who was sourced/quoted in the story. News professionals and international news agencies decide the amount of coverage a country receives, determine the topics or issues that will be emphasised and if that country is covered at all (Wu, 2001, p495). Therefore, sources are just as important as news values in determining what becomes news in the international arena.

### *Foreign News*

According to Beaudoin & Thorson (2001) stories are considered foreign in nature if they deal primarily with a foreign nation. Galtung & Ruge (1965) argued that in foreign news, what one country chooses to consider an 'event', is culturally determined. Therefore, foreign news for a country would be those news stories that have the same or almost similar cultural values to theirs.

Some researchers argue that the economic, social, political and geographical characteristics of a nation determine the amount of coverage one country receives in the press of another (Wu, 2003; Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Ostgaard, 1965).

It has also being argued that the developed countries, who own and operate the majority of the media organizations around the world, use stereotypes - often negative media constructions and representations - to portray the developing world and minority groups (O'Shaughnessy, 1999, Taylor & Willis,1999; Branston & Stafford, 2003).

There have been many studies of the coverage of third world countries in the media of western nations and of the foreign news transmitted abroad by western news agencies (Giffard, 1984, p14). One of the persistent themes of proponents of the New International Information and Communication Order was that the major international news agencies project a negative image of developing countries. The argument of the imbalance and misrepresentation of information between developed and developing countries might be an old one and debated widely for decades. However, researchers argue this imbalance is still evident today (see Beaudoin & Thorson, 2001; Robie, 1995; Wilnat, Graf & Brewer, 2003) as this case study will demonstrate.

### III. Findings

#### i. Content Analysis

The majority of the articles came from *The Australian*. The second highest number of stories was from the *Courier Mail*. The newspaper that has the least number of stories was the Sunday Mail (Brisbane), the only Weekly newspaper in the study.

#### *Mode*

Out of the forty articles selected for the study, 85% were considered negative and 15% positive. The following tables give some examples from the different newspapers:

**Table 1:** Positive/negative modes in *The Mercury*

Title	Overall	Mode	
		Headline	Connotations (positive/negative)
Quick News	Negative	Negative	“brink of collapse”
Quick News: PNG reloads in drugs war	Negative	Neutral	“drug trafficking”, “gun smuggling and money laundering”, “growing problem of people smuggling”
Two held over death of pilot	Negative	Negative	“lawless city in the country’s highlands”

**Table 2:** Positive/negative modes of *The Australian*

Title	Overall	Mode	
		Headline	Connotations (positive/negative)
Neighbourhood	Negative	Neutral	“renewed speculations of a vote of no confidence”, “disputed proposal”
Somare reshuffles posts to retain grip on power	Negative	Negative	“brink of collapse”, “dumped”
PNG profits	Positive	Positive	“on track to deliver strong profits”
Versatile reformer of charm and wit –Pacific mourns	Negative	Neutral	“corrosive seeds of corruption”, “crisis”
Campaigner ends fight	Negative	Neutral	“lack of adequate hospital facilities in PNG”, “corruption”
Bystanders chop off murder suspect’s leg	Negative	Negative	“Angry bystanders chopped the leg off”, “gang”, robbery attempt”
Downer and PNG at odds over immunity for police	Negative	Negative	“strife-torn nation”, “solution”, “sensitive”
Pilot’s widow lashes out	Negative	Negative	“notorious PNG Highlands”, “failing to restore law and order in PNG”
PNG plan threatened	Negative	Negative	“crisis”, “threatening to derail”, “stabilization package”

Chase Aussies away, urges PNG governor	Negative	Negative	“stabilise the troubled nation”, “crime-riddled Highlands”
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**Table 3:** Positive/negative mode of the *Courier Mail*

Title	Mode		
	Overall	Headline	Connotations (positive/negative)
PNG accused in rights abuse list	Negative	Negative	“severe human right abuses”, “lack of law and order”, “poor” “Low”, “severely deteriorated”
Somare on the Brink	Negative	Neutral	“brink of collapse”, “crumbled”
‘Love gift’ for family	Negative	Neutral	“murdered”, “shot dead”, “robbery”
Vote of no confidence in Somare in doubt	Negative	Negative	“threats”, “remove”, “rife”, “upset”, “overthrow”
Oil Search predicts firm earnings	Positive	Positive	“strong profits”
Dynamite in briefcase on PNG flight	Negative	Negative	“airport security”, “explosives”, “alarm”, “fatal stabbing”
Big-hearted adventurer slain for \$20	Negative	Negative	“shot dead for just \$20 in PNG”, “thieves”

**Table 4:** Positive/negative mode of *The Herald Sun*

Title	Mode		
	Overall	Headline	Connotations (positive/negative)
Danger for Police	Negative	Negative	“killed”, “dangers”, “dangerous”, “risks dispute”
Honour abroad	Positive	Positive	“Hundreds of people expected at Anzac day ceremonies”
Helped Build new nation	Negative	Neutral	“lack of adequate”
Hell, guts and glory	Negative	Neutral	“rugged, dense, mosquito and leech-ridden jungle that is humid”, “muddy”, “awash with rain and a long way from home”
Aussie pilot killed	Negative	Negative	“troubled nation”, “stalled”
Aussie pilot slain	Negative	Negative	“shot dead”

**Table 5:** Positive/Negative mode of *The Daily Telegraph*

Title	Mode		
	Overall	Headline	Connotations (positive/negative)
Plaque for dead pilot	Negative	Neutral	“murdered by bandits”
Kokoda trek to cemetery – ANZAC Day-Lest we forget	Positive	Positive	“Record crowds expected to attend Anzac day commemorations”
Australian pilot shot dead in PNG	Negative	Negative	“troubled nation”
Pilot shot in PNG	Negative	Negative	“troubled region”
Shot pilot a missionary	Negative	Negative	“troubled region”

**Table 6:** Positive/Negative mode of *The Sunday Mail*

Title	Mode		
	Overall	Headline	Connotations (positive/negative)
Teens retrace tracks of Kokoda veterans	Positive	Neutral	“teenager pays personal homage to his grandfather who fought in WWII”
Gilly tackles the digger trail	Positive	Positive	“magnitude of our young Anzacs’ achievements”

### *Focus*

There is a noticeable lack of diversity in the stories, mostly dominated by the murder of an Australian pilot, Alan Mourilyan in Mt. Hagen, Western Highlands (11 out of the 40 articles). Five stories were on the Kokoda Trail as it was ANZAC day, four stories on the sacking of seven ministers of parliament by the PNG Prime Minister and four stories on the Enhancement Corporation Program. Had it not been for the murder of the Australian pilot and ANZAC day, the Australian press would have very little on PNG.

The findings revealed that the highest numbers of articles (17) were focused on crime (law & order). This includes those articles that had more than one focus. For example, 11 of the 17 articles were on the murder of the Australian pilot. Of the 11, 7 were on Crime (law and order) alone while the other four had more than one focus. Crime (Law & Order) was separated from conflict and made a category on its own because it in itself is a social phenomenon. Conflict was narrowed down to political conflict. The second highest number of articles was focused on PNG politics (13) and the third was AusAID (7).

The majority of the articles that had more than one focus contained either one or all of the following: Law & order, PNG politics, Australian politics and AusAID. Therefore, it was likely that if a story were on AusAID, it was also focused on crime (law & order), PNG politics and Australian politics. The stories were mainly on crime (law & order) and what the Australian government could and wanted to do to solve the problem and what the PNG government was up to at that moment.

**Table 7:** Focus of the articles

Main Focus	No. of articles	Sharing focus with:
PNG Politics	13	*, ***, ****
Australian Politics	5	*, **, ***
AusAID	7	*, **, ****
Humanitarian	1	
Crime (Law & Order)	17	***, ****, *****
Economics	3	
Australian History	5	
Cultural	0	
Environment	0	
Odd & Unusual	1	
Death of prominent persons	2	

**Key:** \* *Crime (law & order)* \*\**PNG politics* \*\*\**AusAID* \*\*\*\**Australian politics*

### *Type*

Only 7 (18 %) out of the 40 articles were features, while 33 (82 %) were breaking or hard news. There were no commentaries, editorials or any other types of articles. The stories indicated very little evidence of in-depth research.

### *News values*

The highest news value used was proximity, including travel and Australian history. It was apparent that the stories on the Kokoda trail were simply Australian history on PNG soil. The findings revealed that proximity in foreign news did not refer only to the country being closer to home but also issues that are closer to the heart. For example, news on proposed plans to celebrate ANZAC day in Indonesia and PNG were reported.

Timeliness and crime (law & order) are the next highest news values present in the selected articles. Politics and personality follow closely. The findings also show that proximity, timeliness and politics were the highest priority for *The Australian* newspaper. The *Courier Mail* was more focused on Law & Order and Politics in PNG. The *Sunday Mail*, the only weekly newspaper, on the other hand, focused on Australian history in PNG.

### *Source*

In analysing the content of the articles using the sources, two factors were looked at: the people the articles were about and the sources interviewed and quoted.

Considering the second factor, 16 articles (41 %) did not quote any sources, while 11 (28%) used only one source, 7 (18%) had two and 5 (13%) had three or more sources quoted. The majority of the sources quoted were the elite, made up of politicians from both PNG and Australia:

**Table 8:** Sources & context of the articles

Groups of people	Sources			Context
	PNG	Australia	Total	
Elite	9	3	12	PNG elites: politics, unstable government Australian elite: AusAID and law & order.
Common	2	7	9	for Australians: law & order and travel for PNG: the odd & unusual event
Police	4	0	4	Law and order
Business organizations	5	1	6	Profits and law & order
Newspapers	2	0	2	Law & order

The majority of the common people mentioned were Australians. The murdered Australian pilot was mentioned ten times while his relatives were mentioned 14 times. The second highest group was the elite. This group includes the leaders of Papua New Guinea and Australia. However, among the elite, the Papua New Guinean leaders were the most talked about.

**Table 9:** groups of people

Groups	Australia	PNG	Total
Elite	5	22	27
Personality	1	0	1
Common people	32	6	38

Bacon & Nash argue that the relationship between journalists and their sources is a fundamental one in the production of news (2003, p 21). This study confirmed that politicians and other official sources dominate media discourses in reporting.

## ii. Survey

### *Foreign Correspondents*

For the foreign correspondents who arrived as journalists after Independence, crime was a point that was stressed prior to their arrival. They arrived with the perception that PNG was not a safe place to work in due to the increased crime rates. Most of the foreign correspondents in PNG indicated that were not victims of crime whilst working in the country.

The male foreign correspondents were more likely to travel to locations considered 'dangerous' for news stories than their female colleagues as the response by a female correspondent shows below:

At first I was reluctant to even walk around on the street (Port Moresby). No, I haven't put my self in danger whilst working in PNG! By deliberate choice...however, overall my lack of extensive travel throughout PNG has meant that many potential stories that occur there simply escape my attention –and the magazine's (*Time*).

After having worked in PNG, they agreed that a journalist could not do proper reporting on PNG from the outside. They indicated that the PNG government should change the regulations for granting visas to foreign journalists and invite more foreign journalists. Foreign correspondents need to take more time to understand and cover thus Papua New Guinea properly.

The majority of the foreign correspondents were based in Port Moresby; however, they travelled to the locations of big stories. Most organisations were willing to pay for their correspondents to travel to locations of major disasters and happenings. The local media and journalists were the source of tips for the foreign correspondents. In covering news stories in PNG, the foreign correspondents said that regardless of the high costs of travel, they found it easy to travel to a site for news stories because there was always someone who could translate and most foreign correspondents knew Tok Pisin.

Although they were aware of the developed and developing world's news values, the foreign correspondents emphasised that no one really used development journalism around the world. Most media organisation they worked for have set ideas about what news stories they wanted, therefore the journalist had to deliver those stories. They explained that they had to keep in mind their audiences as well. Therefore, although stories about PNG were negative, so were stories about Iraq, Israel and Palestine.

#### *PNG Mainstream media*

PNG journalists and media managers indicated that occasionally they give stories and tips to foreign correspondents. They said that foreign correspondents were not to blame for the country's negative image overseas. The general feeling was that the negative coverage of PNG was reflecting a certain reality. Papua New Guinean journalists also reported negative issues as witnessed. However they explained that the problem starts when foreign journalists do not report the context of the event, leaving out important information on the causes.

The role of the PNG media was simply summed up in the following quote from the chairman of the PNG Media Council:

Is it the job of the PNG media to improve the country's image overseas, or is it our job to report and cover issues that will assist our government improve its ability to deliver service to our communities?

A member of the PNG Media Council argued that there might be a role for the Council:

We could do more in the sense that, e.g. the Media Council would like to invite more overseas reporters, writers and broadcasters (radio/TV) to come to the country to do research for stories, and write about our positives and also our negatives but access allowed by the government is almost impossible...

The journalists in the PNG mainstream media explained that although they combined both Western and developing news values, the Western news values dominate their work, focusing often on crime and political scandals. Media organisations in PNG did not have a standard set of news values that the journalists could follow.

#### *PNG Government media services*

Two respondents from the PNG government information services gave their comments on foreign correspondents and the Australian media coverage of PNG: they were the Deputy Secretary, at the time, of the Government Information Services, and the Acting Director, Media Dept. of Prime Minister and NEC. They argued that foreign journalists to PNG did not really understand the PNG cultural diversity and actually had next to no interaction with the ordinary citizens of PNG.

They explained that the PNG Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister's Media Unit liaised closely with those journalists seeking entry into the country and for any other purpose. There were certain international media organisations or journalists who have been 'blacklisted' because of misreporting in a previous instance. However, they said that the government welcomed visiting journalists to the country.

The government, they argued, has been making efforts to portray a better image of PNG overseas, firstly through the PNG Tourism Promotion Authority and the overseas consulates. They, however, explained that it was the role of every Papua New Guinean to work towards improving the national image. How that was to be achieved was not explained.

#### *Political Analysts*

The opinion of political analysts, Allan Patience, a former Professor of Political Science at UPNG, and David Anere, former PNG Diplomat and academic, was sought in order to better understand the complexities of the PNG/Australia relationship. They both agreed that PNG is heavily dependent on Australia resulting in a complex relationship that is poorly understood on both sides. They also agreed that Australia's interest in PNG is mainly for security issues and that could be a factor influencing news stories.

They believed that the Australian Press Coverage of PNG is almost non-existent, resulting in misinformation about PNG and its problems. They argued that the press coverage shows Australia's ignorance of PNG and Australia's self image as an important 'middle power' closely allied to the United States and Europe. They agreed that the context of how and why negative events occur is rarely reported. They, however, indicated that a contributing factor, for the negative press cover, might be the PNG government's visa regulations for foreign journalists which needs to be changed in the government seriously considers to change the image of the country.

#### **IV. Analysis & Discussion**

The findings support the *main hypothesis (H1)*, the Australian press coverage of PNG could be used as an example that western media's coverage of developing countries is mostly negative. Even articles on positive or neutral events contained negative PNG connotations - 'brink of collapse', 'trouble nation', 'strife-torn nation', 'lawlessness', 'dangerous' - and stereotypes such as 'potentially volatile tribal Papua New Guineans'. The journalists seemed to write stories about PNG based on colonial impressions, using exaggerated stereotypical portrayals of Papua New Guineans such as "tribal Papua New Guineans who had just evolved out of cannibalism".

One foreign correspondent stated his perception of PNG before his arrival as "knowing it was a very tribal place, colourful, adventurous but potentially violent as well". The stereotypes fit in with yet another of O'Shaughnessy's descriptions of the noble savage.

While this stereotype portrays non-Whites as morally superior to Whites, it is still limiting in that it locks non-Whites into a predetermined mould, denying them their own histories, glossing over the specificity of different non-White cultures, and portraying them as incapable of change (1999, pp 231-2).

O'Shaughnessy explains that in relation to ethnicity, white representations of non-white people have used a number of problematic stereotypes and that these stereotypes are found in many twentieth-century media representations, both fictional and factual (1999, p 228). He goes further to say that one example of this is the 'dangerous savage'. The majority of the surveyed foreign correspondents had heard about how dangerous PNG was through the media and other sources before they took their assignment. Even if their perceptions change after their arrival in the country, not all Australian citizens have the chance to do so. As they explained, they have constraints imposed by the newspapers or agencies to write stories based on their news values and priorities.

One could argue that PNG's image is an issue of negative representation. Representations, however realistic or plausible media images seem, they never simply present the world direct. They are always a construction, a representation, not a transparent window on to the real world (Branston & Stafford, 2003:90; O'Shaughnessy, 1999, pp 42-3; Taylor & Willis, 1999, p 39). According to Brevier, Graf & Wilnat (2003), people depend on the mass media for information about international affairs. Therefore, one might be able to conclude from the above that Australians are likely to picture PNG as described by their media.

The perception is that readers and viewers throughout the world are more attracted to horrors and extremes than to routine positive images, and Pacific countries have reason to complain about misrepresentation, distortion or over-emphasis (Crocombe, 2001, pp 279-280).

The majority of the articles focused on law & order, PNG politics and AusAID. According to Branston & Stafford (2003, p 90) the media give us ways of imagining particular situations, identities and groups. The overall impression from the stories is that there is a big issue with law & order and how unstable the PNG government was and linking to this the Australian government plans on how PNG's problems could be solved. An example of this would be the stories on the Enhancement Cooperation Program (ECP). As Cass (1992, p 88) argued in *The Australian's* coverage of Bougainville, the Australian newspapers seem to display a conviction that the former colony could not really look after itself.

Another article taken from *The Australian* (16 March 2004) on the murdered Australian pilot had his widow criticising the Howard government for failing to move more quickly to restore law & order in PNG:

"The (federal) police were supposed to have been there two months ago," she said from Cairns yesterday. "We put all this money over there and no one is safe. We can't even protect our own people".

This implies that it is the role of Australia to restore law & order in PNG since the PNG government seems unable to do so. The reader is given the impression that PNG government is non-functional which justifies Australia's caretaker role of PNG in the years before independence.

Political leaders often seem to be identified as the cause of problems and the images they are presented with:

... non-Whites are incapable of ruling fairly, and that, given power, they will tend towards deviant excess. Once again, this stereotype provides a justification for White rule, conceived of as necessary to restore fairness and equality (O'Shaughnessy, 1999, p 235).

This particular stereotypical image is portrayed in the use of connotations that describe the PNG government. For example, phrases such as “greedy ambitions” and “retain grip on power” were used in the headline and in an article about the Prime Minister of PNG, Michael Somare, sacking seven ministers. The choice of these words portrays an image of the Prime Minister as some sort of dictator; sacking ministers in order to retain his power.

Within this frame of analysis, it is worthy looking at the sources of the stories. Six articles (41%) did not quote any sources and 11 out of the 40 articles had only one source, indicating little research into the topic. The findings seem to be in agreement with Hurst (1988, p 5) who suggested that the Western media fail to live up to the standards of accuracy, fairness and objectivity that they claim should be the hallmarks of responsible journalism everywhere.

PNG elites who were quoted in the articles were used in the context of conflict or instability within the government. Similar is the use of PNG police in articles about law & order. There seems to be a trend that the PNG elites always appear in negative articles depicting unstable government and conflict.

The findings showed that the PNG daily newspapers, *The National* and *Post Courier*, were the main source of information for the foreign correspondents. The PNG media tend to be negative in their domestic reporting as Pamba (2005) and Dorney argued, and it is not surprising that foreign correspondents pick up this negative style in their own reporting. However, this does not justify their reporting, when they should be conducting their own research into the stories.

The findings suggest that the Australian press used news values that belonged to the developed world to cover Papua New Guinea: proximity, timeliness, personality, odd and unusual events and human interest. Crime (law & order) and politics were also present in the articles. These findings are in agreement with Keenan (2004) and Pamba (2005) who argue that the two values most prominent in Western media are ‘prominent people’ and ‘negativity’. Westestahl & Johansson (1994, p 84) found that the two news values of importance and proximity play a central role in news selection. Note that law & order, politics and personality were present in large numbers in the selected articles from the Australian press. This is a clear indication that the coverage of PNG by the Australian press is predominantly on politics, elites and crime (law & order). The news on politics was mainly about politicians fitting into the category of ‘prominent people’. On the other hand, politicians are discussed in the context of conflict therefore being negative.

As a foreign correspondent pointed out, “crisis and disasters get covered while good-news stories don’t.” This statement is in agreement with Keenan (2004) who argued that news with *Time Magazine, Australia* was coups, political turmoil, transnational crime and regional politics. Therefore, the daily Australian newspapers are no exception in that negative news will be covered more than positive news.

The findings also indicated that human interest stories related to citizens of their country abroad were a priority. Among the group of ordinary people mentioned in the articles, Australians were mentioned more than Papua New Guineans. This is also supported by a foreign correspondent who explained which stories he chose to cover whilst working in PNG.

Aussies being killed or getting into trouble were sure-fire stories. As a 'foreign' correspondent you have to keep in mind your 'home' audience. So, 'what is Australia going to be interested in?' is one question you keep asking yourself.

The features were about the Kokoda trail, which is a major part of Australian history. Very little was written about PNG and its contribution to the war. Another classic example is the stories on the murder of the Australian pilot. These stories were breaking news and practically made up the entire press coverage on PNG. This again brings up the question of whether there would have been any coverage of PNG had these events not occurred.

## **Conclusion**

The findings confirmed the argument that the Australian media is negative in its coverage of PNG. The Australian media also tends to focus more on human interest stories that are about their own citizens abroad and they use predominantly western news values to report on PNG, which result in crime and politics along with prominent people receiving more attention. The findings support the thesis that there was no diversity in the Australian press coverage of PNG.

Galtung & Ruge (1965, pp 69-70) argue that American concepts of the world may be inaccurate and incomplete due to the reporting only of violence, crisis and disaster. Similar can be said of the Australian perception of PNG. As one PNG journalist and columnist put it, although the negative reporting of Papua New Guinea might reflect reality, the full context of the issues is not reported. With a few notable exceptions such as Sean Dorney and Mary Mary-Louise O'Callaghan, foreign journalists, as Pacific islands governments have argued, are often uninformed about the pacific region, culturally insensitive, overbearing and show little respect for the traditions or customs of the Pacific nations (Solomon, 1992, p124).

Patience predicts that as long as ordinary Australians continue to hold prejudiced ideas about PNG, their governments will continue to pursue inappropriate strategies for dealing with this country and with the wider South Pacific region (2005, p11).

PNG could use media specialists to enhance its image overseas, especially in Australia. Manheim & Albritton argued that in the absence of direct personal contact, individuals' images of the actors and events on the international scene will be unavoidably heavily media dependent (1984, p 643). Their study showed that countries that had negative images in the American press had their images improved after they were associated with a professional public relations effort (p641). However, the question is how much PNG as a developing country can afford to be engaged in a public relations image campaign abroad when its priorities lie elsewhere.

Ben Bohane, a freelance photographer and journalist, argues PNG and other Pacific Island countries could improve their public image by creating a regional media organisation that could challenge the way the region is reported from a Pacific perspective.

Clearly there is a gap in knowledge regarding how Australian media represent PNG to their domestic audiences and readers. There is a need for further research in this topic. It would also be useful to do an Australian readers survey to see how much impact the Australian press has on its readership in regards to general perceptions of PNG.

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### **Interviews/electronic survey**

Aitsi, Peter - Managing Director of PNGFM and Manager of PNG Media Council

Anere, David - former diplomat and academic

Boden, Ian - former ABC and BBC correspondent, former editor of the National, columnist

Bohane, Ben - freelance photographer/photojournalist in the south pacific region

Dorney, Sean - former ABC foreign correspondent to PNG

Keenan, Liz - writer with Time, Australia

Kili, Justin - former general manager of the Wantok

Gomez, Brian - former executive editor of the National newspaper

Palmer, Lucy - former AAP correspondent

Pamba, Kevin - journalist and columnist of the National newspaper

Patience, Allan - former Head of Political Science at the University of Papua New Guinea

The Deputy Secretary of the Government Information Services

The Acting Director for Media from the Dept of Prime Ministers and NEC