

Editor's Notes: Dangerous Journalism – Who's at risk?

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“Dangerous Journalism”

An edition to honour the 40th Year Anniversary conference of the Journalism Education and Research Association of Australia (JERAA), “Dangerous Journalism”, held at Charles Sturt University, Bathurst, NSW.

Dangerous Journalism – who is at risk?

When Australian and New Zealand journalism educators and scholars met for their annual conference in Bathurst, NSW, Australia, at the end of 2015, the experience in Cairo of recently freed Australian Al Jazeera journalist, Peter Greste, and his Egyptian work colleagues was top of mind. Greste had been released just months earlier after more than four hundred days behind bars; Al Jazeera Cairo bureau chief, Mohamed Fahmy, and producer, Baher Mohamed, had been incarcerated for even longer when freed a few weeks after him.

Fahmy, Greste and Mohamed were arrested in their Cairo Marriott hotel room in December 2013; Egypt's Interior Ministry said in a statement that they had used rooms in the Marriott to meet with members of the banned Muslim Brotherhood and had “broadcast news that harms national security as well as spread false information for Al Jazeera, without the approval of relevant authorities.” (Mada Masr, 2013) Amid eleven mis-trials, suspended proceedings, appeals and re-trials they were convicted of aiding a “terrorist organisation”; Greste and Fahmy were sentenced to seven years jail, Mohamed to a ten year prison term. Even after their releases they faced a retrial process that ended with sentences of at least three years each. Mohamed and Fahmy were eventually pardoned in September 2015 (Viney, 2015). The Egyptian government told Australian Foreign Affairs minister Julie Bishop a few days later that Peter Greste would be pardoned at a later date (O'Malley, 2015).

The cases of the three Al Jazeera journalists highlight what can happen to foreign and local correspondents reporting events in nations where government and judicial arms have powers to prevent their work. What better example to illustrate the Journalism Education and Research Association of Australia's (JERAA) conference theme of “Dangerous Journalism”: three journalists imprisoned, accused of breaking national security laws and then subjected to flawed judicial processes just for, as their employer Al Jazeera (Gearin, 2014) and numerous journalists (e.g. Kidd, 2014; McNeil, 2014) have said, doing their jobs.

It was apt then that the first keynote speaker for the JERAA conference was another Australian journalist working in the Middle East, Guardian correspondent Martin Chulov. His presentation brought home the dangers faced by journalists working in regions of

upheaval – where talking to any of the “sides” involved in national strife can bring violent retribution upon yourself as journalist or on the people you interview (Chulow, 2015).

The theme of Dangerous Journalism however can be – and was at JERAA 2015 – interpreted in multiple ways. There are of course – as with the Al Jazeera Three – the dangers faced by journalists who perform work that exposes the activities of autocratic governments, organisations, crime figures, guerrilla organisations or militia – all of whom might not hesitate to stop journalists’ work via violent or unjust methods. The New York Times reported in 2016 that 1,195 journalists were known to have been killed because of their work since 1992 and, where those were identified as murders, only 13 percent resulted in prosecution (Singhi, 2016).

There are also cases in liberal democratic countries – where journalistic independence is generally respected – of legal, economic or editorial pressure being brought to bear on journalists reporting unwelcome truths. Peter Manning, Executive Producer of Four Corners when Chris Masters’ Moonlight State program was aired (precipitating the Fitzgerald Inquiry and subsequent downfall of the Joh Bjelke Petersen government in Queensland) says, for almost a decade after his Moonlight story, Masters was prevented from working at his full capacity as a journalist because of the time he had to spend defending himself against criticism and litigation arising out of his Moonlight State program’s revelations. (Manning, 2011)

But not all aspects of dangerous journalism are about dangers to journalists themselves. Firstly there is the profession: themes arising out of the JERAA 2015 conference included changes to the nature of journalism arising out of brand names funding its production and the ongoing impact of digitisation on the market models which traditionally paid for journalists’ work. At the time of this *fusion* edition’s publication in May 2017 Fairfax Media journalists had just been on strike for more than a week protesting another savage round of job cuts and federal cross party pressure had forced the establishment of a Senate Inquiry into the Future of Journalism.

Other papers focused on the risks associated with how mental illness and suicide are reported – including when those who have suicided are high profile people. Other research discussed reporting of Islam and Muslim people – including sessions on good reporting practice. There was research on victim blaming in reporting, bias in crime reporting and conflicted relationships when a murder is reported in a country town. Another topic: how high profile people are harmed by social media and the access that their public have consequently to publishing about them. Even traffic safety was well represented in papers on how cycling safety is reported and another on how women drivers are treated by journalism. Then there were papers on issues of free speech and the impact of media laws including defamation and copyright. And still, the dangers of being a foreign journalist in “non-Eurocentric” or other countries where cultures are different to your own was a theme well represented among the presentations.

Fittingly, this edition of *fusion* – containing papers delivered by journalism and other scholars at the Bathurst JERAA conference – also spans divergent ways in which journalism is dangerous. Dr Kasun Ubayasiri’s Journalism in the cross hairs: The Islamic

State's exploitation of western media practice gives insight into the objectives of terrorism – to break down government institutions and social order by terrorising populations – and the key role that media play in spreading that terror. But journalism is not dangerous in this arena only because ISIS terrorists use it for their purposes; as Dr Ubayasiri shows, terror is wielded against journalists themselves. In the cases of recent beheadings of journalists by ISIS – filmed and disseminated through various media and social media channels – western journalism is both a weapon and a target of terror. Journalists from non-Islamic, so-called “western” countries, are viewed as an important strategic enemy of ISIS: because journalists, ISIS, says – no matter how neutral their reportage within democratic boundaries that allow a free press – are representatives and soldiers of capitalist liberal – and therefore colonialist – societies. This makes them an acknowledged enemy of Islamic State and their publicised beheadings another event of terror to be shared widely with “western” audiences.

Another very different danger in journalism is raised by Professor Stephen Tanner's poignant reflection, *The ethical dilemmas of writing about family following a traumatic incident*. Here we see the danger journalists writing the personal pose for those close to them. In a clear, honest and compelling voice Professor Tanner ponders the issues that arose as he wrote a book about his wife Kath's serious injuries in a road accident, her slow recovery and the impact on their children. He asks how family – particularly one's children – are affected when a journalist tells a story of personal experience. And what rights, ethically, does a writer have to tell that story he has such close access to. Professor Tanner lays out the journey his family had to travel and the role his book writing had within it – with a reflexive inquiry drawing on literature, ethical codes and the very specific circumstances of the trauma he and his family experienced. We await with great interest the release of the full length book at the heart of the dilemma he has shared with us here.

Trauma is also central to Jasmine MacDonald's PhD research. Her focus is the impact on journalists exposed to traumatic incidents as part of their job. *Trauma Exposure in Journalists: A systematic literature review* has been constructed using methods of the psychology discipline for psychology doctoral research. Ms MacDonald's paper gathers together and synthesises quantitative and qualitative interview data (using a range of questionnaires) from published research across psychology, journalism and other disciplines. It is a rich resource for any researcher wanting a thorough overview of what has already been discovered about the impact on journalists of being exposed – for some, on a regular basis – to traumas such as road accidents, violent crime and other tragedies. Especially useful is the quantitative data showing us how many journalists in locations around the world report being exposed to events they find traumatic. As Ms MacDonald points out, there are so many divergent questions and data gathering methods that have been used around this issue across the literature available, it is difficult to make generalisations whilst still applying the analytical rigour required of her discipline. As a journalist looking for an angle in my readings of the varied data arranged for us here, it seems a majority of journalists at some point in their careers are exposed to potentially traumatic events and there is still little attention paid to this hazard by their employers.

The theme of dangerousness is construed far more positively in the *The Change Makers Project: A service learning approach to journalism education in Australia*. Dr Scott Downman challenges journalism educators to look beyond work integrated learning models when providing students with real world experience. He sets out a service learning model where students are engaged in projects that involve journalism but are also designed to benefit in other ways the communities where the journalism students work. The “Change Makers” project examined in this paper involved journalism students at the University of Queensland working with secondary students at an ethnically diverse high school to produce a magazine for a local youth audience. This case study is used to distinguish between service learning and other practice based approaches, based on definitions provided in existing scholarly literature: in particular by identifying that the students’ professional work meets a recognised community need and the students have opportunities to reflect on this work. This is especially so where they are placed within diverse communities and are thus compelled then to see their own cultural and economic positions. The danger highlighted here is perhaps to the *modus status quo* of practice-based teaching for professions.

It is appropriate, in representing the JERAA 2015 Dangerous Journalism conference in this fusion edition, to acknowledge research presented or discussed during proceedings and accepted for publication elsewhere. Papers now already published, in press or having passed successfully through a peer review process for publication include: *Travel Writing in a Dangerous World* (Stubbs, in press), *The disclosure disconnect: ideals of transparency and editorial reality* (Fisher, 2016); *Interrogating power and disrupting the discourse about Onslow and the gas hubs* (Davies, 2016); *Defamatory meanings and the hazards of relying on the ‘ordinary, reasonable person’ fiction* (Fernandez, pending); *Once a Journalist, Always a Journalist? Industry restructure, job loss and professional identity* (Sherwood & O’Donnell, 2016); *Distant, disconnected and in danger: Are educators doing enough to prepare students for frontline freelance?* (Wake, 2016); *Dangerous liaisons: undercover journalism, standpoint theory and social revelation* (Avieson & McDonald, 2016); and *The effects of job loss on regional and rural journalism in Australia* (Zion et al, 2016). Another publication outcome was an entire issue of *Australian Journalism Review* (Vol. 38, No. 2 – December 2016) arising out of a panel session led by Kristy Hess and Lisa Waller on ‘Local government and the Media’. They edited the special edition which included their own and other papers based on conference presentations at JERAA (Hess & Waller, 2016; Simmons & Erskine, 2016).

To finalise these notes to the fusion edition commemorating JERAA’s Dangerous Journalism conference I would like to acknowledge the excellent, insightful work that my colleague, Dr Margaret Van Heekeren, now at University of Sydney, undertook to create that memorable gathering – with help from award winning journalism and humanities teacher and scholar, Isabel Fox. Thank you to both of you for making that conference such a success and for developing this fusion edition in its early inception – including selecting the papers and liaising with authors. And a very special thank you to the editorial coordinator of *fusion*, Michelle O’Connor, who has been behind every edition of this

journal since it was launched. Without your assistance, constancy and regular communication with the editors and authors this special edition would not have been possible. Many, Many thanks to you, to Margaret and to Isabel,

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To cite this editorial

Nankervis, Kay. “Editor’s Notes: Dangerous Journalism – Who’s At Risk?” *Fusion Journal*, no. 11, 2017. <http://www.fusion-journal.com/issue/011-dangerous-journalism/editors-notes-dangerous-journalism-whos-at-risk/>