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## From the Editors

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This bumper edition of Australian Journalism Monographs comprises two very different examinations of media, journalism and Australian society. In this issue, Lisa Waller from Deakin University writes a monograph which investigates the specialist ‘subfield’ of indigenous reporting in ‘It comes with the territory: ‘Remote’ Indigenous reporting for mainstream audiences’. Wallace’s monograph is part of an Australian Research Council funded project: The Media and Indigenous Policy. In this work Wallace investigates issues which include “the dominance of The Australian newspaper ... the centrality of ‘whitefella gatekeepers’, the struggle for journalistic autonomy; the challenges of ‘getting Indigenous voices’ and ... the ways in which the wider field of journalism imposes its own logics” on reporting practices. She argues that a handful of Australian specialist Indigenous affairs reporters see and understand their reporting field differently from political specialists and generalists who produce most mainstream news about remote Indigenous communities. Her monograph raises a range of cultural and journalistic issues to extend discussion in this field.

In issue two, Christina Hunt from CQUniversity presents a monograph about ABC documentary filmmaker Bill Steller in ‘Empathy and courage: An early ABC documentary filmmaker’s journey’. Hunt’s biographical account weaves together Steller’s own narrative with archival material and a first-hand analysis of his documentary work. She explains how her examination includes “four interlinking areas—the documentaries; the institution of the ABC; the national context of the time; and the filmmaker”. In this monograph, we follow Steller’s story from his migration to Australia in 1948, through several decades of ground breaking documentary making until his retirement in 1989. Steller worked on programs such as *Chequerboard*, *A Big Country*, *Four Corners* plus a swathe of other documentary series, chronicling issues from poverty to the Vietnam war to the Stolen Generation. The monograph is an insightful, candid and moving account of Steller’s contribution to the documentary filmmaking industry and a social commentary of the times.



# **It comes with the territory: ‘Remote’ Indigenous reporting for mainstream audiences**

Dr Lisa Waller, Deakin University

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## **Abstract**

Mainstream news coverage of ‘remote’ Indigenous Australia is arguably one of the most distinctive forms of Australian journalism practice. While there has been considerable scholarly interest in news media representations of ‘remote’ Indigenous people, little research has been done until now on the logic or operations of this reporting specialisation. This monograph presents a Bourdieuan analysis of the subfield based in the insights study participants offered in interviews undertaken as part of *The Media and Indigenous Policy* project. It analyses the reporting subfield through an investigation of the practices participants say shape the way white, mainstream journalists understand their role, its possibilities and limitations. Reporting specialists spoke of the geographical and ontological distances they have to negotiate in dealing with Indigenous and government sources, as well as the ways in which they are constrained by institutional pressures. They attribute many of the difficulties with covering ‘remote’ Indigenous issues to factors linked with these physical and cultural distances.

## Preamble

As a researcher on *The Media and Indigenous Policy* project<sup>1</sup> I sought interviews with many white<sup>2</sup>, mainstream journalists who had experience reporting ‘remote’ Indigenous affairs during the study period. Some of these journalists are well known, others are not; some are current reporters, but there are many whose bylines faded long ago. One of the journalists I approached was Nicolas Rothwell, who writes on Indigenous issues for *The Australian*, but my interview request was politely declined via his literary agent. I was therefore surprised to receive a personal email from him many months later in response to a feature article I had written about my research into the news media’s powerful role in the Northern Territory’s bilingual education policy process (Waller, 2011). In his email Rothwell offered the opinion that ‘poor news coverage of the Indigenous education domain’ in particular:

... relates to the propaganda of the NTG [Northern Territory Government] and reflects, of course, the general collapse and degradation of journalism in the NT, where the only significant local sources are the Territory ABC and *NT News*.<sup>3</sup>

Rothwell would not be drawn further. However, the journalists who did agree to go on the record offered observations and experiences that echoed his provocation. They were reflexively aware of the structural setting and context of local news production in the Northern Territory. For example, they were critical of the limited number of local news outlets and quality of commercial news, restricted budgets for travel and the demands of covering ‘everything’. They described their frustration with the Territory Government’s media-related practices of withholding information from them on one hand, and the ways it uses the media for strategic purposes on the other (see McCallum & Waller, 2012). For example, one journalist told how the office of the Chief Minister timed announcements so deadline pressures made it difficult for reporters to conduct thorough inquiries or research:

If stuff has really been planned for some time, they won’t tell us about it, so they keep us very much ill informed ... They’ll often send out a media

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1 This was funded through Australian Research Council Discovery Project (DP 0987457, 2009–2011).

2 I use ‘white’ rather than ‘non-Indigenous’ in this context because it is the term many of my research participants used to discuss non-Indigenous people, organisations and ideas. I’m also aware of its scholarly connotations: Critical whiteness theory treats whiteness not as a biological category but as a social construction. It draws attention to the invisibility of dominant ‘white’ perspectives by problematising the normalisation and naturalisation of whiteness. It is not a theory used in this monograph, but can be a powerful lens for considering some of the issues it raises.

3 Email from Nicholas Rothwell received November 17, 2011.

alert which is just a two-liner ... they attempt to keep us on a very tight drip feed so we couldn't possibly do things like research questions prior to an interview.

As the project progressed, I recognised the need to theorise what these journalists (as well as other members of the policy constellation) were doing and saying in relation to 'remote'<sup>4</sup> Indigenous reporting beyond my specific interest in news and the bilingual education policy process. This is the context (or field) in which the news about bilingual education policy is constructed, and from a Bourdieuan perspective, understanding this is paramount (Bourdieu 1990).

Much research in Journalism Studies focuses on how standardised news routines and professional and institutional ideologies shape the news. I take a different approach to those working with ideas from political economy, and also those who analyse media texts. My interest is in studying people's media-related practices (Couldry, 2004, 2012) and I contend that this is a powerful way of generating insights into how media power operates in different social domains. My approach is informed by the scholarship of Pierre Bourdieu and others, including Couldry, working in his tradition of field-based research. This approach emphasises the importance of generating theory from the insights offered by research participants and analysing their practices in order to construct a rich and nuanced understanding of the dynamics driving the field (Wacquant, 1989; Benson & Neveu, 2005).

## Introduction

Journalistic production is always strongly dictated by the specific social, political and economic conditions in which it is organised (Champagne, 2005) and therefore needs to be understood within a specific context (Schudson, 2005). As a field it also has its own common sense that interacts with other fields, such as education and politics, to create a powerful set of norms that define the boundaries around what is and is not considered news and who should be included in the construction of stories (Stack, 2007). This monograph argues through the spoken word of participants that, because of the organization and operation of the Australian news media and northern Australia's particular geography and social history, white, mainstream reporting of 'remote' Indigenous Australia is a distinct, but weak subfield of Australian journalism. Journalists speak of the

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<sup>4</sup> 'Remote' appears in scare quotes throughout the monograph as a reminder that it is a relational concept. In other words, it depends where you stand in social space. For example, Yolgnu people in North-East Arnhem Land regard Melbourne and Canberra as very 'remote' places (Marika et al, 2009).

geographical and ontological distances they have to negotiate in dealing with Indigenous and government sources, as well as their newsrooms. They attribute many of the difficulties with covering 'remote' Indigenous issues to factors linked with these physical and cultural distances.

Due to its economic imperatives and close relationship with the state, Bourdieu viewed journalism overall as a weakly autonomous field (Bourdieu, 1998). Within the journalism field, some subfields are stronger than others. Specialist rounds such as sport, entertainment, fashion and business sit comfortably within the wider logic and economic imperatives of the journalism field (Marchetti, 2005). They can be described as strong subfields because they involve specialist reporters and contribute revenue from the advertising and large audiences or targeted publics they attract. 'Remote' Indigenous issues are not money-spinners or ratings draw-cards for mainstream media companies. In the main, they are covered for mainstream audiences as part of national political rounds or by general reporters, with only a handful of journalists who can be considered dedicated specialists. Through participants' comments, this group's identifying qualities include the number of years spent covering Indigenous affairs, their ability to interact with Indigenous people and understand their worldviews, as well as a strong desire to be relatively autonomous. Four of the journalists quoted here, who can be described as Indigenous specialists, have between 10 and 35 years' experience in the round. Tony Koch of *The Australian* lamented:

There's not enough doing it. There's not enough, I mean there are probably half a dozen serious Indigenous reporters in Australia.

When asked, none of the specialists who were interviewed could name five others.

While the Indigenous round is not regarded as a revenue or audience generator, participants emphasise it is one of the most expensive forms of Australian news reporting. Furthermore, there are weak connections between mainstream news outlets and 'remote' Indigenous audiences, as well as news audiences on the eastern seaboard of Australia and 'remote' Indigenous communities.

The analysis offered here draws on the work of a number of scholars who work in Bourdieu's tradition of field-based research, including Patrick Champagne and Dominique Marchetti (2005), who was a colleague of Bourdieu at the Centre for European Sociology. His work stemmed from Bourdieu's basic relational insight of field theory: that how you see and understand the world varies systematically depending on your relative position in social space (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984).

Marchetti's research addressed what is sometimes seen as a shortcoming of

Bourdieu's theory of fields, which is a lack of attention to variation within the field (Benson & Neveu, 2005). He focused on specific types of journalists, rather than journalists as a whole.<sup>5</sup> Marchetti (2005) said, because specialised journalists have different characteristics and therefore different ways of perceiving the same event, 'the handling of news will sometimes be noticeably different according to the speciality mobilised' (Marchetti, 2005: 64).

I argue here that specialist Indigenous affairs reporters see and understand their reporting field differently from political specialists and generalists who produce most mainstream news about 'remote' communities. This small group of reporters has developed skills and knowledge for interacting with Indigenous people and understanding their societies. In her book, *The Tall Man* (2008), which told the story of the Palm Island death in custody of Mulrunji Doomadgee, Chloe Hooper discussed the news media coverage of the case. She observed that, of the "15 or so journalists at the inquest, only *The Australian's* Tony Koch did not stay with the police but rather with a local family and went out on the street reporting" (Hooper, 2008: 92). Specialists such as Koch have a distinct set of reporting practices that enable them to navigate the 'remote' Indigenous field (Waller, 2010a). They are more likely to unearth their own stories and include a range of Indigenous voices and perspectives in their reports. Participants said political specialists and generalists lack this knowledge and skill and it is reflected in their reporting.

While the wider project incorporates Indigenous perspectives, and the voices of Indigenous people and their organizations are heard through the findings, this monograph does not consider the Indigenous media sphere or those working inside it. Its focus is squarely on white, mainstream journalism. This was a crucial aspect of the project because in the main it is this white, mainstream journalism that the nation relies on to 'know' or 'imagine' (Anderson, 1983) 'remote' Indigenous Australians and the policies that govern their close relationship with the state (Meadows, 2005).

The following section situates this research within the context of the two wider projects to which it contributes. This is important, as many issues and perspectives that are relevant to news about Indigenous affairs policy are featured in related publications and are therefore not discussed here, or are only mentioned briefly.

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<sup>5</sup> This approach is also theoretically consistent with the policy-specific approach (Koch-Baumgarten & Voltmer, 2010) I have taken to understand the interplay of media and policymaking.

## Background

My study of the dynamic interplay of news media and bilingual education policy in the Northern Territory (Waller 2012, 2013) contributed to *The Media and Indigenous Policy* project (McCallum, 2012), which explored the connections between media attention to Indigenous issues and the development of Indigenous affairs policy. We examined the development of health and education policies within specific discursive environments and at particular policy moments. The project team<sup>6</sup> analysed media texts, policy documents, public statements, and the understandings of those involved in the policymaking process. This has resulted in six major insights about the manifestation of news media power in the policy process: narrow, sensationalist and enduring framing of Indigenous issues and people in mainstream media reporting (McCallum, 2011, 2013); the rise of campaigning journalism (McCallum & Reid, 2012; Dunne Breen & McCallum, 2013); Indigenous people's engagement with mainstream media and their media-related incursions into policy debates to advocate for particular policy outcomes (McCallum et al., 2012; Waller, 2010a); the mediatisation of bureaucrats' policymaking practices (McCallum & Waller, 2012; McCallum, 2013) and finally, what we term the 'singular influence' of Indigenous media stars such as Noel Pearson in the policy constellation (McCallum & Waller, 2013; Waller, 2010b).

## Methodology

Working with Couldry's (2004, 2012) 'media as practice' methodology to theorise the relationship between news media and bilingual education policy involved listening to the spoken word of study participants through depth interview (Gamson & Stuart, 1992). Their local understandings were analysed to reveal the media's powerful role in the policymaking process (Waller, 2012, 2013). Indigenous perspectives and research methodologies were central (Waller, 2010a), and my work with Yolgnu people and Yolgnu social theory informed the approach to methodology and analysis (Smith, 2004; Connell, 2007; Marika et al., 2009). Depth interview (Gamson & Stuart, 1992) is one methodological approach used to access the professional and personal perspectives of individual actors in a particular policy field. Participants shared personal experiences of developing, promoting, influencing and reporting bilingual education policy, expressed opinions about the role of media, and

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6 Chief investigators were Associate Professor Kerry McCallum, University of Canberra, and Professor Michael Meadows of Griffith University. Lisa Waller, Michelle Dunne-Breen, Holly Reid and Monica Andrew were the other team members.

reflected on their own professional practices. Interviews of between 30 minutes and two hours were conducted between May 2009 and August 2011, with more than 25 individuals, to explore these themes. I used theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to identify potential participants, which is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes and analyses the data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop theory as it emerges. The sample included Indigenous people, current and former federal and territory politicians, their advisors, bureaucrats, education department employees, academics, journalists and activists.

This monograph draws mainly on my interviews with specialist Indigenous reporters but it also includes the voices of other journalists, some bureaucrats, academics and politicians. Many of the research participants, including journalists, agreed to be identified. Current and former ABC reporters Murray McLaughlin, Katrina Bolton and Ursula Raymond, *The Australian's* Tony Koch, Bob Gosford from *Crikey*, and current and former Fairfax journalists Lindsay Murdoch and Chips Mackinolty are identified most clearly through this monograph. They are current or former Indigenous affairs reporters. Their interest and involvement with Indigenous people goes beyond their reporting practice. For example, Koch takes his annual holidays fishing at the Cape York communities he reports on; Mackinolty is a well-known artist as well as a writer, and has run arts centres in Top End Indigenous communities. At the time of our interview he was working as a policy advisor for a peak Indigenous organization. Bob Gosford has had a long association with Walpiri people and was writing for *Crikey* from his home in Yuendumu on the Walpiri lands for three years. Raymond is an Indigenous woman, did her journalism training with the ABC and after many years with the public broadcaster, produced the ABC's Indigenous current affairs program *Awaye*. Others who contribute here include former politicians, bureaucrats and academics who have a deep understanding and experience with news media and Indigenous peoples in the Northern Territory.

### **Working in Bourdieu's tradition of field-based research**

Bourdieu's concept of the journalistic field provides a lens for examining news media's roles in the field of power. It also offers a way of conceptualizing and discussing the processes and challenges involved in news media production. His colleague Marchetti (2005) is concerned with thematic specialisation in journalism. He argues firstly that the journalistic field is structured around an opposition between a 'generalist' pole and a 'specialised' pole, and that

“the degree of specialisation depends on the media outlet and the journalist” (Marchetti, 2005: 64). He has conducted studies of many specialist rounds and argues that journalism subfields have their own logics and specific properties that can help to distinguish how they vary from other reporting specialties. There are seven ‘logics’, or specific properties, that emerged as themes through my research with journalists who have reported on ‘remote’ Indigenous people and issues. They are the economics of remoteness, fluidity and inconsistency in the round, the dominance of *The Australian* newspaper and its Indigenous media ‘stars’; the centrality of ‘whitefella gatekeepers’, the struggle for journalistic autonomy; the challenges of ‘getting Indigenous voices’ and finally, the ways in which the wider field of journalism imposes its own logics. Marchetti (2005) did not consider specialties as they relate to journalism’s democratic function or the public good. However, as our project team has reported elsewhere (McCallum et al., 2012), ‘remote’ Indigenous reporting specialists have also identified a social justice orientation as a strong underpinning of their journalism practice.

### **The economics of remoteness**

High costs associated with time, travel and interpreter services were identified as a major factor in ‘remote’ reporting. Most journalists said their main opportunities to travel to Indigenous settlements were when government ministers took them along in their planes:

You can always bet that it’s an event that suits the government’s agenda (Murray McLaughlin, journalist, ABC).

They described the efforts they made to travel independently and stressed the importance of this for investigative reporting. *The Australian*’s Tony Koch observed that both major media outlets and national policy development were ‘remote’ from Indigenous peoples in northern Australia and therefore journalists needed to get out to their lands independently to find out what was happening:

The policy is made in Canberra mostly but it’s implemented so far away ... you’ve got to go to the communities and spend some time there, spend some days there ... and find out what’s really going on.

The ABC’s Murray McLaughlin said this access was crucial because it was the only way to make contact with relevant Indigenous sources:

I want to be out there. That’s the only way. That’s where these people are. They’re not going to come to you.

Katrina Bolton, who also worked for the ABC in Darwin before leaving to study

medicine, said she had to be resourceful:

It's stressful. There's a lot of pressure to keep costs down... I feel that pressure very strongly yet little is actually voiced about it. In practice it means ... I've even rung up people I haven't met and [said] 'can I stay at your house and can my camera man stay at your house?' ... There are times when we've paid for our accommodation, but there is a pressure there and there's a real consciousness of making our dollars stretch.

News organizations are under pressure from falling circulations/ratings and advertising revenue (Deuze, 2005). As a result, there are fewer reporters, greater time pressures and budgets for travel have shrunk (Davies, 2008). Newsrooms must decide how to allocate their limited resources:

For me to go to the Torres Strait and do a week up there with a photographer, my editor pointed out to me a couple of years ago that he can actually send a journalist on an entire Ashes tour of England for cheaper for two months, you know. It costs \$6000 or \$7000 a day to fly there and hire boats and charter planes and get around. So there's that little inhibitor ... (Tony Koch, journalist, *The Australian*).

McLaughlin gave the example of the \$5000–\$6000 a day cost to travel to a community in the Arafura Swamp to cover an education issue for the ABC's *7.30 Report*:

It was a great yarn, but in the scheme of things that's an expensive story. There wouldn't be many stories done out of Sydney for example, which cost that sort of money in hard cash. We're not talking below the line, just labour and the cost of taking a camera crew ... because that's just a constant challenge ... we're talking above the line stuff here. So I'd be, per story, I'd be the most expensive reporter in the land, but that's only because of the huge distances you know, you chew up a hell of a lot of fuel (Murray McLaughlin, journalist, ABC).

The wider logic of journalism, expressed through news values (Gans, 1979) and imagined audiences (Dreher, 2010), also play a role in determining what resources eastern seaboard newsrooms will allocate. Participants said major political or policy announcements, staged events or stories with a high threshold of conflict are more likely to be sponsored than a piece of investigative journalism. Lindsay Murdoch, who works for Fairfax Media from Darwin and reports on 'remote' Indigenous affairs, explained:

There's nowhere to stay, it costs a fortune—so unless it's something that's going to get up on the front page there's not a commitment from

the bosses. They're difficult. To go anywhere it's a huge effort.

Bolton said the ABC had supported her to do some investigative work:

... while there's a real battle to keep costs at a minimum, it's been under ABC steam that got us there (Katrina Bolton, former journalist, ABC).

However, there were occasions when she had pursued aspects of a story on her own time and at her own cost:

In the end, I flew myself down there, borrowed my sister's bicycle and did it on my own time ... The stories I'm most proud of, I've done almost all on my own time, sometimes footing the bill.<sup>7</sup>

All the journalists who were interviewed said their organisations' official policies were that they paid for their reporters' travel costs. However, one admitted:

... the practice is often we attempt to bum lifts ... and especially when there's sort of event-based or announcement-based stuff—that's particularly when we're trying to hitch rides or keep down costs.

Murdoch said Fairfax was "cutting corners mainly because of the cost of it". This included strategies such as sending its photographer out bush while Murdoch used the phone and other resources to write the accompanying report from Darwin, where he could be working on other stories at the same time:

Unless someone's flying you out there, you've got to hire a plane usually, or drive vast distances on bad roads and ... you've got stuff to do in town too. If you're Fairfax's only guy on the ground here, if you go out to a community for a week...

Others described creative ways of negotiating obstacles, such as limited resources for travel. Koch revealed one of his most successful techniques:

With News Ltd, we've got a 1300 number so you can ring free from any phone anywhere in Australia. And I just put that number all around, all the communities, anywhere, on cards, anyone that wants to talk to me can just pick up the yellow phone (Tony Koch, journalist, *The Australian*).

Journalists who accompany government ministers on trips to 'remote' settlements are constrained in what they can cover. McLaughlin said it was difficult to break away from the minister's program. Murdoch commented that unless the government provided transport these trips would not receive media coverage:

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<sup>7</sup> Here Bolton is discussing some of the research she conducted for her ABC radio documentary *Drink, Death and Dollars*. It won the 2011 Walkley Award for best radio documentary.

We don't have to pay for those flights so that's why we readily jump at them, but if we had to pay for ourselves, when you're looking at \$5000–\$6000 a day to get out to these places, it's too much. Editors won't pay it (Murray McLaughlin, journalist, ABC).

## The Australian

Participants overwhelmingly identified Australia's only national daily newspaper and Rupert Murdoch's flagship *The Australian* as the mainstream news outlet with most interest in Indigenous affairs. In a departure from the political economy view and its emphasis on media ownership, this can be interpreted as *The Australian* occupying the strongest position in the subfield, understood by participants as its agenda-setting influence on public and policy discussion of Indigenous affairs<sup>8</sup>. Bourdieu said cultural capital remains on the side of the 'purest' journalists of the print press, and they are the ones who launch the critical debates that others pick up:

As Einsteinian physics tells us, the more energy a body has, the more it distorts the space around it and a very powerful agent within a field can distort the whole space, cause the whole space to be organised in relation to itself. (Bourdieu, 2005: 43)

In his essay on *The Australian*, Manne (2011) observed that it is the only newspaper:

that is read by virtually all members of the group of insiders I call the political class, a group that includes politicians, leading public servants, business people and the most politically engaged citizens. (Manne, 2011: 5)

Champagne (2005) discussed how quality broadsheet newspapers make it a point of honour to maintain a relative autonomy in relation to the most immediate demands of the public and support certain forms of public interest journalism that are not economically profitable. *The Australian's* commitment to Indigenous affairs reporting can be understood in this way. It is praised for:

playing a crucial role in alerting the public to the breakdown of conditions of life in remote communities and providing one of the most intellectually courageous Aboriginal leaders of contemporary times, Noel Pearson, with a permanent forum for the expression of his views (Manne, 2011: 13).

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<sup>8</sup> For a detailed analysis of *The Australian's* campaigning style of journalism on Indigenous affairs, see McCallum & Reid, 2012.

The News and Indigenous Policy project has generated findings on the agenda-setting role of *The Australian* in Indigenous affairs policy (McCallum, 2012; McCallum & Reid, 2012; McCallum & Waller, 2012). The reporting of Indigenous affairs is of fundamental importance to *The Australian* (Rothwell, 2011; Mitchell, 2011). Over the past two decades the newspaper has made Indigenous affairs one of its central campaigning themes, holding governments to account on issues such as land rights and remote Indigenous disadvantage (Neill, 2002). McCallum's (2010) study concerning the depiction of Indigenous violence in Australian media found that *The Australian* was the only newspaper that gave sustained focus to issues of 'crisis' in Indigenous Australia. She identified that over a six-year period, *The Australian* produced more than three times the number of news reports about topics such as Indigenous violence and alcohol abuse as any other Australian newspapers:

It is for these reasons that *The Australian* can be considered a primary agenda-setter on Indigenous issues for other parts of the news media and for political decision-makers (McCallum & Reid, 2012: 73).

Lindsay Murdoch was reflexive about the variation between the *The Australian* and Fairfax papers. Indigenous affairs rates lower in the news hierarchy at Fairfax because its audiences are not perceived to be as interested (Matthews, 2008):

... see my audience is in Melbourne and Sydney where the Oz<sup>9</sup> sort of laps it up more, but for my audience we don't get really ... we're not interested in chasing all that sort of in and outs of black politics or even ... any politics in the Northern Territory (Lindsay Murdoch, journalist, Fairfax Media).

An experienced political journalist working for Fairfax in the Canberra Press Gallery echoed Murdoch's thoughts about imagined eastern seaboard audiences more broadly when she observed:

You would never hear Indigenous policymaking raised ... [Tabloid newspapers] just don't think it relates to their readership at all, therefore, you simply accept that unless it's scandalous you don't see it.

Variation in the subfield can be measured in the biographical trajectories of journalists, as well as general economic and professional indicators, including the age and experience of journalists; the space and position of stories; and the salaries and status of journalists (Marchetti 2005). Specializations cannot be considered from an economic perspective only because they are also linked with social and political logics. For example, as Bourdieu argued in *On Television* (1998), there

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9 'The Oz' is *The Australian* newspaper's nickname.

is symbolic capital attached to political rounds and foreign correspondents, or the *autonomous* pole of the field. These subfields can be costly and bring in less revenue but they occupy high status in the field and confer symbolic capital on the media outlet. Commenting on *The Australian's* coverage, former Fairfax Media and News Corp correspondent Chips Mackinolty said:

... the only place that's provided any real resources consistently has been Murdoch.

Discussing its coverage of the Northern Territory Emergency Response, Murray McLaughlin said:

... as much as I can't stand *The Australian* newspaper, I think actually it's prosecuted a pretty good case for resources and improvements and what not. And I think that they more than the ABC, and I say this with some reluctance, but I think that they have helped keep Canberra focused as much as it is (Murray McLaughlin, journalist, ABC).

However, the newspaper was criticised for its neo-conservative ideological bent, with comments such as:

... and of course you've got the other main newspaper locally is *The Australian* which is just increasingly fascist.

... they think they own the debate ... They think they should run bloody Indigenous policy.

Journalistic capital can be measured by indicators linked to production, including the number of exclusives, the rate of articles picked up by other outlets, the size of the specialist staff, editorial space, and the size of audience and that audience's profile (Marchetti, 2005: 72). Again *The Australian* stands out for the size of its specialist staff, the number of exclusives it gets, the editorial space it devotes to Indigenous issues and its well-educated, national audience. Murdoch described the close geographic and professional relationship between *The Australian's* senior press gallery journalists and former Indigenous Affairs minister Jenny Macklin. He observed that *The Australian* could effectively lock leading territory-based journalists out of a story:

Leaking [to a journalist from *The Australian*] about some announcement the day before she actually makes it ... and then [the journalist] beats the shit out, gets a big run, oh, this is new, brand new, this is all big, huge and the Oz put it on the leader page ... and everyone says 'Oh, that's a good story' ... [Macklin's] ... got this habit, I'm furious with Macklin because she just—well it's in her interest because the Oz gives these stories a big

run, so she feeds—bloody gives it to [*The Australian* journalist] and then the next day we get it suddenly released on the fax and on our email. And ... I'd struggle to get it in the paper. Probably wouldn't get it in the paper ... but because [*The Australian* journalist] has got an exclusive and ... gets the mix-master out on it and ... gets a big run ... and then by the time it gets to us we just ignore it, but Macklin's got a run, you know (Lindsay Murdoch, journalist, Fairfax Media).

Murdoch's comments here show he is reflexively aware that the framing of a news story "is a reciprocal process between political elites and journalists" (Kuypers, 2002: 11). As Reich (2006) has argued, this reciprocity is a different reality to what is asserted in much of the literature on journalists and their sources. She says scholars tend to focus on the tensions between elites, such as politicians and journalists, and argue the news media has the final say over which events are deemed newsworthy, seemingly demonstrating their independence in the news process. However, media organizations are inherently a part of the community where they exist, and for this reason are subject to community influences, particularly powerful actors and institutions and their needs (Kuypers, 2002). In the case of *The Australian*, it is a powerful presence in the federal parliamentary community (Manne, 2011).

*The Australian* gives prominence to an Indigenous story from northern Australia by placing it on page 1 of its weekend edition regularly. Some of its most senior journalists have worked the round, including prize-winning reporters Tony Koch, Paul Toohey and Nicolas Rothwell, the godson of Rupert Murdoch (Skelton, 2010). Their seniority and public profiles bring substantial symbolic capital to their roles and are indicators of the high value placed on Indigenous stories with national significance (McCallum & Reid, 2012).

## **Indigenous spokespeople and *The Australian***

*The Australian* retains the nation's most influential Indigenous commentator, Noel Pearson, and regularly features contributions from others, including Marcia Langton. Scholars working with Bourdieu argue that the power of the journalistic field lies in its capacity to weigh on other social fields through the fame it creates. This power of consecration (Champagne, 2005; Darras, 2005; Waller, 2010b)—to say who and what is important, and what the public should think about important things and people—is based on its own legitimacy (Champagne, 2005). Manne described the newspaper's consecration of Pearson and those who agree with him as "univocalism" and argued its neglect of other Indigenous voices "represents a kind of distortion":

*The Australian's* univocalism has seriously misled its readers about the balance of Indigenous sentiment in the Northern Territory and elsewhere (Manne, 2011: 13).

Maddison (2009) has also observed the rise of Indigenous media stars. She notes in particular, the dominance of Noel Pearson as a media creation, a spokesman for the conservative Right, and the “modern face of Indigenous politics” (Maddison, 2009: xxxvi). Many participants in *The Media and Indigenous Policy* project also commented on the rise of conservative Indigenous commentators during the Howard era as key players in policy debates, and the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER or Intervention)<sup>10</sup> in particular. They identified a small group from outside the territory as ‘too dominant’ in both the public and policy discussion, acknowledging in particular Pearson’s ‘stunning success in engaging the eye of the mainstream’. As one senior public servant observed:

And you know, he’s incredibly well connected in government so every government wants a Pearson tick of approval. Every government actively seeks it out, they just can’t help themselves because there isn’t any other Indigenous leader with the same credit rating.

Mackinolty pointed to Marcia Langton, Warren Mundine and Noel Pearson and commented:

One of the problems—this is a national problem—is this overwhelming desire for simplicity as such that the only Aboriginal people journalists sort of can talk to are sort of Noel Pearson (Chips Mackinolty, former Fairfax Media and News Corp correspondent).

The concept of ‘singular influence’ (Waller, 2010b) is one way of conceptualizing this desire for simplicity in both journalism and politics. It also offers ways of

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<sup>10</sup> The Northern Territory Emergency Response marked a huge shift in federal and state policy regarding Indigenous people—one that moved away from self-determination towards imposing state control (Altman & Hinkson, 2007). The *Racial Discrimination Act (1976)* was suspended to allow the Federal Government to roll out its policy agenda. Government-appointed business managers took administrative and financial control of communities. The Intervention coincided with radical changes to local governance by the NT Government. Community councils, which had been the seats of local decision-making and activism, were disbanded and most local government responsibilities were taken over by newly created shires. Housing management was taken away from local groups. Social welfare payments were ‘quarantined’ so that half of a person’s social welfare payment had to be spent at government-approved shops on government-approved items. The Federal Government also tried to deny communities the right to block unauthorised access to their communities by scrapping the permit system (Toohey, 2008). The Northern Territory Emergency Response reduced the control that Indigenous people had over managing their own affairs (Altman & Hinkson, 2007). There was no recognition of the need to communicate with Indigenous people or to consult them about the changes to their lives.

thinking about the power of the state and media to endorse an individual such as Pearson as providing the logical or ‘commonsense’ explanation. A policy insider noted this effect when he said:

So [Pearson’s] notion about individual responsibility, that it’s not all up to governments, is a really, really important one and has been, like, I’ve worked with Noel on and off and seen him with Tony Abbott. Tony Abbott is one of his biggest fans. And Tony, to his credit, has done things very much as a result of Noel... He has a very strong ideology.

Pearson became an influential news source for *The Australian* during the Howard years. The newspaper also provided him with a regular Saturday column that was given prominence, often running off page 1. It is from this platform of media power that Pearson articulated the discourse of individual responsibility that defined the terms of public debate on Indigenous matters and even suggested policy solutions (McCallum & Waller, 2013). As one participant said:

... his impact on Howard at the start of 2007, his role in the architecture of this dramatic response by Howard to try and create a new term agenda that included change for Indigenous people, was certainly influential on John Howard. It brought that remarkable, all of those remarkable events that happened in 2007.

## **Fluidity and mobility**

Participants’ observations suggest fluidity and mobility are defining characteristics of the reporting subfield, with a high turnover of local journalists, ‘parachute journalists’ from the eastern seaboard dropping in and out with high news value events, and a high degree of mobility among Indigenous sources. Participants observed that almost all Indigenous reporting for local Territory audiences is done by generalists, or by people who can only be described as moderately specialised because they move on to other rounds (Marchetti, 2005). Participants identified the local Territory journalists as a high turnover group, often young and inexperienced, who were expected to cover Indigenous affairs as part of their general duties. Mackinolty contended:

There’s never been a consistency of Aboriginal affairs round. There is a round but it keeps getting shoved around and between shifts and stuff like that. You’ll get people picking up a story with no background knowledge ... and ... tough luck, which is kind of foolish in a way. (Chips Mackinolty, former Fairfax Media and News Corp correspondent).

Marchetti (2005) argued that circulation of journalists provides an indicator of the specialisation's level of professionalisation: the more professional, the less turnover. A number of participants observed there was high turnover in Territory newsrooms, with comments such as:

... take the ABC newsroom here in Alice Springs – there's a huge turnover every year.

Some participants expressed an understanding of the pressures these local Territory-based general reporters face. Former NT Labor Senator Trish Crossin explained:

You need to put [them] in context. They cover all of the issues in the Northern Territory so you don't just have ... an arts writer or an education writer, or a legal writer ... They've got to do everything.

A number of people who were interviewed commented on Indigenous people being highly mobile and often difficult to contact. Bolton said often people in 'remote' communities do not have a phone. *Crikey* journalist Bob Gosford observed that it was common to have no mobile phone credit and that people relied heavily on text messages. He also said it was a widespread practice to give phones away and to swap them with family:

A lot of people don't have home phones and if they do, people are highly mobile so often it's the institutions that people work through or are represented by, so you pass messages through. That's changed a fair bit with mobiles—but again, because what might have been someone's good contact a month ago is now their daughter's contact. 'Ah, yeah, mummy' and people are still highly mobile. 'Mummy's in Alice blah, blah, blah'.

### **'Whitefella gatekeepers'** <sup>11</sup>

Journalists said they had to negotiate entry and access through key non-Indigenous people in 'remote' communities. They described them as "gatekeepers" and some observed that generalists relied on them even more heavily than specialist reporters. One specialist observed that generalists "tend to grab what's easiest and earliest":

Whether that's someone walking down the street or someone that's nominated as the spokesperson, usually by a white person ... So your gatekeeper will be a whitefella.

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<sup>11</sup> 'Whitefella' and 'blackfella' are Aboriginal Australian words that describe non-indigenous and Indigenous people respectively.

Since White conducted his study of an editor's daily news selection at a wire service (1950), there has been a rich vein of communication research on news selection. Gatekeeping is the process by which the vast array of potential news reports are sifted and shaped into those few that are actually transmitted by the news media (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991). However, gatekeeping is also thought of as more than just selection, to include how reports are shaped, timed and handled (Shoemaker et al., 2001).

Murdoch said "whitefella gatekeepers" played a pivotal role in his relationship with Indigenous leaders and organizations. He described communities as having "whitefella protection" and defined the role of these gatekeepers as telling Indigenous people "what to do and what to say". He said "whitefella gatekeepers" had their own agendas, which shaped the dialogue with journalists:

There's always a whitefella behind it, you know the advisors, and they've always got agendas so you can find yourself dealing as much with a white guy as you do with a blackfella ... the blackfellas up here, the leaders, usually they've got white advisors, out on the communities there's usually white advisors (Lindsay Murdoch, journalist, Fairfax Media).

Gosford offered a different view. He attributed their importance to the fact they were easily contactable, which was crucial for journalists who needed comments, interviews and background to meet the news cycle and their deadlines:

I think that's a general rule across the board because they're the points of stability. The points of constant change are the Aboriginal people, they'll be in Yuendumu one day, they'll be in Lajamanu for a ceremony the next week. They'll be in Alice Springs for a meeting of a board that they're sitting on the week after that. They'll be away at a funeral, blah, blah, blah. They'll be back in Yuendumu at work etcetera (Bob Gosford, journalist, *Crikey*).

The literature on source relationship suggests journalists rely on people who meet journalistic norms of source selection. They tend to be geographically close and socially similar to working journalists and are likely to meet the "standard definitions of reliability, trustworthiness, authoritative and articulateness" (Gans, 1979: 24).

Bolton described whitefellas in communities as "non-Indigenous brokers" and said she relied on them for story ideas and setting up contact with Indigenous sources:

They're very rarely Indigenous people who are your direct contacts. They're usually the white people working for Indigenous organizations. Preferably the long termers, and then they can sometimes be a bridge to

Indigenous people. But I've found that it's very rarely a direct connection. There's almost always a non-Indigenous kind of broker or at least introducer, because we never seem to have time in communities to actually stop and meet people properly (Katrina Bolton, former journalist, ABC).

## **The struggle for autonomy**

'Autonomy' is an important concept both empirically and theoretically in Bourdieu's general theory of fields. In considering the journalism field in particular, the concept of autonomy can be understood to have two dimensions: the autonomy of the field from other fields, as well as the value of autonomy as it relates to prestigious, quality journalism. Schudson (2005) notes that Bourdieu's concept of field is an effort to establish a vocabulary and framework for understanding how different realms of social life are related to one another but are also distinct from one another, "each field having some measure of autonomy from the others and therefore needing to be understood to some degree in its own terms" (Schudson, 2005: 214). Each field is structured around the opposition between what Bourdieu calls the 'heteronomous' pole, which represents forces external to the field (and are primarily economic), and the 'autonomous' pole representing the specific capital that is unique to that field (its prestige—such as creative or scientific skills). Inside the journalistic field, economic capital is expressed through circulation, ratings and advertising revenues, whereas the "specific cultural capital" of the field takes the form of intelligent commentary and investigative reporting—the kinds of journalism practices that are celebrated in Australia each year through the Walkley Awards. Due to its economic imperatives and close relationship with the state, Bourdieu viewed journalism as a weakly autonomous field (Bourdieu, 1998). However, Marchetti (2005) said levels of autonomy vary within the field and it could be an indicator of a journalistic subfield's importance. Factors such as whether someone is based in a newsroom or rarely in the office can be a factor. Marchetti (2005) said those not office-based are often more 'independent', 'alternative' or 'autonomous' than their colleagues.

Indigenous reporting specialists described striving for a high degree of autonomy, which they understood in terms of working independently and having the freedom to decide what to cover and how to cover it. It is through these news-making practices that Indigenous reporting specialists have been able to break the big stories that contribute to setting the political and policy agenda (McCallum et al., 2012) and win awards. Walkley award winner Bolton said she strived to spend time 'out bush'. Two-time Walkley winner Murdoch

said, “I haven’t set foot in the office for 18 years”, and Gosford was writing for *Crikey* from his home in Yuendumu. Mackinolty worked as a stringer and said he had the freedom to refuse to cover some issues. He also said his strong personal contacts meant he was not reliant on Fairfax’s sponsorship for travel or news subsidies for story ideas:

I have the advantage that I knew a lot of people out bush ... I had no money for travelling ... I was doing stuff for [Fairfax] and they paid for one trip to Alice Springs. The rest of it I did either hitching with other people or just on the phone and getting people to ring to get comments on stuff and so on.

Describing the need for independent newsgathering practices to find out “what’s really going on”, Koch (who has won five Walkleys) said:

... unless ... reporters ... get off their butts and go out, and not just go out with the minister flying the government jet ... and be given the candy-coated version ... You’ve got to go to the community and spend some time there ... and find out what’s really going on.

The specialists who speak through this monograph can be understood to have a degree of autonomy and emphasise the importance of journalistic independence. Their autonomous journalism practice is evidenced through their award-winning and agenda-setting reportage. However, participants’ understanding of how the economics of remoteness and the values and routines of media organizations and governments impact upon the subfield suggests that overwhelmingly mainstream journalists reporting on ‘remote’ Indigenous affairs are not big winners in the struggle for autonomy.

### **Getting Indigenous voices**

Participants identified cultural responsiveness<sup>12</sup> (or competence) as a key attribute of Indigenous reporting specialists. They said it enabled independent newsgathering, and helped them to negotiate ‘obstacles’.

If you don’t know how to be culturally aware with traditional people especially, then it doesn’t matter how much you try to make eye contact you’re not going any further (Katrina Bolton, former journalist, ABC).

Cultural competence is a concept developed in social medicine (Betancourt et al., 2003; see also Purdie et al., 2010). It refers to an ability to interact effectively

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<sup>12</sup> The term some Indigenous people and organisations now prefer.

with people of different cultures and has four dimensions: awareness of one's own cultural worldview; positive attitude towards cultural differences; knowledge of different cultural practices and worldviews; and cross-cultural skills (Betancourt et al., 2003). The ABC and the Australian Press Council have sets of protocols for reporting on Indigenous people and affairs. However, while adhering to these guidelines is crucial, it does not equate to culturally responsive reporting. The codes require journalists to respect Indigenous peoples' beliefs and practices, especially in relation to ceremony and land (Plater, 1992), and participants said they had improved news organisations' approach and their reporting:

Back in the '80s there was pretty much outright refusal by Murdoch papers to even countenance the sort of restrictions on the naming of dead people and so on, and now it's part of the practice of the local Murdoch papers that they will enquire as to whether or not a person's name can be used. The ABC's been pretty good at it for a lot longer, so that's been a big shift (Chips Mackinolty, former Fairfax Media and News Corp correspondent).

The literature on media representation identifies obstacles to quality reporting, from lack of familiarity with Indigenous public spheres (Meadows, 2005; Waller, 2010a) to racist attitudes (Jakubowicz et al., 1994). Journalists who participated in this study were reflexive about barriers that made it difficult to get Indigenous voices into their reports, from lack of cultural responsiveness on their part, to newsroom values and norms:

The most difficult thing with Indigenous reporting is actually getting their voices. You want their voices but it's so hard to get Indigenous voices—getting people to talk with you and share with you stories, particularly if it's not a hip, hip-hooray story because you run into all sort of barriers, the shyness barrier, the is my English good enough barrier, the cultural barriers (Katrina Bolton, former journalist, ABC).

Mackinolty, Murdoch and McLaughlin identified their lack of Indigenous language ability as a barrier to good reporting. McLaughlin underlined that not being able to speak with people in Indigenous languages was:

... a huge impediment to cutting through and being able to talk to people ... you rely on someone who has got a rough understanding of English ... or on the rare occasion you actually hire a professional interpreter, or you rely on white people who have worked there long enough that they can speak the language. So all of that means stuff is necessarily filtered so ... you can never really be confident that you're getting it right all the time (Murray McLaughlin, journalist, ABC).

These accounts demonstrate that the journalists who were interviewed do not attribute lack of Indigenous voice in the news solely to the ideological position of their media organizations. Lack of cultural competence on their part and investment in it by newsrooms were understood by participants to be major barriers to representing Indigenous perspectives. For example, Mackinolty commented on the lack of education of journalists on Indigenous culture, society and politics:

I don't know any journalist since I've been here ... who has made an attempt to learn an Aboriginal language, or who has made any serious attempt to go through some kind of orientation course or learnt anything much about kinship systems and political systems and so on ... and it really comes out. I remember when Gorbachev came into power in the Soviet Union, within days every journalist knew how to pronounce his name, but you still get journalists who can't even get their heads around how to pronounce Aboriginal names, personal names or community names (Chips Mackinolty, former Fairfax Media and News Corp correspondent).

Another barrier was the clash between newsgathering rituals and Indigenous practices:

... the two are really quite directly opposed often, like your time frames and your budget and the time frames that pushes on you, are really like direct opposite to what is considered polite in Indigenous culture. But sometimes it's also knowing how to ask (Katrina Bolton, former journalist, ABC).

“Knowing how to ask” involves spending time with Indigenous people, which can be difficult for journalists for a range of reasons. Koch emphasised this as a most important aspect of quality Indigenous reporting (Waller, 2010a). Other specialists underlined this point as well:

You can't just rush in bang, bang and get your interview. You've got to sit down, how you're going, what's going on, and then finally they might tell you what you want to know (Lindsay Murdoch, journalist, Fairfax Media).

Koch and McLaughlin identified patience as an important quality:

When you go there under your own steam you've just got to have patience because people run their own timetable. It's no use saying I'll see you at 2 o'clock next Wednesday. It's a matter of rolling up on Wednesday and just sitting around and waiting and sometimes it never happens, and I've long learnt not to feel any frustration about that (Murray McLaughlin, journalist, ABC).

Nevertheless, newsroom racism was an obstacle some reporters identified. It took several forms. The first was a lack of interest in Indigenous stories from news editors. Couldry (2006) contended that what is omitted from news agendas can tell us as much about the beliefs and values of media organizations as what is published. Meadows (2001) has shown that Indigenous people are routinely silenced through being *talked about*, rather than *heard*, in broadcast news on Indigenous affairs. Dreher (2010) argued that entrenched news values and existing story agendas shape media discussion of marginalised groups—focusing on addressing the stereotypes and concerns of perceived ‘mainstream’ audiences, rather than providing an open forum where marginalized peoples’ perspectives can be aired:

... there is ... a limited appetite for blackfella stories. I can remember I’d been up here not that long really, maybe a year, and I can remember my EP [executive producer] said to me, she said, now Murray we like your stories, but do you reckon you could get a few more white faces in there? That’s the prevailing attitude (Murray McLaughlin, journalist, ABC).

Gosford expressed the opinion that journalists from the Murdoch press who were in Central Australia to cover the NTER sought out routine and predictable images and stories about Indigenous dysfunction:

*The Australian* had a bunch of journalists going around here who were basically out writing black ... they wanted pictures of kids, snotty nosed kids with dirty nappies or naked, playing in the dirt with beer cans around, or old crones standing around drunk. And they got it because there’s lots of that here (Bob Gosford, journalist, *Crikey*).

The media plays a key role in the process of entrenching racism at an institutional level through routine, day-to-day ‘reinforcement of stereotypes’ (Said, 2003: 26). Meadows’ (2001) study of national television coverage of Indigenous people found it reinforced the dominant ideology of non-Indigenous racial superiority, thereby contributing to a stream of research that has found media representations of Indigenous Australians and issues are racist discourses (Cottle, 2004; Jakubowicz et al., 1994). Media representations and narratives have been found to sensationalise Indigenous issues by highlighting violence and dysfunction (Hollinsworth, 2005; McCallum, 2007).

Bolton recalled being deeply uncomfortable when she was sent to an Alice Springs shopping centre to get Indigenous peoples’ reactions on welfare quarantining for a news story on the NTER being produced out of the ABC’s Canberra studios:

It was awful. And in the end someone did talk because I kind of sweet talked/charmed/ batted my eyelids into it and [they] also knew our camera man who actually happened to be Indigenous ... But, it was just so contrived because of the speed and the urgency and the expectation that we could just snap our fingers and get Indigenous reaction ... I think it was worse because there were all these implicit assumptions: ‘Hi, you’re an Aboriginal person in the supermarket you must be on welfare.’ It was just awful (Katrina Bolton, former journalist, ABC).

Participants identified a range of Indigenous cultural practices journalists need to understand and negotiate. McLaughlin said mourning practices, known as sorry business, was “the biggest disrupter of story ventures”:

The number of times I’ve turned up to a place and just can’t do anything ... can’t move around even because of this sorry business going on, or fortunate enough to learn about it before I go and have to cancel the trip. Sorry business prevails, that’s the reality (Murray McLaughlin, journalist, ABC).

Other cultural practices are not so familiar to many journalists, such as who has the right to speak about certain land, certain business:

So that whole thing, that whole cultural thing of not speaking out of turn, not speaking when it’s not your land, not speaking when you’re not senior enough, is really, really, really limiting (Katrina Bolton, former journalist, ABC).

Bolton said many elders did not trust journalists and she would approach younger people:

There’s no affection towards the media among some of the older people. When you blast in there and shove a camera in their face and want them to talk quickly or in brief answers, it’s just so culturally clashing. So you get that problem where the sort of young articulate person ... gives you a great background briefing and says all the things you need to hear and then says ‘Oh, but I can’t say it’.

Understanding the social dynamics of an Indigenous society can assist journalists in the quest for comment. Bolton described her approach on a court story at Borrooloola:

I just went and said, ‘do you mind if I sit down with your mob’, and everyone ... just stayed fairly silent and I sat down. I didn’t start talking straight away, and slowly I did, a little, and not just to one person, but a

few people, and suggested the idea that maybe they might talk with me and why. But also said things like if you want to sit together and pick one person to talk ... that's OK. Those kind of things are barriers to people, but no one ever really explains to you as a journalist that perhaps it might make ... all the difference ... might mean the difference between getting a piece from them or not.

### **The ways journalism imposes its own logic**

Because of the very public relationship between Indigenous Australia and the state (Meadows, 2005), much Indigenous news is politically enabled, framed and driven. Journalists rely on government to take them to 'remote' settlements, and much of the news is generated from the offices of politicians and public servants.

Participants from the Northern Territory who are not journalists identified pressures reporters are under to conform to the agendas and values of their elite sources and their newsrooms. Champagne (2005) observed such journalists are torn between the contradictory demands of economic profitability, taking political positions and the imperatives proper to intellectual work (Champagne, 2005). One academic and former ministerial adviser commented:

I know the [reporters who] try and do things well, like you know, the old traditions of enquiry, and ... they have this sense of what they're there to do intellectually, ethically, and then they have a whole lot of other imperatives. They have the imperatives of the station, the editor, not crossing this line, not crossing that line and it's a rope that they walk and then of course, no time is given to actually do original enquiry to the depth that's ever needed. So if you're going to do that you're more or less doing it as a labour of love in your own time ... Otherwise they're just getting the verbatim press releases off the fax machine from the minister's office and printing that. They're not doing really any exposé (Tess Lea, academic, Charles Darwin University).

Mackinolty observed that most Indigenous affairs reporting in the territory relied heavily on official sources within government:

A hell of a lot of reporting generally up here is reporting of press releases and then getting the other side to say what they think about that press release. [There is] very little independent generation of stories.

Indigenous reporting specialists expressed frustration with these reporting

practices because they said the result was news that reflects the agendas of powerful sources. Graham Ring, who worked as a journalist for both mainstream and Indigenous publications, reflected:

If you only get ... the products from Minister Macklin's spin-doctors saying 'this is a great thing' then people from Sydney and Melbourne are not going to get an opportunity to see much of the case against it as it were.

Former ABC journalist and NT Government media advisor Ursula Raymond said much of the mainstream news commentary was written remotely and with little or no direct reference to Indigenous people or organisations:

There's a lot of people who write stuff from interstate, they don't actually come here and write the story, or if they do come here, the odd ones ... they don't contact you for whatever reason.

As McChesney (2003) argues, this reliance on official sources gives those in political office power to set the news agenda through what they speak about, and just as importantly, through what they remain silent about. Study participants described how clever politicians use journalistic conventions to their advantage (Waller, 2012) and they observed that Territory-based journalists cannot afford to antagonise official sources too much without risk of being cut off and therefore being ineffective. McChesney (2003) says reliance on official sources gives the news a very conventional and mainstream feel:

In view of the fact that legitimate sources tend to be restricted to political and economic elites, this bias sometimes makes journalists appear to be stenographers to those in power (McChesney 2003: 303).

McLaughlin observed that journalists from the eastern seaboard who covered the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) followed government media agendas closely and made no adjustment to their routine newsgathering practices, such as focusing on elite sources (Gans, 1979), to accommodate the remote context:

I was at Mutitjulu the day that they rolled in and there was chaos. It was a bloody traffic jam at Mutitjulu, they came from everywhere ... the attention from mainstream media down south lasted for a few weeks and was usually tied to things like visits by [Indigenous affairs minister Mal] Brough or [Prime Minister John] Howard ... and you'd roll up and join the throng. It was just like being in the big city really, cameras everywhere ... that coverage tended to be pretty superficial, but you knew instinctively that it would fall off (Murray McLaughlin, journalist, ABC).

Hess (1996) found ‘parachute’ journalists, such as those described above, “know a great deal about covering crises but not necessarily much about the crisis they are covering” (1996: 100). Koch observed these reporters’ lack of knowledge, time and rapport resulted in distrust on the part of Indigenous people:

... there’s this term, they call us ‘seagulls’ — politicians and journalists — because they say that we fly in, shit on them, and leave. (Tony Koch, journalist, *The Australian*).

## Conclusions

News is never just the product of the specific logic of the journalistic field. To avoid this kind of media centric bias (Couldry, 2004), the project to which this monograph contributes was underpinned by a multi-perspectival and policy-specific approach. We have examined journalism in its complex relations with Indigenous people, bureaucracies, academia, activist organisations and the other social spaces with which it interacts in order to report on specific Indigenous policies. The value and relevance of Marchetti’s scholarship lies in its insistence on seeing journalism as a complex field and not as a single homogenous institution or profession, and in recognizing that even within journalism rounds, or specialisations, there are variations that inflect the reporting. The media-related practices study participants share through this monograph suggest that ‘remote’ Indigenous reporting for white, mainstream media outlets and audiences is a relatively weak subfield. According to participants the subfield is dominated by *The Australian* newspaper, a few Indigenous media stars, and most journalists are local and national reporters. It attracts few economic resources and is not perceived to be of high news value, unless stories fit the routine frames of crisis, violence or political controversy. Rapid turnover of local journalists and highly mobile Indigenous sources make fluidity and mobility defining characteristics.

Marchetti (2005) found that from the generalists’ perspective, what matters is mastery of journalistic skills including resourcefulness, speed, brashness, ability to get there first, and independence vis à vis sources. These attributes are said to equip reporters to handle any topic at short notice, and write about it in a way the public can understand. However, Champagne argued “generic discourse on ‘the journalist’ is an obstacle to understanding the field of relations in which this actor is situated and plays the game” (Champagne, 2005: 55). Depending on the outlet and news department, journalists are nearer to or farther from the *autonomous* (intellectual), or *heteronomous* (primarily economic/commercial) pole, and they are more or less competent concerning the topics they cover.

Journalists with expertise in the subfield said mainstream journalistic skills alone were inadequate for covering ‘remote’ Indigenous contexts, where knowledge of cultural practices is needed to gather story ideas and perspectives from Indigenous sources (Waller, 2010a). The wider logic of journalism, expressed through news values (Gans, 1979) and imagined audiences (Dreher, 2010), have also been observed to play a role in determining what resources eastern seaboard newsrooms will make available at different times, and what kinds of stories they pursue and represent. Marchetti (2005) said the positioning of specialists in the journalistic space could be sensitive to characteristics of the era. This has been a key focus of *The Media and Indigenous Policy* project because certain events, especially controversies, can contribute to transforming the position of topical news specialties or their content (Koch-Baumgarten & Voltmer, 2010). McCallum’s (2011) quantitative analysis of Indigenous health reporting in mainstream Australian newspapers between 1988 and 1995 graphically illustrates this argument. Our qualitative studies of media power and the NTER in 2007 (McCallum & Waller, 2013; McCallum & Reid, 2012) also provide compelling evidence of this reporting trend. McLaughlin observed that the NTER generated intense media interest from generalists for just a short period:

The Intervention ... for a while there it was a window — it was open slather, you could get on anything you wanted but the window’s to an extent closed again and it is a constant battle.

Taking a practice approach based in Bourdieu’s tradition of field-based research has generated some precise local understandings of this ‘constant battle’ to make mainstream Australia aware of ‘remote’ Indigenous people in Australia and to hold governments accountable for the policies that shape their existence. These insights inform the wider project’s findings about how journalism interacts with other fields and why Indigenous policies are represented and discussed in certain ways at certain times.

At its best moments, the distinctive Australian journalism specialisation discussed here amplifies Indigenous voices in the mainstream (McCallum et al 2012), thereby contributing to Australia’s vibrant democracy. It can enable the nation and the world to come to better understandings of the rich and complex world of ‘remote’ Australian Indigenous people and sheds light on the issues that concern them. At its worst, it triggers knee-jerk policy reactions from politicians that have negative impacts upon the lived experience of Indigenous Australians (McCallum, 2012; Waller, 2013). Greater commitment and investment is needed at social, institutional, professional and personal levels to strengthen this unique form of Australian journalism.

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Lisa Waller is a senior lecturer in Journalism at Deakin University, Victoria. Her research explores how news media shape social space, from small regional communities to the judicial system and controversial policy fields, including Indigenous affairs. Before becoming an academic in 2007, she worked as a staff journalist on metropolitan daily newspapers including *The Newcastle Herald*, *The Canberra Times*, *The Australian* and *The Australian Financial Review*. Her PhD was part of an Australian Research Council Discovery Project that investigated the relationship between news media and Indigenous policymaking in Australia between Australia's bicentennial celebrations (1988) and the Apology to the Stolen Generations (2008).

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