Reporting Military Conflict and Human Rights Abuse: The Australian Press and Bougainville, 1996


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Declaration

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma. No other person’s work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis. This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

John Roberts
Dedicated to the people of Bougainville.
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List of Abbreviations

AAP: Australian Associated Press.
ABC: Australian Broadcasting Commission.
AP: Associated Press.
BIG: Bougainville Interim Government.
BRA: Bougainville Revolutionary Army.
CNN: Cable News Network.
CRA: Conzinc Rio Tinto Australia.
CRAE: Conzinc Rio Tinto Australia Explorations.
IBIS: Independent Bougainville Information Service.
PNG: Papua New Guinea.
RTZ: Rio Tinto Zinc.
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Summary

In this thesis, I study Australian press reporting of the Bougainville War (1988-1997). My focus is the reporting in three newspapers which are commonly understood to be part of the ‘quality press’: the Australian, the Sydney Morning Herald and the Age. I concentrate on their reporting of three incidents which occurred in 1996, in the southwest of Bougainville. Two of these incidents (which occurred at Simbo and Malabita) look like significant abuses of human rights and the other involved a battle between the BRA (Bougainville Revolutionary Army) and PNGDF (Papua New Guinea Defence Force) troops (at Kangu Beach). The Papua New Guinea (PNG) government also alleged that human rights abuses took place during that battle.

I ask two questions:

• How did the three newspapers report these incidents?

• How can we best understand this process of reporting?

I argue that there was a dichotomous pattern in the reporting. The three newspapers portrayed the victims of the BRA (at Kangu Beach) more sympathetically than they portrayed the victims of the PNGDF (at Simbo and Malabita).

I further argue that both the ‘liberal’ model – which emphasises factors such as journalists’ access to reliable sources – and the ‘political-economic’ model – which emphasises factors such as the government’s role as a major source for news – provide some understanding of the process of press reporting. However, I argue that the political-economic approach, as exemplified by Herman and Chomsky (1988), provides the most satisfactory way to understand this process. The news presentation, in this case, is best understood as reflecting domestic power interests in Australia.

I firstly review the literature on mass media reporting of war before turning to a detailed description and analysis of the reporting of the three cases. In this description and analysis, I use a theoretical framework which draws mainly on the political-economic approach of Herman and Chomsky (1988) and the cultural approach of Cerulo (1998).
I then discuss the reporting using evidence from interviews with the key journalists who covered the incidents in 1996. To understand the reporting, I compare the heuristic value of two approaches to the study of war reporting: the ‘liberal’ (conventional) approach, which sees the mass media as playing an adversarial role in society and the ‘political-economic’ approach, which sees the mass media as playing a legitimising role.
INTRODUCTION

In 1963, the Nasioi people of central Bougainville, a small island in the South Pacific (see maps, figs 0-1 and 0-2, pp. 2-3, below) faced a huge threat to their traditional culture, economy and natural environment. That year, Conzinc Rio Tinto Australia Explorations (CRAE) began exploring their land for gold and copper. In 1963, Bougainville was part of the Australian administered UN trust territory, New Guinea.

Eventually, in 1969, encouraged by the Australian administration and against the wishes of the population (Age, 16 September 1997, p. 9) workers began to establish a giant gold and copper mine. The mine was to cause much environmental and social devastation (Applied Geological Associates, 1989). It also fuelled the growth of a longstanding independence movement in Bougainville (Pembshaw, 1992).

The political conflict over the territory and the mine reached a head in November 1988, when a small group of Bougainvillean activists blew up power pylons, forcing the closure of the mine. They wanted the PNG government to negotiate both about compensation for the mine and about independence.

However, the PNG government, faced with this threat to the integrity of its nation-state, sought to reassert its control and immediately dispatched a riot squad, the Police Mobile Response Unit. Later, they would send in PNG Defence Force (PNGDF) regular troops. According to the United Nations (1996) and Amnesty International (1990), these security forces committed many human rights abuses in 1988.

By early 1989 the indigenous people of Bougainville had formed the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) to fight the central government forces.

The Australian government and Australian defence forces personnel were to become directly involved in the Bougainville War (O’Callaghan, 1999a, Cronau, 1993, Watts, 1994, John, 1999, Sharp, 1997). As early as 1990, the PNGDF formed, trained, provided weapons to, directed and paid local militias. These groups, named the ‘Resistance’, were to play a major part in the military operations, which were designed to quash the separatist movement.
Figure 0-1: Papua New Guinea’s area of direct military interest. Source: Dibb and Nicholas (1996, p. xii).
Figure 0-2: Map of West Pacific Islands. Adapted from Map of West Pacific Islands (1998) produced by U.S. Central Intelligence Agency http://www.lib.utexas.edu/Libs/PCL/Map_collection/australia/West_Pacific.

The fighting ended in 1997 with the signing of the Burnham peace agreement and since then the peace process has proceeded apace. In early 2001 the parties agreed to a number of conditions as part of an ongoing peace settlement: that the ‘Resistance’ and BRA hand in weapons to be stored in locked containers, under the supervision of the United Nations; that a referendum on independence for Bougainville be held in 10-15 years; that an interim autonomous Bougainville government, with its own police force, be formed whilst the central government maintain responsibility for foreign affairs, defence and banking (National, 2002b). The PNG parliament is expected to pass legislation enabling the peace settlement to be realised as this thesis goes to press (Moruata, 2000).

Without prejudging the precise role of the Australian media in the diplomatic and military policies and interventions of the Australian government, it would seem that there is value in exploring the activities and significance of the Australian press in reporting this war.

While there are many aspects of this conflict, I have chosen to concentrate on three events. Two of these, by conventional standards, constitute prima facie cases of serious human rights abuse. The other was a battle during which, the Papua New Guinea government alleged, human rights abuses took place.

In 1996 three mass killings occurred in the context of Papua New Guinea’s counterinsurgency operations, in southwest Bougainville. In the first incident ten to twelve civilians, including women and children, were killed by PNG troops and ‘Resistance’ (pro-government militia) members at Simbo village, in January. The second incident occurred at the Kangu Beach ‘care centre’ (resettlement camp). PNGDF guards had been abusing detainees, including the wives of ‘Resistance’ members. In September, the militia unit finally defected to the BRA and with them attacked the guards and dissolved the camp. The combined BRA/ex-‘Resistance’ group killed thirteen security force members. The PNGDF claimed that some of the victims were disarmed before being killed and photographic evidence indicated that two of the bodies were later mutilated. In the final incident, nine civilians were killed in a mortar attack on a church by the PNGDF at Malabita, in November.
Two questions: Firstly, how did the Australian quality press report these incidents? Secondly, how are we to understand this process of press reportage?

Throughout this war elements of the mass media, including the press, reported on both the military operations and diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict. In this regard, the Australian press played an important role in bringing this conflict to the attention of Australian ‘public opinion’ and to the policy-making community.

Whilst there are a few writers (Pellegrini, 1994, Cronau, 1994, LaFitte, 1992, Watts, 1994, 1996a, 1996b, 1999c, Watts and Porszolt, 1993) who have briefly dealt with Australian mass media reporting of the Bougainville War, the topic has received little scholarly attention. In this thesis, I offer the first detailed and systematic analysis of the role of Australian media reporting of the Bougainville War. There are several related rationales for addressing mass media reporting of the three incidents in 1996.

Firstly, the mass media can help to mobilise public opinion to protest against and possibly stop violent abuses. It can inform the public about the situation and create an environment where they will be more likely to take direct action. For example, in the 1970’s Australian unions placed bans on South African ships in protest against apartheid. It is likely that the workers and union leaders, in this case at least in part, learnt about the apartheid situation from the mass media.

While governments plainly have and rely on their own diplomatic and military intelligence sources as a guide to their actions, the press also provides an important source of information to governments and can play an important role in shaping political support for – or opposition to – particular foreign policies.

The role of the media in mobilising support for particular diplomatic and military intervention was revealed recently by news coverage in Australia about East Timor, where one third of the population was killed (directly or indirectly) by the Indonesian military in the years 1975 to

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1 I have found a substantial number of books about the Bougainville War, especially for the period from 1988 to 1992, (the first three years) and from 1998 (after the war ended, with a crisis in Papua New Guinea surrounding the use of British and South African mercenaries in Bougainville and the subsequent implementation of an Australian sponsored peace process). However, I have found no books on the role of the Australian media.
1996. The foreign affairs committee of the Australian parliament (cited in Pilger, 1998) made a conservative estimate that 200,000 people were killed in East Timor during those years.

In terms of lives lost, the case of Bougainville is comparable to East Timor, considering the time scale and population. According to Claxton (1998) there were 10,000 to 20,000 deaths, mainly of civilians, in Bougainville (five to ten percent of the population) over a period of nine years. However, in the case of East Timor, the deaths occurred over 25 years. Considering the time scale, the proportion of deaths is equivalent to 25 per cent of the population over 25 years – making it comparable to East Timor. The comparison is made more poignant when one considers the capacity of the Suharto regime to impose state terror. The CIA once claimed that Suharto’s performance in 1965, in this regard, was comparable to that of the Nazis in World War II (cited in Chomsky, 2000, p. 64).

Bougainville has been the subject of domination by the West since the late nineteenth century. Germany and England agreed that it should come under the dominion of the German Empire in 1899. It fell to Australia during World War I and was held briefly by Japan during World War II. After World War II, it became part of the territory of New Guinea, which was mandated to the Australian government. Papua New Guinea (PNG) became independent in 1975 and Bougainville became part of this state in 1976. However, since 1975 Australia has maintained a ‘special relationship’ with PNG. Australia supplies about $300 million per year in aid and maintains close defence, commercial, political and cultural ties with PNG (Connell, 1997).


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2 Most of these were caused by the economic and communications blockade which was enforced by the PNGDF (Claxton, 1998). Some civilians were killed by the BRA, but reports by the United Nations (1996) and Amnesty International (1994, 1997) indicate that the majority of civilians killed by direct violence were victims of the central government forces. These victims were killed by such means as indiscriminate bombing and strafing and summary execution. (United Nations, 1996, Amnesty International, 1994, 1997)

3 The Australian senate committee which inquired into Australia’s defence relationship with Papua New Guinea in 1991 found that:

  Australia has supported the unity of Papua New Guinea and has played a major role in the training and equipping of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force, including the controversial supply of helicopters that were used on Bougainville. These issues have precluded Australia from playing a significant role in finding a solution to the crisis. (Australia, 1991, p. 183)
From the early years of the war the Australian government maintained a strategic objective to protect PNG’s sovereignty over Bougainville. However, in 1993 the Australian government began to withdraw support and instead sought a political solution for the conflict after PNG’s war effort began to falter (Gillespie, 1999a). These changes in policy direction gained momentum in March 1996, with the election of the Liberal government. According to Watts (1997a), the new government was more active than their predecessors in seeking a political solution. Australian support for the war dwindled more in mid 1996. The success of the BRA on the battlefield convinced many policy makers in Canberra of the futility of continued military operations (Watts, 1997a). In contrast, PNG Prime Minister Chan continued to favour the use of military options (Watts, 2000b). Despite the tensions in its relationship with PNG over these tactical issues, the Australian government was still committed to the strategic objective of maintaining PNG’s sovereignty over Bougainville. As Australian defence planner and academic, Paul Dibb, stated at the PNG Update Forum, held at Parliament House in Canberra in November 1996:

It is in Australia’s national interest that we continue to see a cohesive, unified, non-secessionist Papua New Guinea. Fragmentation would involve all sorts of potential geopolitical problems. (cited in McLellan, 1997, p. 10)

Moreover, the Australian government continued to provide military support which Sharp (1997) and John (1999) argued was crucial for PNG’s operations in Bougainville in 1996.

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4 According to the 1991 Australian senate committee:

Australia’s concern with Bougainville is twofold; first is a general concern for the integrity of Papua New Guinea and the stability of the area; second, the interests of Australian mining companies have been central to the conflict. (Australia, 1991, p. 183)

Australian foreign minister Evans stated on ABC radio, in January 1990 that in relation to the Bougainville War:

From a purely self interested Australian regional security perspective, the fragmentation of PNG is something we ... would like to see avoided at all costs. (cited in Watts, 1994, p. 24, emphasis in text)

One action that Evans presided over soon after this statement was issued was the change in defence arrangements between Papua New Guinea and Australia. According to Evans and Grant (1991, p. 171) these arrangements were made with a view to ‘gradually shifting the balance of support from an external to an internal focus’ to shift the focus of the PNGDF from external to internal defence (that is defending the state from insurrection). This policy was formulated soon after concern about Bougainville ‘became acute in 1990-91’ when both governments ‘embarked on a joint reassessment of the whole pattern of defence and security co-operation’. (Evans and Grant, 1991, p. 171)

According to the Australian senate inquiry into Australia’s defence relationship with Papua New Guinea (Australia, 1991, p. 183), the Australian Government ‘made no secret of its strong support for the Papua New Guinea Government’ in relation to the war on Bougainville. Furthermore, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (cited in Australia, 1991, p. 191) stated that:

Australia has a strategic interest in the unity of Papua New Guinea, the maintenance of the authority of the central government, the restoration of law and order on Bougainville and the continuing viability of the existing and (potential) substantial Australian investment in the Papua New Guinea economy.

5 These tensions are discussed in O’Callaghan (1999a).
Past Australian governments supported the interests of Australian multinational mining corporation, Conzinc Rio Tinto Australia (CRA, which has since been taken over by its UK parent company, Rio Tinto). This corporation played a key role in the conflict. According to Oliver (1991) the Australian government supported the initial counterinsurgency operations in part to protect the viability of CRA’s mine at Panguna. Furthermore, John Momis, a PNG parliamentarian, argued that CRA and the former colonial administration were to blame for the conflict, as he said:

This crisis was something that was created by the Australian colonial administration and multi-national company Conzinc Rio Tinto of Australia. … In their zeal to raise revenue and to enable PNG to be independent, they dismally failed to take into account the importance of rights of people to land and to own resources and to participate actively in work that the mine created. The colonial administration and Conzinc Rio Tinto must accept the blame for the imposition of this problem on PNG. They were not prepared to listen to the duly elected leaders of Bougainville. Their only motive was a profit motive.

(Address to the PNG parliament, cited in the National, 2001)

Given the importance of Australia’s role in the war, there is clearly some value in exploring the role of the press in helping to produce this policy conclusion. There are some more personal reasons for my interest in this issue. I have been actively involved for some years in working on various campaigns to support the people in Bougainville in their bid for independence and I was interested to survey the press reporting of this conflict from its inception.

Secondly, there are some important theoretical issues at stake. As Meehan, Mosko and Wasko (1994) argue, there is a need in critical communication studies to synthesise political-economic and cultural approaches to the mass media. There is something of a gulf between

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A group of landowners from the Panguna area have recently launched a class action in the US against RioTinto Zinc (RTZ, the former parent company of CRA, which has since taken over CRA). The landowners allege that the company played a key role in the war and are demanding compensation. According to their lawyer, Steve Berman:

The suit claims the company engaged in a joint venture with the PNG government to maintain a copper mine on the island, which resulted in international environmental violations and crimes against humanity stemming from a military blockade motivated by civilian resistance to the mine. (Hagens-Berman, 2000)

The PNG government has opposed the lawsuit by introducing legislation to stop it proceeding and writing to the Australian and US governments in protest against the court proceedings (Watts, 2002). The Australian government also wrote to the US government, agreeing with the PNG government that ‘the US “should not sit in judgement on the acts of government of other states” and that the action could “give rise to recriminations”, thereby endangering the Bougainville peace process.’ (Roberts, quoting the PNG Ambassador to the US, Mr Igara, Sydney Morning Herald, 23 March 2002, http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2002/03/22/australia.htm) In late March, the US court dismissed the case against Rio Tinto stating that the proceedings might adversely affect US foreign policy interests (it would affect the relationship between PNG and the US). However, the judge imposed a condition on the PNG government not to impose any legal bar to prevent the case proceeding in PNG (Korimbao, 2002). Steve Berman (cited in Korimbao, 2002) said that apart from the political issues raised by the court, the case could still proceed in the US.
these two approaches. The cultural approach tends to emphasise issues such as ethnicity and gender, whereas the political-economic approach tends to emphasise ‘structural’ factors such as ownership of media corporations and the role of governments (Meehan, Mosko and Wasko, 1994). My aim is for this thesis to contribute to this synthesising project.

Another issue is the social role of the mass media. Many writers in the ‘liberal’ tradition (discussed in chapter one, below) assume that, in the reporting of war, the mass media play an ‘adversarial role’ (Adubato, 1997). It is not surprising that many Australians hold this view, given that the mass media often promote their adversarial role in the reporting of many political issues. Examples such as the recent reporting of the ‘children overboard’ affair serve to confirm this view. During the Australian federal election campaign in 2001, the incumbent Liberal government promoted the false story that asylum seekers threw children overboard after being intercepted in the Indian Ocean whilst attempting to enter Australia. Recently, there have been many press reports which have been critical of the government in this regard (for example, see A ge, 4 March, 2002, p. 15). However, many writers, particularly those in the ‘political-economic’ tradition (discussed in chapter one, below), argue that in reporting war the mass media play a ‘legitimising’ rather than ‘adversarial’ role (Adubato, 1997). Writers such as Mills (1959), Chomsky (1989, 1993, 1996, 2000), Kellner (1995) and Herman (1999) argue that despite the existence of critical commentary, the general thrust of reporting typically reinforces the political agenda of privileged segments of society.

Finally, there is debate over explanations for bias in mass media reporting of war. As I discuss in chapter one, below, writers in both the ‘liberal’ and ‘political economic’ traditions agree that the mass media often present a biased representation of war. However, these writers differ in their explanations for this pattern of reporting. Writers in the ‘liberal’ tradition argue that such reporting is due to circumstances beyond the control of the media. An example is when the military attempt to manipulate and control the media in times of war (Young and Jesser, 1997). In contrast, writers in the ‘political-economic’ tradition (such as Herman and Chomsky, 1988) argue that the mass media are complicit with the government and military in presenting a biased view.

The primary data used in the study comes from two sources. The published press reports and interviews with journalists.

I study the reporting in three Australian newspapers, which are commonly understood to be part of Australia’s quality press: the A ustralian, the A ge and the Sydney M ornin g Her ald.
on these publications because they have a distinct and politically important readership – well-educated middle-class Australians. Furthermore, they cover the majority of the Australian newspaper market: New South Wales (the *Sydney Morning Herald*); Victoria (the *Age*) and all over the nation (the *Australian*). They also provide a large enough, but manageable, sample.

Between 1997 and 2000, I interviewed the key journalists who reported the Bougainville War. I spoke with the three main journalists who covered the three incidents in question: Mary Louise O’Callaghan (the *Australian*), Paul Ruffini (whose *Australian Associated Press* stories appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Age*) and Lucy Palmer who wrote for the *Sydney Morning Herald* in the latter half of 1996. I also spoke with three media workers who did not write for these newspapers: Sean Dorney (ABC), Max Watts (a freelance journalist and a correspondent for several European media outlets7) and Wayne Coles-Janess (a filmmaker, who visited the scenes of one of the three incidents and interviewed eyewitnesses from two of them, in Bougainville, in 1997). The interviews were semi-structured and I focussed on several themes concerning their experiences in reporting the war, especially the three incidents in 1996. These themes were:

- Reasons for the particular ways in which the three newspapers portrayed the violence;
- how decisions were made about the use of some sources in preference to others;
- why some topics were included and others excluded;
- the role of vested interests such as government departments.

I will use these two sources (interview data and press reports) to examine press reporting in the light of relevant theories of media in advanced industrial societies such as Australia. This will help to answer my two research questions: How did the Australian quality press report the three incidents? In a context of scholarly debate about the role of the media, how do we best understand this process of press reportage?

In chapter one, I will review literature in three areas: The Bougainville War and the Australian media; mass media and modern societies, in particular, Australia; and mass media reporting of

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7 Watts wrote regularly for: *Neues Deutschland* (Berlin Daily); *Woz* (Die Wochenzeitung Zuerich Weekly); *A'kin* (Vienna Monthly). He also wrote occasionally for *Frankfurter Rundschau* (Frankfurt/National Daily); *Junge Welt* (Berlin Daily); *Blaettchen* (German Bi-Weekly); *Reporteurs Sans Frontieres* (Paris); US Radio Pacifica (Watts, 2001).
wars like the Bougainville War, in Australia and other modern countries. I will ask how this literature can help us to study reporting of the three incidents.

In chapters two and three, I will discuss the reporting of each of the incidents in turn, in the light of the literature discussed in chapter one. Chapter two will be an analysis of the reporting of both the Simbo incident (where ten to twelve civilians were killed by central government forces) and the Kangu Beach incident (where 13 security force members were killed). In chapter three, I will analyse the reporting of the case of Malabita (where nine civilians were killed by the PNGDF).

In chapter four, I will summarise the findings of my analysis of reporting and discuss how we can best explain them. I will argue that: firstly, there was a dichotomous pattern whereby the three newspapers portrayed victims of the BRA more sympathetically than victims of the PNGDF; secondly, that the political-economic approach to mass media reporting of war, as exemplified by the Herman and Chomsky (1988) propaganda model, provides the most satisfying explanation for this pattern of press reportage.
LITERATURE REVIEW

By common consent, the ‘mass media’ are understood to constitute a significant component of modern social, economic, political and cultural life. From Matthew Arnold (1966) to Baudrillard (1995), critics have argued that the media have a significant role in shaping some of the most distinctive features of culture and even social reality itself. The media have likewise been presumed to play a major role in representing the key political, diplomatic and military events of our time, while some writers have insisted that the media, on occasion, become part of those political processes. It should not be surprising that the explanations, characterisations and evaluations of the role and significance of the media are diverse.

My research project is situated in the field of critical communication studies (see Meehan, Mosco and Wasko, 1994 and McChesney, 1994). My aim in this chapter is to review the literature which will help us to study Australian press reporting of violent incidents which occurred in 1996, in the course of the Bougainville War. In this review I want to renew the theoretical debates addressing the social role of the mass media in advanced state-capitalist societies. I will address the mass media, as opposed to the ‘alternative’ media. According to Martin (1995), the mass media are controlled by relatively few people compared to the number in their audiences. In contrast, the alternative media are more subject to control at a grass-roots level and are more financially dependent on their audiences (Martin, 1995).

Because the issue of power is central to mass media reporting of war, I will concentrate on the role of the mass media in power relations in society. As McQuail (1994) argues, power is an important theme in the study of mass media and society. I will review the literature on the role of the mass media in society, mass media reporting of wars in Australia and other modern countries and Australian mass media reporting of the Bougainville War. I categorise the theoretical approaches to the study of media reporting of war into four areas: liberal, political-economic, post-structuralist and cultural.

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8 As I indicated in the introduction to this thesis, there has been little study done specifically on Australian mass media reporting of the Bougainville War.
The ‘liberal’ approach

Those writers who belong to the liberal tradition, have generally promoted what McQuail (1994, p. 69) calls the ‘pluralist media model’. He argues that writers in the pluralist tradition tend to adopt the key assumption that no one ruling group dominates society. An important element of the liberal view is the democratic postulate – that the media, in modern societies, play a counterbalancing role to the power of state institutions such as the military, the bureaucracy and the parliament. This proposition is consistent with the way traditional liberal democratic theory represents the media as the ‘fourth estate’ – an independent institution which checks the power of the sovereign, the parliament and the judiciary. A corollary of the ‘counterbalancing’ view of the media, is the ‘oppositional’ media theory. According to Adubato (1997, p. 29) this has been a dominant school of thought in the literature on state-media relations during wartime. He observes that writers in this school of thought see the media as performing a role as a ‘watchdog’ on the government on behalf of the citizenry.

Many conventional studies of the media deploy many of the themes found in the liberal tradition. They tend to avoid criticism of the media’s role in the capitalist system. As McChesney (1998, p. 4) argues, such work:

…presupposes capitalist society as a given and then discounts structural factors in explaining behaviour.

Likewise, Young and Jesser (1997), writing in the liberal tradition, in their study on the media and the military avoid discussion of certain ‘structural’ factors. These factors include the concentration of media ownership and the mutual interests of mass media corporations, governments and the military (which are assumed in studies in political-economic tradition, discussed below).

Many writers, who work in the liberal tradition, such as Marshall and Kingsbury (1996, pp. 185, 191-92) concede that in times of war, military and government officials attempt to control and manipulate the mass media. Likewise, Young and Jesser (1997), writing in the
same tradition, argue that since the end of the Vietnam War, the military in Australia have tended to impose greater restrictions on – and manipulate – the media to its aims in the preparatory and early stages of the conflict. Similarly, O’Callaghan (1999a) argued that because of the blockade of Bougainville by the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF), Australian journalists were unable to get access to reliable information about the war. She argued that this was a major reason why the Australian mass media often ignored the war.

However, the emphasis of ‘liberal’ writers on government intervention, rather than the response of the mass media leads to an incomplete analysis of the media’s role in times of war. Many writers (Kellner, 1992, Adubato, 1997, Cronau, 1994, Watts, 1999c, Pilger, 1998) challenge this ‘liberal’ position suggesting that there are other factors, besides government intervention, which affect war reportage. These studies show the limitations of O’Callaghan (1999a) who does not address Australian mass media behaviour when reliable information did emerge from Bougainville, despite the blockade. Cronau (1994) argues that there were influences other than the blockade influencing media reporting in Australia. He supports his argument with evidence that the mass media ignored or played down newsworthy information when it did emerge. Cronau (1994, p. 160), a former ABC television journalist, gave the example of an Australian film crew breaching the blockade in 1994 and returning with a ‘journalistic coup.’ They had filmed interviews with Bougainville Interim Government (BIG) President, Francis Ona, Vice President, Joseph Kabui, Commander-in-Chief of the BRA (Bougainville Revolutionary Army), Sam Kauona and other leaders of the independence movement. However, the filmmakers said that television news programs and several current affairs programs in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne showed little interest (cited in Cronau, 1994). Similar evidence was provided by Watts (1994), who observed that the Australian media ignored broadcasts by Radio Free Bougainville, whilst the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation used them regularly. Furthermore, Australian human rights lawyer Rosemarie Gillespie gathered dozens of statutory declarations and took video evidence of human rights

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9 Similarly, media workers in the US claimed that they were unable to perform their ‘watchdog’ role when reporting the Gulf War because of the military regulation of sources. Adubato (1997, p. 78-79) found that:

Many in the media complain that they were denied access to the ‘real story’ of Operation Desert Storm. … the majority of media executives, senior producers and correspondents at ABC and CNN, say they did all they could to report as much of the war as possible.
abuses during three trips to Bougainville (Gillespie, 1999a). Watts (1999c) observed that the mass media paid little attention to Gillespie’s information.

Despite the significant manipulation and control of the media by military and government officials in times of war, writers in the liberal tradition argue that the media continues to play an adversarial role. For example, Marshall and Kingsbury (1996, p. 32) argue that power within the media in Australia is exercised in a fragmented way:

… the media work within social power networks, but in a relative [sic] loose and unstructured way. There is no evidence of a hegemonic control of which the mass media are a part. We do not question that the mass media generally have the capacity to create the multiple realities … However, we will seek to show that…power is not monolithic but rather… subjected to limitations and resistance by others and to manipulation by power holders and would-be power holders.

Similarly, Marshall and Kingsbury (1996, pp. 185, 191-92), argue that during wars the power of the media are open to the potential challenge of independent news-gathering by journalists. They cite the example of the influence of television on the course of the Vietnam War. As Marshall and Kingsbury (1996, p. 192) argue:

In the Vietnam War, American news managers were able to keep the realities hidden for a long period by restricting the movement of reporters in the major war zones… Yet, eventually, in a positive demonstration of media power, television’s graphic on-the-spot reporting of what came to be known as ‘the living-room war’ was a strong factor in the decision by President Lyndon Johnson to end his political career and in America’s eventual decision to withdraw from Vietnam.

However, there is little empirical evidence to suggest that the Australian mass media played a truly adversarial role in reporting the Vietnam War. Marshall and Kingsbury (1996) do not use any evidence to support their assertion that television reporting led to the end of the Vietnam War. Furthermore, most empirical studies (for example, Tiffen, 1990¹⁰) have found that the Australian media supported the Australian and U.S. government agenda for the war

¹⁰ According to Tiffen (1990, p. 112) despite the fact that Australian news coverage ‘often departed from the short term propaganda aims of the American government’, the mass media did not play an adversarial role in reporting the Vietnam War. As Tiffen (1990, p. 137) argues:

The debates about oppositional media are greatly overdrawn in America, but in Australia it would be ludicrous even to raise the issue. The Australian news media lost the war of trying to cover Vietnam. The political irresponsibility of being a junior ally combined with the majority of the Australian press’s whole-hearted support for the government produced an acquiescent, unquestioning media which failed to challenge the assumptions which led to tragedy and failure.
Similarly, in the only detailed empirical studies on the case of the Bougainville War, the findings suggest that the Australian media did not play an oppositional role. Cronau (1994) argues that the media neglected their watchdog role by reporting only some parts of the story of the war. After reviewing the literature, analysing press reports and interviews with journalists, Cronau, 1994, p. 173) argued that:

…we repeatedly hear that the conflict is ‘an internal matter for the PNG government’ despite ‘the universal human rights of the Bougainville population’, and ignoring ‘the vital strategic interest of Australia in PNG that sees Australia providing helicopters, arms, ammunition, patrol boats, mercenary pilots, military advisers and technical personnel, training, and logistical intelligence’.

He concludes as follows:

In making decisions about which parts of the story to tell, much of the mainstream Australian media have chosen sides. The misery and destruction of Bougainville, away from the eyes of the world, is a sign of the dangers of the media’s neglecting the watchdog role. A better understanding of the forces which mould our media may make a contribution towards providing the open scrutiny that is the oxygen of democratic government. (Cronau, 1994, p. 173)

Watts (1999c), who covered the war as a freelance journalist for several European publications, analysed several cases of mass media reporting and spoke to journalists and editors. He argued that the Australian ‘establishment’ media ‘played an essential role in keeping the Australian public acquiescent…about the [Bougainville] war’ (Watts, 1999c, p. 34). However, compared to the literature on Australian reporting of other wars, especially those in Vietnam and the Persian Gulf, these studies are brief and few in number.

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11 McGregor (1998, p. 129), argued that:

Most studies clearly show how in both news reporting and editorial opinion, the support of western intervention in Viet Nam (e.g. Tiffen, Chinn, Brooks, Peterson). Most Australian media reproduced - voluntarily - the shared rhetoric and point-of-view of the Australian and USA governments: the media was [sic] overwhelmingly pro-war, anti-communist and anti- the anti-war movement. (In Australia, even after the election of the Whitlam government in 1972, on an anti-war policy, most of the media remained pro-war.)

More recently, Torney-Porlicki (1999) in a recent book examining Australian war journalism in South East Asia also supports Tiffen’s (1990) view.

12 For example, he argues that Australian aid to Bougainville was ‘targeted’. That is, …a deliberate and major part of the Australian/PNG war plan for the reconquest of Bougainville’ (Watts, 1999c, p. 32). He argues that media reporting assumed ‘such aid was going to those in need’ and that not once did the mass media report or explain this ‘targeting’ of aid (Watts, 1999c, p. 32).
Studies on Australian mass media reporting of the Gulf War\textsuperscript{13} and the East Timor conflict suggest some support for the liberal view. In contrast to studies on media reportage of the Bougainville and Vietnam wars, there is much disagreement concerning the role of the Australian mass media in reporting the East Timor conflict. Tiffen (2001, p. 104) argued that the mass media at times opposed the Australian government, though ‘too often the media took their cues about newsworthiness form what was “in play” in Canberra and Jakarta’. In contrast, Burchill (\textit{Age}, 15 March, 2000, p. 17) and Pilger (1998) both argued that the Murdoch press, including Australia’s only national newspaper, clearly supported the agenda of the Australian and Indonesian governments, in their reporting of the East Timor conflict. Thus, there is some question about the exact role played by the Australian mass media in recent conflicts.

Writers in the liberal tradition, such as Young and Jesser (1997) and Marshall and Kingsbury (1996), point to the existence of criticism of the government in war reporting as evidence that the mass media play an oppositional role. However, the fact that some journalists criticise the government does not necessarily imply that the media play an oppositional role. As Chomsky (in Wintinock and Achbar, 1994) points out, most criticism in the mass media serves to legitimise government agendas, because it is kept within certain bounds. Pilger (1997, p. 23) illustrates this point by referring to the observations of a group of Russians who toured the U.S. long before the end of the Soviet Union:

\begin{quote}
They were astonished to find, after reading the newspapers and watching television, that all the opinions on the vital issues were the same. ‘In our country’, they said, ‘to get that result we have a dictatorship. We imprison people. We tear out their fingernails. Here you have none of that. How do you do it? What’s the secret?’
\end{quote}

Moreover, Chomsky (in Achbar, 1994) argues that criticism of tactical issues only also serves to maintain the pretence of an oppositional media.

The strength of the liberal approach is that it provides useful ideas for analysing how the media can sometimes challenge the power of the military and the government, for example,

\textsuperscript{13} In the case of the Gulf War, Pilger (1997) argued that the Western media, including the Australian media, played a legitimising role. However, Tiffen (1992) is less convinced of this. He disagreed with ‘the most fundamental criticism’ made by anti-war critics: that the media became ‘an arm of government, presenting an officially promoted view of the war.’ (Tiffen, 1992, p. 134) He attributes the poor performance to circumstances and technology rather than complicity with the government agenda. Tiffen (1992, p. 134) concluded as follows:

The long range of the weaponry and the central importance of the air war put the media into a forced dependence upon military and political sources whose ability and willingness to inform were selective. The media were also necessarily captive to the uncertainties and changing expectations which attend all major conflicts.
by journalists independently gathering news. A serious weakness with the liberal approach is that many scholars have found the mass media often supportive of the Australian government agenda in the reporting of war. Moreover, such reporting often cannot be simply attributed to the efforts of the military to manipulate and control the media. This challenges one of the fundamental assumptions in the liberal approach, that the mass media in Australia play an oppositional role to government.

The political-economic approach

Writers in the ‘political-economic approach’ adopt a ‘dominant model’, viewing mass media as playing a key role in the domination of society by a small, privileged minority. As McQuail (1994, p. 69) says, a dominant model:

…sees media as subservient to other institutions, which are themselves interrelated. Media organizations, in this view, are likely to be owned or controlled by a small number of powerful interests and to be similar in type and purpose. They disseminate a limited and undifferentiated view of the world shaped by the perspectives of ruling interests. Audiences are constrained or conditioned to accept the view of the world offered, with little critical response. The result is to reinforce and legitimate the prevailing structure of power and to head off change by filtering out alternative voices.

Writers in this tradition also emphasise ‘structural’ factors, which according to McQuail (1994, p. 9) means that they focus on the relationship between ‘media systems and organisations’ and social structures in society. McChesney (1998, p. 3) observes that writers in this tradition are concerned with:

…the how ownership, support mechanisms (e.g. advertising) and government policies influence media behaviour and content. This line of inquiry emphasises structural factors and the labor process in the production, distribution and consumption of communication. (McChesney, 1998, p. 3)

In line with their adoption of the dominant model, writers in the political-economic tradition (for example Schiller, 1992, Kellner, 1992, Herman and Chomsky, 1988) argue that the media play a legitimising role when reporting war. This contrasts with the view of writers in the liberal tradition who argue that the mass media play an adversarial role.

Theoretical support for the political-economic approach to war reporting stems from a variety of traditions, including neo-Marxist (Schiller, 1984, Parenti, 1989, 1993) and power elite (Mills, 1959, Domhoff, 1990). Many of the assumptions in political-economic writing
are also held by writers in other critical approaches such as critical theory (Gramsci, 1957, Kellner, 1992, 1995) liberal humanism (such as Carey, 1995) and radical pluralism (such as Lindblom, 1977). For the purposes of this thesis, I will concentrate on an important exemplar of the political-economic approach, Herman and Chomsky (1988) ‘propaganda model’.

Herman and Chomsky (1988, p. 306) claim that the mass media are ideological institutions that:

…carry out a system-supportive propaganda function by reliance on market forces, internalized assumptions, and self censorship, and without significant overt coercion.

They offer convincing evidence that the mass media play a legitimising role by comparing countless cases of mass media reporting of war. They observe that the presentation of news in the mass media conforms to a consistent dichotomous pattern. Herman and Chomsky (1988, p. 33) used the concept of ‘worthy and unworthy victims’ to describe this pattern:

A propaganda system will consistently portray people abused in enemy states as worthy victims, whereas those treated with equal or greater severity by its own government or clients will be unworthy.

They observe that, typically, the mass media pay much attention to the victims of official enemies, giving them coverage which tends to excite and enrage the reader. In other words, these victims become ‘worthy’ of our sympathy and attention. In contrast, ‘unworthy victims’ are likely to be ignored or their suffering downplayed. They are portrayed as less ‘worthy’ of our sympathy. An example of dichotomous reporting is the recent mass media reporting of the bombing of New York’s twin towers on September 11 2001. As Pilger (2001, http://www.zmag.org/pilgertruthes.htm) observes, the mass media focus on the victims of the twin towers whilst ignoring the victims of the U.S. and its friends in Iraq and Afghanistan:

…more Iraqi children die every month, mostly as a result of the Anglo-American embargo, than the total number of dead in the twin towers, a truth that is not allowed to enter public consciousness. The killing of Iraqi infants, like the killing of Chechens, like the killing of Afghan civilians, is rated less morally abhorrent than the killing of Americans.

Herman and Chomsky (1988, p. 33) argue that by focussing on victims in enemy states rather than those who are victimised by the U.S. and its friends, the mass media serve domestic
power interests\textsuperscript{14}. Pilger (2001, \url{http://www.zmag.org/pilgertruthes.htm}) argues that the mass media’s dichotomous treatment of U.S. – as opposed to Afghan and Iraqi – victims is influenced by U.S. foreign policy interests in Afghanistan:

The twin towers attacks provided Bush’s Washington with both a trigger and a remarkable coincidence. Pakistan’s former foreign minister Niaz Naik has revealed that he was told by senior American officials in mid-July that military action against Afghanistan would go ahead by the middle of October. The US secretary of state, Colin Powell, was then travelling in central Asia, already gathering support for an anti-Afghanistan war ‘coalition’. For Washington, the real problem with the Taliban was not human rights; these were irrelevant. The Taliban regime simply did not have total control of Afghanistan: a fact that deterred investors from financing oil and gas pipelines from the Caspian Sea, whose strategic position in relation to Russia and China and whose largely untapped fossil fuels are of crucial interest to the Americans. In 1998, Dick Cheney told oil industry executives: ‘I cannot think of a time when we have had a region emerge as suddenly to become as strategically significant as the Caspian.’

To explain the consistent dichotomous pattern in news presentation, Herman and Chomsky (1988) looked to ‘structural’ factors: ownership, advertising, sourcing, ‘flak’ and ideology. They referred to these as the ‘five filters’ through which information must pass before it emerges as news which is ‘fit to print’. As Herman (1998, p. 192) states:

The crucial structural factors derive from the fact that the dominant media are firmly embedded in the \textit{market system}. They are profit-seeking businesses, owned by very wealthy people (or other companies); and they are funded largely by advertisers who are also profit-seeking entities and who want their ads to appear in a supportive selling environment. The media are also dependent on government and major business firms as information sources; and efficiency and political solidarity to prevail between the government, major media and other corporate businesses. Government and large non-media business firms are also best positioned (and sufficiently wealthy) to be able to pressure the media with threats of withdrawal of advertising or TV licences, libel suits and other direct and indirect modes of attack [‘flak’]. The media are also constrained by the dominant ideology, which heavily featured anticommunism before and during the Cold War era and was mobilized often to cause the media to refrain from criticising attacks on small states labeled communist. (My emphasis)

\textsuperscript{14} Herman and Chomsky (1988, p. 33) wrote:

Whilst the focus on Cambodia in the Pol Pot era (and thereafter) was exceedingly serviceable, as Cambodia had fallen to the communists and useful lessons could be drawn by attention to their victims, the numerous victims of the U.S. bombing before the communist takeover were serenely ignored by the U.S. elite press. After Pol Pot’s ouster by the Vietnamese, the United States quietly shifted support to this ‘worse than Hitler’ villain, with little notice in the press, which adjusted once again to the national political agenda.

Carey (1995), a colleague of Chomsky, studied corporate propaganda in Australia and the U.S. during the 20th century. He argued that the media in both countries supported propaganda campaigns which were aimed at advancing the political objectives of privileged segments of the population.

Writers from outside of the political-economic tradition have also provided support for the Herman and Chomsky (1988) model. Ward (1995) explored reporter-source relations in Australian newspapers. He found that journalists were readily captured by sources and that government and corporate sources were able to shape news. White (cited in Ward, 1995, p. 177) suggests that journalists, as a matter of course, use government press releases despite not trusting them. This, he argues, is a shift from the previous practice to ‘distrust and discard’ such material. In 1983, the Hawke government established its own media unit, the ‘National Media Liaison Service’ (NMLS) which, according to Ward (1995, p. 170)

has wielded a considerable influence over the ways in which [Parliamentary Press] Gallery members report federal politics, by providing them with, in effect, information subsidies.

Paul Kelly, a former Gallery correspondent and now editor-in-chief of the Australian, once described aNiMLS [the pejorative term for NMLS] as a ‘defacto research unit for the press gallery’.

The only detailed studies (Cronau, 1994, Watts, 1996a, 1999c, Watts and Porszolt, 1993) of Australian mass media reporting of the Bougainville War also support the Herman and Chomsky (1988) model. For example, Cronau (1994, p. 173), using a combination of the political-economic approach and the cultural approach (discussed below, p. 27) reviewed literature, analysed news reports and interviewed several Australian journalists who covered the Bougainville War. He argued that the majority of reporting in the Australian mass media, such as the ABC and the Sydney Morning Herald, was influenced by factors relating to the political economy of the media, as explained by Herman and Chomsky (1988).

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15 Carey (1995) argued that after the election of the Whitlam government (in 1972), Australian business elites became more convinced that propaganda was necessary to promote their political aims. He presented evidence of the extensive use of business propaganda: For example that around 50% of the content of newspapers was written directly from corporate public relations news releases. He also argued that the change in public debate towards the agenda of ‘economic rationalism’ was a direct result of intentional propaganda programs. Organisations like the Business Council of Australia who funded the right wing think tanks designed and carried out these programs. Some of these programs, known as ‘treetops propaganda’, were directed at academics and journalists.
The propaganda model has been subjected to many criticisms. However, for reasons of space I will only deal in detail with the most important of these:

Firstly, that the model is a conspiracy theory.

Secondly, that it relies on a distinction between truth and ideology.

Thirdly, that it is functionalist and deterministic.

Marshall and Kingsbury (1996) claim the propaganda model is a conspiracy theory, quoting critics such as the editor of the *New York Times* who appeared in Wintonick and Achbar’s (1992) film on Chomsky’s ideas, *Manufacturing Consent*. They argued that since there was little evidence of conspiracies in the media in Australia, the model is not applicable to our mass media. Interestingly, they ignored Chomsky’s (in Achbar, 1994, pp. 61, 113-14) convincing rebuttal of these criticisms, which appeared in the same film. Herman and Chomsky (1988, p. xii) clearly state that the model is not based on conspiracy theories, but is closer to a guided market analysis (see also above, p. 20). Likewise, Herman (1998, p. 195) refutes the claim arguing that such critics make a superficial assumption that, as the media comprise thousands of ‘independent’ journalists and companies, any finding that they follow a ‘party line’ serving the state must rest on an assumed conspiracy. (In fact, it can result from a widespread gullible acceptance of official handouts, common internalized beliefs, fear of reprisal for critical analysis, etc.) The apologists can’t abide the notion that institutional factors can cause a ‘free’ media to act like lemmings in jointly disseminating false and even silly propaganda; such a charge must assume a conspiracy.

Other refutations of the ‘conspiracy theory’ criticism can be found in Herman (1998, p 195-6).

Regarding the second criticism, Foucault argued that political and theoretical action based on a distinction between truth and ideology was impossible. This eliminates most arguments about truth, which have stemmed from liberal humanist and Marxist politics. (Barker, 1993). Foucault (1984) argues that:

It is not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be [a] chimera, for truth is already power), but of detaching the power of truth from forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time.
Notwithstanding the central role of ideology in the propaganda model, Herman and Chomsky’s (1988) methodology is not based on the truth/ideology dichotomy. In their case studies, where they do point to distortion in news coverage, they point out that they are not interested in whether the media tells the truth. Instead, they compare sources which are ordinarily defined as legitimate (such as United Nations reports, Amnesty International reports, court judgements and government documents) with the versions which are printed in the press.

The third criticism of Herman and Chomsky’s (1988) model is that it is deterministic and functionalist. According to Herman (1999) analysts such as Schlesinger, Curran, Golding, Eldridge and Graham Murdock criticise the model on these grounds. However, he argues that of these, only Schlesinger both summarises the elements of the model and discusses Herman and Chomsky’s (1988) evidence. Schlesinger (1989, p. 301) acknowledges that their case studies make valuable points, but concludes that the model is a

…highly deterministic vision of how the media operate, coupled with a straightforward functionalist conception of ideology.

Herman (1998) argues that this criticism is based on a straw-person argument, since any model has deterministic elements. He argues that determinism is only a problem if it can be shown that a model is not logically consistent, operates on false premises or is a poor predictor of determined variables. He observes that the critics have agreed that the case studies are powerful. However, he argues that they have not shown where the alleged determinisms lead to error. Furthermore, he says, they have not pointed to any alternative models that will do a better job.

The allegation of determinism ignores that the model seeks to provide only a broad framework. Herman (1998, p. 199) acknowledges that the model is dealing with extraordinarily complex sets of events, that it ‘requires modification depending on many local and special factors’ and that it ‘may be entirely inapplicable in some cases’. However, this does not diminish the model as a tool for analysis. As Herman (1998, p. 199) argues, the model is useful in important cases and is defensible unless a better model is provided.

The second part of this criticism, that the model is functionalist, also does not invalidate use of the model. Herman (1988) argues that the strength of the model is that it describes a complex process whereby the media serves the elite. He argues that this is merit, because it shows a dynamic and self-protecting system. Furthermore, he argues that the critics are
inconsistent in that they sometimes seem to seek more functionalism. He observes that Eldridge and Schlesinger, who have criticised the model on these grounds, contraditorily point to analyses that focus on ‘how media sources organise media strategies’ (cited in Herman, 1998, p. 200). He argues that according to these writers, focussing on microcorporate strategies are legitimate but focussing on global corporate strategies are ‘illegitimate functionalism’ (Herman 1998, p. 200).

Other criticisms of the model are adequately refuted by Herman (1998, p. 196-200)

I have outlined the political-economic approach to the study of the mass media, focussing on an exemplar, the Herman and Chomsky (1988) propaganda model. The strength of the model is that it takes into account a range of societal factors. However, we need to avoid using the model in the determinist fashion that critics of Herman and Chomsky (1988) have warned against.

The importance of theoretical models such as Herman and Chomsky (1988) is that they aid the construction of a better society by conceptualising structures of domination and resistance. As Kellner (1995, p. 25) argues:

Critical social theories are weapons of critique and instruments of practice, as well as cognitive maps. Critical theory points to aspects of society and culture that should be challenged and changed, and thus attempts to inform and inspire political practice. Practice-oriented theory also posits certain goals and values that are to be realized and sketches ways to transform society to make it better, to increase human freedom and happiness. They provide vocabularies that help mobilize responses to social problems and issues, and thus aim at intervention in the public sphere.

The Herman and Chomsky (1988) model has been rigorously and thoroughly developed, applied in relevant studies and criticisms of the model have been convincingly refuted or can be accommodated into the present study. Thus, the model provides a very satisfactory tool for analysing press reporting of violent incidents in the Bougainville War.

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16 As McChesney (1998, p. 3-4) argues:

The political economy of communication cannot provide a comprehensive explanation of all communication activity, but it can explain certain issues extremely well and it provides a necessary context for most other research question in communication.
The post-structuralist approach

Writers in the post-structuralist tradition reject reference to social structures in social theory and instead emphasise discourse. As Barker (2000, p. 18) argues, post-structuralists reject:

…the idea of an underlying stable structure which founds meaning through fixed binary pairs (black-white; good-bad). Rather, meaning is unstable, being always deferred and in process. Meaning cannot be confined to single words, sentences or particular texts but is the outcome of relationships between texts, that is, intertextuality.


Foucault (1984) argues that truth cannot be divorced from power. Rather, he argues, truth is attached to various forms of hegemony, ‘social economic and cultural’ (Foucault, 1984, p. 74-5). Foucault (1984) argues that the media form a key institution in the production of ‘truth’ and that in ‘societies like ours, the political economy of truth is characterized’ by a number of ‘important traits.’ One of these, is that ‘truth’ is:

…produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media). (Foucault, 1984, p. 73, my emphasis)

The strength of post-structuralist theory is that it leads us to question the value of social theory as an absolute truth. As Kellner (1995, p. 24) argues:

Post-structuralist theory has made us aware that theories are constructs, products of specific social discourses, practices and institutions and thus do not transcend their social fields. Traditional theories that claim to provide a foundation of truth which transcends the interests of particular theories, have been widely rejected, as have positivist theories which claim that science provides a privileged mode of truth to which all theory should aspire. Against positivism, it is generally agreed that there is no such thing as an immaculate perception, that seeing, interpreting, explaining and so on are all mediated by theoretical discourses and embedded in theoretical assumptions.

Yet this does not mean that Foucault argues to abandon social theory altogether, as Kellner (1995, p. 24) argues:
…with Foucault, it is perhaps better to conceive of theories as instruments, as providing tools in a toolkit, or… as weapons used to attack specific targets.

One important example of the post-structuralist approach to war reporting is the work of Baudrillard (1995) who studied the mass media reporting of the Gulf War. According to Baudrillard (1995), the ‘Gulf War’ was merely a ‘technological simulacrum’ – a product of the mass media – which was made in the interests of U.S. imperialism, rather than an actual event which took place in the Middle East. Baudrillard (1995, p. 76) argues that:

This Gulf War is … a sham, so paltry: the point is not to rehabilitate other wars, but rather that the recourse to the same pathos is all the more odious when there is not even an alibi of a war.

The presumption of information and the media here doubles as the political arrogance of the Western empire. All those journalists who set themselves up as bearers of the universal conscience, all those presenters who set themselves up as strategists, all the while overwhelming us with a flood of useless images.

The elements of his argument are as follows:

1. There are certain agreed and defined characteristics of war, for example, that it is a military confrontation between adversaries.

2. These characteristics were not part of what actually took place in Iraq during ‘Operation Desert Storm’. In fact, this operation involved, primarily the bombing of thousands of people who were defenceless or at least, virtually so.

3. The ‘Gulf War’ as a media event was not reflective of what actually happened.

4. Therefore, the ‘Gulf War’ did not take place.

There are a number of problems with Baudrillard’s (1995) approach. Firstly, Baudrillard (1995) deals only with text without explicit reference to a reality which may exist outside of text. As Norris (cited in Cloud, 1994, http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=000000005964061&Fmt=3&Deli=1&Mtd=1&Idx=24&Sid=4&RQT=309) argues, by adopting the relativist philosophical and textual stance of other postmodernists, Baudrillard (1995) has ‘abdicated grounds in which to evaluate the war’. He argues that:
…the problem with various poststructuralist intellectual movements …is their treatment of language and texts as entities without reference to a world we might designate as ‘real’.

Secondly, Baudrillard (1995) makes the questionable assumption that the mass media construct truth which is not at least partly based on actual events. This fails to account for instances of mass media reporting of the war which do just that. For example, during the Gulf War, Peter Arnett (cited in Adubato, 1997) of CNN (Cable News Network) reported on February 13, 1991, the U.S. bombing of the bunker/shelter at Amiriya. CNN aired Arnett’s report despite the fact that it challenged the agenda of the U.S. government. Likewise, Barnes (1994, http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?Did=000000006104221&Fmt=3&Deli=1&Mtd=1&Idx=28&Sid=2&RQT=309&L=1) dismisses ‘Baudrillard’s fanciful claims about the Gulf War being only a CNN production’.

I am not arguing that by airing segments such as Arnett’s report, the mass media presented a version of the Gulf War which was not divorced from the interests of power. As Adubato (1997) found, Arnett’s critical reporting was not typical of mass media coverage of the Gulf War. However, I argue that journalists drew, at least in part, on real events when reporting the Gulf War and not solely on the requirements of U.S. political domination, as Baudrillard (1995) suggests.

Thirdly, Baudrillard (1995) is inconsistent in dealing with the concept of ‘truth’. In the post-structuralist tradition, he asserts that we should not be trapped into establishing the ‘truth’ of the ‘war’ (cited in Patton, 1995, p. 14). Yet a belief in such truth is implicit in Baudrillard’s (1995) argument. He argues that the ‘Gulf War’ presented in the media was different to what actually happened. This presupposes that he knows what ‘actually happened’ and in turn, implies that it is important to know this ‘truth’ about the war.

The strength of the post-structuralist approach is that it reminds us of the connection between truth and power and that we need to use social theory as a tool for analysis rather than to find the absolute truth. However, there are serious doubts that a strictly textual approach favoured by post-structuralists is the most satisfying one for a study of war reporting.

The cultural approach

According to McChesney (1998, p. 4) the cultural approach:
...is often concerned with the relationship of media ‘texts’ to audiences and both of them to existing class and social relations, but it is mostly uninterested in examining the structural factors that influence the production of media content.

McQuail (1994) includes writers such as Carey (1988), Hall (1977) and Fiske (1989) in this approach. I have also included Saussure (cited in Barker, 2000) and Hartley (1982).

Said (1978, 1981) is an important scholar in the cultural tradition. He extended the discourse analysis of Foucault, studying how truth intersects with European domination of the Third World. He studied academic and media discourse about the third world and in particular how it represents political conflicts. According to Said (1978, 1981), concepts such as ‘Orientalism’ and ‘Islam’ have been discursively constructed under the regime of Western institutions. As such, these constructs should be seen as part of the domination of the West over the Third World.

According to Said (1978, p. 2), ‘Orientalism’ refers to the Western academic tradition and style of thought which is based on the premise of the distinction between East and West (Said, 1978, p. 2). The concept can be understood as the ‘corporate institution for dealing with the orient’ or as ‘a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient.’ (Said, 1978, p. 3).

Given its history of domination by imperialist European powers (see above, p. 6), Bougainville would be a very interesting case to use Saidian analysis. Potential questions for such an analysis could include how much was the reporting of the events and their context couched in racist or essentialist terms? How much has the imperialist relationship between Australia and Bougainville influenced the discourse in the press on the Bouganville War?

An example of Saidian analysis is that of LaFitte (1991, 1992) who identified aspects of Australian media reporting which essentialised the Bougainville War. LaFitte (1992) noted that in Australia, there was an absence of a public debate of any serious attempt to read the indigenous Melanesian culture. He asserted that reporters’ questions, about the use of Australian helicopters in the commission of human rights abuses in Bougainville, had been predicated on the assumption that:

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17 See Said, 1978, p. 3, where he describes the influence of Foucault on his thoughts about orientalism and Said, 1981, where he introduces the concept of Islam, which is based on orientalism.
Australia, as a civilised nation, must uphold standards of conduct to which Papua New Guinea could not be expected to adhere… we are the upholders of civilized norms, they are the savages. (LaFitte, 1992, p. 5)

This is reminiscent of the orientalist duality of the West and the Third World of which Said (1978) writes.

Cerulo (1998), also writing in the cultural tradition, has developed an interesting model of media portrayal of violence. Her work is in the tradition of narration researchers such as James Carey, Michael Gurevitch and Gaye Tuchman (Cerulo, 1998). She argues that in the reporting of political conflict, the media can portray violence as either legitimate or unacceptable. Cerulo (1998, p. 5) found that specific sequences were used, which conveyed the stories from different perspectives, as she writes:

Victim sequences present violence from the perspective of the injured party. In contrast, performer sequences unfold violent events from the perspective of the person who commits the act. Contextual sequences prioritize the circumstances surrounding a violent act. Finally, doublecasting sequences highlight individuals who play a dual role – both the victim and the perpetrator of violence. (Emphasis in text.)

Thus, Cerulo (1998) provides a potential way of describing the representation of the Bougainville war by analysing sequences. She also offers an explanation for the way journalists choose certain sequences rather than others. Cerulo, (1998, p. 6) claims that cultural conventions influenced the choice of sequences:

…strong cultural conventions – conventions linked to narrators’ perceptions of audience morality – lead storytellers to systematically invoke particular sequences at different times. Specifically, storytellers sequence heinous, unacceptable acts – acts I refer to as deviant violence – in ways that differ dramatically from justifiable, acceptable acts – [which I call] normal violence. Similarly, ambiguous violence – acts too difficult to classify – enjoy their own unique formatting style. (Emphasis in text.)

She argues that the tendency of journalists to invoke particular sequences in different contexts was influenced by their socialisation, especially their training.

In cases of overt war, violence is presented as either ‘normal’ or ‘deviant’ depending on which side is the perpetrator. She considered the examples of the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. In the latter case, President Roosevelt, as part of his address, said:
Yesterday, December 7, 1941, a date that will live in infamy the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan. (Cited in Cerulo, 1998, p. 53)

This, according to Cerulo, is a typical victim sequence: victim -act- performer. This is shown in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1-1: Sequencing in Roosevelt’s address (source: Cerulo, 1998, p. 53).</th>
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How can this approach help us to analyse reporting of the Bougainville War? In the case of the World War II, the effects of cultural conventions on storytelling are understood easily enough. One reason was that the U.S. government promoted its war effort against Japan. Australia’s involvement in the Bougainville War was different. Firstly, there was no overt declaration of war by the Australian government against the independent Bougainville Interim Government, which declared independence in 1990 (though several writers, LaFitte, 1992, Watts, 1994, John, 1999, Cronau, 1994, have argued that the Bougainville War was an Australian ‘proxy war’). However, Australia did have certain policies which were aimed at supporting the Papua New Guinea government. These policies were also aimed at assisting PNG to maintain control of the disputed territory. Secondly, the Australian policies and assistance to the PNG war effort were not widely promoted. Hence, there was not a clear signal from the government which might have been reflected in cultural conventions.

Cerulo (1998) only briefly discusses instances, such as these, under the heading of ethnic violence or terrorism. Such cases, she said, were confusing to the public and there was ambivalence as to who was right and who was wrong. Therefore, an ‘ambiguous’
A problem with Cerulo’s (1998) use of terms such as and ‘ethnic violence’ and ‘terrorism’ is that they have often been used subjectively in media discourse. For example, Chomsky and Herman (1979) argued that the conventional definition of ‘terrorism’ is dependent on domestic power interests. Hence, Pilger (2001) observed that the mass media referred to the September 11 attack on the NY Twin Towers as ‘terrorism’. He contrasts this with the illegal U.S. involvement in the ‘Contra’ terror against Nicaragua in the 1980s. In the latter case, the U.S. became the only state to ever be convicted in the World Court for international terrorism – yet the mass media does not refer to these U.S. international crimes as ‘terrorism’.

Another problem with Cerulo’s (1998) model concerns her reasons for why journalists use certain sequences in certain circumstances. Her explanation, cited above, is ‘that cultural conventions – lead storytellers to systematically invoke particular sequences at different times.’ This is vague. It begs the question of what is ‘culture’ and ignores the fact that culture is made up of many different and conflicting elements.

Cerulo (1998) offers a neat tool for analysis which can be used to describe the reporting in newspapers of incidents of violence in the Bougainville War. However, as I have argued above, there are problems with using her model for both describing and understanding reporting of war.

**Discussion**

In this thesis, I aim to continue the project of Meehan, Mosko and Wasko (1994) who sought to use a synthesis of political-economic and cultural approaches to the study of mass communication and society. Meehan, Mosco and Wasko (1994, p. 348) advocate an ‘holistic approach to study of culture and communication – an approach firmly rooted in political economy.’ I will adopt a framework for describing and explaining reporting which is grounded in political economy, uses cultural theory, but which takes account of post-structuralist theory. I will also use elements of the liberal approach.

interesting. However, for reasons of space, I will only be able to use one approach from the cultural tradition. I have chosen the Cerulo (1998) model, which, as I have argued above, provides a highly satisfactory tool for analysis. In using these models, I am conscious of the warning of post-structuralist writers, that, the models are tools for analysis rather than paths to absolute truth. I use elements of the liberal approach because it is helpful in explaining processes in press reporting which may not be accounted for by the ‘structural’ factors which are outlined by Herman and Chomsky (1988).

I use several of the models described above to address the research question, how did the Australian, the Sydney Morning Herald and the Age report three violent incidents in 1996? I will use Herman and Chomsky’s (1988) concept of ‘worthy and unworthy victims’ to analyse certain elements of the reporting. The results of this analysis will have implications for the role which the newspapers played in reporting the three incidents. If the newspapers consistently portrayed the victims of the PNGDF as ‘unworthy’ compared to the victims of the BRA, this would suggest that the newspapers played a legitimising rather than adversarial role. I will analyse certain elements of the reporting using Herman and Chomsky (1988), Cerulo (1998) and Hartley (1982). These elements are as follows:

1. Attention and prominence.
2. Rhetoric.
3. Use of various sources.
4. Critical stance of the newspapers toward PNG officials.
5. The portrayal of the moral aspects of the violence.

Firstly, attention and prominence. I will examine how much attention has been given to the incident, taking note of how many items were published and their size. I will also analyse headlines and placement of items to determine the amount of prominence given to stories about each incident. As Herman and Chomsky (1988) observed, ‘unworthy victims’ are likely to be ignored in comparison to ‘worthy’ victims who are likely to be the focus of many news items, often for a long period. They also argued that stories of ‘worthy victims’ are likely to appear on the front-page of newspapers and be featured in headlines.
Secondly, I will examine the rhetoric of reporting. This will include aspects such as the vocabulary, details and context used when reporting an incident. According to Saussurre (cited in Barker, 2000, p. 67) narrators select from a paradigmatic field of signs and thus produce a certain meaning for the story. Hartley (1982, p. 20) gives the following example:

(Paradigmatic)
Soldiers
Freedom fighters
Terrorists
→ → → → → today attacked → → →
volunteers
liberated
gunman

Using the words ‘terrorists attacked’ suggests that the perpetrators were engaged in an unacceptable act of violence. Herman and Chomsky (1988) would suggest that the press would be more likely to use these words, rather than ‘soldiers liberated’, in reporting about ‘worthy victims’. According to Herman and Chomsky (1988, p. 43) details and context can be used as well as vocabulary to emphasise the suffering of the victims and to ‘generate the maximum emotional impact on readers’. For example, in the case of the political murder of, a Polish priest – a ‘worthy victim’ – by the Polish Police in 1984, during the Cold War, the New York Times (cited in Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. 45) reported that:

The priest’s bent legs were tied to a noose around his neck in such a way that if he straightened them he would be strangled.

The third element is the use of sources. I will analyse press reporting in light of claims, evidence and analyses obtained from a wide variety of sources, most of which were accessible by the mass media. Herman and Chomsky (1988) argue that in reporting ‘unworthy victims’ the mass media are less likely to use unofficial sources, but rather rely on government accounts. I will examine how journalists used unofficial and dissident sources, such as the Bougainville Interim Government (BIG), Amnesty International and Bougainvillean refugees as opposed to the PNG government and the PNGDF (Papua New Guinea Defence Force).

The fourth element of reporting I will describe is criticism of the PNG government and military. I will examine how critical the three newspapers were in relation to the three incidents. In doing so, I will follow examples offered by Tiffen (2001) and Herman and Chomksy (1988). Tiffen (2001, p. 46) in addressing the Australian mass media reaction to the Dili massacre, observed that
most news media reported Indonesian statements, but sometimes also quoted witnesses who refuted the claims about the provocation and violence by demonstrators.

Herman and Chomsky (1988) provide a more complex analysis of media criticism of government. For example, in their analysis of the critical stance of the U.S. media toward U.S. policy in Vietnam, they distinguished between strategic and tactical criticisms of government policy. Strategic criticisms related to the survival of the ‘state capitalist’ system and the major goals of the government. In contrast, they argued that tactical criticisms were concerned with how the U.S. government and military set out to achieve these objectives. They found that the media mainly accepted and promoted the strategic objectives without question. Often this was done by assuming certain premises – such as that the U.S. had a right to use military aggression against the Vietnamese. Tactical issues, such as whether or not the Vietnam War was too costly was, later in the war, debated in the media. However, the general premise of the U.S. right to use aggression (which related to the survival of the U.S.-imperial system) was never in question.

In my analysis in chapters two and three, I will examine the extent to which the three newspapers offered a critical stance toward PNG officials. In particular, I will focus on how much the press:

- Made counterposing statements to those from PNG officials;
- adopted a critical stance toward strategic as opposed to tactical issues of Australian foreign policy.

Herman and Chomsky (1988) argue that in reporting ‘unworthy victims’ the press will be less likely to criticise the domestic government on strategic issues of foreign policy. The analysis which I have discussed above will test this aspect of the model in relation to Australian foreign policy in 1996. Furthermore, this part of the analysis will give a clear indication of to what extent the three newspapers played an oppositional role in reporting the three incidents in 1996.

The fifth element of reporting that I will describe will be the legitimacy of the violence. I will examine this in each case by using Cerulo’s (1998) model. I will focus on leads and headlines and discuss the implications as to how the three newspapers viewed the violence in moral terms. Herman and Chomsky’s (1988) model suggests that the press would judge violence perpetrated by the PNGDF to be more legitimate than that perpetrated by the BRA.
I will also compare the reporting in each of the cases. Following Herman and Chomsky (1988) I will ask how victims of Australia’s ‘friend’, the PNG state, were presented in the three newspapers compared to the victims of the BRA. Quantitative evidence will be shown, initially, with a table comparing attention and prominence given to each incident in the three newspapers. This will be loosely based on Herman and Chomsky’s (1988) table in which they compare the coverage of various incidents which occurred during the cold war: The murder of Polish priest and solidarity activist, Fr. Jerzy Popieluszko, in 1980; the murder of four U.S. churchwomen in El Salvador in 1980; and several other incidents. Table 1-2, below, is an adapted version of their table which describes the reporting of the cases of Popieluszko and the four women.

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The table clearly shows that a more sympathetic coverage was given to the Polish priest, whom Herman and Chomsky (1988) argued was a ‘worthy victim’. In my table, in chapter four, I will use the following measures:

- The number of items published;
- their size;
- the number of times the incident was mentioned in a headline;
- the number of editorials;
and the number of front-page articles.

I will also present quantitative evidence comparing the sequencing used in reporting the various incidents. I will present one table showing the sequences used in leads and another for the headlines. From this, we may see if the three newspapers presented the violence of one side as more legitimate than the other side. I will demonstrate that the newspapers portrayed violence perpetrated by the PNGDF as more legitimate than that perpetrated by the BRA (Bougainville Revolutionary Army). This suggests that the victims of the PNGDF were portrayed as ‘unworthy’ compared to the victims of the BRA.

Thus, I will present qualitative and quantitative evidence to describe, compare and contrast the reporting in each of the cases, using a range of measures. The overriding aim will be to demonstrate whether the newspapers portrayed the victims of the BRA in the battle of Kangu Beach as more ‘worthy’ than the victims of the PNGDF in the two massacres at Simbo and Malabita. I will demonstrate in chapters two to four that there was a dichotomous pattern in the reporting of the three incidents. The three newspapers consistently portrayed victims of the PNGDF as less ‘worthy’ than victims of the BRA.

Turning to the second research question – how do we best understand the process of press reportage of the three incidents? I use two approaches: the political-economic approach as exemplified by Herman and Chomsky (1988) and the liberal approach. According to writers in the liberal tradition, the mass media play an adversarial role in society. However, they concede that in reporting war, certain circumstances limit the ability of the mass media to play this role. As Young and Jesser (1997) argue, these circumstances are often a result of deliberate attempts by governments and military forces involved in the war to manipulate and control reporting. Writers in the political-economic tradition argue that the media play a ‘system supportive’ (Herman and Chomsky, 1988) or legitimising role in war reporting. They argue that the mass media are complicit in this role rather than being passively controlled or manipulated by governments and military forces. My analysis in chapter four, which is aimed at understanding the process of press reporting, will proceed by comparing the heuristic value of both the political-economic and liberal approaches to war reporting. I will use the findings from the descriptive analysis of press reporting together with evidence obtained from interviews with journalists who reported the three incidents.

As I discussed above (p. 31), Cerulo (1998) does not provide a comprehensive and satisfying explanation for the sequencing patterns found in press reporting. On the other hand, using
both the liberal and political-economic approaches will provide an understanding of the process of press reporting which will adequately reflect the complexity of those processes.

I have argued that the most useful framework to adopt in this thesis is one which is grounded in political economy, uses the cultural and liberal approaches and takes account of the post-structuralist approach. To describe the pattern of reporting, I will use Herman and Chomsky’s (1988) concept of ‘worthy and unworthy victims’, complemented by Cerulo’s (1998) analysis of sequencing in narratives and Hartley’s (1982) analysis of vocabulary. This will have implications as to the extent to which the three newspapers played a legitimising – rather than counterbalancing – role in their reporting of the three incidents. To explain the pattern of reporting, I will compare the approaches of Herman and Chomsky (1988) and Young and Jesser (1997). This discussion will address the following theoretical issues:

• The extent to which the pattern of reporting can be explained by the manipulation and control of information by the PNG and Australian governments.

• the extent to which reporting can be explained by ‘structural’ factors, such as the role of government as a source of news, rather than other factors, such as the lack of reliable information.

I now turn to an analysis of reporting in three newspapers of the first two incidents, which occurred at Simbo and Kangu Beach.
REPORTING OF INCIDENTS AT SIMBO AND KANGU BEACH

On 25 January 1996, between ten and twelve civilians were killed by the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) and their allied militia – the ‘Resistance’ – at Simbo village, near Buin, in south Bougainville (see map, Fig 2-1, below, p. 39). Eight months later, in early September 1996, eleven PNGDF troops and two of their allied militia were killed by the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) and ‘Resistance’ members who had defected to them, during a battle at Kangu Beach on the southern tip of the island (see Fig. 2-1, below, p. 39).

In this chapter I ask, how were these two, quite different, incidents reported in the *Age*, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Australian*?

I draw on a range of theoretical frameworks which I identified in chapter one as having some prospective interpretive value. I compare how the victims of Simbo and Kangu Beach were portrayed in the three newspapers.

Using Herman and Chomsky’s (1988) propaganda model, I argue that the victims of the PNGDF at Simbo were portrayed as ‘unworthy’ compared to the victims of the BRA at Kangu Beach, who were portrayed as ‘worthy’. In other words, there was a dichotomous pattern of reporting, whereby the Kangu Beach victims were portrayed more sympathetically than the Simbo victims were. This has implications for the role of the three newspapers in reporting the two incidents. Giving too much sympathy to the victims at Simbo could have challenged the Australian government agenda for Bougainville. In 1996, the Australian government supported the objectives, if not the tactics, of the Papua New Guinea (PNG) government in its military operations in Bougainville. Given this support, the dichotomous pattern of reporting suggests that the three newspapers played a legitimising rather than adversarial role in reporting the two incidents.
Figure 2-1: South and Central Bougainville and Western Solomon Islands.
Adapted from Dorney (1998, p. 9).
Firstly, I discuss the case of Simbo, beginning with an examination of what actually happened, before turning to a description and analysis of reporting of the incident by the three newspapers.

**Simbo: ‘PNG soldier killed in shootout with rebels’**

We do not know exactly what happened at Simbo as there was no independent investigation. The first Australian press reports on the incident were based on a Reuter (1996a) report which appeared under the headline, ‘PNG soldier killed in shootout with rebels’. However, reports from other sources tell a different story. The most convincing account of the incident was made by an eyewitness, Peter Naurai (cited in Havini, 1996), who was wounded at Simbo and evacuated to the Solomon Islands by the BRA. He told Bougainvillean refugees in Honiara, the Solomons capital, that the attack began at 5 am. The villagers, he said, heard gunfire and tried to run away but the central government forces attacked them at random with high-powered automatic rifles and grenades. Naurai (cited in Havini, 1996, p 49) said that:

> About 10 people died and others were injured including women men and children.
> The people in this village were all civilians.

He named 9 out of the 10 killed. (Havini, 1996). He also said that a pregnant woman was shot dead and her abdomen was cut open with a knife. The soldiers, he said, then:

> …took out the fetus from her uterus….Later when the PNG military left, neighbours from the nearby village of Tulagai went and saw the fetus laying on the mother’s chest where the PNG military had left it. The neighbours took the bodies & buried them in the cemetery. (Interview by Bougainvillean refugees, cited in Havini, 1996, p. 49.)

Many of the important details in this account were corroborated in other reports of

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18 There may have been an internal inquiry by the PNGDF, but if so it was not made public (Dorney, 1999). There was no independent inquiry either. According to Amnesty International (1997) and US Department of State (1998), despite requests from the UN to investigate human rights abuses, there was only one such independent inquiry, by a Commonwealth-appointed Sri Lankan judge, which was made into the murder of Bougainvillean Premier, Theodore Miriung. The judge found that certain PNGDF troops committed the murder.
the incident, including two from Bougainville. For example, the report by Morris Siriapi of the Independent Bougainville Information Service (IBIS, cited in Watts, 1996a, p. 3) said that ‘a baby 8 months and 5 children’ were killed and gave the names and ages of the dead as follows:

- Pampam Ligitai Morou village 20 years
- Patrick Tumo Tuaokai village 21 years
- Minou Roitua Mainika village 22 years
- Patrick Utumu Simbo village 16 years
- Charles Ona Simbo village 15 years
- David Nusirau Simbo village 7 years
- Josephine Beti Simbo village 4 years
- Theresia Monta Simbo village 9 years
- Piruke Siro Simbo village 11 years
- Mary Pateri Simbo village 23 years
- Usiah or Isiah Simbo village 8 months

19 Regarding the number killed and injured, Morris Siriapi (cited in Watts, 1996a, p. 3), from the Independent Bougainville Information Service, in Bougainville, stated that:

> Members of the PNGDF and resistance walked into the village … at 4 am … and mercilessly massacred to death 12 civilians with 2 seriously injured. Amongst the dead were a young mother, a baby of 8 months and 5 children.

Ruby Mirinka (cited in Sydney Morning Herald, 14 October, 1996, p. 7), a Bougainvillean nurse who was not allied to any of the warring parties, spoke at a conference in Sydney in October 1996 and stated that ten people were killed. PNGDF sources (cited in Reuter, 1996a and Watts, 1999c) said that 15 Bougainvilleans were killed (they may have reported the two injured as killed). The Solomon Star newspaper in Honiara reported that two people died as a result of being refused medical treatment in a PNGDF-controlled care centre, after being shot in an incident in the same area in late January. As for the report of the pregnant woman and her foetus being killed, this was also corroborated by Ruby Mirinka (cited in Sydney Morning Herald, 14 October, 1996, p. 7). Other reports indicated something similar. Several other reports indicated that the attack occurred at Simbo (Siriapi, cited in Watts, 1999c, Reuter, 1996a, Mirinka, cited in Sydney Morning Herald, 14 October, 1996, p. 7). Papua New Guinea (PNG) security forces sources told Reuter (1996a) that ‘details were sketchy but it was likely a woman and child were among those killed’. Likewise, Siriapi (cited in Watts, 1996a) stated that a young mother was killed.

Naurai (cited in Havini, 1996) and Siriapi (cited in Watts, 1999c) also gave very similar accounts of the names, gender and ages of the victims. There were some differences in the details but translation and other difficulties of obtaining information could explain these. Given the diversity of Bougainvillean culture, witnesses and those who recorded and transmitted the statements may not have spoken the same language. Also, communication between independence groups on Bougainville was often unreliable (Coles-Janess, 1999, O’Callaghan, 1999a, Palmer, 1999). Likewise, radio communication between Bougainville and the Solomon Islands was rudimentary. This may have affected the accuracy of the account finally arriving in Australia, which was originally transmitted by Siriapi.

20 This organisation was established by Australian human rights lawyer, Rosemarie Gillespie, whilst she was on the island in the months before the incident took place.
Andrew Saririn       Simbo village       1 1/2 years

The two survivors of the massacre were Cecilia Taroroa (20 Years) and Uliar Noutau (? Years), now suffering from serious injuries.

However, PNG security force sources (cited in Reuter, 1996a and Watts, 1999c) indicated, explicitly or implicitly, that the victims were BRA soldiers who were killed in a battle. Similarly, BRA sources speaking to Dorney (cited in Watts, 1999c) conceded that one PNGDF – and one BRA – soldier were killed in the incident. This version of events is inconsistent with those of other sources. When speaking to Reuter (1996a) BRA sources denied any losses at all. The reports from Siriapi (cited in Watts, 1999c) Mirinka (cited in Sydney Morning Herald, 14 October, 1996, p. 7) and Naurai (cited in Havini, 1996) only mentioned civilian victims. One PNGDF source in Bougainville told Watts (1996a) that he recognised one of the names from Siriapi’s (cited in Watts, 1999c, p. 4) list of civilians as a ‘BRA killed at Simbo’. The security forces’ claim that all of the dead were BRA is also inconsistent with their own statement (cited in Reuter, 1996a) that a woman and child were killed. In commenting about the incident at Simbo, it is likely that the PNGDF troops followed the practice of the U.S. forces in Vietnam, who invariably referred to all dead (including women, children and elderly) as ‘Viet Cong’. The PNGDF, similarly referred to all dead as ‘BRA’ or ‘rebels’ (Watts, 1997b). However, if there was a battle, the important fact remains that many defenceless civilians were killed.

There was some evidence that there was more than one incident at Simbo21. However, though Siriapi (cited in Watts, 1999c) and Naurai (cited in Havini, 1996) gave different dates for the massacre22, the names, ages and gender of the victims were too similar to suggest there were two incidents. Therefore, I agree with Watts (1996a), who argued that the reports from Siriapi (cited in Watts 1999c), Reuter (1996a) and Dorney (cited in Watts, 1999c) were all of the same incident.

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21 Dorney (1999) suggested that there may have been several and other reports indicated some discrepancy over the date. Similarly, according to Kauona (2000a), villagers would often return to their village after such massacres, only to be attacked again a few days later by the PNGDF.

22 Reuter (1996a), Niesi (1996) and Siriapi (cited in Watts, 1999c) stated that it occurred on Thursday 25 January. Dorney (ABC radio, cited in Watts, 1999c) reported an incident giving almost the exact details as Niesi (1996) and Reuter (1996a). However, he said that the incident occurred ‘yesterday’, which, going by the date of his broadcast, would put it on 31 January. Naurai (cited in Havini, 1996) said that the incident occurred on 2 February, one day after Dorney’s (cited in Watts, 1999c) broadcast. Naurai may have been wrong, given that he was speaking three months after the event had taken place.
Analysis

Press reports of the massacre gave a very different impression from those offered by unofficial and eyewitness reports, which I have discussed above. The point here is not to discover the ‘truth’ about the incident and compare it to the accounts in the press. Rather, it is to discuss how journalists responded to the accounts which were available to the press, on the public record. The following is an analysis of reporting of the incident in three newspapers, the Sydney Morning Herald, the Australian and the Age. In presenting this analysis, I will address the following questions.

1. How much attention and prominence was given to the story?

2. Was the rhetoric in reporting likely to cause outrage in the reader and emphasise the severity of the abuse?

3. How did the press use official as opposed to unofficial sources?

4. How did writers address the legitimacy of the violence?

The day after the massacre, on 26 January, Reuter (1996a) released a report on its wire service, which was available to all three newspapers in this study (the Sydney Morning Herald, the Australian and the Age). The full article which was based on Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) and Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) sources was as follows:

PAPUA NEW GUINEA: PNG SOLDIER KILLED IN SHOOTOUT WITH REBELS.

PORT MORESBY, Jan 26 (Reuter) – A Papua New Guinea soldier was killed on Thursday in a shootout with rebels on the island of Bougainville, security sources on the island said on Friday.

The sources also said 15 rebels were killed in the fighting as government troops and pro-government irregulars overran a camp of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA).

But rebel sources denied any BRA fighters had been killed.

The security sources said details were sketchy but it was likely a woman and child were among those killed in the battle.

The soldier is the second reported killed on Bougainville this week in a flareup of the fighting between government troops and secessionist rebels that has been going on for eight years.
Hundreds of people have died in the fighting or due to a lack of medical supplies since the hostilities began on the island, 800 km (500 miles) northeast of Port Moresby.

United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) representative Dr Hamid Hossainin said earlier this month that up to 5,000 children alone were believed to have died from preventable diseases due to the lack of medical supplies and treatment.

A third round of peace talks is expected to be held in Australia in March or April to continue discussions on disarming all factions, amnesty for the rebels and the future status of the resource-rich island.

The three newspapers each published their own edited version of this Reuter (1996a) report the next day. The Sydney Morning Herald adopted the same word usage and general portrayal of the victims but they deleted certain details and descriptive context from the original version. Under the headline ‘Fighting kills 16 in Bougainville’, the full Sydney Morning Herald (cited in Watts, 1999b) article is as follows:

PORT MORESBY: A Papua New Guinean soldier and 15 rebels were killed on Thursday in a shoot-out on the island of Bougainville, security sources on the island said.

The soldier is the second reported killed on Bougainville this week in a flare-up of the fighting between government troops and secessionist rebels that has been going on for eight years. – Reuter.

As discussed in chapter one, different choices of words produce different meanings. In the case of Simbo, the Sydney Morning Herald adopts the signs used by Reuter – a ‘soldier’ and ‘rebels’ were killed in a ‘shootout’ during a ‘flareup of the fighting’. This word usage suggests that the act was one of maintaining order rather than abuse. The other newspapers (the Age and Australian) used similar wording and therefore suggested the same meaning.

In the rest of the reporting, there was little to suggest outrage and to emphasise the severity of this instance of human rights abuse. This is demonstrated by the information which was excluded from the accounts in the Sydney Morning Herald, the Age and the Australian. As Watts (1996a) noted, the following elements found in the Reuter (1996a) account were deleted:

- The BRA sources denied that any of their fighters had been killed.
- ‘It was likely that a woman and child were among those killed.’ (Reuter, 1996a, cited in Watts, 1996a).
- Hundreds had died during the war due to the lack of medical supplies.
• Up to 5000 children had died from preventable diseases due to the lack of medical supplies and medical supervision.

The other newspapers reported the story in much the same way and all deleted the same information except the *Age* (27 January, 1996, p. 10) which tailed the item by saying ‘Rebel sources denied any losses’. The publications left out the ‘contextual’ information about the past suffering of Bougainvilleans during the war. If included, this information would be more likely to promote sympathy for the victims and encourage the reader to feel some outrage about the event and the war itself.

A similar effect was at work in the headlines, which read: ‘PNG soldier killed in shootout with rebels’ (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 January, cited in Watts, 1996a, p. 1); ‘16 dead in fighting on Bougainville’ (*Australian*, cited in Watts, 1996a, p. 1); and ‘Bougainville shootout’ (*Age*, 27 January, p. 10).

Watts (1996a, p. 3) also noted that:

> Neither Reuter nor the other media comment on the cause of this ‘lack of medical supplies’. The marine and air blockade imposed on Bougainville since April 1990 by the PNG/Australian forces is not mentioned. (Emphasis in text.)

If the sub-editor included this information, it would have suggested outrage against the perpetrators of the violence.

PNGDF sources were used heavily in the original Reuter (1996a) report and in the three newspapers. The Reuter (1996a) correspondent used the PNGDF version in the headline and based most of the article on this. Journalists are trained to place the most important information in the lead of the item. Similarly, the least important details are left until last. These rules enable the sub-editor to cut the item easily (Ward, 1995). Despite the BRA claim that none of their fighters were killed, the writer states as a fact, in the lead of the item, that 15 ‘rebels’ were killed. The three newspapers emphasised the official version more than the original Reuter (1996a) report. Two of them cut the BRA denial and the other gave it only at the end. In contrast, the BRA claim was placed near the start of the Reuter (1996a) report.

One element of reporting which suggests the relative ‘worth’ of victims is how the press addressed the morality of the violence. The press may have portrayed the violence perpetrated by the PNGDF as more ‘legitimate’ or acceptable than that perpetrated by the
BRA. If this was so it would suggest that the victims of the BRA were ‘unworthy’ compared to victims of the PNGDF. We can use Cerulo’s (1998 and chapter one, above) model to ascertain how the press addressed the morality of the violence.

Cerulo (1998 and above, chapter one) argues that journalists present violence as either ‘normal’ – therefore legitimate and acceptable; ‘deviant’ – therefore unacceptable; or ‘ambiguous’ – too difficult to classify into right and wrong. The last category is divided into two subcategories. The first is a ‘doublecasting’ sequence where:

…contextual information simultaneously casts the central subject of the story as both victim and perpetrator… (Cerulo, 1998, p. 50)

The second is a ‘contextual’ sequence where information about the victim and the perpetrator is mentioned after ‘contextual’ information. By using this sequence the narrator entwines the victims and perpetrators in a story rather than placing either of them at the centre of that story.

The writers of the three Simbo items invariably viewed the violence, against the Bougainvilleans, ambiguously – too difficult to classify into right and wrong. They used both ‘contextual’ and ‘doublecasting’ sequences.

In the headline of the *Sydney Morning Herald* item, ‘Fighting kills 16 on Bougainville’ (Reuter, cited in Watts 1996a, p. 1) the sub-editor uses a ‘contextual’ sequence as shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Identity qualifier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fighting</td>
<td>context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kills</td>
<td>cct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 in Bougainville</td>
<td>victim (place frame)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this headline the sub-editor starts with ‘contextual’ information, puts the act of violence next, then mentions the victims but omits the perpetrators of the act. Thus the reader is led into the story with the circumstances of the act and is left without anyone to blame. By using a ‘contextual’ rather than a ‘deviant violence’ sequence to describe the event the sub-editor suggests that the violence is more acceptable. As Cerulo (1998, p. 47) writes:

Contextual sequences prioritize data on an act’s setting or circumstance. Such information encases the central players into a story. In so doing, contextual sequences offer reasons...
and explanations for otherwise unacceptable violence. Indeed, such formats provide potential justifications for violent acts, justifications that appear before readers and viewers actually learn of the act itself.

Providing justifications for the use of violence is characteristic of the portrayal of ‘unworthy victims’.

In the body of the article the journalist provides further justification for the violence by using a ‘doublecasting’ sequence. In other words, the PNGDF soldiers and the rebels are cast in dual roles – as both victims and perpetrators. The sequence is shown in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text Identity qualifier</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A Papua New Guinean soldier and 15 rebels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>were killed on Thursday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>in a shootout on the island of Bougainville, security forces on the island said.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The soldier is the second reported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>killed on Bougainville this week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>in a flare-up in the fighting between government troops and secessionist rebels that has been going on for eight years.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity qualifier</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>victim role</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at (temporal frame)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perpetrator roles (place frame, source)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>victim</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>act (temporal frame)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>context, perpetrator role (temporal frame)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here, the journalist casts the soldier and rebels in double roles – as both victims and performers of the violent act. The victims of both sides were named first and then information about the content is provided which also casts them in the perpetrator role. In the first sentence, the narrator tells us that the ‘Papua New Guinean soldier and… rebels were killed… in a shootout.’ In line three, the journalist writes that they were killed in a shootout – implying that they were performers as well as victims. In lines four to six, above, the ‘soldier’ was killed in fighting between ‘government troops and secessionist rebels. Here, the writer casts the soldier firstly in the victim role and then in the performer role. By using a ‘doublecasting’ sequence, the journalist offers a potential justification for the killing of the 15 Bougainvilleans.

It is also interesting that the one PNGDF victim is mentioned before the 15 ‘rebels’ in both sequences (lines one to three and lines four to six). In lines four to six, the ‘rebels’ are cast
only in the performer role. Thus, the journalist emphasises that the one soldier rather than
the 15 ‘rebels’ are the important victims in the story.

The Australian headline, ‘16 dead in fighting in Bougainville’, puts both PNG and
Bougainvillean victims in dual roles (Australian, cited in Watts, 1996a). Again, this presents
the PNGDF killing of the rebels in a more acceptable light than if the headline read ‘15
Bougainvilleans killed by PNGDF’. In the Age (27 January, 1996, p. 10) the headline,
‘Bougainville shootout’, contains contextual information only.

The leads in the Age and the Australian also suggest justification for the PNGF violence by
displaying victim sequences which emphasise the violence allegedly perpetrated by the BRA.
For example, the sequence in the Age lead is shown below.

| Text |
| Text Identity qualifier |

A Papua New Guinea soldier  victim-performer

was killed yesterday  act, (temporal frame)

in a shoot-out with rebels on Bougainville, context, performer (place frame, source)

security forces on the island said.  

(Age, 27 January, 1996, p. 10)

In the above case the journalist emphasises the ‘deviant’ violence against the one soldier
rather than the 15 ‘rebels’ by mentioning the soldier in the victim role first and omitting the
fate of the ‘rebels’.

In sum, sub-editors and journalists use ‘deviant violence’ sequences to describe the killing of
the soldier. In contrast, they use ‘ambiguous violence’ sequences to describe the killing of
Bougainvilleans. This kind of narrative has the effect of both potentially justifying the
violence of the PNGDF against the ‘rebels’ whilst suggesting that the violence inflicted on the
PNGDF soldier was unacceptable. This is consistent with the Herman and Chomsky (1988)
who argue that victims of friends will be treated as ‘unworthy’ in the press whereas victims of
enemies will be treated as ‘worthy’.

The next account of the incident to emerge was from Morris Siriapi of the Independent
Bougainville Information Service (IBIS). He sent a message to the Bougainville Freedom
Movement in Australia via a radio link in the Solomon Islands, four weeks later on 23 February, reporting that the PNGDF had massacred unarmed civilians (Watts, 1999c).

All three publications ignored the Sirapi report, although, as Watts (1996a) observed, the Bougainville Freedom Movement in Sydney faxed it to all media. Two of the newspapers (the Sydney Morning Herald and the Australian) ignored it because editors believed the source to be untrustworthy (Watts, 1996a).

This contrasted with sub-editors’ treatment of the earlier unconfirmed report based on PNGDF sources, which was denied by the BRA. Watts (1996a, p. 4) also presented the new report to the original Reuter (1996a) correspondent who replied that it was ‘too late’ to correct the mistake. The papers apparently made no attempt to check the Siriapi story with the PNGDF (See Watts, 1996a). Several weeks later evidence emerged which corroborated Siriapi’s version of the massacre.

In April 1996 Peter Naurai, the 16-year-old survivor of the massacre (see above, p. 40), was evacuated to the Solomon Islands by the BRA for medical treatment. He arrived in Honiara, in the Solomon Islands on 24 April 1996. His picture and name were immediately published in the Solomon Star newspaper. He told the Honiara newspaper that he was refused medical treatment by the PNGDF at a care centre, near Simbo and then escaped. He also endured a gun battle with the PNGDF whilst crossing to the Solomons (Havini, 1996). However, the journalist who wrote the story did not mention the Simbo massacre. They reported that Naurai was wounded at a massacre in late January but that the incident occurred at a ‘care centre’ under the control of the PNGDF – not at Simbo. It is likely that the reporter confused the Simbo incident with another incident near Laguai in March where a woman, whom they interviewed with Naurai, was shot and wounded by the ‘Resistance’ (see Havini, 1996). Hence, the Australian press could not gain any information about the massacre from this report. However, he told his story of the Simbo massacre to Bougainvillean refugees on 9 May, two weeks after the Solomon Star published his first account. All reports of the incident (besides the reports published in the Australian press), including Naurai’s statement, were published in Australia (Havini, 1996) in May, 1996.

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23 As Watts (1996a, p. 3) wrote in relation to the Sydney Morning Herald and Australian:

When presented [by Watts] with the details the editors explained that the ‘unconfirmed’ Bougainvillean report was of absolutely no interest to them.

24 Also spelt as Naurai.
Despite the publicity given to Naurai in the Solomon Islands, the publication of his and other accounts in Australia and his availability for interview the three publications still ignored the story. There were minor inconsistencies in the accounts (discussed above, p. 41) but there was a credible basis for a story, full of drama and human interest. Journalists often claimed that the reason why they did not report Bougainville was that there were no pictures, due to the blockade (Watts, 2000a). However in this case pictures were available – news organisations simply needed to fly photographers to Honiara to obtain them.

Ruby Mirinka’s account (discussed above, p. 41), emerged in October. She spoke at a women’s conference in Sydney and repeated the main claims: the massacre of civilians at Simbo and the killing of the woman and the cutting of the foetus from her womb. Jopson (Sydney Morning Herald, 14 October, p. 7) wrote about these claims and they were published the Sydney Morning Herald immediately. However, the incident was downplayed. The information was contained in one paragraph, towards the end of a small article on another topic, in the back pages of the news section in the Sydney Morning Herald (see, Sydney Morning Herald, 14 October, p. 7). This was the only one instance that I could find where one of the three newspapers to contain a report of this version of the incident.

This article shows that the earlier reports from Siriapi and Naurai were robust enough to be published in the Australian quality press. In the case of Jopson’s article the unconfirmed and unofficial report given by Mirinka was deemed fit to publish. In contrast, because it was ‘unconfirmed’, sub-editors were uninterested in the Siriapi (cited in Watts, 1996a) report which was relayed to Australia. Also the eyewitness report and a photo of one of the wounded – which would seem to make this version more credible than Mirinka’s – was ignored by the three newspapers.

Turning to how Jopson (Sydney Morning Herald, 14 October, p. 7) portrayed the legitimacy of the violence. Despite relying on Mirinka’s testimony she still fails to present a victim sequence which would portray the violence as ‘deviant’ and therefore unacceptable. The sequence is ‘contextual’, as shown below:

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Mrs Mirinka claimed that during a dawn massacre of 10 villagers at Simbo in South Eastern Bougainville by PNG Defence Force soldiers, a pregnant woman was cut open and her foetus left lying on her body.

In this instance, Jopson (Sydney Morning Herald, 14 October, p. 7) presents a ‘contextual’ sequence which suggests that the violence is ‘ambiguous’ – too difficult to classify into right or wrong. Rather than mentioning the victims first, as one would do if the violence was judged to be ‘deviant’ (see Cerulo, 1998 and above, chapter one), she begins with the act – the massacre.

Cerulo (1998) argues that by using ‘contextual’ sequences journalists suggest that the violence is more acceptable than it otherwise might have been. Jopson (Sydney Morning Herald, 14 October, p. 7) focuses the reader’s attention on the context – the massacre – rather than the victim. This takes the reader’s attention away from the fact that innocent people were killed by PNGDF soldiers. Instead, Jopson (Sydney Morning Herald, 14 October, p. 7) draws attention instead to the fact that a massacre occurred. This has the effect of downplaying the severity of the violence, which is consistent with Herman and Chomsky (1988) who argue that stories about victims of friendly states are likely to be downplayed in the mass media.

So far in this chapter, I have discussed reporting of the Simbo massacre in the three newspapers in terms of: the amount of attention given, rhetoric, the treatment of sources and the legitimacy of the violence. I will now turn to the case of Kangu Beach before comparing and contrasting the reporting of the two incidents.

**Kangu Beach: ‘Bougainville killings barbaric act, says Chan’**

In contrast to the massacre of civilians at Simbo, both sides agreed that a battle occurred at Kangu Beach, on 8 September 1996. Kangu Beach was the base for PNGDF’s ‘D’ Company and a strategic location in Southern Bougainville, being the only port for the main town of
Buin (Dorney, Radio Australia, 9 September, cited in Reuters Business Briefing, 1999). Ten PNGDF troops and two ‘Resistance’ members were killed on the first day of the battle and one PNGDF soldier was killed later in the week. After one week of fighting, there were eight wounded (Sydney Morning Herald, 11 September, 1996) and five captured (Sydney Morning Herald, 17 September, 1996, p. 14) PNGDF troops. One of the first reports in the Age on the incident appeared under the headline ‘Bougainville killings barbaric act, says [PNG Prime Minister] Chan’. The PNG government alleged that some of the soldiers were disarmed before being killed. There was also solid evidence to suggest that at least two bodies were later mutilated. Thus, the Kangu Beach incident could be considered a case of human rights abuse. However, by conventional standards the incident at Kangu Beach was far less serious than the case of Simbo. The BRA did not kill civilians at Kangu Beach and unlike the PNGDF at Simbo they took five prisoners, rather than shooting at everyone in sight.

There are a number of important issues about the incident which are relevant to the press reporting. Firstly, the PNG government’s attitude to peace negotiations at the time of the attack. In March 1996 PNG Prime Minister Chan abandoned the peace process which had begun with the Cairns peace talks in December 1995 and unilaterally lifted the ceasefire. In July he launched ‘Operation High Speed II’ which ended a few weeks later in a decisive victory by the BRA26. After that there were sporadic instances of violence. For example, three Australian churchwomen told ABC radio that they were harassed at gunpoint by PNG soldiers whilst attending the Bougainville Women’s Forum in August. The soldiers forced them to hand over their video camera, tapes and notes of the meeting (Pacific News Bulletin, 1996c, p.2). By September 1996 the PNG government had failed to re-enter any meaningful peace process (Pacific News Bulletin, 1996a).

Secondly, the conditions in ‘care centres’ (internment camps) in Bougainville were very poor. The Kangu Beach ‘care centre’ was one of many. By July 1996 70,000 to 80,000 Bougainvilleans out of a total population of around 170,000, lived in ‘care centres’ controlled by the PNGDF (Sydney Morning Herald, 13 July, 1996, p. 34). The security forces began to establish these camps in 1988 when the conflict began. According to human rights lawyer, Rosemarie Gillespie (1999b), who visited Bougainville several times, the PNGDF used ‘care centres’ much like the U.S. used ‘strategic hamlets’ in Vietnam. She argued that people were

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26 As part of this operation, it had fired on a boat attempting to cross into the Solomon Islands from an Australian supplied helicopter. The Sydney Morning Herald reported that people in the south of Bougainville, near Kangu Beach, had suffered from the bombardment of phosphorus bombs dropped from Australian supplied helicopters by the PNGDF in July (cited in Sharp, 1997).
rounded up and forced into them, so as to allow their former land to be used as ‘free fire’ zones. The Bougainville Interim Government (BIG) referred to the ‘care centres’ as ‘concentration camps’. The UN (1996) reported many cases of torture, harassment, rape and execution of civilians in ‘care centres’. Such were the conditions that sometimes pregnant women would rather die in childbirth in the ‘bush’ rather than risk attending a care centre (Coles-Janess, 1999). For some time prior to the 8 September 1996, PNGDF soldiers had been abusing the ‘care centre’ residents (PNG Prime Minister Chan, National Broadcasting Corporation of PNG, cited in Pacific News Bulletin, 1996a, p. 3) and local women (Amnesty International, 1997). The Pacific News Bulletin (1996a, p. 1) also reported that, shortly before the battle, the PNGDF had killed three children at the camp, the oldest of whom was 10 years.

Thirdly, who attacked the camp and why? Before the attack the local ‘Resistance’ members were allied to the PNGDF, but were unhappy about the PNGDF abuses and defected to BRA (Watts, 1999a). The BRA and ‘Resistance’ then launched the attack together (PNG Prime Minister Chan, National Broadcasting Corporation of PNG, cited in Pacific News Bulletin, 1996b, p. 3). The objective was to free the ‘care centre’ inmates (Kauona, 2000b, Watts, 2000b, Coles-Janess, 1999). They surprised the 32 central government forces who guarded the ‘care centre’, killing 12 of them on the Sunday morning. The BRA and ex-‘Resistance’ members then dissolved the camp (Coles-Janess, 1999) thus freeing the internees who returned to their villages (Kauona, 2000b). The Pacific News Bulletin (1996a) was to later report that the attack might have been a reprisal for the earlier killing of the three children by the PNGDF.

Fourthly, on the Sunday morning, how did the twelve security force members die? According to Amnesty International (1997, http://www.amnesty.org/ailib/aipub/1997/ASA/33400197.htm) a ‘Resistance’ leader was reported as saying that his men attacked the PNGDF, ‘disarmed them and then were joined by the BRA in ‘the killing of the soldiers’. However, it is not clear from the Amnesty Report whether they gained this statement directly from the ‘Resistance’ leader or from hearsay.

The Amnesty International (1997) version also begs many questions. How did the ‘Resistance’ manage to disarm the 17 victims (including the 5 who were captured) when there were another 15 soldiers at the camp? If the ‘Resistance’ had disarmed all of the 32 guards

27 Also, the PNGDF did not allow Amnesty International to visit the site of the massacre and talk to other witnesses. They conducted their investigations in Port Moresby, the Solomon Islands and Buka, a PNG controlled island to the north of the Bougainville mainland, far from Kangu Beach, which is at the southern tip (Amnesty International, 1997).
before the attack began, why did they not kill or capture all of them? If they did not disarm all of the soldiers how were the BRA and ‘Resistance’ able to execute the twelve without the others intervening?

Former Commander-in-Chief of the BRA, General Sam Kauona (2000b) denied that the soldiers were executed. According to the PNGDF internal inquiry ‘some’ of the soldiers were disarmed, giving their guns to the ‘Resistance’ members for ‘safe-keeping’, before being killed (Chan, cited in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 October, 1996, p. 10). Kauona also denied this. Furthermore, relatives of the deceased men at Kangu Beach claimed that the PNGDF investigation was flawed and questioned its findings.

The alternative view is that the soldiers were killed in battle. According to Thomas Tarei, the commander of BRA ‘H’ company who led the attack, it was a big battle (cited in Coles-Janess, 1999). Initial reports indicated that this was so. The *Sydney Morning Herald* (Ruffini, 11 September, 1996) reported that up to 200 BRA soldiers took part in the attack. According to Kauona (2000b) the BRA and defecting ‘Resistance’ members knew who had been abusing the residents and targeted these soldiers during the battle. Tarei told Coles-Janess (1999) that at the time of the attack some troops were drunk, some were asleep, some were playing volleyball and some were fishing. The battle lasted a week and a patrol boat which attacked the beach at one stage was repelled by BRA fire (Reuter, 1996c).

In summary, we don’t exactly how the soldiers were killed. None of the reports state categorically that the victims were summarily executed. Rather this is an implication of those reports. The evidence suggesting that the victims were executed is flimsy and, according to the internal PNGDF investigation, only some of them were disarmed before being killed. However, it is likely that some of the soldiers did not have ready access to the weapons when the attack began.

Fifthly, at least two of the victims’ bodies from Kangu Beach were mutilated after the attack (Kauona, 2000a, O’Callaghan, 1999b, Chan, cited in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 October, 1996). It is unknown as to whether the ‘Resistance’ members or BRA soldiers were responsible.

Some of the PNGDF soldiers had repeatedly raped women at the ‘care centre’ including the

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28 The *Pacific News Bulletin* (1996b, p. 4, citing the PNG Post-Courier and the independent wire service, *Pacnews*) reported that:

The widow of the officer commanding …[the PNGDF troops] at the time of the massacre questioned the length of time the investigating Colonel had spent on his investigation and how many soldiers, resistance fighters and civilians he had interviewed. She said that according to her sources he had spent only one day at Kangu and complete [sic] the investigation within one week.
wives of ‘Resistance’ members. Apparently, those soldiers whose bodies were mutilated were the worst offenders (interview data).

Analysis

Initially, there were striking similarities in reporting between the Simbo massacre and the Kangu Beach incident. All three articles appear to have been based on one report written by Paul Ruffini who was stationed in Port Moresby for the wire service, Australian Associated Press (AAP). We can recall that the first articles on the Simbo massacre were all based on the one wire service report (from Reuter, 1996a). The first newspaper reports about Simbo appeared only as ‘news-in-brief’ items. Likewise, two publications, the Age and the Australian, on the first day ran a ‘news in brief’ item based on the AAP report. The following is the Age (10 September 1996, p. 7) item:

PNG SKIRMISH.

Rebel fighters on Bougainville today claimed to have killed 12 Papua New Guinean soldiers in a battle at the weekend. -- AAP.

The Australian ran a slightly longer ‘news-in-brief’ item.

In contrast to the Simbo case, on the first day of reporting of the Kangu Beach incident, one of the publications, the Sydney Morning Herald, published a long front-page report on the incident. Another obvious difference in reporting of the Simbo and Kangu Beach incidents was the credence given to the BRA version of events. For example the Sydney Morning Herald article relied heavily on the BRA version.

As I discussed above, by analysing the sequences in headlines and leads we can see how the press presented the violence in moral terms. Presenting the violence at Kangu Beach as less legitimate than the violence at Simbo would suggest that those victims were ‘worthy’ compared to the Simbo victims. On the first day the headlines in the three newspapers read as follows:
12 PNG soldiers killed in beach fight, say rebels (Sydney Morning Herald, 10 September 1996, p. 1)

Rebels boast 12 killed (Australian, 10 September 1996, p. 8)

PNG skirmish (Age, 10 September 1996, p. 7)

Each of the three headlines provides a different moral narrative. It is interesting that the Sydney Morning Herald, which published the most prominent and largest article, used a victim – ‘deviant violence’ – sequence, as shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Identity qualifier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 PNG soldiers</td>
<td>victim,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>killed</td>
<td>act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in beach fight say rebels’</td>
<td>context</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This suggests that the violence is ‘heinous’ and ‘unacceptable’ (Cerulo, 1998). Such reporting is typical of the treatment given to ‘worthy victims’ in the press because it is sympathetic to the victims and emphasises the severity of the violence.

In contrast, the headline in the Australian presents a performer – ‘normal violence’ – sequence, as shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Identity qualifier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rebels boast</td>
<td>performer, context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>victims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>killed</td>
<td>act</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Using this sequence suggests that the violence is acceptable. According to Cerulo (1998) the use of such sequences is prevalent in a lot of war reporting since violence is more acceptable in times of war. The headline in the *Age* (10 September, 1996, p. 7) ‘PNG skirmish’ casts the two sides – the PNG and BRA soldiers in violent roles by referring to the act as a ‘skirmish’. In this sense it is a ‘doublecasting’ sequence, suggesting moral ambiguity in relation to the act.

The sequencing in this headline presents the violence as more acceptable than it otherwise might have been presented. Thus the headlines in two of the newspapers present the violence as more acceptable than it was presented in the *Sydney Morning Herald* headline. However, the items in those two newspapers had little prominence in the press. The fact that the largest and most prominent item used a ‘deviant violence’ sequence in the headline is typical of the treatment of ‘worthy victims’ because it draws attention to the unacceptable act.

We can recall that in the case of Simbo the press showed no interest in following up the story. In the case of Kangu Beach it was followed up vigorously in the following days. On the next day, all publications contained moderate-sized articles. In the *Age* and the *Australian* they appeared in the first nine pages. The headlines and leads displayed victim (‘deviant’ violence) sequences (one headline and two leads); ‘contextual’ (‘ambiguous violence’) sequences (one headline and one lead); and one performer (‘normal violence’) sequence (headline). The prevalence of ‘deviant violence’ sequences and the relative lack of ‘normal violence’ sequences is typical of the treatment of ‘worthy victims’ in the press.

The *Age* (11 September 1996) article emphasises the ‘barbarity’ of the act. The item appears under the contextual headline ‘Bougainville killings barbaric, says Chan’ (*Age*, 11 September 1996, p. 8). The lead is also contextual as shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Identity qualifier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The killing of 12 Papua New Guinean soldiers by rebel fighters on Bougainville over the weekend was a barbaric act that sabotaged attempts to resolve the conflict, the Prime Minister, Sir Julius Chan, said today.</td>
<td>act victims perpetrators (place frame, time frame) context.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This is a contextual lead because it does not begin with the victim or the perpetrator but enaces those actors within the event – ‘the killing’. This suggests that the writer thought the violence was morally ambiguous. It is not a ‘doublecasting’ sequence, which casts both sides in perpetrator roles. On the contrary, by using Chan’s statement in the lead the PNG government and its defence force is cast as the ‘peacemaker’ rather than as one of the antagonists in a war whose troops have just been involved in a battle to defend a strategic beach29.

Again, word usage and content is important. The combination of the ‘contextual’ sequence which downplays the PNGDF’s combatant role and the use of the term ‘barbaric’ to describe the BRA victory adds to the impression that the violence is not ‘normal’. This kind of reporting is typical of that normally given to stories about ‘worthy victims’ because it emphasises the heinous nature of the act.

Analysis of content shows that Ruffini (Age, 11 September, 1996, p. 8 and above) portrays the BRA as belligerent, the PNGDF as seeking to maintain order and the PNG government as seeking peace. One wonders what Chan meant by his phrase ‘attempts to resolve the conflict’. He had already unilaterally lifted the cease-fire in March, launched ‘Operation High Speed II’, with the help of Australia (Dorney, 199830). Yet he had failed to lift the cease-fire by the time of the battle and had refused international requests, including from Australia, to commence peace negotiations. However, Ruffini (Age, 11 September, 1996, p. 8) fails to challenge Chan’s statement by making or using counterposing statements. This failure to challenge was the predominant response in all three publications in reporting as a

29 Kangu Beach was the only port for Buin, the main town of the Siwai district in southwest Bougainville (Dorney, cited in Reuters Business Briefing 1999).

30 Australia was reluctant to overtly supply lethal aid, but agreed to give a special grant to supply ‘non-lethal’ aid such as ration packs, after Brigadier-General Singirok visited Australia just prior to High Speed II (Dorney, 1998). Wayne Coles-Janess (1999) in his visit to Bougainville in 1997 noticed the discarded Australian-donated ration packs, clearly marked as such. This he said, did not go unnoticed by the local population. He said that on his trip around Bougainville he was continually asked ‘why is Australia supplying military weapons and equipment to shoot us?’ (Age, 1 March 1997, p. A27) The special aid was in addition to the Defence Cooperation Program aid. The latest annual installment of $12million of which was approved in July 1996, as High Speed II began. Other aid included the supply of arms and ammunition at reduced rates and around $150 million per annum in unconditional aid to the PNG government (Sharp, 1997).
whole of this incident. Mary-Louise O’Callaghan (1999a), who wrote several articles for the 
Australian on this incident, said that ‘Chan’s idea of an attempt to resolve the conflict was High Speed II’. However, she did not include counterposing statements in her news report when she reported Chan’s comments.\footnote{She said that she did not criticise Chan, in that news item, because she thought that Chan could ‘hang himself’ (O’Callaghan, 1999b). One journalist (who did not wish to be identified) stated that those readers who were following the story would have realised that the statement was an example of ‘Chan’s doublespeak’. Furthermore, they said that Chan had a right to have his comments aired in the press.}

In the days after the battle, the story of Kangu Beach continued to receive substantial attention in the three newspapers. News writers focussed mainly on two issues. The first was the continuation of the battle, after PNG sent reinforcements to Kangu Beach (for example, Sydney Morning Herald, 12 September 1996, p. 8). The second was that the battle had inflamed tensions between PNG and Australia over the supply of military aid (Australian, 12 September, 1996, p. 2, p. 2). These issues were canvassed in four articles, including an editorial in the Australian, in the next two days. Between 10 September, when the incident...
was first reported, and the 13 September there were 10 moderately sized articles on Kangu Beach, mainly in the first 10 pages, in the three newspapers.

The three newspapers continued to give attention to the story over the next three months basing the articles on issues arising in the aftermath to the incident. These stories addressed: the plight of prisoners – to whom journalists consistently referred as ‘hostages’ – who were being held by the BRA and the negotiations to free them (for example, Sydney Morning Herald, 17 September 1996, p. 14), the return of the bodies to Port Moresby and associated grieving (Australian, 16 September, 1996, p. 14 and Sydney Morning Herald, 30 September, 1996, p. 13); the official investigation (for example, Skehan, Sydney Morning Herald, 25 October 1996, p. 10); and the continuing ‘tensions’ between Australia and PNG over the incident (for example, Age, 16 September 1996, p. 15). I counted thirteen articles which mentioned the incident appearing between 13 September and 22 November 1996 including one editorial. Furthermore, writers continued to refer to the incident in December in feature and opinion articles and in another editorial.

The emphasis on the suffering of the victims and the savagery of the killing of the 13 security force members (one was killed, apparently in battle, later in the week), was evident in the representation of the event in three newspapers. News stories at first referred to the incident as a ‘battle’ (for example, Sydney Morning Herald, 10 September, 1996, p. 1) and a ‘bloody battle’ (Australian, 11 September, 1996, p. 9). However, it was later often called a ‘massacre’ in the Sydney Morning Herald and the Australian, (including four times in headlines, Australian, 21 September, 1996, p. 16, Australian, 16 October 1996, Sydney Morning Herald, 25 October 1996, p. 10), a ‘slaughter’ (for example, Sydney Morning Herald, 30 September, 1996, p. 13 and Australian, 11 September, 1996, p. 9). The Age and Sydney Morning Herald reported foreign minister Downer’s comment that it was ‘tragic’ (Sydney Morning Herald, 12 September, 1996, p. 8). In the Sydney Morning Herald, it was called a ‘bloody, stinking, insignificant and meaningless battle’ (quoting a deceased soldier’s relative, Sydney Morning Herald, 30 September, 1996, p. 13) The BRA leaders were referred to as ‘killers and cultists’ (Sydney Morning Herald, 30 September, 1996, p. 13) which emphasised that they were at the least deviant. The use of words such as
‘massacre’ and ‘slaughter’ began after PNG Prime Minister Chan announced that several of the victims’ bodies had been mutilated and after the remains had been flown back to Port Moresby.

Another aspect of the reporting was the range of opinion which could be expressed. To what extent were writers critical of BRA aggression in the three newspapers? Professor James Griffin, an expatriate Australian adviser to the Papua New Guinea government, took the most extreme opinion in the three newspapers denouncing the BRA. The subtitle to his article reads that Australia has a responsibility to help PNG contain Bougainville’s ‘killers and cultists’. Griffin (Sydney Morning Herald, 30 September, 1996, p. 13) then writes that Australia should act to ‘rid Bougainville of its secessionist leaders’ and that no Australian government:

…serious about human rights could countenance Bougainville coming under the control of killers and cultists like Kauona and Francis Ona, or being reduced to chaos for the indefinite future.

Griffin (Sydney Morning Herald, 30 September, 1996, p. 13) suggests that Australia should become more directly involved in the conflict by:

• Aiding the PNGDF to ‘locate’ and ‘rid Bougainville of its secessionist leaders’;

• providing patrol boats and a surveillance ship with helicopters to seal off ‘the arms trade’;

• taking over the border patrols thus freeing up the PNGDF to do more on the island.

Furthermore, Griffin (Sydney Morning Herald, 30 September, 1996, p. 13) argues that ‘perhaps’ more ‘forceful means, which it is unnecessary to adumbrate here, may be needed at some future stage.’ Nothing, he says, ‘can now be achieved without action against the BRA forces and their fanatical leaders.’

Griffin (Sydney Morning Herald, 30 September, 1996, p. 13) does not provide any evidence of the ‘arms trade’, nor that Ona and Kauona were directly linked to the killing of the soldiers at Kangu Beach. Neither did other writers who wrote about the incident in the Age, the Australian and Sydney Morning Herald.

The available evidence suggests that there was, effectively, no such ‘arms trade’. This was
supported by Sean Dorney (1999), a veteran ABC South Pacific correspondent, whom journalists regard as the leading authority on Bougainville (interview data). He told me that during or since the war no convincing evidence of an ‘arms trade’ in high-powered weapons between the Solomons and Bougainville emerged. According to Coles-Janess (1999) the BRA’s arsenal consisted of captured PNGDF weapons and ammunition, home made and reconditioned World War II weapons and small arms such as shotguns which were on the island before the conflict began. Dorney (1999) and Coles-Janess (1999) conceded that a few shotguns may have been brought over from the Solomons. However, these were of little consequence.

It is true that the BRA were largely responsible for the killings. However, there is little evidence to show that the BRA murdered the soldiers as the rhetoric in Griffin’s (Sydney Morning Herald, 30 September, 1996, p. 13) article suggests. Furthermore, there is less evidence, still, linking Kauona and Ona with such events (see above, pp. 53-54). In any case, the internal report (according to press reports) found that the killings were mainly the responsibility of the former ‘Resistance’ members (Chan, cited in Sydney Morning Herald, 25 October 1996, p. 10). There was no indication that the inquiry found that the BRA soldiers committed the crime. There is no evidence presented by neither Griffin nor anyone else in the press linking Ona (the President of the Bougainville Interim Government) and General Kauona to an alleged murder. The suggestion of Griffin that General Kauona and President Ona murdered the soldiers at Kangu Beach rests on the idea that because they were in command of the BRA they were responsible.

Griffin (Sydney Morning Herald, 30 September, 1996, p. 13) is misleading when he presents Kauona as the main agent for continuing the war. He claims that Kauona was ‘boasting’

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33 The following is a transcript of our conversation:

Roberts: There were claims of arms smuggling from the Solomon Islands to Bougainville - is there any truth in that?
Dorney: Well there was certainly a premium on shotguns and things like that, which were used in villages and whatever. These aren’t double-barreled shotguns I mean these are hunting sort of rifles. A few of those certainly were bought from around Solomons because they became very pricey. …From my own personal observations, most of the weapons that the BRA had …[were] captured from the PNGDF. Bought stolen or captured. Because there were a number of incidents where they killed quite a few. There were very high powered weapons that they got at Kangu Beach, but years before that when Arawa was recaptured by the PNGDF there was an ambush near the golf course and 11 or 12 PNG soldiers were killed and the BRA captured quite a few weapons. They also captured quite a few weapons in other isolated incidents.
referring to statements made by Kauona in a recent press release. He quotes Kauona as saying that the BRA had captured a large amount of weapons and ammunition in recent campaigns and that this would allow them to continue the war for years. This encourages the reader to believe that the BRA leadership is responsible for not only the deaths at Kangu Beach but also the continuation of the war in Bougainville. However, Griffin (Sydney Morning Herald, 30 September, 1996, p. 13) omits the rest of Kauona’s statement, in which he said that the threat to continue the war is only made if the PNG government fails to reinstate the cease-fire (Bougainville Interim Government, 1996).

In sum, Griffin (Sydney Morning Herald, 30 September, 1996, p. 13) writes that Kauona and Ona are ‘killers’. He does not provide any evidence to support this claim, nor is there any such evidence contained in the three newspapers’ reporting of Kangu Beach. He also calls for drastic Australian military intervention. However, Griffin’s article is an exception. Several other opinion writers mentioned Kangu Beach but did not use such words against the leadership of the BRA nor suggest such drastic Australian intervention.

It is interesting to look at the sequencing quantitatively in reporting about Kangu Beach. According to Cerulo (1998) the lead is the most important part of any news item. As shown in table 2-1, below, the leads presented slightly more ‘deviant violence’ sequences (six) than ‘ambiguous’ (four) or ‘normal’ (four). In the headlines there was a clear preference for ‘ambiguous’ sequences (ten) rather than ‘deviant’ (three) or ‘normal’ (two, table 2-1, below). The main difference in the reporting of the two incidents at Kangu Beach and Simbo was in the use of ‘deviant violence’ sequences. In the case of Kangu Beach close to 30 per cent of the leads presented such sequences, suggesting that the killing of the PNGDF soldiers was heinous and unacceptable. In contrast, in the case of Simbo not one of the leads or headlines presented ‘deviant violence’ sequences. The difference in the use of sequences suggests that the three newspapers viewed the violence at Kangu Beach as less legitimate than the violence at Simbo. Thus, these publications also suggest that the victims at Kangu Beach were more ‘worthy’ than the victims at Simbo.
In this chapter, I have argued that there were important differences in the reporting of the two massacres in the three newspapers. According to Herman and Chomsky (1988), the mass media tend to portray victims of official enemies as ‘worthy’. In contrast, they argue that victims who have been abused with equal or greater severity by official friends are typically portrayed as ‘unworthy’ by the mass media. The case of Simbo, where victims of the PNGDF were killed, is clearly a more severe case of human rights abuse than the case of Kangu Beach.

In chapter one, I argued that we could analyse certain elements in the reporting of incidents in 1996 to determine whether the three newspapers treated the victims of the PNGDF as ‘unworthy’ compared to victims of the BRA. The analysis in this chapter has shown that, in certain elements of reporting, the three newspapers treated the victims of the PNGDF as ‘unworthy’ compared to the victims of the BRA at Kangu Beach. In this chapter, the elements of reporting that I used were:

- Prominence and attention;
- rhetoric in reporting;

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In this chapter, I have argued that there were important differences in the reporting of the two massacres in the three newspapers. According to Herman and Chomsky (1988), the mass media tend to portray victims of official enemies as ‘worthy’. In contrast, they argue that victims who have been abused with equal or greater severity by official friends are typically portrayed as ‘unworthy’ by the mass media. The case of Simbo, where victims of the PNGDF were killed, is clearly a more severe case of human rights abuse than the case of Kangu Beach.

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- Prominence and attention;
- rhetoric in reporting;
• use of sources;

• sequencing in reporting.

The battle of Kangu Beach was given prominence and attention and the tone of reporting was such as to engender sympathy for the victims. Whilst the PNG government and military were portrayed as promoting peace and order, the BIG and BRA were portrayed as belligerent and guilty of a ‘barbaric’ act. Much of the reporting was based on unverified sources. The event received attention in several opinion feature articles and in editorials. In one opinion article extreme views were expressed promoting the outrageousness of the act and the malevolence of the political and military leadership of the self-determination movement in Bougainville.

In contrast, there was very little attention and prominence given to Simbo incident in the three newspapers. The massacre was virtually ignored. At the time of the massacre all three newspapers published only one ‘news in brief’ paragraph on the incident. The incident was then largely forgotten. Watts (1996a, p. 4) says that there was no follow-up in the mainstream media. Furthermore, he found that there were no mainstream journalists assigned to do any further research on the story. Throughout 1996 there was only one exception to this general neglect. It was mentioned in October, some eight months later.

I have argued that the vocabulary, details and context and placement used in the reporting of the Simbo massacre was such as to engender little sympathy for the victims or outrage about their treatment. The reporting also suggested little moral repugnance of the act.

The testimony of Bougainvillean unofficial and dissident sources including one eyewitness was ignored. This omission occurred despite the fact that the Solomon Islands’ press published a story told by and photo of the eyewitness. The key details, number killed, ages and approximate date and time were corroborated, apparently independently. According to the Australian Associated Press journalist who covered the war for several years, Lucy Palmer (1999) there was no doubt that the PNGDF perpetrated the massacre of the villagers. The three newspapers had the opportunity to photograph and interview the injured eyewitness but did not. Whilst the unofficial versions were virtually ignored less convincing versions given by official stories were printed.

34 There were two editorials in the first week and a total of four in the three months after the incident.
In the case of Simbo, there were no comments published about the outrageousness of the act nor the malevolence of PNG troops who committed the massacre or the officials who commanded them and did nothing to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Journalists responded differently during the aftermath of each of the incidents. The Simbo massacre was an obvious case of gross human rights abuse. It was well documented and well publicised (though not in the three newspapers). The press had ample opportunity, resources and availability of sources in the Solomon Islands and Australia to publicise the incident. There was an eyewitness available in the Solomon Islands who had a dramatic story to tell of violence, heroism and human survival against the odds. Had the press publicised the incident well there would have been at least some public pressure for an official inquiry. As it stood, there was ample justification for editors and opinion writers to call for such an inquiry themselves. In the case of Kangu Beach the press drew attention to the grieving of the victim’s relatives and the return of the bodies to Port Moresby. They also reported the results of the inquiry and the reactions of the PNG and Australian governments in a way which promoted sympathy for the victims. It is likely that the Australian press reportage of this incident contributed to pressure which resulted in PNG Prime Minister Chan instituting an inquiry.

The violence perpetrated by the BRA at Kangu Beach was presented as less legitimate than in the violence perpetrated by the PNGDF at Simbo. The analysis of the sequencing showed that reporting of the Simbo case emphasised the violence on the PNG soldier who was allegedly killed during the incident. It also portrayed the killing of this soldier as ‘deviant’ – unacceptable violence. However, reporting portrayed the PNGDF killing of the civilians at Simbo as ‘ambiguous’ – too difficult to classify into right and wrong. There were examples of a specific type of ‘ambiguous’ reporting – the use of ‘doublecasting’ sequences, which cast the PNG soldiers and Bougainvillean as both victims and perpetrators of violence. The use of these sequences emphasised the claim by the PNGDF (cited in Reuter 1996a) that the victims at Simbo died in a ‘shootout’. The use of ‘ambiguous’ – especially ‘doublecasting’ – sequences suggested that the violence against the civilians was more acceptable than it otherwise might have been.

In contrast, in the case of Kangu Beach the violence against the PNG security force victims was often presented as deviant. Importantly, the violence of the PNGDF, both during the battle and previously at the ‘care centre’ and elsewhere in Bougainville was ignored or
downplayed in reporting of Kangu Beach. In other words, the 13 security force victims were cast as victims rather than as both perpetrators and victims. The differences in the sequencing of reporting of the two incidents suggest that the three newspapers portrayed the victims at Simbo as ‘unworthy’ compared to the victims at Kangu Beach. Certainly, these publications often used other sequences to describe the violence at Kangu Beach thus presenting the violence as more acceptable than if they used only ‘deviant’ sequences. However, in cases where sequencing in one part of the article suggested acceptance of the violence, sequencing in other parts of the article and content suggested that the violence was deviant.

In sum, my analysis of several elements of the reporting has shown that the victims of the BRA at Kangu Beach were portrayed as ‘worthy’ compared to the victims of the PNGDF at Simbo. This supports Herman and Chomsky (1988) who argue that the mass media tend to portray victims of official friends as ‘unworthy’ compared to victims of official enemies. Given that the Australian government supported the objectives, if not the tactics, of the PNG government in its military operations on Bougainville, this pattern of reporting suggests that the three newspapers played a legitimising rather than oppositional role in reporting the two incidents. In the next chapter, I will consider the reporting of the incident at Malabita which occurred in December 1996. This case was similar to the case of Simbo, nine civilians were massacred by the PNGDF. However, the Malabita incident was to receive much more attention and be reported quite differently to the Simbo massacre.
Chapter three

REPORTING THE MALABITA MASSACRE

On Sunday morning, 28 November, nine civilians, including women and children, were killed in a mortar attack on a church by the PNGDF (Papua New Guinea Defence Force) at Malabita in southern Bougainville (see map, fig 3-1, below, p. 69).

In this chapter I ask how did three Australian newspapers, the Australian, the Sydney Morning Herald and the Age, report this incident? As I indicated in chapter one, there are a variety of theoretical perspectives which can be drawn upon to interpret this case. I begin by discussing the circumstances of the Malabita incident.

The Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) victory at Kangu Beach was a turning point in the war and it was to usher in further victories by the BRA in the field (Watts, 1999b). The security forces responded to the battle of Kangu Beach with a series of ‘payback’ killings (Australian, 13 December 1996, p. 13). For example, John Napatalai, co-ordinator of the Kangu beach ‘care centre’ and Theodore Miriung, the PNG-appointed Premier of Bougainville, because of their perceived role in the Kangu Beach attack were assassinated by PNGDF troops (Amnesty International, 1997). However, the BRA continued to overrun PNGDF positions and by the end of November 1996, had gained control of much of south of Bougainville (Kauona, 2000a).
Figure 3-1: Bougainville and Buka Islands, showing location of Malabita. (Adapted from O’Callaghan, 1999a, p. xi.)
According to eyewitnesses (cited in *Australian*, 6 December 1996, p. 9), on 28 November 1996, a group of family and friends had gathered for a Catholic Mass at Malabita when the PNGDF fired seven rounds from their nearby base at Buin. Two of these rounds cut through the roof and exploded on the ground and the rest fell outside (eyewitness cited in *Australian*, 6 December 1996, p. 9). A two-year-old child and five others, mainly women, were wounded (Amnesty International, 1997). The incident was described by Amnesty International (1997, [http:///www.amnesty.org/ailib/aipub/1997/ASA/33400197.htm](http:///www.amnesty.org/ailib/aipub/1997/ASA/33400197.htm)) as:

…an indiscriminate attack on civilians by the PNGDF. The church was in a BRA controlled area but there appear to have been no military targets in the immediate vicinity.

The Malabita massacre was part of a spate of attacks on civilians in the area (*Australian*, 13 December 1996, p. 13). In late November and early December 1996 there were reports of up to one hundred civilians killed by the PNGDF and pro-government militia in several villages in the Siwai district in southwest Bougainville (Bougainville Interim Government, cited in Sharp, 1997). These attacks were a result of the frustration and anger of the PNGDF and ‘Resistance’ forces (Kauona, 2000a, O’Callaghan, 1999b). The occurrence of a high number of attacks in the one area within a period of a week and involving so many deaths suggests complicity, if not planning, on the part of local PNGDF commanders.

This situation is reminiscent of the slaughter of East Timorese by Indonesian troops and their allied militia in 1999, though on a much smaller scale. Whilst the Australian Defence Intelligence Organisation was aware of the involvement of higher officials within the Indonesian army in the East Timor attacks, the Indonesian and Australian governments insisted that the killings were the work of aberrant troops and local militias (*Age*, 17 March 2002, pp. 1 and 6). According to General Kauona (2000a), the former Commander-in-Chief of the BRA, the killings (including the Malabita massacre) were not official ‘search and destroy’ operations which were common in the earlier stages of the conflict (see Gillespie, 1999a). Rather, he said that they were the result of the frustration of local PNGDF commanders.

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35 By this time, the BRA had breached the blockade, using automatic weapons mounted on powered ‘banana boats’ and was able to regularly cross into the Solomon Islands (Watts, 2000b). At least seven out of the 16 wounded survivors of two of these attacks (at Mokukruru and Malabita) were evacuated to Honiara for medical treatment (O’Callaghan, *Australian*, 6 December 1996, p. 9 and O’Callaghan, ibid, 7-8 December 1996, p. 15).

36 I put this to Mary-Louise O’Callaghan (1999b) and she agreed that local commanders probably gave the troops a ‘free hand’. However, she believed that higher officials were unaware of what had happened.
personnel.

I argue on two grounds that the higher officials of the PNGDF and PNG government, such as those in Port Moresby, were largely responsible for the killings.

Firstly, human rights abuses such as these had been committed, repeatedly, by security forces since 1988 (Amnesty International, 1997, United Nations, 1996). Despite this, PNG officials had continued to deploy troops and mount offensives. Furthermore, they had failed to bring any of the perpetrators to justice despite requests from Amnesty International and the United Nations to do so. They had also failed to investigate human rights abuses apart from one case, the assassination of Premier Miriung (U.S. department of State, 1997). Such failure to act on the criminal abuses of the PNGDF amounted to a situation where they operated with impunity on Bougainville (Amnesty International, 1994). This responsibility of higher officials for human rights abuses in the past was highlighted by an Amnesty International (1996) press release, published on the day after the first news report of the Malabita massacre appeared. In the release, entitled ‘Government Yet Again Turns a Blind Eye to the Latest Killings on The Island Of Bougainville’, Amnesty International (1996, p. 1) stated that:

The government has consistently failed to respond adequately to killings, disappearances’ and torture by its forces since the eight-year conflict began…

This lack of action by the government has allowed the security forces to continue committing grave human rights violations in the knowledge that they are unlikely to be held accountable for their actions.

Amnesty International (1997) also stated that, consistent with past behaviour of PNG higher officials, the Malabita killings were not investigated independently.

The PNG government and defence force also assisted in the continuation of the human rights situation by keeping independent observers away from Bougainville despite UN requests to let them in. As Amnesty International (1996, p. 1) stated:

Verification of the exact circumstances of the attack has been hampered by lack of access for independent observers.

Unless the authorities allow access to Bougainville for independent human rights observers and unless mechanisms are set up for investigating any allegations of violations and holding those responsible to account, the people of Bougainville will continue to be

The second ground for arguing that the PNG higher officials were responsible for the killings is that they occurred in the context of renewed offensive military operations. As stated above, Chan lifted the ceasefire in March 1996 and launched High Speed II in July. Since then, the Australian government, the Solomon Islands government and other groups had called for the PNG government to initiate peace proceedings. In addition, the BRA had been calling for a truce with much the same conditions that were eventually agreed to at the Burnham Peace conference in 1997 (see Pacific News Bulletin, 1996c). However, Chan failed to reinstate the ceasefire or make any peace initiatives (see Pacific News Bulletin, 1996c).

Furthermore, some officials in PNG, including the Minister for Defence Mr. Ijape, were at the time planning the ‘Sandline’ mercenary offensive which was aimed at assassinating BRA leaders and invading the Panguna mine site and surrounding villages (O’Callaghan, 1999a).

Information about the attack only emerged because ‘the survivors managed to travel to the Solomon Islands to seek medical attention’ (Amnesty International 1997, http://www.amnesty.org/ailib/aipub/1997/ASA/33400197.htm). Also, due to the BRA’s ability to breach the blockade, photos of the bombed church site, showing dismembered bodies (‘Bougainville: the War Next Door’, n.d.) and dead children, were sent to Australia (see figs. 3-2 and 3-3, pp. 73 -74, below).

Initial reports

Immediately after the incident at Malabita, the BRA evacuated wounded survivors to the Solomon Islands for medical treatment. These survivors were to become the first and most important source for Australian news reporting. As Amnesty International (1997) found, news of the attack was only made because these survivors made it to the Solomons. Five days after the attack and upon arrival at the General Hospital in Honiara some of them spoke to the Australian reporter, Mary-Louise O’Callaghan (Australian, 6 December 1996, p. 9). Her article was to be the first Australian report on the incident.

37 However, the Australian government was still supplying the PNGDF with much needed military aid (See Sharp, 1997).
Figure 3-2: Child's body, from Malabita (Paul Bobby). Source: Coles-Janess, (2000).
Figure 3-3. Malabita victims (Paul Bobby). Source: Coles-Janess (2000)
On the same day the BIG (Bougainville Interim Government, which represents the movement for self-determination on Bougainville), stated that nine civilians were killed: three men, three women and three children (Sydney Morning Herald, 7 December, 1996, p. 21). They also released the names of eight of those killed and five of the injured (Reuter, 1996b).

Initially the story of the massacre was reported prominently in only one of the three newspapers. On 6 December the Australian published two of O’Callaghan’s (Australian, 6 December 1996) articles, on page one and nine. The page-nine item was medium sized and at the top of the page. However, the page-one item was small and at the bottom of the page. It was under the headline, ‘PNG troops kill nine in church raid’ and began with:

PAPUA New Guinea troops killed nine civilians and seriously wounded nine others after launching a mortar attack on a church in South Bougainville in one of the worst incidents of the eight-year civil war.

The incident, confirmed yesterday by The Australian, is one of a growing number of attacks by PNG troops and resistance fighters in Bougainville and the Solomon Islands in the past week. (Australian, 6 December 1996, p. 1, emphasis in text)

O’Callaghan downplayed the severity of the human rights abuse. The troops ‘killed’ rather than ‘massacred’; ‘launched an attack’ rather than ‘committed an atrocity’; and the event is not referred to as a ‘human rights abuses’ or similar terms. The term, ‘resistance fighters’ evokes visions of freedom and heroism. This group is referred to more accurately by Peter Young (1999, writing for Jane’s Information Group which publishes Jane’s Defence Weekly) as ‘pro-government guerillas’. However, O’Callaghan (Australian, 6 December 1996, p. 9) prefers to adopt the PNG official terminology.

O’Callaghan (Australian, 6 December 1996, p. 9) does give an account from the viewpoint of one of the wounded women:

Ms Kauvina Tom, 24, who suffered shrapnel wound to her upper thighs, told the Australian yesterday that villagers from the rebel-controlled area of Malapita had gathered for their usual early morning prayer service around 7 am last Thursday when the attack took place. (Emphasis in text)

This is a dramatic and personalised story which would be likely to enrage the reader and encourage sympathy for the victims. However, it was left to the second half of the article on page nine.
She also mentions the suffering of a child as she writes:

Wounds suffered by the five, including a two-year old boy, Makiwa Baubake, were consistent with a mortar attack... (*Australian*, 6 December 1996, p. 9)

However, this is her only mention of child victims (three of whom were actually killed, Amnesty International, 1997). Returning to the vocabulary used, we may note that Makiwa suffered ‘wounds’ rather than being ‘blown open by shrapnel’. The importance of this detail is also played down by its placement in the middle of the second article, on page nine.

O’Callaghan (*Australian*, 6 December 1996, pp. 1 and 9) omits to mention the most newsworthy aspect of the story – and the one which readers would probably view with the most seriousness – that among the nine civilians were three women and three children. It was contained in the BIG press release which was issued on the same day as the article appeared. The BIG, in Sydney, obtained this information from its contacts amongst the Bougainvillean refugees in the Solomon Islands. O’Callaghan was based in the Solomon Islands and had spoken to the eyewitnesses eliciting many other details, such as that seven shots were fired in quick succession, that five landed outside the church and that the last two cut through the roof. It is therefore puzzling that she omits one of the most newsworthy details – the six dead women and children.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Age* both reported the story the next day, downplaying the seriousness of the incident. They both supplied fewer details of the suffering of the civilians and the headlines ignored the deaths of the women and children.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* treated the incident less prominently, than the *Australian* did. It ran an article mentioning the massacre on p. 21, giving little attention to the atrocity as a separate incident. Instead, it highlighted the problems of the PNGDF and placed the massacre within the context of other attacks by them. The headline for the *Sydney Morning Herald* article read: ‘PNG troops accused after 20 die in raids’ (7 December 1996, p. 21).


Certain details which would cause concern in the reader were referred to but downplayed. The journalists mentioned that three young children were killed and that several children were among the wounded. But they did not do this until the second paragraph. In the eighth
paragraph, the journalists mentioned that three women were killed. They mentioned that ‘a mortar bomb’ (my emphasis) was fired at the church (Sydney Morning Herald, 7 December 1996, p. 21) contradicting their claim, found later in the article, that there were in fact seven mortars. O’Callaghan (Australian, 6 December 1996, p. 9) the day before had quoted an eyewitness as stating that 7 mortars were fired, with two hitting the church directly. Palmer and agencies (Sydney Morning Herald, 7 December 1996, p. 21) did not mention this until the eighth paragraph, after quoting a PNGDF source stating that they could not confirm nor deny the incident and that they were ‘gravely concerned’ about the allegations.

Palmer and agencies (Sydney Morning Herald, 7 December 1996, p. 21) also made an important omission. Like O’Callaghan (Australian, 6 December 1996, p. 9), they failed to state explicitly that the church contained only civilians. As Amnesty International (1996) emphasised in their press release the day before, the incident was an indiscriminate attack on civilians and there were no military targets in the area.

The rhetoric used by (Sydney Morning Herald, 7 December 1996, p. 21) was similar to that used by O’Callaghan (Australian, 6 December 1996, p. 9). The headline stated ‘20 die in raids’ (referring to 11 victims of another massacre as well as the nine from Malabita) rather than ‘20 murdered by PNGDF killers’. Francis Ona, the President of the BIG referred to the PNGDF in such terms in his press release issued the day before the Sydney Morning Herald article was published. As in the headline, the words used in the lead distinctly played down the seriousness of the atrocity and described the act as a ‘punishment raid’, as if the victims deserved some retribution.

The Age also downplayed the story. In the first two months after the Australian published O’Callaghan’s (Australian, 6 December 1996, p. 9) article, the Age published just one short article on the Malabita massacre. It appeared in the middle pages of the newspaper. The article, sourced from AAP (Age, 7 December, 1996, p. 13) placed important details, such as the killing of women and children, toward the end and used similar rhetoric to that of O’Callaghan (Australian, 6 December 1996) and Palmer and agencies (Sydney Morning Herald, 7 December 1996, p. 21). It referred to the ‘killing of nine civilians in a mortar attack on a Catholic church’ (Age, 7 December, 1996, p. 13). It also omitted details mentioned by Amnesty International (1996) that there were no military targets in the area and that the attack appeared to be an indiscriminate attack on civilians. The article implied that the PNGDF might have been aiming at combatants in or near the church.
In sum, in the initial period after the massacre whilst the three newspapers reported the story they also downplayed it. The reports were not prominent in the three newspapers except for one case. The reports suggested little moral concern about the violence and downplayed or ignored details which emphasised the serious nature of the atrocity, for example that women and children were killed.

The legitimacy of the violence

Cerulo (1998) has suggested that the sequencing of narratives carry judgements about the relative legitimacy of various violent acts. Using Cerulo’s (1998) approach, I believe we can establish how the press both evaluated and represented the moral aspects of the violence.

As I discussed in chapter one, Cerulo (1998) argues that cultural conventions lead journalists to make decisions about how they sequence narratives about violence. Stories of ‘deviant’, ‘normal’ and ‘ambiguous’ violence are structured in different ways. In this section I analyse the press reports to answer the question: is the violence presented as ‘deviant’, ‘normal’ or ‘ambiguous’? Addressing this question will allow a discussion in chapter four as to why they have portrayed the violence in the way that they did.

The table below shows the sequence used in the headline to the first article, O’Callaghan (Australian, 6 December 1996, p. 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text Identity qualifier</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PNG troops</td>
<td>PNG troops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kill</td>
<td>kill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nine</td>
<td>nine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in church raid</td>
<td>in church raid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perpetrator</td>
<td>perpetrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>act</td>
<td>act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>victim</td>
<td>victim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>context</td>
<td>context</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is a typical perpetrator (‘normal violence’) sequence – Perpetrator, act, victim. The PNG troops are mentioned first, thus the reader is led in to the story from the perspective of the perpetrator. The absence of the victims’ perspective is shown by the place in the sequence. This is underscored also in content. The headline writer fails to identify the victims beyond the number killed. By using this sequence, the reader is led into the story through the experience of the perpetrator, rather than the victims. According to Cerulo (1998) the use of
such a sequence suggests that the violence though regrettable is legitimate. Such sequences, she observes, are typically used to describe acts of violence which are assumed as maintaining order – such as police shootings.

In the lead the same perpetrator (‘normal violence’) sequence is repeated, as shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text Identity qualifier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PAPUA New Guinea troops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>killed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nine civilians and seriously wounded nine others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>after launching a mortar attack on a church in South Bougainville in one of the worst incidents of the eight-year civil war.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again, the writer begins with the perpetrator, whilst mentioning the victims toward the end of the sequence.

O’Callaghan (Australian, 6 December, 1996, p. 9) had a second article published in the Australian on the same day. The headline in that article again presents a perpetrator sequence, ‘PNG troops kill nine in church attack’. The lead also carries a perpetrator sequence:

Papua New Guinea troops killed nine civilians and seriously wounded nine others after launching a mortar attack on a church in South Bougainville in one of the worst incidents of the eight-year civil war. (Australian, 6 December, 1996, p. 9)

The Age and the Sydney Morning Herald followed up the next day with stories on the massacre. The Sydney Morning Herald item told the story of the massacre as one of several recent massacres. The headline read: ‘PNG troops accused after 20 die in raids’ (Sydney Morning Herald, 7 December 1996, p. 20). This is different to the perpetrator sequences found in the headlines and leads on the previous day. The PNG troops are not presented as the perpetrators. Rather, they are seen ambiguously as the accused. This provides a context for the reader, after which the reader is told about the victims and the act. This is a ‘contextual’ sequence which suggests that the violence is ‘ambiguous’ – too difficult to classify into right and wrong. Convincing evidence had been presented in the press in the days before the article appeared that an atrocity had been perpetrated by PNGDF troops. Given this evidence, it is interesting that the sub-editor uses an ‘ambiguous violence’ rather than a ‘deviant violence’ sequence, which would have suggested that the violence was unacceptable.
In the lead, the writer reverts to a perpetrator sequence, as shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Identity qualifier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leaders of the crisis torn Papua New Guinea Defence Force say they are gravely concerned over allegations that soldiers on Bougainville have killed at least 20 civilians and wounded 19 more in a mortar attack and a punishment raid on a village in the past 10 days.</td>
<td>intro/context perpetrator act victim context</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The *Age* headline reads, ‘PNG army killing civilians: rebels’. This is a clear-cut perpetrator (‘normal violence’) sequence. The pattern is repeated in the lead, which reads, ‘Bougainville secessionist fighters today accused the Papua New Guinean army of killing nine civilians in a mortar attack on a Catholic church in the island’s south last week.’ (*Age*, 7 December, 1996, p. 13) This suggests that the violence was ‘normal’ or legitimate.

On the same day, as the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Age* articles, O’Callaghan (*Australian*, 1996, 7-8 December, 1996, p. 15) wrote her third article on the Siwai massacres, but referred little to the Malabita case.

In total, there were four initial articles mentioning the Malabita massacre. Three of these contained a reference to the violence in the lead. In sum, the headlines and leads in the first reports are primarily in perpetrator sequences. The only exception is one headline (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 December 1996, p. 21) in which as ‘contextual’ (‘ambiguous’) sequence is used. Following Cerulo (1998) such a pattern, strongly suggests that the violence is ‘normal’ and therefore legitimate and acceptable. The violence is presented as an act of maintaining order, rather than of ‘deviance’. Notably, there is lack of victim sequences, where the reader is drawn first to the suffering of the victim so that they respond to the violence as ‘deviant’ and therefore unacceptable. Such reporting downplays the severity of the human rights abuse which was perpetrated at Malabita.

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38 She focussed on the nearby Mokukruru massacre and the Malabita massacre was not mentioned in the lead.
Reactions by PNG and BIG officials and Amnesty International and the press response.

How did the three newspapers respond to the PNG government reactions to the massacre?

PNG officials had little to say about the incident. The PNG government made no official comment at all on the massacre (Amnesty International, 1996, *Australian* 13 December 1996, p. 13). On 6 December, as the story broke General Jerry Singirok, the Commander of the PNGDF, was ‘unavailable for comment’ (*Australian*, 6 December 1996, p. 9). On the next day it was reported that PNGDF Chief of staff, Colonel Jack Tuat, said that he ‘could not confirm or deny’ details of the ‘reported’ incident. Tuat claims to be ‘gravely concerned’ that ‘everything is pointing towards the security forces’ and that ‘he would like to see the full report’ before commenting (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 December 1996, p. 21).

Francis Ona, the President of the BIG expressed his concern about the PNG officials. According to Reuter (1996b), he said that the PNG Prime Minister, Chan, had totally lost control of his military on Bougainville. Ona (cited in Reuter, 1996b) continued:

> It seems that the PNGDF are trying to kill as many civilians as possible before they are withdrawn from Bougainville… we now have an unruly bunch of marauding killers that are making Bougainville their killing fields.

Amnesty International (1996, p. 1) in their press release, issued on the same day as the first newspaper report, criticised the silence of the PNG government:

> Serious human rights violations on the island of Bougainville have yet again been met with a resounding silence from the Papua New Guinea (PNG) Government, as more civilians were reportedly killed last week by the security forces…

Amnesty International (1996, p. 1) noted that, despite the expressions of concern, there had been no commitment to investigate the incident:

> PNGDF’s Chief of Staff, Colonel Jack Tuat, commenting on the reports gave no commitment that the incident would be investigated and there does not appear to have been any reaction yet from the government.

Amnesty International (1996) also argued that the PNG’s lack of adequate response to such abuses in the past had led to a situation on Bougainville where the troops operated with impunity. Furthermore, that PNG officials had failed to demonstrate any recent change in this regard:
This lack of action by the government has allowed the security forces to continue committing grave human rights violations in the knowledge that they are unlikely to be held accountable for their actions (Amnesty International, 1996, p. 1).

They stated that the PNG government’s response was inadequate given its failure to investigate abuses and to prosecute offenders. This, they said, had been the case since the beginning of the war. Notwithstanding this, Amnesty International (1996, p. 2) concentrated on the period since the visit of the UN Special Rapporteur in 1995, observing that:

With only one exception, none of the dozens of reports of extrajudicial killings and ‘disappearances’ in the past two years have been addressed by the government. Members of the security forces alleged to have committed violations have not been investigated or prosecuted, and many remain stationed on the island.

The investigation of the assassination of Theodore Miriung in October did not suggest that the PNG authorities had changed in this regard. As Amnesty International (1996, p. 2) stated:

In November, in an unprecedented move, the PNG Government invited a Sri Lankan judge to conduct a coroner’s inquiry into the death of former Bougainville Premier, Theodore Miriung, in October. Last week, the judge released his preliminary findings that PNGDF soldiers and members of the Resistance Forces were responsible for the killing.

Amnesty welcomed the willingness of the government to establish an independent coroner’s inquiry into Theodore Miriung’s death, but actions taken by the authorities since the preliminary findings do not suggest that this inquiry reflects a consistent change of government policy to ensure independent and full investigations of all human rights violations on Bougainville.

Soldiers who are alleged to have been involved in the killing are still stationed in the area where the killing took place, despite a recommendation by the coroner’s inquiry that they be removed.

Their final criticism concerned international monitors, including journalists who had been barred from the island. This situation had existed since the PNG government had formally established a blockade on Bougainville in May 1989 (Amnesty International, 1994). They also stated that if this situation continued it would result in the commission of more human rights abuses:

Throughout the conflict, human rights violations by the security forces and abuses by the armed secessionist BRA have been facilitated by the lack of international and domestic scrutiny, as journalists and human rights monitors have been barred from the island. This is despite recommendations from the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial,
summary or arbitrary executions for greater access to the island (Amnesty International, 1996, p. 2).

Two days later, Brigadier General Singirok, Commander-in-Chief of the PNGDF, made his first and only statement on the matter: that the PNGDF post at Buka had received no report of such an incident and that ‘the security forces maintain there were no shots fired into the church at Malabita’ (Broadcast on Radio New Zealand International, on 10 December 1996, cited in Pacific News Bulletin, 1997, p. 5). However, Radio New Zealand International (RZNI) reported on the 10 December, that Tuat in response to further questions said that the incident was ‘still being investigated’ (cited in Pacific News Bulletin, 1997, p. 5).

There was much in the reaction of the PNG officials which the press could legitimately criticise. As I have shown above, the officials did very little to address the concerns raised by Amnesty International (1996). Furthermore, noting what the human rights body said, these officials continued to ignore the recommendations of the UN which were made two years prior.

How did the press respond to the official PNG reactions? There were four items focussing on Malabita in this initial period. In the first published article on the incident O’Callaghan (Australian, 6 December 1996, p. 1) quoted a statement by BIG (Bougainville Interim Government) President Francis Ona as follows:

We are extremely concerned that the Prime Minister, Sir Julius Chan, has now totally lost control of his military on Bougainville.

She omits the other important part of Ona’s statement in which he says that ‘the PNGDF are trying to kill as many civilians as possible before they are withdrawn from Bougainville’ and that the PNGDF were ‘an unruly bunch of marauding killers that are making Bougainville their killing fields’ (cited in Reuter, 1996b and above p. 81). This quote was reported in full on the Reuter (1996b) wire service. Though several newspaper reports quoted various statements from BIG this claim was omitted entirely from reporting about Malabita.

The next day, in the Sydney Morning Herald (Sydney Morning Herald, 7 December 1996) counterposed Tuat’s expression of ‘concern’ with a reference to the assassination of Bougainville Premier Theodore Miriung in October, 1996. She states that:
Although the Miriung inquest findings were released a week ago, the soldiers under suspicion have not been removed from their unity at Tonu, in southwestern Bougainville, or been questioned by police. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 December 1996, p. 21)

This suggests that the PNGDF officials’ ‘concern’ about the lawlessness of PNGDF troops is questionable. However, the thrust of the article supports Tuat’s line. The article begins:

> Leaders of the crisis-torn Papua New Guinea Defence Force say they are gravely concerned over allegations… (*Palmer, Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 December 1996, p. 21)

This theme is reiterated with quotes from Tuat in paragraphs four five and six. The counterposing statement about Miriung is left until the second last paragraph.

The *Age*, (7 December, 1996, p. 13) said that the PNGDF ‘was waiting to talk to officers on the island about the alleged incident.’ Unlike the *Sydney Morning Herald* (7 December 1997, p. 21), the *Age* presented nothing to challenge this statement.

In sum, the press entirely ignored Amnesty International’s (1996) media release, as they were to do later. They also showed very little interest in criticising the PNG government on the same grounds. The small amount of criticism was placed in the context of the problems facing the PNGDF rather than moral criticism of the PNG leadership. In keeping with this theme, writers selectively reported from the BIG press release, avoiding such words as ‘marauding killers’ and ‘killing fields’.

In the initial period of reporting the three newspapers played down the seriousness of the atrocity at Malabita. This is demonstrated by my analysis of the attention, prominence and rhetoric in reporting. The analysis of sequences used in headlines and leads demonstrates that journalists and sub-editors played down the seriousness of the incident, presenting the violence as ‘normal’. Though the three newspapers suggested that the violence was regrettable, they also presented the attack as an act of maintaining order – and therefore legitimate and acceptable. There was also a lack of moral criticism of PNG officials for their role in the atrocity, despite the fact that Amnesty International (1997) made such criticisms.

The issue was virtually ignored by the three publications for another nine days. There was only one specific mention of the Malabita incident between the 7 December, when the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Age* published their accounts of the incident and the 15 December.
**After the release of the photos**

As I discussed at the start of this chapter, the BRA was to smuggle out photos of the massacre (two of which are shown in figs 3-2 and fig 3-3, above, pp. 73-74). On 15 December 1996, four of the photos including one of the wrapped bodies of the children, (fig 3-3, above, p. 74) were published in the Solomons Citizen newspaper.

Two of the newspapers, which took up the story the next day (16 December), tended to downplay the suffering of the victims and did not publish the most disturbing photos. The exception was the *Sydney Morning Herald* which emphasised the suffering of the victims by placing a photo showing the children's bodies (Fig 3-3, above, p. 74), together with an article on the front page. However, the importance of the victims’ plight was diminished by the placement of the article and photo on the bottom of the page and the small size of the article. It also placed two more pictures on page nine – one of more bodies and another of the wrecked ‘bush’ church. There was no accompanying article, but a large caption which read:

> ...bodies lie outside a church near Buin, in the south of Bougainville, after the Papua New Guinea Defence Force allegedly launched a mortar attack during morning Mass. The secessionist Bougainville Interim Government claims nine people were killed including three young children, but PNG has denied the attack. The rebels say a long-range, 120 mm launcher fired a mortar bomb on the church and claim that the launcher’s range, 4.2 kilometres, means the shells must have been fired from an area controlled by the PNGDF. *(Sydney Morning Herald, 16 December 1996, p. 9)*

It was the only publication to publish the pictures of the dead children. The *Australian* gave less emphasis to the suffering of the victims than the *Sydney Morning Herald* did. There was no front-page article but a small item on the bottom of page ten. A photo, only of the wrecked church rather than the bodies, accompanied it. The *Age* ignored the story entirely.

These images (shown above, pp. 73-74) were disturbing and it might be argued that they were not appropriate to publish in a metropolitan daily newspaper. The first one (Fig. 3-2, above, p. 73) was perhaps too graphic. However, apparently the *Sydney Morning Herald* believed that the second (Fig. 3-3, above, p. 74) was acceptable. They published it but not one of the other three newspapers did.

After the release of the photos, there was a greater emphasis on the suffering of the victims. Both the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Australian* mentioned that three women and three children were killed. However, none of the headlines mentioned that the victims were
civilians (in fact they were all civilians) nor that women and children were killed. These details were obviously newsworthy.

In sum, there was a more sympathetic reaction to the incident after the publication of the photos. However, overall the suffering of victims was still downplayed.

How did the press portray the legitimacy of the violence after the photos were published?

In December 1996 there were five more items published after the photos emerged: three in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and two in the *Australian* (the *Age* ignored it). The headlines and sequences for each of these articles are shown in table 3-1, below, in chronological order.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Headline (Publication)</th>
<th>Sequence</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16/12</td>
<td>News</td>
<td>Civilians accuse / PNGDF of / mortar attack (Australian)</td>
<td>Context/perpetrator/act.</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16/12</td>
<td>News</td>
<td>Photos proof of/ PNG / mortar raid, say Bougainville rebels (<em>Sydney Morning Herald</em>, p. 1)</td>
<td>Context/perpetrator/act, context</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16/12</td>
<td>Photos</td>
<td>Bougainville / massacre: / the bloody aftermath (<em>Sydney Morning Herald</em>, p. 9)</td>
<td>Place frame/act/consequence</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/12</td>
<td>News</td>
<td>Pressure grows on / defence force / over church attack / claims (<em>Sydney Morning Herald</em>)</td>
<td>Context/perpetrator/act/context</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20/12</td>
<td>Opinion</td>
<td>Overhaul best defence in PNG (<em>Australian</em>)</td>
<td>Massacre not in headline</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24/12</td>
<td>Opinion</td>
<td>Australia holds its fire while Bougainville bleeds (<em>Australian</em>)</td>
<td>Massacre not in headline</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A = ‘ambiguous’ sequence.
The sequences in the first three headlines conform to the following pattern –
context/perpetrator/act (see table 3-1, above). This pattern is suggestive of ‘ambiguous’
vioence, because it begins with context rather than the perpetrator or the victim. Using
Cerulo’s (1998) model, this suggests that the writer considered the circumstances too
confusing to understand the violence as either ‘normal’ or ‘deviant’. Thus, despite the photos
being released, which provide further proof of the atrocity, the headlines still do not suggest that the violence is deviant. Rather, ‘contextual’ sequences are used, which focus the readers’ attention on the circumstances of the violence. This presents the violence as more acceptable than if ‘deviant’ sequences were used.

The leads for these articles are shown in table 3-2, above. In the first four cases the leads fall back into the pattern we saw in the leads and headlines before the release of the photos. There is a difference though. There is much more ‘contextual’ information and in most cases this is given at each stage in the sequence. This could be described as a sequence which is half-way to becoming a ‘contextual’ sequence but maintaining the emphasis on the perpetrator and therefore still suggesting that the violence is ‘normal’.

The pattern changes in the leads for the two opinion pieces. In the first, O’Connor (Australasian, 20 December, 1996, p. 15) focuses on the context surrounding the massacres at Malabita and Mokukuru, in particular, the problems within the PNGDF. In his lead, he writes:

There is a common saying among military professionals that there are no bad soldiers, only bad officers. The truth of the saying is nowhere more evident than on Bougainville where the traditional indiscipline of the Papua New Guinean Defence Force is threatening to destroy all attempts to bring peace to the island.

In the second paragraph, O’Connor (Australasian, 20 December, 1996, p. 15) focuses on the Malabita massacre: ‘Reports of troops attacking churches…are well known.’ Here, he ignores the victims, replacing them with ‘churches’ and gives preference to the ‘troops’.

In the second opinion article, Skehan (Sydney Morning Herald, 24 December 1996, p. 13, case six in table 3-2, above, p. 87) refers to the series of attacks in the Siwai area in November and December, of which Malabita was one. In the same article, the reader is led into the story being told of the ‘slaughter of women and children’ then ‘uncontrolled elements within the BRA’ who have committed ‘gross human rights abuses’ including ‘cold blooded killings’ in the past. Lastly, the reader is told of how the BRA’s adversary, the PNGDF, has also but only of late been responsible for the same type of abuses.

This is a ‘contextual’ sequence but it is tending towards a ‘doublecasting’ sequence. A ‘double-casting’ sequence presents each of the actors in double roles (as both the perpetrator and victim). It would be difficult for a journalist to present a ‘doublecasting’ sequence in
these circumstances, given that the victims were all unarmed civilians. However, Skehan (Sydney Morning Herald, 24 December 1996, p. 13) manages to get close to such a sequence. As we can see in table 3-2 (case six, above, p. 87) he begins with the act and the victims then turns to BRA violence and finally refers to the perpetrator of the Malabita massacre – the PNGDF.

As Cerulo (1998) argues, ‘contextual’ sequences typically describe violence which is considered ambiguous. Such sequences lead the reader to certain moral judgements about the violence of the perpetrator. When the storyteller gives details of extenuating circumstances – such as that the wife was beaten by her husband for years before she finally killed her son – this suggests that the violence is less wrong. Likewise, Skehan (Sydney Morning Herald, 24 December 1996, p. 13) by referring to past abuses of the BRA suggests that the PNGDF violence is more acceptable.

We can now examine how the three newspapers portrayed the legitimacy of the violence in the periods before and after the photos were released.

The table below gives a summary of the sequences in the reporting of this incident.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date (page)</th>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Headline</th>
<th>Lead</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6/12 (p. 1)</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/12 (p. 9)</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/12</td>
<td>SMH</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/12</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13/12</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16/12</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16/12 (p. 1)</td>
<td>SMH</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16/12 (p.9)</td>
<td>SMH</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/12</td>
<td>SMH</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20/12</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24/12</td>
<td>SMH</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P = ‘perpetrator’ sequence  
C = ‘contextual’ sequence  
C = ‘contextual’ sequence  
- = massacre not mentioned

The lines show when the photos of the massacre were made available to the press.  
I have not included the Australian article of 7-8/12 because it focussed on another massacre and only referred to the Malabita massacre briefly towards the end.
As table 3-3 (above) shows, in articles about the Malabita massacre, perpetrator sequences dominate in the leads. Every news item lead presents a perpetrator (‘normal violence’) sequence. However, in the opinion articles the massacre is either left out of the lead (items 5 and 10) or a ‘contextual’ sequence is used. Perpetrator sequences are more prevalent in the headlines before the photos were released. After the photos the headlines change to use ‘contextual’ sequences. In the opinion articles headlines tend to avoid the actual massacre (items 10 and 11). In one case (item 5) the headline presents a ‘contextual’ sequence.

In sum, the general trend is to use ‘normal violence’ sequences which portray the violence as legitimate and therefore acceptable. According to Cerulo (1998) such sequences are typically used to describe police violence against unruly citizens. The leads in the news items present the violence mainly as ‘normal’, despite the release of the photos. However, headlines begin presenting the violence as ‘normal’ (perpetrator sequence) then change to present it as ‘ambiguous’ when the photos are released (see the entries below the lines in the table). This suggests that sub-editors were beginning to have doubts that the troops’ action was one of maintaining order. Importantly, whilst the violence is presented as ‘normal’ or ‘ambiguous’ it is not presented as ‘deviant’. The use of these sequences suggests to the reader that the PNGDF’s violence at Malabita was more acceptable than it otherwise might have been. This is done by encasing the violent act within a story where the circumstances are presented first. As Cerulo (1998, p. 47) writes:

… contextual sequences offer reasons and explanations for otherwise unacceptable violence. Indeed, such formats provide potential justifications for violent acts, justifications that appear before readers and viewers actually learn of the act itself.

PNG official reactions and press response

After the photos were published the PNGDF officials said nothing about the massacre, continuing the silence since 10 December. As I will discuss below, there were some comments in the three newspapers about PNG’s official silence on the matter. How critical were they toward the PNG government?

The dominant theme in the press reaction was the crisis being experienced by the PNGDF and suggestions of incompetence about their management of this. In opinion writing, O’Connor’s (A ustralian, 20 December, 1996, p. 15) only concern in relation to PNG’s response was its public relations failure:
The [PNG] government’s public relations have been a disaster, which has played into the hands of the Bougainville rebels.

Skehan (Sydney Morning Herald, 24 December 1996, p. 13), in the only other opinion piece, simply says that the PNG government and military officials ‘went to ground after initially responding with half-hearted denials.’

As for news items, Skehan, in the Sydney Morning Herald (16 December 1996, p. 1) ignores the fact that the PNG officials were silent about the latest evidence of the atrocity. Instead he simply repeated Tuat’s claim of 6 December, that the PNGDF officials were ‘concerned’ and waiting further reports from the army’s command on Bougainville. He also ignored later contradictory statements from the PNGDF – one denying PNGDF involvement and the other that they were still making investigations. By doing this, Skehan (Sydney Morning Herald, 16 December 1996, p. 1) suggested that the PNGDF was, indeed, still ‘concerned’.

By quoting an outdated statement from the PNGDF, Skehan supported rather than challenged the PNGDF position. Skehan suggested that the PNGDF was at worst incompetent (by not responding since the 6 December) rather than dishonest or malevolent.

The day after the publication of Skehan’s (Sydney Morning Herald, 16 December 1996, p. 1) article the press began to subject the PNG response to some scrutiny. On 17 December in the Sydney Morning Herald an article was published under the headline: ‘Pressure grows on defence force over church attack claims’. The writers, Skehan and Palmer (Sydney Morning Herald, 17 December 1996, p. 14), quoted a spokesman from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs who expected the PNG government to ‘put a priority’ on investigating the reports of the massacre. They wrote:

The reference to the need for priority to given [sic] to investigating the civilian deaths follows a lack of detailed information from the PNG Government and the PNGDF in response to the allegations.

This was despite the fact that more than 20 civilian deaths allegedly occurred at the end of November and the beginning of this month.

Here they do offer some challenge to the PNGDF response. However, it is consistent with the line put earlier in the Sydney Morning Herald that the PNGDF is facing a crisis and therefore cannot respond adequately to the killings.
The press offered a critical response in three out of the five articles appearing after the release of the photos. However, these writers suggest that the PNG officials have often been incompetent in the face of a crisis – rather than malevolent – and criticise them as ‘half-hearted’ – rather than dishonest. Their brevity and their placement also obscure these criticisms. For example, Skehan’s (Sydney Morning Herald, 24 December 1996, p. 13) criticism is a small sentence half-way through a small opinion piece. As they did before the release of the photos, the writers portrayed the crime as ‘undisciplined’ behaviour and placed it within a context of a crisis facing the PNGDF. They ignored criticisms and facts which were inconsistent with this theme.

What is interesting is which criticisms of the PNG government were included in the three newspapers and which were not. As I discussed above, Amnesty International (1996) criticised the PNG government the day of the first Australian press report of the massacre. These criticisms were based on four grounds:

1. PNG’s lack of commitment to investigate despite statements of concern.
2. The silence of the PNG government.
3. That PNG troops operate with impunity on Bougainville.
4. That PNG government had banned independent observers from travelling to the island.

I have pointed out above that in the press there was some criticism of the silence of the PNG government. However none of the writers mentioned PNG’s lack of commitment to investigating the massacre.

Only one writer said that troops operated with impunity on Bougainville. O’Connor (Australian, 20 December, 1996, p. 15) wrote:

    PNGDF soldiers now regard themselves as an elite whose members are exempt from the restrictions of the civil law…

    Successive PNG governments are not free from blame. The military has been and is treated badly by their political leaders. It has been expected to perform miracles on Bougainville without adequate political or financial support.

He says that the PNG officials are to blame but not for failing to investigate nor for failing to comply with UN recommendations but for tactical reasons such as not giving the military
enough support. As for O’Connor’s (Australian, 20 December, 1996, p. 15) mention of civil law, it is irrelevant for the purposes of this discussion whether PNG troops were breaking civil or military law.

The writers in the three newspapers avoided the issue of troops operating with impunity by omitting details which suggested PNG’s past inadequate action and PNG’s defiance of the UN. There was only one exception to this – when Palmer mentioned that troops involved in the assassination of Premier Miriung had not been removed from their posts. However, this detail was downplayed, as I have discussed above.

Only one writer, O’Callaghan (Australian, 13 December, 1996, p. 13) in a feature article, mentioned the barring of observers:

> With the army controlling access to the island and preventing almost everyone, including journalists and international agencies, from visiting, it has proved almost impossible to confirm these.

She doesn’t mention that this had gone on for years and, as Amnesty International (1996) argued, that this situation had contributed to the continuation of human rights abuses on the island.

The writers in the three newspapers tended to ignore the lack of investigation into the massacre. There are two reasons why the lack of investigation is important in this case. One is that failure to allow independent observers onto the island made it difficult to verify the details of the killings and therefore hampered the ability of the Australian media to cover the issue. The second is that a failure to investigate allows the PNGDF on Bougainville to operate with impunity and thereby increases the chances of further human rights abuses taking place.

Amnesty International (1996) reported that PNG refused to allow independent monitors onto the island despite calls from the UN to do so. The Papua New Guinea authorities refused to allow an investigation team from the Red Cross to enter mainland Bougainville after the incident (Niuswire, 17 December, cited in Pacific News Bulletin, 1997, p. 5). The writers in the three newspapers ignored this.

In November and December, several bodies called for the involvement of an international body on Bougainville. These bodies included the Papua New Guinea Catholic Commission

The lack of independent investigation received no comment in the press until February 1997. Greg Roberts in an article published in both the Age (15 January 1997, p. 10) and the Sydney Morning Herald (15 January, p. 15) made a brief comment that the Malabita massacre was yet to be investigated. However, this was the only comment to be made on the matter in the three months after news of the massacre emerged.

In sum, despite the comments by Amnesty International (1996) and other organizations, the writers in the three newspapers ignored PNG’s failure to investigate the atrocity, apart from a brief mention two-and-a-half months after the event. They also tended to avoid or downplay the PNG government’s silence, the impunity of troops on Bougainville and the lack of access for independent observers.

There is one criticism which both Amnesty International (1996) and the press avoid and that is direct moral criticism of PNG officials. Instead the writers in the press criticise the troops in this fashion. For example, Skehan (Sydney Morning Herald, 24 December 1996, p. 13) says that:

…of late … members of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) have been responsible for some of the most barbarous acts.

There is one exception – O’Callaghan (Australian, 13 December, 1996, p. 13) who says:

As for Port Moresby, leaders there want to give every impression of wanting to disown any responsibility for the very demons they have unleashed.

However, this is a mere hint of a moral criticism and appears at the very end of the article, suggesting that it is of little importance.

In this chapter, I have described and analysed the reporting by focussing on a number of elements:

• attention and prominence;
• rhetoric;
Firstly, regarding attention and prominence, the victims at Malabita were neither totally ignored nor did they receive a large amount of attention in the publications in the sample. For example the *Age*, the largest selling ‘quality’ paper in Australia’s second largest city, ignored the incident completely except for one small article in the middle pages. In all likelihood the story would have been forgotten after a few days if not for the release of the photos of the massacre. This lack of attention was despite the story of Malabita containing many elements which the press would normally consider to be newsworthy:

- violence;
- human drama and survival against the odds;
- personal stories;
- the presence of victims who were innocent, ordinary people, including three women and children who were killed;
- the fact that it occurred on an Island which is geographically very close and within a country which we have close commercial, cultural (many Australians used to live and work in Bougainville) and political ties. Indeed, many writers (Oke, 1997, Sharp, 1997, John, 1999, Amnesty International, 1993 and Gillespie, 1999a) have argued that the Australian government’s material and/or diplomatic support for the war was instrumental in the continuation of such human rights abuses.

Initially, the incident was not reported prominence. The exception was the *Australian* newspaper which published one front-page article. Again, after the photos were released, there was only one front-page article published (in the *Sydney Morning Herald*).

Secondly, the rhetoric in reporting suggested little moral concern about the violence inflicted by the PNGDF at Malabita. The journalists used words such as ‘troops’ rather than ‘perpetrators’ or ‘killers’ and used phrases such as ‘launched an attack’ rather than ‘committed an atrocity’. They also ignored or downplayed details which emphasised the seriousness of the offence, its gruesome nature and the suffering of the victims. Details omitted or
downplayed included the fact that women and children were killed, that people were blown apart and that the church contained only civilians. There was more sympathy shown for the victims after the publication of the photos. However, the suffering of the victims, the severity of the abuse and the guilt of the perpetrators was still downplayed.

Thirdly, the criticisms of PNG officials were rare, downplayed and limited to tactical issues. The press release from Amnesty International (1996), which criticised PNG officials on a number of grounds, was ignored. The three publications also showed very little interest in criticising the PNG government on these same grounds. The small amount of criticism was placed in the context of the problems facing the PNGDF rather than moral criticism of the PNG leadership. In keeping with this theme writers selectively reported from the BIG press release, avoiding such words as ‘marauding killers’ and ‘killing fields’. What is interesting is that the press took up some of the criticisms mentioned by Amnesty International (1996) but avoided others. The three newspapers ignored PNG’s failure to investigate the atrocity, apart from a brief mention two-and-a-half months after the event (see A ge, 15 January, 1997, p. 10). They also tended to avoid or downplay the PNG government’s silence, the impunity of troops on Bougainville and the lack of access for independent observers. There was one criticism which both Amnesty International (1996) and the press avoided – moral criticism of PNG officials.

There was more criticism after the release of the photos than before their release. The press offered a critical response in three out of the five articles appearing during this time. However, these writers suggested that the PNG officials had been incompetent in the face of a crisis, rather than malevolent; and criticise them as ‘half-hearted’, rather than dishonest.39

Fourthly, I analysed the sequencing in the reporting. This analysis showed that the three newspapers played down the severity of the crime by mainly portraying it as ‘normal’ (legitimate) violence rather than ‘deviant’ (unacceptable) violence. The three newspapers mainly presented ‘perpetrator’ – ‘normal’ – sequences which suggested that the violence inflicted by the PNGDF at Malabita was a legitimate, if regrettable, use of force. The leads in the news items present the violence as ‘normal’ throughout the period of reporting, even after the release of the photos. Headlines began presenting the violence mainly as ‘normal’ (perpetrator sequence) then changed, to sometimes present it as ‘ambiguous’ after the photos

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39 The other two opinion/feature writers (Skehan, Sydney Morning Herald, 24 December 1996, p. 13 and O’Connor, A ustralian, 20 December, p. 21) commented but they suggested a lack of competence rather than culpability on the part of PNG officials.
were released. Importantly, whilst the violence may have been presented as ‘normal’ or ‘ambiguous’ it was not presented as ‘deviant’. This suggests that the PNGDF’s violence at Malabita was more acceptable. As Cerulo (1998) argues, the use of ‘contextual’ sequences gives the reader justifications for violence which otherwise might have been considered unacceptable.
Chapter four

MAKING SENSE OF THE REPORTING

One foreign correspondent, Lindsay Murdoch (Age, 19 February 1997, p. A17), has argued that the mass media reported little, if anything, of the human rights abuses in Bougainville in 1996. Referring to the Malabita massacre, he offers reasons for this:

... Papua New Guinea Defence Force soldiers started firing mortars into a village loyal to the guerrillas. By the time they stopped, children had been blown apart: six-year-old Alvina, five-year-old Danny, 14-year-old Brenda and a dozen others... 

You never saw the horror of these events on the nightly news, so no politicians talked of their outrage, no official investigation was set up and therefore nobody issued warrants to bring the killers to justice.

You don’t see the barbaric acts of the Bougainville war on television because the PNG Government maintains a blockade of the island and prohibits journalists going there. There is no CNN factor to stir the international community into action. (Murdoch, Age, 19 February 1997, p. A17)

My aim in this thesis so far has been to address the question – how did the Sydney Morning Herald, the Australian and the Age report three violent incidents in Bougainville in 1996? Two of these incidents look like significant abuses of human rights and the other involved a battle between BRA (Bougainville Revolutionary Army) troops and PNGDF (Papua New Guinea Defence Force) troops. I have focussed on the reporting of three incidents, one of which was described by Murdoch (Age, 19 February 1997, p. A17) above:

the Simbo massacre, in which ten to twelve civilians, including an eight month old baby, were killed by the PNGDF and their allied ‘Resistance Force’, in January;

the battle of Kangu Beach, during which 13 Security Force members were killed by forces opposed to the central government, in September;

the Malabita massacre (described by Murdoch, Age, 19 February 1997, p. A17 and
above) in which nine civilians were killed when the PNGDF mortar-bombed a packed church during Mass, in December.

In this chapter I attempt to make sense of the reporting. To do this I firstly ask the question – how do we best describe the pattern of reporting of the three incidents contained in the three newspapers? As I have noted, Murdoch (Age, 19 February 1997, p. A17) describes one aspect of the reporting of the Bougainville War – that there was little reporting of events such as the Malabita massacre. Yet, this goes only part of the way toward answering this question. If we compare the reporting of the three cases using the analyses from chapters two and three and by conducting a quantitative analysis of the reporting I think we will get a clearer sense of what is at stake.

The larger question which I address in the rest of this chapter is how do we best explain this pattern of reporting? Murdoch (Age, 19 February 1997, p. A17), in the quote in the previous page above, suggests that the main reason for the invisible status of human rights abuses was the blockade which was enforced by the PNGDF. In chapter one I discussed a number of theoretical perspectives on the reporting of war in the mass media. In this chapter, I analyse two of these theoretical approaches – the ‘liberal’ and the ‘political-economic’. I discuss how each of the two approaches explains the pattern of reporting which I describe, using evidence which I obtained in interviews with journalists who wrote about the incidents.

The pattern of reporting

As I argued in chapter one, we can use Herman and Chomsky’s (1988) model to describe the pattern of reporting in the three newspapers. They argue that the mass media will tend to portray victims of official friends as ‘unworthy’ compared to victims of official enemies. I argue that the three newspapers portrayed the victims of the BRA at Kangu Beach as ‘unworthy’ compared to the victims of the PNGDF at Simbo and Malabita. Let me begin with the reporting of the ‘worthy victims’ at Kangu Beach.

As I discussed in chapter two, the three newspapers reported the victims at Kangu Beach sympathetically. They gave some attention to the battle and reported it prominently. Whilst the PNG government and military were portrayed as promoting peace and order, the BIG and BRA were portrayed as belligerent and guilty of a ‘barbaric’ act. Much of the reporting
was based on unverified sources. The event received attention in several opinion and feature articles and in editorials. In one opinion article, Griffin (Sydney Morning Herald, 30 September, 1996, p. 13) emphasised the seriousness of the violence inflicted on the soldiers and referred to the leaders of the self-determination movement in Bougainville as ‘killers and cultists’.

Using Cerulo’s (1998) model I found that the newspapers often cast the act of killing the 13 security force members as ‘deviant violence’ and therefore heinous and unacceptable. In a minority of cases, they cast the violence as ‘normal’ and therefore acceptable.

In contrast, the Simbo massacre was virtually ignored by the three newspapers despite the fact that ample information was available. Whilst writers relied on unverified official sources to report the massacre, they failed to use more convincing reports from unofficial sources. There were comments published of neither the outrageousness of the act nor the malevolence of PNG troops who committed the massacre nor of the officials who commanded them and who did nothing to bring the perpetrators to justice.

In the case of Simbo, the press ignored the aftermath of the incident: the care of the wounded survivor in hospital in the Solomons, grieving relatives and the failure of the PNG government to institute an inquiry. Conversely, much of the reporting of the battle of Kangu Beach focussed on the aftermath of the incident, such as the grieving relatives and the PNGDF inquiry. The Simbo massacre was an obvious case of gross human rights abuse and was deserving of attention in the press. There was a clear need for an independent inquiry and the story of the aftermath was very newsworthy. For example, the wounded eyewitness endured a gun battle with the PNGDF whilst being evacuated to the Solomons by the BRA.

The Simbo massacre was portrayed as more legitimate than the violence at Kangu Beach. The violence at Simbo was portrayed as ambiguous, mostly by placing the victims, whom an eyewitness identified as unarmed civilians, in the role of combatants – ‘rebels’. This contrasted with the case of Kangu Beach which, as I have argued, was often portrayed as ‘deviant’.

Journalists and editors portrayed the victims at Malabita more sympathetically than those at Simbo. They gave more attention to the Malabita massacre and gave more indication of the severity of the crime, especially after the photos of the incident were released. The three newspapers also reported the Malabita massacre more prominently than the Simbo massacre.
In the former case, they published two front-page articles. In contrast, they referred to the Simbo incident only in ‘news-in-brief’ items and obscurely in an article under a different topic some months after the event. However, as I discussed in chapter three, the three newspapers also downplayed the massacre at Malabita.

Compared to Kangu Beach victims, the three newspapers cast the Malabita victims as ‘unworthy’. The newspapers portrayed the victims of Malabita (who were killed by the PNGDF) less sympathetically than the victims of the BRA at Kangu Beach. In chapter three, I discussed several elements of the reporting of the Malabita case. These included: attention, rhetoric in reporting, moral criticism of officials, press reaction to the aftermath of the incident and the legitimacy of the violence. In terms of attention, the three newspapers published twice as many articles about Kangu Beach as they did for the Malabita case.

Regarding the rhetoric in reporting, the three newspapers ignored or downplayed the suffering of victims and the severity of the crime at Malabita. This contrasted with the reporting of the incident at Kangu Beach, which I discussed in chapter two. For example, terms such as ‘massacre’, ‘barbaric’ and ‘tragic’ were used prominently in the case of Kangu Beach but terms such as ‘slaughter’ were used less often and less prominently in the case of Malabita.

The writers portrayed the violence at Malabita as a result of incompetence of the PNG leadership and the PNGDF rather than as a result of malevolence. They portrayed it as a breakdown in discipline and framed it within a wider context of a crisis facing the PNGDF. They avoided evidence and criticisms which were inconsistent with this theme. For example, all writers ignored the PNGDF’s long record of human rights abuses and the PNG government’s failure to bring them to account and to investigate the abuses. Journalists also avoided moral criticism of PNG officials. The most extreme critic of PNG officials in the case of Malabita referred to them as ‘failing to take responsibility for the very demons they have unleashed.’ (Australian, 13 December 1996, p. 13) In contrast, in the case of Kangu Beach, writers portrayed the BRA as belligerent. One opinion writer branded the BRA leaders as ‘fanatical…killers and cultists’ for their assumed role in the incident.

In the case of Malabita the newspapers portrayed the violence as more legitimate than they
did in the case of Kangu Beach. In the main, writers presented the violence at Malabita as ‘normal’ or legitimate. According to Cerulo (1998), the most important part of a newspaper article is the lead. Writers presented ‘normal violence’ sequences in all leads about the Malabita massacre, suggesting that the violence was a legitimate, if regrettable, use of force. In the headlines, the violence was presented as ‘normal’ in all cases except one, where it was presented as ‘ambiguous’. Writers avoided ‘deviant’ violence sequences which suggests that the violence is heinous or unacceptable. In contrast, in the case of Kangu Beach, writers tended to portray the violence as ‘deviant’ or ‘ambiguous’ rather than ‘normal’.

The analysis of sequencing patterns is further evidence that the journalists portrayed the Malabita victims as ‘unworthy’ compared to the Kangu Beach victims. In the case of Malabita, they portrayed the violence as more legitimate than in the case of Kangu Beach.

We can also analyse the differences in reporting of the three incidents somewhat more ‘quantitatively’. Table 4.1 (below, p. 103) shows some measures of attention and prominence in reporting in the three newspapers. It shows that the Kangu Beach massacre was given far more attention than the Simbo massacres. Column 4 shows there were three articles about the Simbo case as opposed to 20 in the case of Kangu Beach. It also shows that there were twice as many articles for Kangu Beach than Malabita. Furthermore, there were also nearly twice as many articles for Kangu Beach as compared to Malabita and Simbo combined (column 4 line 4). I have accounted for variations in article size by including the number of sentences in each item, in column two.

The Kangu Beach incident was reported more prominently than Simbo. We can compare the differences in prominence by looking at columns 3 and 4 (table 4.1, below, p. 103) The Simbo victims were reported far less prominently than those at Kangu Beach were. For example, there were five headlines which mentioned the Kangu Beach victims, whereas there were none mentioning those at Simbo.

The newspapers also reported the Malabita case more prominently than the Simbo case. In terms of headlines and front-page articles, Kangu Beach and Malabita were reported with equal prominence.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incident</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Articles (no.)</th>
<th>Sentences* (no.)</th>
<th>Front-page (no.)</th>
<th>Headlines** (no.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Aus</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>SMH</td>
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<td>60</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Total of lines 2 and 3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data based on articles appearing in the month after the first press report of the incident.

* Number of sentences which refer to the incident.

** Number of headlines which specifically identify the victim/s of the violence, for example, ‘PNG troops’ or ‘civilians’.
Overall, the quantitative analysis of attention and prominence shows that the victims of the BRA (at Kangu Beach) were reported with more sympathy than the victims of the PNGDF, at Simbo and Malabita. However, there were important differences in the representation of the cases of Simbo and Malabita. The latter received coverage that was far more sympathetic. We can see this, for example, in the number of front-page articles (two in the case of Malabita as opposed to none in the case of Simbo).

What can a quantitative analysis tell us about the differences in portrayal of the legitimacy of the violence by the two sides? As I will now demonstrate, such an analysis supports the findings of my discussion above. Table 4-2, below, shows the sequences used in leads in reporting of the three incidents.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Incident</th>
<th>Sequence type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Normal’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simbo</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kangu Beach</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malabita</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This table only includes the articles which contained leads about the incident and those articles discussed in chapters two and three.

The main feature of the results is that the PNGDF violence was not once presented as ‘deviant’ whereas the violence perpetrated by forces resisting the PNGDF often was. In the case of Kangu Beach, where BRA-aligned forces attacked PNGDF troops, journalists wrote just under half of the leads in ‘deviant violence’ sequences. In contrast, at Malabita, where PNGDG troops murdered nine civilians, journalists wrote over 90% of the leads as ‘normal’ violence sequences. In the case of the Simbo massacre, an eyewitness reported that central government forces killed 12-14 unarmed civilians (see chapter two). However, the journalists portrayed the violence as ‘ambiguous’. They cast the victims as perpetrators as well as victims. For example, in all three articles, the civilians were cast as BRA ‘militants’. (See chapter two.) The press does not always portray violence perpetrated by governments as
legitimate. Rather, as Cerulo (1998) argues, the violence is more likely to be portrayed as legitimate if there is official domestic support for the perpetrator. It is unlikely that the Western press would portray violence by the Taliban against the rebel ‘Northern Alliance’ in Afghanistan as legitimate, even though it was perpetrated by the government. Neither would we expect violence perpetrated by the Iraqi government against the Kurds; the Chinese government against the Tibetans; the Serbian army against the ‘Kosovo Liberation Army’; the Nicaraguan army against the ‘Contra’ rebels; nor the Cuban Army against dissenters to be presented as legitimate in the Western mass media.

We can see the same pattern occurring in the headlines. Table 4-3, below, shows sequencing used in headlines for the three incidents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incident</th>
<th>‘Normal’</th>
<th>‘Ambiguous’</th>
<th>‘Deviant’</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘contextual’</td>
<td>‘doublecasting’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simbo</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kangu Beach</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malabita</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9 (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table shows that the BRA violence at Kangu Beach was portrayed as ‘deviant’ or unacceptable in three headlines. However, the PNGDF violence at Simbo and Malabita was never portrayed as such.

In general, using Cerulo’s (1998) model for analysis, writers, by using certain sequences in headlines and leads, portrayed PNGDF violence as more legitimate than BRA violence. This had the effect of downplaying the incidents at Malabita and Simbo in comparison to the incident at Kangu Beach.

In sum, there were important differences in the reporting of the three incidents in the three newspapers. Herman and Chomksy (1988) argue that victims of official enemies will be
portrayed as ‘worthy’ by the mass media. In contrast, they argue that victims of official friends who have been abused with equal or greater severity will be portrayed as ‘unworthy’ by the mass media. The cases of human rights abuse by the PNGDF at Simbo and Malabita were clearly more serious than the incident at Kangu Beach.

There was a dichotomous pattern in the reporting of the three incidents in the three newspapers. Using the terminology of Herman and Chomsky (1988) the newspapers treated the victims of the PNGDF at Simbo and Malabita as ‘unworthy’ compared to the victims of the BRA at Kangu Beach. We can see this in the amount of attention and prominence which the press gave to the incidents; the rhetoric of reporting; the use of sources; the attention given to the suffering of the victims; the criticism of PNG officials in reporting; and the portrayal of the legitimacy of the violence. However, there were important differences in the reporting of the two massacres of Bougainvillean civilians by the central government forces at Simbo and Malabita. In many ways, the victims in the latter case were reported more sympathetically. I will now turn to the question of how we can best explain this pattern of reporting.

Explaining the pattern of reporting

I turn now to a discussion of the evidence from interviews with journalists and key players involved in reporting the Bougainville War in 1996. In this discussion, I will demonstrate that whilst the liberal approach explains some aspects of the reporting, the political-economic approach, as exemplified by Herman and Chomksy (1988) provides a more satisfactory explanation. I begin by addressing the reporting in the two cases where the victims suffered under the PNGDF: Simbo and Malabita.

As I discussed in chapter one, liberal scholars emphasise ‘non-structural’ factors, such as availability of information but tend to ignore political and economic factors. I argue that this approach can help us to understand some but not all of the reporting which I have described. I will present evidence concerning the professional integrity of journalists and the availability of information (such as eyewitness testimony and photographs).

‘Liberal’ approaches to war reporting provide good explanations for the differences observed in the reporting of the Simbo and Malabita cases. According to eyewitnesses, central government forces murdered the victims at both Simbo and Malabita. However, whilst the publications virtually ignored the Simbo massacre they gave a moderate amount of attention
to the Malabita massacre. There were also qualitative differences. In the case of Simbo, reports from Bougainvilleans, including from one eyewitness, were ignored by the three publications. In the case of Malabita, eyewitness stories and other data from unofficial sources were used more so by the three publications.

In the ‘liberal approach’ writers emphasise circumstances such as the lack of verifiable information. Several journalists (Palmer, 1999, O’Callaghan, 2000, Dorney, 1999, Ruffini, 1999) said that an important reason why the Simbo incident was not reported more was that there was a lack of verifiable information. However, this explanation is not convincing. Watts (2000a, e-mail) argued that this claim was ‘simply untrue’. He said that throughout the war ‘journalists did visit Bougainville’ but their stories and/or films were not used in Australia before 1997 – ‘after Bougainville had won the war’. Watts (2000a) cited the case of the PNGDF ambush of Australian filmmaker, Wayne Coles-Janess and his unarmed guide in 1994. Coles-Janess (1999) managed to capture the shooting on videotape. Watts (2000a, e-mail) observed that this footage was shown ‘incomprehensively’ on ABC’s Foreign Correspondent, appearing with the subtitle ‘cease-fire violation’ but without any other explanation or details. He observed that despite this evidence the press ignored the story. According to Watts (2000a, e-mail), ‘verification is a function of politics’.

It is likely though that the three newspapers gave more prominence and attention to the Malabita massacre because there was strong evidence available – there were eyewitnesses and photos. Regarding eyewitnesses, the BRA evacuated five wounded survivors of the Malabita massacre to the Solomon Islands. This provided Mary-Louise O’Callaghan with the opportunity to interview them and verify a story of human rights abuse by the PNGDF. O’Callaghan (1999b) told me that because she had this evidence, it was an opportunity to ‘go hard’ on the PNGDF’. However, there was also one wounded eyewitness available for interview in the Solomons from the Simbo massacre. So, the differences in reporting cannot simply be explained by the availability of eyewitnesses. O’Callaghan (2000) was unaware that the Simbo eyewitness had arrived in the Solomons. In the case of Malabita, she could hardly miss it. At the time, the BRA had claimed that up to 100 people had been killed by the PNGDF in several attacks, in the southwest of Bougainville. Malabita was just one of these attacks. Victims from another of these attacks (at Mokukuru) had also been evacuated to Honiara at the same time. Honiara is a small town and it would not have taken long for the word to get around that there were several Bougainvilleans suffering from mortar and
gunshot wounds in the hospital. O’Callaghan’s BRA contacts in the Solomons would probably have alerted her to the attacks.

A series of photographs provided another piece of strong evidence which enabled the journalists to report the massacre. Australian human rights lawyer, Rosemarie Gillespie said that the photos were taken, as a very sophisticated tactic, by BRA commander Paul Bobby. According to Watts (1999a), the photos were brought out with ‘luck and difficulty’. He was referring to the fact that the photos would have been taken on a BRA banana boat across to the Solomon Islands. The occupants of the boat would have to risk being fired upon by PNGDF patrols. As Watts (1999a) stated: ‘These photos greatly helped the report of the mortar story’.

The importance of the photos is underscored by comparing the reporting of Malabita with yet another massacre of civilians by the PNGDF which occurred at around the same time, in the same general area, at Mokukruru. The wounded from Mokukruru also travelled to Honiara and were interviewed by Mary-Louise O’Callaghan. However, their story received far less attention in the press than the Malabita massacre.

Regarding the differences in the reporting of sources, journalists often included material from BIG/BRA sources in reporting about Malabita (see chapter three). In contrast, in reporting the Simbo massacre, the three publications relied heavily on the PNGDF account.

How can we explain this difference in the use of sources? It is likely that BIG press releases were included in the press coverage of Malabita because the Australian had already published O’Callaghan’s (Australian, 6 December 1996, p. 9) article. According to Sean Dorney (1999), BIG press releases were reported regularly in the South Pacific press in the early to mid 1990s. However, he said, they were usually avoided by the Australian mass media. It is interesting then that material from BIG was included in reporting about Malabita. The inclusion of BIG material was connected to how newsworthiness is defined in the mass media. I had the following conversation with Sean Dorney about this issue. Firstly, I said that journalists writing stories about Malabita (and Kangu Beach) used much material from BIG press releases. He replied:

…I suspect [that] most of the media coverage of that would have followed stories I’ve done or stories Mary-Louise has done. … then the other media would have followed up because, all of a sudden, it seemed like a good story again. … You have to understand the way news minds operate … it becomes newsworthy because the Australian’s run it. …
I then asked him: ‘So if Mary-Louise hadn’t have been there, there would have been virtually nil in the papers?’ He replied:

Yes and a lot of her stuff often followed up stuff that I was getting or on PM [ABC radio program] or on the TV news. I mean it even gets to the stage, Jack, where I would get so frustrated with the lack of interest I could generate, on a program like AM for instance, that Mary-Louise and I would share information. Once it appeared on the front-page of the Australian then AM would run my piece because it was ‘news’. Whereas if her’s wasn’t there they would say ‘oh well you know’. A lot of this isn’t based on any ideology or anything. It’s just based on what’s newsworthy today and ‘if the paper thinks it newsworthy then, oh shit, maybe it is’. Its very frustrating ’cause again and again and again you come up with [good] stories [which are not published]. One of the great problems in PNG apart from huge stories like Sandline where Mary-Louise got the scoop is that a scoop is the worst thing you can have, because your own people say: ‘Well, it can’t be important, no one else is running it.’ (Laughs)

Dorney (1999) explains why the BIG claims were reported at Malabita and not Simbo whilst taking the political and economic system for granted. According to him, these can be explained within the framework of the ‘liberal model’. It implies that changes in reporting occur due to circumstances other than the mass media’s role in supporting the state-capitalist order, alleged by the political-economy model.

In sum, the press reported the Malabita massacre with more prominence and attention than the Simbo massacre. They also used more unofficial sources. These differences can be explained by a combination of factors:

- O’Callaghan found out about the Malabita massacre at least partly because many of the wounded rather than just one, arrived in the Solomons for treatment.

- The BRA smuggled photos out of Bougainville which the Bougainville Freedom Movement distributed to the mass media.

- Once O’Callaghan’s (Australian, 6 December 1996, p. 9) article was published the massacre became ‘newsworthy’ which allowed the press to use statements from the BIG about the massacre.

Thus, the ‘liberal approach’ to war reporting goes some of the way towards explaining the differences between the reporting of Malabita and Simbo that we noted above. These
differences can be explained by factors such as journalists being more able to verify information. However, it is likely that other factors also influenced the reporting.

I argue that one needs to consider the political-economic approach to the study of the mass media to more fully understand the pattern of reporting found in chapters two and three, above. The Herman and Chomsky (1988) propaganda model presents a more satisfactory explanation for the pattern of reporting than that presented by liberal scholars. Their work is representative of a large body of scholarship within a long-standing political-economic tradition of analysis. An important fact, which they stress, is that mass media organisations are highly centralised and powerful profit-making institutions which share important interests with governments in modern societies. Herman and Chomsky (1988, p. 306) argue that the mass media

…carry out a system-supportive propaganda function by reliance on market forces, internalized assumptions and self censorship and without significant overt coercion.

The pattern of reporting described in chapters two and three suggests that the three newspapers carried out a ‘system-supportive propaganda function’. I am not arguing that journalists consciously set out to promote a biased view of the war. Rather, I argue that there is sufficient evidence that the following factors, outlined by Herman and Chomsky (1988), shaped the presentation of news:

- the role of internalised assumptions and beliefs held by journalists;

- the role of government and defence sources (in this case, in PNG and Australia) in news-making;

- the influence of ‘flak’ (negative responses to reporting, such as the threat of litigation).

The dichotomous pattern of reporting, to which I have referred above, is best understood as supporting the maintenance of the political and economic relations between Australia, PNG and Bougainvilleans. The particular political and economic relations to which I refer were as follows – Australia and PNG had a shared intent and interests in maintaining Bougainville as part of PNG. However, the two countries, by the end of 1996, disagreed on tactical grounds. Australia was unhappy with PNGs repeated use of the ‘military solution’ and withdrew some military support from PNG. The reporting of Malabita (which focussed on the indiscipline of PNGDF troops), for example, challenged the PNG government on tactical grounds.
However, this was consistent with the Australian government agenda. The reporting failed to challenge the PNG government’s strategic goals – to maintain Bougainville as part of PNG. Again, this was consistent with the Australian government agenda. Furthermore, the dichotomous reporting promoted the view that Bougainville was best kept under the control of PNG rather than be allowed the self-determination which was the object of their struggle.

However, I do not have direct evidence that these strategic imperatives actually informed the reporting processes and so such a relationship is somewhat speculative. More research into the precise role of Australian foreign policy and the Australia-PNG relationship and how this relates to press reporting is required. At best, one could say that there is the potential to adapt this aspect of the Herman and Chomsky (1988) model to the reporting of the incidents in 1996.

As I discussed above (p. 109), the ‘liberal approach’ can explain the differences in reporting between Simbo and Malabita. However, the Herman and Chomsky (1988) view can also accommodate these differences. They write that factors such as the relationship between the government and the mass media shape the news so that it reflects domestic power interests. Using this approach, one would focus on the implications of reporting for Australian foreign policy. Independent journalist, Max Watts (1996a, p. 4) did this writing:

…the war against Bougainville is completely dependent on Australian …support. If too much of the Bougainville reality were to reach the Australian public, government policy and – the war itself – would be endangered. [Emphasis in text.]

Furthermore, Watts (2000a, e-mail) argued that the suppression of news of human rights abuses during the war was important in maintaining the imperialist relationship with the West (including Australia) and the Third World (including Bougainville). He argued that ‘if Bougainville can dispossess Rio Tinto’ of their mine at Panguna, ‘this – if reported widely – could become a factor in other such struggles.’

The Herman and Chomsky (1988) model explains the reporting in the case of Simbo, when the massacre was virtually ignored. However, how can this model accommodate the reporting of the Malabita massacre? Herman and Chomsky (1988) argued that victims in friendly states are likely to be portrayed as ‘unworthy’ in the mass media. In certain respects, the reporting of the Malabita massacre challenged this. The story appeared on the front-page on several occasions – more so than the Kangu Beach incident – and journalists sometimes used rhetoric condemning the PNGDF. However, Herman and Chomsky (1988) note that
‘the system is not all powerful’ and exceptions do occur. They write that such exceptions are
due to conflicting factors which act against the ‘propaganda model’ such as the professional
integrity of journalists. Arguably, the case of Malabita was such an exception. One journalist,
Mary-Louise O’Callaghan was stationed in Honiara by her own choice – not because she was
sent there by a news organisation. When she became aware of evidence of a PNGDF atrocity
she worked hard to gather the necessary evidence to back the claim. Once her article was
published the other newspapers followed suit.

The problem with this explanation is that it tends to make the Herman and Chomsky (1988)
model meaningless. The situation whereby ‘structural’ factors which influence reporting can
be counteracted by factors such as the professional integrity of journalists is close to the
liberal model’s view of press behaviour. However, as Herman (1998) notes, Herman and
Chomsky (1988) put forward specific limits on the effects of journalists’ integrity on press
reporting. They argued that press would tend to criticise government policy only on tactical
issues rather than on strategic objectives.

In the case of the Malabita massacre, we can easily adapt this part of the model to explain the
press reporting. As I discussed in chapter three, reporting in the three newspapers contained
some material which was critical of the PNG government and its military forces. However,
this criticism was confined to minor issues only – such as the PNG officials losing control of
troops on Bougainville. Press reporting of the Malabita massacre did not challenge the
strategic objective in Australian foreign policy – to maintain Bougainville as part of PNG.

The Herman and Chomsky (1988) model can also account for the reporting of the Malabita
massacre if we consider the changing political agendas during 1996. The Labor government,
which found it hard to disengage its support for the Bougainville War (Sydney Morning Herald,
24 December, 1996, p. 13) was in power in January, when the press ignored reports
suggesting that the PNGDF had committed a war crime at Simbo. The Liberal government
which was elected in March 1996, was less weighed down by this ‘historical baggage’ (Sydney
Morning Herald, 24 December 1996, p. 13) and were less supportive of the war. Kangu Beach
was a turning point in the war, when many political, bureaucratic and military elites in
Canberra and Port Moresby had become convinced that the PNGDF could not win (Watts,
1999a, 1997a).

As Watts (2000a, e-mail) wrote, regarding the more sympathetic coverage given to the
Malabita massacre as compared to the Simbo case that: There were ‘two fundamental
...children had been *blown apart*. Six-year-old Alvina, five-year-old Danny, 14-year-old Brenda and a dozen others... (Age, 19 February 1997, p. A17, my emphasis).
for example, was never in question. Amnesty International (1996) pointed out PNG’s poor record on human rights abuses and criticised PNG officials for not allowing human rights monitors to visit the island and for not committing themselves to an investigation. Furthermore, they pointed out that PNG, in failing to do these things, was acting in defiance of UN recommendations. Amnesty International’s (1996) call for the involvement of international monitors was made twice, before and after the photos were released and was reported on Radio Australia (cited in Reuters Business Briefing, 1999) on 8 December 1996. These criticisms were omitted from the press coverage. They may have presented some challenge to the legitimacy of the PNG occupation of Bougainville and perhaps have encouraged self-determination. Since the Australian government was against self-determination for Bougainville – they wanted to maintain PNG sovereignty – such criticisms were also inconsistent with that agenda.

The mention of self-determination rather than continued occupation by PNG security forces was, for writers in the press, also out of the question. Yet, this was a key demand of the Bougainville independence movement and had been since the war started. It was also a central factor in the conflict. The withdrawal of PNG troops and a commitment to address the future political status of Bougainville was also to be made part of the eventual Burnham peace declaration signed in March 1997.

In sum, both the liberal and the political economic approaches go some of the way to explaining the differences in the reporting of the Simbo and Malabita incidents. However, I will argue below that the liberal explanation becomes less convincing when we compare the reporting of Malabita (where the PNGDF committed an atrocity) to that of Kangu Beach (where the BRA killed 13 security force members).

As my quantitative and qualitative analysis above suggests, the three newspapers treated the victims at Kangu Beach as if they were more ‘worthy’ than the victims at Malabita. In quantitative terms, the three newspapers gave far more attention to the battle of Kangu Beach than to the Malabita massacre. In qualitative terms, there were differences in moral criticism in the reporting of Kangu Beach and Malabita. The three newspapers denounced the BRA and its leadership in moral terms but did not denounce the PNG leadership in the same way. In the latter case, one opinion writer called the BRA leaders ‘killers and cultists’ (Sydney Morning Herald, 30 September 1996, p. 13). In contrast, in the case of Malabita, the most extreme denunciation of the PNG leadership was by O’Callaghan (Australian, 13 December
1996, p. 13) who wrote that officials in Port Moresby wanted ‘to give every impression of wanting to disown any responsibility for the very demons they have unleashed.’ In the case of Kangu Beach, there is a more clear, extreme moral denunciation of the leaders. In the case of Malabita, the denunciation was vague and the moral implications are ambiguous.

Some interview data supports the liberal view that factors such as access to reliable information can account for this difference. In the case of the *Age*, I asked Paul Ruffini, who wrote that article, about his experiences and thoughts of the reporting of that incident. He said that there were a number of issues involved: he couldn’t compete with Mary-Louise O’Callaghan who was already in the Solomon Islands; he was unable to travel there himself because AAP would not pay the fare; and there was a ‘stuff up’ at the AAP (Australian Associated Press) office and he didn’t get the photos. He also said that, in general, reporting about Bougainville did not suit editorial news agendas. For example, one reason why the *Age*’s only article on the Malabita massacre was short, was that editors substantially shortened the original article.

40 These issues can be seen in more detail in the following excerpts of my conversation with Paul Ruffini (1999).

Apart from the fact that Mary Louise O’Callaghan had already interviewed witnesses, he said that …it was sort of a problem of how to do it - I said we talked about going over there - and the company didn’t want to bear the cost as I recall. As I said, we would have liked to have had the story. (Ruffini, 1999)

There were also other problems for him in Port Moresby.

You get a lot of misinformation what have you and I think the photos help the story along as well. I’m pretty sure the *Sydney Morning Herald* had the photos as well. I know they tried to give them to us and I had organised for them to do it and it was just once again, a conspiracy of stuff ups. I don’t know if AAP [Australian Associated Press] would like me telling you this but apparently they were delivered to the office and, you know, they just went missing…

Roberts: Does that mean that the *Age* didn’t get them then?

Ruffini: They would have got them from Lucy Palmer.

Roberts: They never published the photos

Ruffini: But I recall talking to my editor about it on the Monday because we had organised it on the Friday, you know, we have, AAP [Australian Associated Press] tends to have, a lot of casual people on the weekends. He was pretty furious, saying you know, just angry that these would have been great to run, because of their newsworthiness. Someone hadn’t been properly briefed and they disappeared into the works. Which was disappointing. (Ruffini, 1999)

I then asked him if having the photos makes a big difference to how much attention a story like that would get in the press. He said:

I think that’s got a lot to do with it. Even, its interesting about the reservations about reporting, as soon as a camera is shoved somewhere, the interest seems to be a hell of a lot bigger. I mean I think you’ve also got to think about there’s no commercial TV news really interested - outside of Sean Dorney’s stuff with the ABC. We had cable TV up there, when a volcano went up on Manam Island, which is separate to this, I know, but CNN had someone there filming it. They spent the money and they get a chopper in and they get the pictures and those pictures are then picked up by Australian television. So its probably an indication of the priority of PNG in the scheme of things. (Ruffini, 1999)

I said that it struck me that they were prepared to put so much effort and expense to cover the volcano and the tidal wave (which hit the northwest coast of PNG in 1997), whereas, there was little concern for the war in Bougainville. I put to him that ‘no-one was interested in sending people to the Solomons’ to talk to the thousands of people in refugee camps, who would have had ‘plenty of stories to tell’. He replied:

Well, news agendas …I don’t know if I want to speak on behalf of them, but its not, I would have thought, high up on their priorities. (Ruffini, 1999)
Paul Ruffini (1999) said that newspapers did not normally cut very much from his articles. However, in the case of his Malabita article, he said that it was ‘a heck of a lot shorter.’

One could argue that these reasons all support the liberal model of the press. However, they are also consistent with Herman and Chomsky’s (1988) view. Regarding the fact that no-one from either AAP (who at the time supplied the *Age* with copy about Bougainville) or the *Age* travelled to the Solomons to cover the massacre suggests that editors at the *Age* had little interest in the story. This is consistent with the ‘political-economic’ view that stories about ‘unworthy victims’ present little value for the Australian government which was supporting PNG’s claim of sovereignty over Bougainville. This lack of interest is also reflected in the fact that AAP would not pay Ruffini plane fare to visit Honiara to follow up the story.

Ruffini’s (1999) claim that reporting about Bougainville did not suit editorial news agendas supports both the liberal and political-economic views of the media, depending on the exact nature of these agendas. The liberal view would suggest that editors were uninterested because most Australians are uninterested in the region. The political-economic view would be that they were uninterested because stories about Bougainville generally reflected badly on Australia’s policy of supporting the PNG government’s war effort.

Further support for the political-economic view is given by Watts (2000a) who said that his reports ran well in the European media. In contrast, he said, the same reports were either ‘systematically spiked’ or did not ‘run’ at all in the Australian press. It is hard to imagine that the European readers were more interested in Bougainville than their Australian counterparts.

Australia has close ties with Bougainville. For example, many in this country would have known one or more of the 2000 Australian citizens who worked in Bougainville during the operation of the mine.

It may well be that political-economic factors, that Herman and Chomsky (1988) argued for, influenced this pattern of reporting, where the victims at Kangu Beach were treated as more ‘worthy’ than the victims at Malabita. These factors include the influence of ‘flak’ (negative responses to news items) and the tendency of journalists to let the government set the agenda. This is supported by data from interviews.

Regarding ‘flak’, one reason why journalists were strident in their moral denunciation of the BRA leadership was because of the threat of litigation. This is a tool which is more easily used by the rich and powerful. Hence, journalists were less likely to denote the PNG
leadership in moral terms and more likely to denounce the BRA in such terms. I asked Mary-
Louise O’Callaghan why her criticism of the PNGDF leadership was muted, what she meant
by it and why she did not use words such as ‘terrorists’ or ‘killers’ to describe the PNG
leadership. She replied:

I think I’m saying that they didn’t want to unleash the demons, I’m not suggesting its by
mistake. I’m just perhaps suggesting that … they should be responsible and that if they’re
trying to disown it, then they know what that means. You’ve got to realise that there are
legal constraints on me. … For instance when the coroner … was brought in to investigate
Miriung’s death, I was able to name people, I was able to talk openly about PNGDF
involvement in Miriung’s death according to the coroner, but short of that sort of evidence…I
can’t just accuse … [X a certain PNG politician] of deliberately activating terrorists or using
the army as terrorists unless I can prove it. [X] would have just slapped a writ on me. So, I
got to get around it by saying things like they’re ‘disowning responsibility for the very
demons that they have unleashed’. … That’s the practicalities of the craft, you know.
Especially since he [X] is a very litigious person and one of the things you come to realise
very quickly is that the rich and powerful are a lot more protected by the law than those
that aren’t…. In the case of Bougainville, its easier for … [X] to get his Australian lawyers
on to us, than it is for, say, the head of the ‘Resistance’ if they feel if they have been
maligning or you know, a BRA rebel, who doesn’t even accept the law of PNG but he
might want to use it. (O’Callaghan, 1999c)

‘Flak’ was also an influential factor in reporting in general about the Bougainville War.
Therefore, the threat of ‘flak’ could have consciously and unconsciously influenced the
actions of journalists and editors in their portrayal of the Malabita and Kangu Beach
incidents.

My interview data reveals that, on several occasions, during the war, officials from Australia
and Papua New Guinea created ‘flak’ about news stories on Bougainville. A good example of
such ‘flak’ was when one journalist, who wishes not to be identified, wrote an article about a
massacre of civilians. They soon received a phone call from an Australian official who
challenged their story. The official also contacted other officials in Canberra and told them
that the story was based on BRA propaganda.

Differences like these in the moral judgements being made can also be explained by Herman
and Chomksy’s (1988) view that the media serves domestic power interests. I put their view
and the opposing ‘liberal view’ of the pluralistic media to Mary-Louise O’Callaghan. She
replied that domestic power interests influence what journalists write but that the media can also act as a ‘force for progress’ as liberal writers believe:

…people feel free to use those terms [such as ‘killers and terrorists’] on rebels and… they don’t do it on the armies because they’re part of the power structure. … Maybe that’s an example of … your theory in action… I think you’ll find probably that both [the ‘liberal’ and the political-economic view apply]… I mean there is that problem with that cliché, whether its ‘paradise lost’ or whether it’s ‘the rebels are the baddies and the killers and the murderers and the terrorists’ and the other guys … their just … ‘not doing a very good job’…. There are those cliches that people fall into through ignorance or habit or particular view of the world they don’t even realise they’ve got but I think there are also other people who try to get beyond that a bit. (O’Callaghan, 1999c)

It is true that O’Callaghan did ‘get beyond’ these cliches ‘a bit’. She criticised the PNG leadership – for not taking responsibility for the army which they themselves had deployed on Bougainville – in a way that no other journalist did in the reporting of the Malabita massacre in the three newspapers. However, this did little to challenge the overall picture which was presented in the reporting of Kangu Beach and Malabita. Firstly, whilst she tried to ‘get beyond’ the stereotyping of the BRA and PNG officials, her criticism was still muted. Secondly, it appeared only at the margins of press coverage – in one newspaper – at the end of a feature article in the middle pages.

The dichotomous reporting of Kangu Beach and Malabita can be explained by a second ‘structural’ factor. This is the tendency of Australian journalists to let the Australian government set the agenda. Interview data reveals that journalists tended to behave this way when reporting the Bougainville War. Below is an excerpt from my conversation with O’Callaghan on this issue:

O’Callaghan: [Regarding] Canberra [journalists] – who are the ones charged [with reporting about Federal Government issues] – [one of the things about the way that they work is that] they [those journalists] are so caught up in news which is being created by the government and therefore to a certain extent… controlled by the government. They’re so caught up with just competing with each other on that…

Roberts: They let the government set the agenda.

O’Callaghan: Yes! And they don’t chase … other stuff. Now it’s not a criticism of the individuals because I see how hard those guys work. … Then there is their papers of course, back in Sydney or wherever, are all [wanting] to make sure that if the Sydney Morning Herald’s got the story, they’ve got the story. So its very hard for any of them to
stand back and try and look at something a bit differently or follow an issue through. A lot of issues are just left at a certain point and the governments know that they can just make the right noises and the majority of journalists will not scrape behind those noises. And the journalists that do are usually badmouthed by both the government and [by] their colleagues ‘cause they are rocking the boat for their colleagues.

…journalists are very lazy. … They are spoon-fed and, for the sake of their careers, they can’t afford to ignore what they are being fed, because that is what everyone else is spewing forth. You know. … I mean, I’ve … been lucky because I’ve …by default carved out a niche that allows me not to … be this performing seal. (O’Callaghan, 1999b)

Sean Dorney (1999) likewise indicated that the press in Australia tended to follow the Australian government reactions to events in the Bougainville War. Hence, he said, the press gave much attention to the Sandline affair because it threatened Australian interests in the region. In contrast, he said that the Bougainville War had been largely ignored up until that point. The following is an excerpt from my conversation with Dorney (1999):

Roberts: I was quite struck at the time of Sandline … There had been virtually nothing in the papers about Bougainville [before that time] … There was a bit in 1996 [on] Malabita [etc] and [then, at the time of the Sandline Affair] all of a sudden it was saturation…. Why did that happen?

Dorney: It’s got a lot to do with the Australian government’s reaction to it. … The Australian government saw Sandline as a major shift in the balance of influence in the Pacific.

Roberts: They were scared, quite rightly, that another country would come in and take their place.

Dorney: Well, I also think they were pretty worried about this African … tendency …of … ‘your hired mercenaries can fix up your problems’. And I think I wouldn’t discount entirely the fact that there was also a human rights worry that was also attached to all of that. But it was also a massive rejection of Australian influence and Australian advice and whatever…

And when the Australian government reacts, the Canberra press gallery reacts and when the Canberra press gallery reacts, it becomes a big story.

As we can see in O’Callaghan’s (1999b) and Dorney’s (1999) responses, there are a number of processes which encourage journalists to follow the Australian government line. One is that the Australian government is an important source of news and this allows the government to a certain extent to control the news. A second is that journalists are disciplined to follow the government line by their colleagues and by the officials. Thirdly, journalists are concerned
about their careers and therefore tend to follow the government agenda rather than ‘rock the boat’.

The Canberra journalists accepted the Australian government line that the Malabita massacre was an ‘internal matter’ for the PNG government. Lucy Palmer (1999) said that the Australian government line, on the Malabita incident, was that it was a sovereignty issue – that Bougainville was an internal matter for PNG and that Australia should respect the sovereign rights of its government. Furthermore, she said that although she did not accept that line, the journalists who work in Canberra accepted it and believed it. I asked her was it not the role of the press in a democracy to bring the Australian government to account on such issues. She replied:

Yes, but its not the way it works… there is a to and fro debate or a lack of debate … a ping pong reality, where Downer says something, Chan says something. (Palmer, 1999)

She said that the journalists who report from Canberra are caught up in the day to day statements of politicians and generally do not write about the broader issues, though they may be relevant.

The fact that Canberra journalists can get caught up in the government agenda can partly explain why the press made no calls for an independent inquiry and why there was little denunciation of the PNG government in the three newspapers.

In sum, the papers reported the incident in a way which followed the PNG government line. They also closely followed Australian government reaction. This could explain why they failed to criticise the PNG reaction. This is consistent with the Herman and Chomsky view that the government serves as a major source for the mass media which leads the press to report news in line with the government agenda. There is evidence to suggest that ‘structural’ factors, such as the use of ‘flak’ and the tendency of journalists to follow the Australian government ‘line’, contributed to the greater moral condemnation of BRA violence in the content of reporting about the two incidents at Malabita and Kangu Beach. Now I will turn to the sequencing of narratives.

As I discussed above, in this chapter, analysis of the sequencing of the narratives also showed a dichotomous pattern. The three newspapers portrayed the BRA violence at Kangu Beach as less legitimate than the PNGDF violence at Malabita. This dichotomous portrayal of the legitimacy does not match the circumstances of each of the incidents. We can recall that the
victims at Kangu Beach were soldiers who were killed during a week-long battle (though there is some doubt as to whether they were executed or killed in battle). On the other hand, eyewitness reports indicated that the victims at Malabita were all civilians who were murdered in an unprovoked attack.

There were two trends in the sequencing of the narratives about Malabita. The most important was the tendency to portray the violence as ‘normal’ and therefore legitimate. We can see this in the leads. The one lead which did not show a ‘normal’ sequence, showed an ‘ambiguous’ sequence. The second trend was to portray the violence at Malabita as ‘ambiguous’ – some headlines used ‘contextual’ sequences.

We can explain the predominance of ‘normal’ sequences by looking at the assumptions that journalists made about the legitimacy of the PNG occupation of Bougainville. These assumptions influenced the way that they reported the violence. As O’Callaghan (2000) said, journalists, before the Sandline crisis, assumed that the PNG government acted in the interests of the majority of the population. In other words, their official military occupation of Bougainville was legitimate. I had put to her that Pol Pot’s or Saddam Hussein’s armies had committed atrocities similar to the ones committed by the PNGDF at Malabita and Simbo and that the press condemned them as ‘terrorists’ and ‘murderers’. She stated:

… PNG was a democratically elected government, so there was an assumption [at the outset] … which I think in subsequent years particularly through Sandline has been proved to be a false assumption, …that the state would be operating in the… interests of the majority of the citizens of the country – which you couldn’t say about Iraq or Pol Pot. I think that is another factor…. I think that the big shock of Sandline was the evidence – the irrefutable evidence … that that wasn’t the case. That just because it was democratically elected didn’t mean that you could assume that it could behave in a responsible way or in the interests of the majority of the citizens of the country. (O’Callaghan, 2000)

The conversation continued:

Roberts: Do you think people make those assumptions a lot – that just because [the government] is democratically elected [and there is a] Westminster system [then] we don’t ask certain questions?


Since journalists assumed the PNGDF occupation of Bougainville was legitimate they tended to portray the violence at Malabita as ‘normal’ and therefore acceptable. This parallels
examples of ‘normal’ portrayal of violence found elsewhere. Cerulo (1998, p. 43) cites the example of police violence in Washington, D.C. In that case, the lead read:

D.C. Police officers shot and wounded two suspects Thursday night, both after they allegedly tried to run over officers who were trying to stop them in unrelated incidents.

Since the police represent the legitimate authority, the violence is presented as ‘normal’, regardless of possible questions such as was the act of violence justified. As Cerulo (1998, p. 43) states:

This text references all violent action from the perpetrators’ vantage point. The structure of the narrative imposes the violent actor’s perspective on the telling of the event. In this account, the performer sequence forces readers to enter the action at the side of the ‘good guy’.

The second trend in the reporting of Malabita was for journalists and sub-editors to portray the violence as ‘ambiguous’ rather than ‘deviant’. I would argue that one reason for this is that journalists were influenced by a ‘party line’, which was consistent with the Australian government agenda. When a journalist stepped out of the ‘party line’ by, for instance, referring to PNGDF abuses, they had to show the complexity of the situation. This was not so when discussing BRA violence.

According to Mary Louise O’Callaghan, journalists can afford to be more ‘lax’ when they are following the ‘party line’. On the other hand, she said that when journalists stepped outside the ‘party line’, they needed to be more careful to show the complexity of the situation. As she said:

…that state fostering of journalists is like a parental relationship … There is positive reinforcement for the journalists that follow the party line, (…the state line). … [It’s as if the state says] ‘we’ll give you a little favour, well give you a little tip off.’ And the trick of journalism is that you don’t cut yourself off entirely from the information flow but you stay outside of that game. … It takes a lot of skill and its something that over the years I think that I have become better at and I think the answer for me is to make sure that my stories are balanced as much as I can. … If you run with an allegation against the army and they won’t deny it, you might mention the fact that they are ill disciplined to give people a sort of context that helps. … I don’t believe the world is black and white either all bad or all good and its very hard to convey that in four hundred words. But that’s kind of what’s in the back of my mind most days. That’s what I’m trying to do – to give some sense of the complexity of the situation. … Maybe that’s made me mention once too often that the
army is ill disciplined and giving you the impression that I’m trying to excuse them…

(O’Callaghan, 1999d)

This could explain why the PNGDF violence at Malabita was typically not portrayed as ‘deviant’ violence. As evidence against the PNGDF mounted, journalists wrote about the violence in a way that showed the complexity of the situation rather than emphasising that the violence was unacceptable. For example, one description of the Malabita massacre was as follows:

The slaughter of women and children on Bougainville during recent weeks is cause for profound sadness. Uncontrolled elements of the secessionist Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) have in the past been responsible for gross human rights abuses, including cold-blooded killings. However, of late it has become clear that members of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) have been responsible for some of the most barbarous acts. (Sydney Morning Herald, 24 December 1996, p. 13)

In this example, the PNGDF violence is framed within a context of past human rights abuses by the BRA. This serves to emphasise the complexity of the situation before the writer mentions the PNGDF violence.

The above evidence suggests that if journalists were to report the PNGDF human rights abuses at Malabita, they were encouraged to emphasise the complexity of the situation. This could explain why the Kangu Beach massacre was more likely to be portrayed as ‘deviant’ in headlines and leads. However, there would have been no such pressure when reporting BRA violence. The Australian government had a strategic interest in discouraging Bougainvillean secession. Therefore, if a journalist portrayed BRA violence as ‘deviant’, rather than ‘ambiguous’, they would not have challenged the ‘party line’.

The portrayal of the legitimacy of the violence at Kangu Beach and Malabita can be explained by looking at journalists’ assumptions and pressures on journalists to follow the ‘party line’ (to use O’Callaghan’s, 1999d, term). The portrayal of PNGDF violence as ‘normal’ reflected journalists’ assumptions that the PNG government and its defence force was acting legitimately in its prosecution of the war on Bougainville. The portrayal of the violence at Malabita as ‘ambiguous’ was, arguably, influenced by the tendency of journalists to follow a ‘party line’, which was consistent with the Australian government policy on Bougainville.
In this chapter, I have analysed the pattern of reporting in the three Australian newspapers of three incidents in 1996. The three newspapers were the Australian, the Sydney Morning Herald and the Age. The three incidents each involved several people being killed and they occurred at Simbo, Kangu Beach and Malabita, all in South Bougainville. I have also attempted to explain the pattern of reporting.

I have argued that there were two important aspects of the reporting. Firstly, that the publications portrayed the victims of the PNGDF in the case of Simbo less sympathetically than the victims of the PNGDF at Malabita. Secondly, that the publications presented the victims of the PNGDF as less ‘worthy’ (using Herman and Chomsky’s, 1988, terms) than the victims of the BRA at Kangu Beach.

In attempting to understand this pattern of reporting I used two theoretical approaches: the liberal view and the political-economic view of Herman and Chomsky (1988). The liberal view, which focuses on ‘non-structural’ factors such as the lack of availability of verifiable information during the Bougainville War, explains the reporting when we compare the cases of Simbo and Malabita. However, it fails to explain the differences in reporting of Kangu Beach and Malabita. In contrast, the Herman and Chomksy model provides a better understanding when we compare the reporting of Malabita and Kangu Beach. It also provides a more satisfying explanation of the entire pattern of reporting, when we compare all three cases.

The following factors were important in producing the observed pattern of reporting:

- The threat of ‘flak’ (negative responses to reporting).

- The tendency of journalists to follow the Australian government ‘line’ on and the Australian government reaction to events in Bougainville.

- Assumptions held by journalists about the legitimacy of PNG operations in Bougainville.
CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have described and analysed the reporting in three Australian newspapers about three violent incidents which occurred in 1996, during the course of the Bougainville War. The three incidents were:

- the Simbo massacre in which 10-12 civilians, including an eight month old baby, were killed by the PNGDF and their allied ‘Resistance Force’, in January;

- the battle of Kangu Beach during which 13 Security Force members were killed by the BRA, in September;

- the Malabita massacre in which 9 civilians were killed when the PNGDF mortar-bombed a packed church during Mass, in December.

I have focussed on two questions:

- How did the three newspapers report these incidents?

- How can we best understand this process of reporting?

I have argued that the overall pattern of reporting is well described using a combination of the Herman and Chomsky (1988) propaganda model and the Cerulo (1998) model, which is used to analyse how journalists portray the moral aspects of violence. I have demonstrated this in my analysis of the reporting in chapters two and three.

I have shown that the three newspapers portrayed incidents differently depending on the perpetrator of the violence. Using Herman and Chomsky’s (1988) conceptual framework, the three newspapers portrayed the victims of the central government forces as ‘unworthy’ compared to victims of the BRA. In chapters two and three I presented quantitative and qualitative evidence to support this argument. For example, in covering the 19 to 21 unarmed civilians who were killed by central government forces in massacres at Simbo and Malabita the newspapers published a total of 13 articles. In contrast, in covering the battle of Kangu Beach where the BRA killed 13 security force members the newspapers published a total of
20 articles. In chapters two and three I presented qualitative evidence by analysing the rhetoric of newspaper coverage.

It is clear that there were significant differences in the reporting of the two massacres which were perpetrated by the central government forces at Simbo and Malabita. For example, the three newspapers gave the Malabita massacre much more attention than the Simbo massacre. Quantitative and qualitative measures demonstrated that the three newspapers portrayed the victims of the Malabita massacre as less ‘worthy’ than victims of the BRA at Kangu Beach.

I used two theoretical approaches in my attempt to explain the pattern of reporting. The first is the ‘liberal’ approach which, in explaining reporting, emphasises factors such as access to reliable information. Secondly, I used the ‘political-economic’ approach in which writers emphasise factors such as the role of government sources in shaping the news. I used the Herman and Chomsky (1988) propaganda model as an exemplar of the latter approach.

I argued that both the ‘liberal’ and Herman and Chomsky (1988) models were useful in explaining the pattern of reporting in the three newspapers. As I discussed in chapter four, the ‘liberal’ model was particularly useful for explaining the differences in the reporting of the two massacres by central government forces at Simbo and Malabita. For example, the increased attention on the Malabita massacre can be explained by greater availability of hard evidence. ‘Liberal’ writing on war reporting suggests that when circumstances permit the mass media will play an adversarial role to that of the domestic government. In chapter four, I found that in reporting the Malabita massacre the three newspapers challenged only the tactical objectives of the PNG government. For example, they criticised the indiscipline of the PNGDF (Papua New Guinea Defence Force). The overriding strategic objective of the Australian government – to maintain Bougainville as part of PNG – was not subject to any challenge in the three publications. This failure to challenge does not sit well with liberal models of an adversarial media. However, it is consistent with the Herman and Chomsky (1988) propaganda model.

I believe that the Herman and Chomsky (1988) model provides a more satisfactory explanation of the overall pattern of reporting as compared to the ‘liberal’ approach to war reporting, as I discussed in chapter four. It suggests reasons for the overall pattern whereby victims of central government forces were portrayed as ‘unworthy’ compared to the victims of the BRA. This model can also accommodate the case of Malabita where, in certain respects, the press were more sympathetic to the victims of the central government forces.
What are the implications of these findings? There was a consistent dichotomous pattern throughout the reporting on the three incidents — victims of the central government forces were portrayed as less ‘worthy’ than victims of the BRA. This pattern is supportive of the Australian government objectives for Bougainville in 1996. The Australian government gave substantial military support to PNG for its operations in Bougainville and wanted the island to remain part of PNG. The dichotomous pattern of reporting implies that the three newspapers performed a role which was supportive rather than critical of Australian government policy on Bougainville. This suggests that the Australian media does not play an adversarial role as liberal models of the media imply. However, the differences in the reporting of the Malabita massacre, as compared to the Simbo massacre, suggest that the Australian mass media does play a somewhat adversarial role. The question is how much? My findings about the reporting of the Malabita massacre (see p. 126 above) suggests that the Australian mass media’s adversarial role in war reporting is limited by the strategic objectives of Australian foreign policy.

My findings imply that certain theoretical models are useful in describing and understanding war reporting in the Australian press. Theoretical models from the liberal, political-economic (Herman and Chomsky, 1988) and cultural (Cerulo, 1998) traditions were helpful in describing the reporting. I also used theoretical models from both the liberal and political-economic tradition to attempt to understand the pattern of reporting. I found that both approaches helped to explain the reporting.

The findings and implications for this thesis are limited by its scope. I have focussed only on three incidents in the Bougainville War. Further research is required into the following areas: Firstly, there needs to be more research into similar cases of violence in the Bougainville War. This ought to be done by examining both individual cases and trends in reporting. Secondly, the relation between Australian foreign policy and reporting of the Bougainville War needs further detailed investigation.
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