

Chapter 11

Can the centre hold? Prospects for mobilising media activism around public service broadcasting using peace journalism

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*Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.*

William Butler Yeats, 'The second coming', 1920.

Peace journalism has developed as a fund of initiatives for editors and reporters, and latterly, evaluative criteria for content analysis by researchers. It has also been a source of impetus for change in media representations of conflict, from civil society. Hackett and Carroll (2006) consider the prospects for 'media activism' to 'democratise public communication'. In this chapter, I examine attempts to mobilise such activism around the coverage, by a public service broadcaster, of the Israel–Palestine conflict. This occurred in a context in which significant political agency was being applied at different levels and with conflicting effects on public policy towards the issue. In the process, I assess the 'credentials' of calls for peace journalism in public service broadcasting as a rallying point for building and sustaining effective alliances in social movements.

Expanding peace journalism

In early 2010, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) agreed to purchase and transmit an independently produced documentary, *Hope in a slingshot*, by an emerging filmmaker, Inka Stafrace, which focuses on nonviolent resistance, by Palestinians, Israelis and internationals, to Israel's illegal military occupation of Palestinian territory. In this, and other respects, the film is a notable example of peace journalism.

Then, in a highly unusual twist, the distributor Ronin Films, received a letter from the ABC's Head of Television, Kim Dalton, informing them of his personal decision to intervene, rescinding the earlier offer to buy the film and announcing that the ABC would not now be screening it. *Hope in a slingshot* was, the letter declared, 'an opinion program' about a 'contentious' subject (Pike 2010). Under Clause 6.6.3 of its editorial policy the ABC would have to find another program that balanced the views expressed in the film and, as it had been unable to do so, *Hope in a slingshot* would have to be dropped from the schedule outright.

Two days after Dalton's intervention became public, Israeli commandoes raided and seized the MV *Mavi Marmara*, a vessel sailing through international waters carrying aid materials for Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, aimed at breaking a blockade on the territory imposed by the Israeli government.

In spite of Israel's vaunted 'withdrawal' from the Strip – dismantling settlements there, along with its army bases, in 2005 – it remains the de facto occupying power, since it retains control over Gazan air space, land borders and territorial waters (Amnesty et al. 2010, p9). The blockade was imposed as a further intensification of economic sanctions after the victory by Hamas in the Palestinian legislative elections of 2006, and continued through and beyond 'Operation Cast Lead', Israel's attack on Gaza in 2008–09.

The International Committee of the Red Cross reported that its effect was to prolong the suffering caused by the attack (ICRC 2009). Thousands of people whose homes Israel destroyed were still without shelter months later, the ICRC said, despite pledges of almost US\$4.5 billion in aid, because Israel refused to allow cement and other building material into the Strip. The report also noted that hospitals were

struggling to meet the needs of their patients due to Israel's disruption of medical supplies.

Gazans were 'trapped in despair', the report concluded, by these measures; measures which both the ICRC itself, and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, have pronounced illegal (Gray-Block 2010) as they are in contravention of Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, prohibiting collective punishments.

The *Mavi Marmara* set sail from Turkey at the head of a convoy of relief ships, carrying 10 000 tonnes of humanitarian aid including food, wheelchairs, books, toys, electricity generators, medicines, and building materials such as plaster and cement. News of Israel's attack on the vessel, in which nine activists were killed and several dozen injured, was greeted with fury around the world: a response channelled in street protests and demonstrations, including one in Sydney held at the traditional venue of the Town Hall steps and convened by a local civil society group, the Coalition for Justice and Peace in Palestine (CJPP).

Among the speakers was Sheik Taj el-Din al Hilaly from Lakemba Mosque in the city's southwest: a stronghold of Sydney's Lebanese Muslim community. Hilaly served for nearly 20 years as Mufti of Australia, a position to which he was appointed by the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils. During this time, he was criticised on numerous occasions, notably for public comments appearing to blame the incidence of rape on women's dress habits (AAP 2006). Hilaly was asked to step down from an official Muslim Community Reference Group after he called the Holocaust 'a ploy made by the Zionists' (in Kerbaj 2006).

Having retired from the role of Mufti in 2007, the slippage of Hilaly's once secure grasp on the allegiances of his followers appeared to be confirmed when, in March 2009, he was caught on CCTV cameras vandalising his own mosque; an incident he himself then reported to police, and attempted to blame on local youths. But there was little sign of this at the Town Hall demonstration, where his arrival at centre stage was greeted with loud approval. Hilaly spoke with passionate intensity. Holding up a large Turkish flag, he told the 4000-strong crowd that 'Turkey is coming' (in Munro 2010), before leading a rhythmic chant of 'Down, down Israel' (personal eyewitness experience).

'Flak' and 'legitimate controversy'

The unease this turn of events occasioned among some supporters of the protest is connected, in some important respects, with the ABC's decision not to screen *Hope in a slingshot*. The context for Kim Dalton's intervention can be conceptualised using the 'propaganda model' of media proposed by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky. News should be seen, they say, as 'inculcating and defending the economic, social and political agenda of privileged groups that dominate the domestic society and the state' (Herman & Chomsky 2002, p298). One way in which this agenda is enforced is by hurling 'flak' in the direction of news organisations when they deviate from it. It works by 'conditioning the media to expect trouble' whenever they take on powerful interests (Herman & Chomsky 2002, p27).

Groups representing Australia's self-defined 'mainstream Jewish community' have been a source of flak in media, political and academic domains alike. Responding to a complaint, Australia's other public broadcaster, the minority-remit SBS, issued a directive to its journalists in 2009 not to use the term 'Palestinian land' since the territory in question was – according to a leaked internal memo – 'disputed' (Lynch 2009a). And modest changes to Australia's diplomatic stance – on questions such as referring the Goldstone Report on the Gaza attack for consideration by the UN Security Council – were followed by a deputation to then prime minister Kevin Rudd, at which threats were made to transfer the money and support of Jewish organisations to the opposition Liberal Party instead (Hartcher 2010).

Attempts were underway through this period to define and enforce, in the context of debate over Israel and Palestine, what Daniel Hallin called the 'zone of legitimate controversy [which] marks out and defends the limits of acceptable conflict [by] exposing, condemning, or excluding from the public agenda those who violate or challenge the political consensus' (Hallin 1989, p117). Notable among these attempts were interventions from a group of academics, led by Philip Mendes, a social work lecturer from Monash University in Melbourne, criticising what they called a 'fanatical form of pro-Palestinian orthodoxy' on Australian campuses (Mendes 2008). Mendes and his colleagues accused advocates

of a cultural and academic boycott of Israel of 'essentialising' all Israeli Jews as being 'racist oppressors of the Palestinians' (Mendes 2008), and took to the columns of *The Australian* newspaper to accuse boycott advocates of belonging to the 'loony Left' (Mendes & Dyrenfurth 2009).

At stake, arguably, is whether the conflict can be represented in public debate, with recourse to frames derived from international law and human rights (as I have done here), without being 'pro-Palestinian' and anti-Israeli. Flak is a factor in academic circles too, with the present author having been obliged several times to defend interventions in public debate in the face of complaints from supporters in Australia, of the Israeli and Sri Lankan governments respectively. On the occasion of the *Mavi Marmara* rally, complaints centred on an email circular originally from the CJPP, forwarded to students and members of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPACS) at the University of Sydney, publicising the event and urging them to 'bring Palestinian flags and banners'.

A subsequent meeting of CPACS' governing council heard objections that this amounted to a 'partisan' stance, 'supporting one side of the conflict over the other', in contravention of academic obligations to remain 'neutral'. Responses from council members emphasised that nothing in the centre's mission – formulated as 'Peace with Justice' – mandates neutrality over issues of human rights and international law, or in the face of 'massive inequality and injustice'. Palestinian flags could, in this context, be seen as 'an expression of solidarity with an oppressed people' rather than an indication of taking one side of a conflict against another.

It is in this spirit of solidarity that *Hope in a slingshot* is conceived and constructed. One reviewer called it 'an important document of Israel's brutal occupation of Palestine [in which] crimes committed with the full backing of the Western powers ... [lets audiences] view up-close the reality of life for millions of Palestinians' (Loewenstein 2010). It could therefore, be seen as rectifying an existing imbalance. Philo and Berry (2004) found that broadcast news in the UK persistently failed to offer any explanation of Israel's military occupation, how it came about, what international law says about it or its consequences for Palestinians.

Through hundreds of interviews and focus groups, they found lacunae, in understanding among the general public, to match these omissions. The British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) reporting changed significantly after the corporation's Board of Governors held their own inquiry into the issue, with Philo among the witnesses called, but no such exercise has taken place in Australia, where the coverage offered by television news generally displays the same pattern.

For all that, the ABC proved insistent that *Hope in a slingshot* not be shown, even when Ronin Films suggested two other documentaries as candidates for a 'balancing' slot in the same series. When members of the Senate in Canberra demanded an explanation of the corporation's stance, from Managing Director Mark Scott, he replied: 'I think finally the television division came to the view that it was not to the standard that they would want to acquire' (Senate Estimates 2010). No explanation was forthcoming of how this squared with the original decision to purchase the film.

The shifting political context

Three months after the attack on the *Mavi Marmara*, the ABC did broadcast a bought-in film, in its *Foreign Correspondent* strand, from the BBC Panorama team, titled *Collision course*, in which reporter Jane Corbin pieced together an account of the incident, using what were described as newly acquired pictures of events on board. Weeks earlier, the BBC had itself broadcast this program, under the title *Death in the Med*, to a hail of complaints, mostly concerning the unchallenged reporting of unsupported Israeli military claims that live rounds were fired at their commandoes, and that passengers were carrying out a 'premeditated attack' when – as complainants pointed out – the premeditated attack was the one launched *by* the commandoes *on* the vessel, not the other way round (Lightbown 2010). Among those to take up the cudgels, with fresh complaints over the film after its showing on the ABC, were the groups involved in organising the Town Hall rally: Australians for Palestine and the Coalition for Justice and Peace in Palestine.

Corbin's account of the political context for the events depicted, given in the introductory section of her film, reproduced similar patterns

of omission to those identified as dominant, in UK television news, by Philo and Berry: ' Hamas, which rules here, refuses to recognise Israel's right to exist', she averred. ' Militants have fired thousands of rockets at civilian targets in Israel in the past few years ... The Turkish Government and many Turkish charities support Hamas' (Corbin 2010).

Among the missing elements in Corbin's film and comments are as follows:

1. Israel refuses to abide by the obligation to live within its legally recognised borders – with connivance by the US and allies – so there can be no certainty of what 'Israel' Hamas might be expected to 'accept'.
2. There is abundant evidence of preparedness by Hamas leaders over recent years to call off their armed struggle if Israel would fully end its illegal military occupation of 1967 and live within its legally recognised borders (in Pilger 2007).
3. There is a colossal disparity between the trickle of casualties resulting from Hamas rocket fire into Israel, and the death toll of 1300 – 400 of them children – in 'Operation Cast Lead', as well as the ongoing damage to life and property from Israeli air raids.

Should public service broadcasters be expected to behave differently? Not, certainly, according to the propaganda model, if the function of corporate media should be seen as inculcating and defending the political agenda of privileged groups that dominate the domestic society and the state. At the time of the events recalled here, however, that agenda was undergoing slight but significant modification.

Under the leadership of Kevin Rudd, Australia declared its aim to win a seat on the UN Security Council. Early in 2010, Ambassador Hesham Youssef, *chef de cabinet* to the Secretary General of the Arab League, visited Canberra to talk to politicians and officials, before making a series of other visits, including one to the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Sydney. He had informed everyone he met, he said at this meeting, that Australia could only look to Arab countries to support its UN bid, if it took steps to differentiate its position on Israel and Palestine from that of the US (personal communication).

This was shortly after the assassination in Dubai, of Mahmoud al-Mabhouh, a Hamas military commander, by suspected Mossad agents using fake travel documents from other countries, including several counterfeit Australian passports. The countries involved took one of two 'lines' in response. The 'softer' line was to call in the local Israeli ambassador for a 'dressing-down'; the 'harder' line was to order the expulsion of an Israeli diplomat. The Rudd government adopted the latter course – a development that prompted Jewish organisations to demand their meeting with Rudd, referenced earlier.

Just a couple of months later still, Rudd had gone, his ousting coordinated by a group of backbench powerbrokers in the ruling Labor Party, prominent among them being Mark Arbib, a Senator from New South Wales subsequently unmasked, by Wikileaks, as a longstanding US intelligence asset who had briefed his contacts at the American embassy on Rudd's travails and the leadership credentials of his deputy, Julia Gillard (Dorling 2010).

Gillard was the beneficiary of Rudd's fall, taking over unopposed, as Labor leader and Prime Minister in July 2010. Some 18 months earlier, at the time of the attack on Gaza, she had been standing in for Rudd. She characterised the onslaught as no more than Israel exercising its 'right to defend itself' against Hamas. Weeks later, she was welcomed to Tel Aviv at the head of a high-level political and business deputation, being greeted, according to reports, with fulsome thanks for having been 'alone in sticking by us'. In speeches and interviews Gillard gave during the trip, the word 'Gaza' did not once pass her lips. Hamas, she told questioners, would first have to 'renounce violence' if it wanted to qualify as a partner in any peace process sponsored by the 'quartet' of the UN, EU, US and Russia (no similar stipulation was made in respect of Israeli violence) (all in Lynch 2009b).

If a prime minister who was sending out signals of growing diplomatic distance from Israel, and thereby its sponsor in Washington – perhaps in pursuit of potential Arab support in Australia's bid for a UN Security Council seat – was ousted by a plot in which a secret US 'information source' was prominently involved, following explicit threats from pro-Israeli groups; and if the result was the installation of

a more unambiguously pro-Israel head of government, then the Corbin explanation of the political context for the *Mavi Marmara* attack – along with the censorship of *Hope in a slingshot* and the directive to SBS journalists – could, indeed, be seen as inculcating and defending the agenda of powerful interests.

Peace journalism and public service broadcasting

The propaganda model has been criticised, however, for attaching too little importance to plurality and variegation within media representations of key issues in public debate, and the scope for journalistic agency (Hackett 2006). A range of scholarship has emphasised these aspects: Hallin (1989) traced the migration of anti-war perspectives from the ‘zone of deviance’ to that of ‘legitimate controversy’; Shoemaker and Reese (1996) set out a ‘hierarchy of influences’ on the work of the journalist; and Bourdieu (1999) saw journalism as a relatively autonomous ‘field’, albeit one that is in a ‘structurally homologous’ relationship with other fields within the same system.

Freedman calls the propaganda model ‘a powerful reminder that the mainstream media are a crucial tool for legitimising the ideas of the most powerful social actors and for securing consent for their actions’ (2009, p59), but prefers to focus on ‘the exceptions, when the “default” position [of support for elite agendas] breaks down, precisely because, as someone who is committed to the transformation and democratisation of the existing media, they provide such important lessons’ (Freedman 2009, p62).

Peace journalism is both a reform program for editors and reporters, and a fund of evaluative criteria for content analysis. It is value-explicit, aimed at ‘creating opportunities for society at large to consider and value nonviolent responses’ to conflict. It is, as Robert A Hackett declares in this volume, a ‘challenger paradigm’ to the hegemonic ‘objectivity regime’ of minority-world, Anglophone news, and one that should be seen as ‘adjacent’ to the media democratisation paradigm prompted by the movement, initiated through UNESCO, for a New World Information and Communication Order.

Peace journalism advocates have often looked to public service broadcasting as a promising field of media activism for transformation. ‘Structural pluralism’ in media, Tehranian suggests, ‘may be considered a *sine qua non* of content pluralism’ (2002, p79), to which Lynch and McGoldrick respond by calling for ‘efforts to make the structural pluralism we already have work properly’ (2005, p230), going on to reference several public service agreements governing the content of broadcast news in different countries.

A crucial provision of the agreement to which ABC journalists are supposed to adhere is enshrined in clause 6.6.3 of its ‘Editorial policy’, adduced in Kim Dalton’s letter: ‘The ABC is committed to impartiality and must demonstrate this in its opinion content through the presentation of a diversity of perspectives.’ It echoes the previous chapter, which makes similar provisions for ‘News and Current Affairs content’, at clause 5.2.2:

d) Be impartial. Editorial judgments are based on news values, not for example on political, commercial or sectional interests or personal views. Do not unduly favour one perspective over others.

(e) Be balanced. Balance will be sought but may not always be achieved within a single program or publication; it will be achieved as soon as reasonably practicable and in an appropriate manner. It is not essential to give all sides equal time. As far as possible, present principal relevant views on matters of importance.

The overarching aim of both ABC news and opinion programming is to ‘contribute to the diversity of content in the media’ and position the ABC as ‘a pace-setter in community discussion.’ When these strictures were put to the test, however, in a complaint to the ABC about its coverage of the Australian government’s Defence White Paper, in 2009, they were ‘trumped’ by a separate document, defining ‘news values’ as relied upon in the clause quoted above, drawn up by ABC news managers the previous year. These included:

- Prominence: status, power of the information source, or of the individuals or institutions involved in the event

- Personification: involvement of famous people even when what happens to them is commonplace.

The response to the complaint, by the ABC's Complaints Review Executive (CRE), made it clear that this definition of 'news values' was being used to exempt the corporation from reporting – in this case – the perspective that Australia should be reducing its defence expenditure, rather than increasing it (by an annual three percent above inflation) as provided for in the white paper. The CRE declared:

In my view the nub of this issue is differing views on what is newsworthy and a matter of importance. From my reading of the correspondence from the listener he is arguing that the issue of whether Australia should spend as much on defence is the matter of importance, and that a wider range of views should be heard on that matter. ABC News argues that the specific release in May of the White Paper on Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific was the newsworthy topic ... The ABC has advised that an appropriate range of principal relevant views on those matters of importance has been presented in radio current affairs programs.

In practice, therefore, the source for a newsworthy development would have to be of a power or prominence equal to that of the government itself, to be entitled to expect their views on the subject to be reported. It is, in effect, a rare public affirmation of conventions deduced from outside by researchers: the habit of 'indexing' the bounds of legitimate controversy to the extent of elite discord (Bennett 1990), often defined by disagreements, in a representative democracy, between the governing party and the principal opposition. On this topic, disagreement is slight, at best: among the evidence adduced in the ABC's original response to the complaint, to show they had presented 'an appropriate range of principal relevant views', was an interview with Brendan Nelson, who had left office months earlier as defence minister in the previous Coalition-led government. The white paper 'basically restates commitments that had already been made by the previous government in the 2007 strategic update', he said (in Lynch 2009c).

So it is also, generally, with Australia's attitude towards the Israel–Palestine conflict. Rudd's brief (and slight) detour aside, Canberra has generally marched in lockstep with Washington, whichever of the two main parties has held office. Under Gillard, on 30 November 2010, Australia joined just six other countries – the US and Israel, and the handful of tiny states whose votes have essentially been bought, namely Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau – in opposing a motion at the UN General Assembly which:

reaffirmed the illegality of Israeli actions intended to change the status of Jerusalem ... Reaffirming its commitment to the two-State solution of Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security within recognised borders, the Assembly also stressed the need for Israel to withdraw from Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem. (UNGA 2010)

An 'elite orientation' is a characteristic of 'war journalism', in the original table put forward by Johan Galtung (1998), since it predicates a bias towards 'official sources: a category topped by the leaders of national states' (McGoldrick 2006). For obvious reasons, political leaders seldom, if ever, *originate* moves to peace. Their position demands that they be seen to respond to an established public mood, or risk being isolated and undermined; famous leadership initiatives have usually followed a groundswell from beneath. The first moves towards peace therefore take place 'below the radar' of journalistic convention, so they are, in effect, being suppressed. Then, states are defined, in terms originally supplied by Max Weber, as political organisations that successfully claim a monopoly on the legitimate use of force in a given territory. Leaders of states therefore have access to a 'lever' that is denied to anyone else. So, if those leaders are also the most important sources for news, there is, ipso facto, bound to be a general, inbuilt bias towards force as a response to conflict.

This general proposition is borne out by the behaviour of the ABC over a range of issues where the effect has been the legitimisation of violence – the attacks on Gaza and the *Mavi Marmara*, and the threat of violence inscribed in the Defence White Paper – sanctioned by official

sources, and the suppression of news about non-elite peace initiatives such as the campaign of nonviolent resistance to Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory, showcased in *Hope in a slingshot*. There is reason to regard this prevalence of war journalism as breaching the compact set out in the 'Editorial policy', the guidelines for journalists that are supposed to safeguard a wider conception of public interest. For instances where this interest may prove politically inconvenient, however, the definition of 'news values' is used to trump the apparent obligations under the policy for heterodox views and perspectives to be reported.

Prospects for media activism

This syndrome has become a focus of concern at the level of civil society, including from the ginger group, Friends of the ABC (FABC), which drew impetus from attempts to defend the corporation against editorial interference by the Coalition-led government of Prime Minister John Howard (1996–2007). When Ronin Films first drew attention to the intervention of Kim Dalton to reverse the ABC's initial decision to purchase *Hope in a slingshot*, FABC spokesperson Glenys Stradijot, quoted in *The Sydney Morning Herald*:

said the decision took the commitment to bias avoidance to an absurd extreme. [Stradijot] said it was important for the ABC to stand up to the pressure on contentious issues such as the Middle East. 'If the ABC's bowing to that sort of pressure, that's not a good thing for an independent broadcaster.' (Sharp 2010)

Here, then, was an apparent opportunity to ally with an established civil society organisation to press the case for peace journalism, as a way to make the structural pluralism notionally provided for in the Australian mediascape work as it was apparently intended. The struggle being waged by Ronin Films, to get the original decision to buy and transmit the film reinstated – including an energetic program of public meetings featuring presentations by Inka Stafrace herself – was taking place in a political context in which a rare degree of agency was being exerted against the legitimisation of the use of force by the Israeli military – contrary to the usual response by Australian elites and against

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the wishes of ‘mainstream Jewish’ organisations and, perhaps, the US embassy in Canberra.

So it was that a decision was made to add visibility to this campaign, by staging a demonstration outside ABC headquarters in Sydney, as part of the biennial global conference of the International Peace Research Association (IPRA). Papers presented at the conference to the IPRA Peace Journalism Commission form the basis for the present volume, and commission members joined local activists in what was billed as ‘the world’s first ever demonstration for peace journalism’ (Lynch 2010).

The publicity leaflet for the event stated:

Hope in a slingshot shows the realities of Israel’s illegal military occupation of Palestinian territory ... The ABC must acknowledge the biases inherent in news, especially about the Israel–Palestine conflict, and use other parts of its programming to rectify them.

It went on to state that if the corporation were to deliver successfully on its public service obligations:

Audiences must have opportunities to see and hear the facts about Israel’s occupation of Palestinian territory, its illegality and its consequences.

This appeal, however, proved impossible to join for Friends of the ABC, which turned down repeated invitations to add its name to the protest and confined itself, instead, to a less specific statement:

There have been regular news and current affairs reports and a number of programs on the ABC (both television and radio) presenting varied Israeli and Palestinian perspectives ... Possibly the ABC’s decision on *Hope in a slingshot* is influenced by fear of a backlash (real or perceived) from some in the community who tolerate no criticism of Israel. (Stradijot 2010)

The first of these statements overlooks the research evidence from Philo and Berry, in the very similar milieu of UK television journalism, that – if no deliberate remedial action is taken – a pattern of ‘Israeli

dominance' (Philo & Berry 2004, p259) supervenes, both in the choice of developments to report and in the way they are described, interpreted and framed. To cite 'varied Israeli and Palestinian perspectives' as having been presented is to ignore the power relations accounted for in the propaganda model and reflected, in coverage of this story, in the lopsidedness of the accounts and views that tend to reach the news. And the latter, of course, positions FABC on the same side of an important line as the bosses of SBS, who instructed their journalists, in effect, to remove the illegality of Israel's occupation from the domain of reportable fact, and to treat it as a criticism of Israel, to be 'balanced' like any other claim, instead.

If Friends of the ABC were to prove impossible to recruit to this form of media activism for peace journalism, what about the civil society groups that joined the protest over the *Mavi Marmara*? If they are to be engaged, clearly it would have to be on a different basis than the conflict-partisan position apparently inscribed in the chants of 'Down, down Israel'. Instead, peace journalism would have to enable its advocates to put forward a set of demands for public service broadcasting to restore to its coverage missing facts that are 'principal and relevant', in order to set the pace in community discussion. Is there, in calling for alternatives to a 'blood-dimmed tide loosed upon the world', an identifiable 'centre' in media representations; can it 'hold' or are its advocates doomed to 'lack all conviction'? The BBC's equivalent document, also called 'Editorial policies', states, as the aim of its journalism, to 'enable the national and international debate', but can one debate, or one community discussion, be identified and addressed; or are there many, each with its own terms of reference, which cannot be brought to mesh or match – an ever-widening gyre?

Hackett and Carroll consider the prospects for media activism as 'a nexus – a point of articulation between movements, transforming and lending coherence to the broad field of movement activism as a counter-hegemonic formation' (2006, p199), but that assumes some degree of commensurability between the assumptions and aims of movement activism, on the one hand, and demands capable of being identified and articulated in media domains, on the other. In the context of peace

journalism, public service broadcasting has been discussed as one such domain where strands can meet, and attain coherence; a proposition now presenting itself, in this tale of two documentaries and two demonstrations, in interrogative form.

In pursuit of a partial answer, at least, an experiment was conducted with two focus groups of Sydney Muslims, in which each group watched a set of television news stories about conflict, produced with familiar rhetorical structures and visual grammars of public service broadcasting. The two sets were 'versioned' to display framing characteristics categorised as war journalism and peace journalism respectively, following the methods outlined in Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) and Lynch (2008).

Sydney's Muslims and the media

Before elaborating on this experiment, a brief digression is necessary, to set the context in which the Muslim peoples of Sydney have been treated and represented by the city's media. Manning (2004) found Muslims 'strongly associated with threat concepts' such as 'fundamentalist or terror or their derivatives', in a systematic content analysis study of the two main Sydney newspapers. Myconos and Watmough considered that 'the media, collectively, represents for many Muslims and people of Middle Eastern background an important site of racism' (2007, p7). They quote witness testimony from an investigation by Australia's Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, that asked Muslims to recount experiences of racism encountered in daily life. 'I think the media is the main cause,' one said, 'because kids are picking on Muslims at school and these kids get it from their parents and their parents get it from the media' (Myconos & Watmough 2007, p9). Lynch (2008) also found that two Australian newspapers were markedly more inclined to frame Islam or Muslims of Middle Eastern background as 'a problem' than their counterparts in the Philippines – another country with a significant Muslim minority, and ally of the US in the 'war on terror'.

Lynch's study included an interview with a senior journalist on *The Sydney Morning Herald*, which had commissioned, as a deliberate reme-

dial measure, a series of articles called 'Faces of Islam,' looking at 'how the Muslim community arrived in Australia, what kind of lifestyles and beliefs, [and] ethnic flavours are represented here' (in Lynch 2008, p173). This had come about as 'a response to a very negative representation of Muslims that has crept into the media here and also into the political debate in New South Wales,' the journalist added (in Lynch 2008, p174).

There is, in other words, an active sense of contestation, in civil society in Sydney, over the representation of Muslims and Islam, both explicitly, and in the context of stories prominent on the news agenda in the period since '9/11' – the 'war on terror' itself; Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Israel and the Palestinians – all of which involve Muslim people as significant subjects, or, indeed, objects (in the sense of having things done to them). This testifies to the power of what Hackett and Carroll call 'hot pokers ... [or] prods to activism,' whereby 'social movements are catalysed and defined by what they perceive to be obstacles to valued goals' (2006, p143). A hegemonic political and media discourse in which Muslims and/or Islam have generally been problematised has brought with it – as a condition of its iteration – what Lewis calls 'slippage and dissociation' (2005, p11), inviting and prompting social movement activism to coalesce around the same set of issues, and its exponents to seek common cause with Sydney's Muslim community and its leadership, as at the Town Hall rally.

Hackett and Carroll find, among social movement activists, a 'widespread acceptance of the need for coalition building,' along with a paradoxical 'divisiveness' that means 'most alliances are short term and focused on single issues' (2006, pp154–55). They suggest, among 'springboards for media activism,' opportunities to form such alliances with 'non-media advocacy groups in civil society concerned with progressive social change,' with the latter being defined by one of their subjects, as 'anybody concerned with human rights and social justice' (Hackett & Carroll 2006, p152). There is a strand of Muslim activist opinion in Sydney, perhaps represented by 'Sheikh Taj,' which, on some issues at least, could not be said to identify with human rights and social justice concerns. But there are many others, across a broad

cross-section of civil society, who have proved willing and capable allies in social movement activism for – in the CPACS formulation – ‘Peace with Justice’.

Participants for the ‘two versions’ experiment were recruited by Kuranda Seyit, a prominent activist, media producer and social entrepreneur, who was appointed shortly before the 9/11 attacks as press officer for the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (which had previously appointed ‘Sheik Taj’), and later set up FAIR, the Forum on Australia’s Islamic Relations. In the latter guise, he organised a set of media awards, to recognise socially responsible reporting by a range of local media, including newspapers and television programs as well as ‘talkback’ radio. As a consummate media activist, Seyit selected the participants for this study to represent a range of views and perspectives on the commensurability, or otherwise, of goals valued in Muslim social movement activism, with distinctions observable in public service broadcasting.

These distinctions were built into the two versions of a 20-minute news bulletin showcasing a recent episode on each of six familiar stories:

1. the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks
2. the funeral of an Australian soldier killed in Afghanistan
3. the latest political row over provisions for asylum seekers in Australia
4. the ‘peace talks’, brokered by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, between Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas
5. Iran’s ‘nuclear ambitions’ as ‘revealed’ by the opening of its nuclear power station at Bushehr
6. Iraqi security, in light of the latest attack by suicide bombers on an army recruitment station in Baghdad.

Pictures for the bulletins were drawn from material broadcast on SBS Television’s evening bulletin, *World news Australia*, with some extra original elements gathered locally. The items were voiced by SBS journalists, so each reporter recorded the voice-over track for the same story in each bulletin, with adjustments to script and content to reflect

distinctions in the peace journalism model. The experiment formed one part of the data collection for a larger study, ongoing at the time of writing, aimed at formulating a Global Standard for Reporting Conflict (see Lynch & McGoldrick 2010), in which aspects of peace journalism are particularised and compared across media and across countries under five headings, following Shinar. In this study, the peace journalism model could be recognised for:

- exploring backgrounds and contexts of conflict formation, and presenting causes and options on every side so as to portray conflict in realistic terms, transparent to the audience
- voicing views of all rival parties
- highlighting creative ideas for conflict resolution, development, peacemaking and peacekeeping
- exposing lies, cover-up attempts and culprits on all sides, and revealing excesses committed by, and suffering inflicted on, people of all parties
- paying attention to peace stories and postwar developments. (Shinar 2007, p200)

In the context of the stories chosen, these criteria tended to be fulfilled, as often as not, by putting into practice Johan Galtung's summarising observation that 'peace journalism makes audible and visible the subjugated aspects of reality' (in Lynch & McGoldrick 2005, p224). In a media milieu in which the 'Faces of Islam' series was conceived by the *Herald* as a belated corrective, the inclusion in news reports about these conflicts, of Muslim perspectives, would automatically 'qualify' as peace journalism at least under Shinar's second heading.

To take, for example, the treatment of the fourth story in the bulletin, on the Israel–Palestine peace talks, the peace journalism version included an interview recorded separately for the exercise with Bishara Costandi, a Palestinian refugee now resident in Sydney and an activist with the CJPP. In the clip chosen for the package, he described the consequences for Palestinians of Israel's military occupation of their territory by inviting Australians to consider it in terms recognisable

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to themselves. Imagine setting out, he said, to go from 'Marrickville to Glebe' (two wellknown adjacent Sydney suburbs) only to face '14 check-points' along the way.

It also featured a sequence of maps showing 'the amazing disappearing Palestine', to illustrate the ongoing encroachment by Israel since the formation of the Jewish state in 1948, and it spelt out some background issues, commonly glossed over, euphemised or omitted altogether. A section of the script said:

The settlements are considered illegal under international law, and the majority of world opinion wants to see Israel pull back to its recognised borders, leaving these streets and houses under Palestinian control.

The package thereby strengthened the peace journalism 'credentials' of this story under Shinar's first and third headings, while filling in some familiar gaps in public understanding identified in the UK study by Philo and Berry.

So how did an audience of Sydney Muslims in the eight-strong group who watched the peace journalism version – featuring this treatment of the Israel–Palestine conflict, along with similar variants on the other conflicts on the list – respond? What, if anything, did their responses reveal about the potential for commensurability between this remedial approach to public service broadcasting and their own perceptions of 'hot poker' issues that act as prods to social movement activism?

As it turned out, a significant pattern was established from the outset. When the bulletin was switched off at the end, and the group asked for overall responses, the very first comments came from M, a student of law and journalism who worked parttime as a lifeguard, and J, a part-time university lecturer:

M: It was very fair, very balanced.

J: A bit more balanced than a lot of SBS. I've complained to SBS several times; you get the usual bland reply, [but] I guess that [the bulletin they had just watched] was reasonably balanced.

This positive reaction, and willingness to perceive significant distinctions, based on expanding the range of principal relevant viewpoints, was immediately opposed, however, by B, a middle-aged man who described himself as unemployed and a some-time charity worker. He said:

Can I be honest? I don't want to beat about the bush: I think M, studying journalism, is always going to be diplomatic. To me, I think it was biased and prejudiced and one-sided ... the media here, let's say, I call it a brain-washing because a lot of people don't like to read, so their only source of normal access to knowledge is through the media and the media is one-sided.

Pressed further on why he thought the bulletin 'balanced', M said:

I guess, the selection of interviews from different perspectives. There wasn't a clear, blatant agenda. You could initially at the start have thought it was a sympathetic slant for the Palestinians but then the Israeli perspective was given, the same thing with most of the other stories, so there was a variety of interviews and it gives at least the viewer a sense of, 'I could do further research into this, I'm not going to take up one perspective, I heard all different perspectives about the subject matter'.

This comment chimes with the update I have proposed elsewhere, and built into content analysis methods for the Global Standard study, of Galtung's original distinction between 'war journalism' as 'propaganda-oriented' and peace journalism as 'truth-oriented'. Concepts of meaning-making have been 'decentred', this argument goes, since the original structuralist text that gave rise to the model, *The structure of foreign news*, published in 1965, notably by Stuart Hall with the insight that an event 'has no fixed meaning, no meaning in the obvious sense, *until* it has been represented' (1997, p7).

Hall, in the Media Education Foundation lecture from which these words are taken, continues:

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The process of representation has entered into the event itself. In a way, it doesn't exist meaningfully until it has been represented, and to put that in a more hifalutin way is to say that representation doesn't occur after the event; representation is constitutive of the event. It enters into the constitution of the object that we are talking about. It is part of the object itself; it is constitutive of it. It is one of its conditions of existence, and therefore representation is not outside the event, not after the event, but within the event itself. (Hall 1997, pp7–8)

This challenges the notion of fidelity to a stable, pre-existing reality, which is implicit in the formulation 'truth-oriented', leading to a re-conceptualisation of this distinction in which peace journalism can be recognised as that which:

offer[s] and draw[s] attention to vantage points from which to inspect propaganda from the outside. Articles scored on this indicator [in an exercise in content analysis gauging the extent of peace journalism] if they contained material likely to open war propaganda to what Hall (1980) calls 'negotiated' or 'oppositional' readings. (Lynch 2008, p143)

The multiplicity of perspectives, prompting and equipping audiences with cues and clues they can use to develop their own views, referred to by M, above, contains a distinct echo of this point.

Later, S, a senior executive in a civil society organisation, commented:

If the news was to be written by Muslim journalists you'd have a different perspective, but the reality is that we don't have our own news station, we don't have our own TV and so on.

As the discussion developed, S went further by referring to the:

Huge amount of mistrust and pessimism, scepticism and lack of confidence within the Australian Muslim community [regarding media representations] ... There's [a] lack of confidence that the Muslim point of view is ever going to get across or what they're going to read is ever going to be fair to the Muslim community. And, to be

honest, I think this is fed by some of our leaders also, who have had that point of view, so they reinforce it [at] any chance that comes up ... [to] confirm their point of view, rather than seeing that isolated good comment [for example] that we should be out of Afghanistan, we should be providing aid, we should be rebuilding and so on [referring to interviews recorded for item number 2 on the list above]. So it's a self-perpetuating state of mind that is basic right the way through the Muslim community.

To the suggestion that the familiar patterns had been 'dislodged' by some of the material in the peace journalism bulletin, she replied: 'but it's not different enough for the community here: you'd have to hit us in the face with a wet fish, I think'. An intriguing suggestion emerged, from some of the other participants, of an incipient generation gap in responses and expectations. A, a part-time office worker for the Australian Federal Police, offered the following assessment of the comments by S and B:

Because they're older, they've had more experience and lived in this country longer. We're [including M, of the participants quoted here, as well as herself] so young, we haven't developed our ideas, like they're not as consolidated. So when they watch news they may be desensitised to some of the crap, they're like 'Ugh, same old stuff', but when I watch the news and I think it's something fresh I go 'Oh my god that was refreshing' ... As young people, when we see something new we don't go 'Argh, they're brainwashing me', we go 'Oh look'. It's that glimpse of hope that there's a slight change.

In response to this prompt, M responded positively to the story about the Israel–Palestine peace talks in particular:

I think it was very effective because, like H [another participant, who described herself as a housewife] said, it gave the story a reality, it contextualised it. When you speak of Palestine in the Middle East, most general Australians get turned off, it doesn't concern us, we're not over there, we don't feel their pain, we don't understand what they're doing. When he used the example – it was a brilliant example, Glebe and Marrickville – general Australians, the vast masses, can relate to

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that because they are familiar with that. So it gave it context, which is what more journalism needs to do.

Conclusion

Peace journalism has been criticised for inscribing in calls for media reform ‘an overly individualistic and voluntaristic perspective’ (Hanitzsch 2007), downplaying the importance of media structures in governing the content of news representations of conflict. Perhaps the best-known critique of this kind is the propaganda model, but this, in turn, is criticised for going, as it were, too far in the other direction, underplaying the scope for journalistic agency and attaching too little importance to plurality and variegation, and moments when they may be extended.

Public service broadcasting has been identified as a media domain in which a mandate to represent a diversity of views and perspectives, and assemble accounts of the facts with due attention to backgrounds and contexts, ‘should’ afford more opportunities for peace journalism. Peace journalism has, in some contexts, proved an animating concept in social movement activism and professional development, as well as scholarly research. To consider the prospects for media activism, to foster journalistic agency within public service broadcasting to get more peace journalism, by evoking and activating its mandate provisions, therefore presents itself as an obvious application of the concept.

Successful media activism depends on alliances with progressive forces, formed and calibrated according to the needs of particular issues. In Australia in 2010, activists were supplied with a ‘hot poker’ by the Israeli military’s attack on the *Mavi Marmara* aid vessel, which brought peace campaigners into alliance with the leadership of Sydney’s Muslim community. Significant political changes were underway in the background, with the Australian government deviating – slightly and temporarily, but significantly – from its customary uncritical pro-Israel stance. And the ABC, the country’s principal public service broadcaster, was coming under pressure over its decision to rescind plans to broadcast a documentary highlighting nonviolent resistance to Israel’s illegal military occupation of Palestinian territory.

This presented a hot poker to media activism too, raising demands in the domain of public service broadcasting, but the most prominent civil society organisation providing independent views on the ABC and its output declined to join in. As with the protests over the *Mavi Marmara* attack itself, Sydney's Muslim community may supply potential partners for alliances to press for change. This potential depends on willingness, by Muslim activists, to identify peace journalism demands vis-à-vis public service broadcasting, as effective ways to surmount obstacles to what they would regard as valued goals.

The commensurability between these two potential allies – peace journalism advocates and Muslim activists – depends on being able to delineate the boundaries of a 'centre', and call for their expansion to include the subjugated aspects of reality, while distinguishing that from a partisan stance in the conflicts themselves. Could peace journalism in public service broadcasting serve as an effective rallying call for such an alliance, or would the Muslim activists see any change that might result as 'too little', preferring to create and consume news 'written by Muslim journalists' instead? Comments in the focus group discussion suggest that the answer is 'yes' in some cases, and 'no' in others: perhaps depending on the generational background of the individual concerned.

Peace journalism, as a value-explicit approach to media practice and analysis, confers a responsibility on its adherents to seek opportunities for practical application. That directs their attention to media activism, and public service broadcasting remains an appealing domain in which to attempt to bring it to bear. Alliance-building for this form of media activism is possible but, in Sydney in 2010, it was underdeveloped, and therefore did not, arguably, make the most of the conjunction of events underway at the time – an experience that holds important lessons for future attempts – both in Australia and elsewhere.

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