

Media

Journos face ethics debate

By Ali Bell

Ethics are vitally important and while cultural and protocol differences exist between Pasifika communities and mainstream, many Pacific journalists rule out a need for a special code of ethics.

Leading broadcaster Sefita Hao'uli says: "If you're human you have ethics. It applies to everyone."

Responding to the Journalism Training Organisation executive director Jim Tucker's call for a special code for Pacific Island journalists and broadcasters, he says: "There are always humans who need to be more ethical."

Hao'uli, managing director of Radio 531pi and one of the Pasifika media pioneers in New Zealand, says interviews are an issue in tight-knit communities of any kind, especially where there are family links.

He asks whether it is ethical for a journalist to write about his or her fraudulent uncle, for example.

"It is important to write the story. The story needs to be told. You can't subsume that to familial considerations. But state your position – make a declaration about your position," he says.

"You should be unhappy at all times as a journalist," says Hao'uli. Unhappiness is a feeling of unease that a journalist has about what he or she is doing – questioning motives.

"Being uneasy means you're telling the truth. It's a quality that goes with the job."

If a journalist does not face such ethical dilemmas and writes a story, even when it causes loss

of face among the reporter's community or family, the organisation the reporter works for will not have integrity.

"You must take the challenge," he says.

Getting the story is a balance between time and ethics, says Hao'uli. It's often more a question of etiquette than ethics – "our job is to write about the truth, not to obey rules of proper etiquette."

Innes Logan, editor of *Spasifika* magazine, says the Pacific journalist has "a great awareness of protocols," but the ethics are no different to journalists from Palagi culture.

The basic principle behind a code of ethics "is very worthwhile," he says, adding that several already exist.

In New Zealand the Press Council has a statement of principles and the journalist's union has a code of ethics. In the United States, the Society of Professional Journalists has a well-established code.

Logan says journalists can face pressure from their news organisations to produce Pacific stories, along with pressure of being a member of their own Pacific community and having to report on it.

Marama Papau, a reporter/director for *Tagata Pasifika*, spoke of a situation she faced when reporting King Taufai'ahau Tupou IV of Tonga's death this month.

Before the king died, *Tagata Pasifika* shot parts of its tribute to him. This way it could be put to air quickly after he died.

The *Tagata Pasifika* team was criticised by some interviewees as not being "real Islanders" – as this was counter to cultural pro-



PHOTO: ALAN KOON

ETHICS CODE: Sefita Hao'uli talks about writing the truth.

ocols against calling on death before its time.

"We don't intend to insult people from our culture," says Papau. "But we have to wear our media hat sometimes. It's more a cultural thing rather than an issue of ethics."

"I don't think we need a separate Pacific code of conduct, although we see things through

different eyes."

When Papau interviews an older Pacific woman, for example, she might sit for an hour over a cup of tea. And she gives background information about herself while asking the woman about hers – "it's about relationships," she says.

"The way we talk with people is different – our ethics are the

Pasifika Code

Journalism Training Organisation executive director Jim Tucker has challenged New Zealand-based Pacific journalists and media people to consider establishing a Pasifika code of ethics.

He floated the idea at the PIMA conference at AUT University last weekend.

Tucker questioned whether Pacific journalists applied ethics in the same way as non-Pacific journalists.

His talk followed the controversy of John Manukia, a Pasifika journalist Tucker described as a "serial fabricator" in a recent article.

Manukia was sacked from the *Herald on Sunday* in 2004, accused of fabricating a two-page interview with a South Auckland ex-police officer.

Tucker said the code would be about "application rather than ethics", dealing with cultural sensitivities in news gathering.

"The truth of how you get the truth – a kind of code of operation," he said.

Journalists could be forced into a position where going for the story took precedence over ethical considerations.

- Ali Bell

same."

The PIMA conference ended with a debate: "Is there a fine line between reporting a story and making it up?"

Despite the opposing side playing "the God car", Tongan publisher Kalafi Moala joked, the team representing a definite line between reporting the truth and fabrication were clear winners.

New Tongan king fuels democratic hopes

By Vicky Crawford

The king is dead but there is hope a new era of democracy will be born in the tiny Pacific Island kingdom of Tonga.

King Siaosi Tupou V, the flamboyant 58-year-old successor to the throne, is known as a more modern man than his father, King Tupou IV, and hopes are high he will be a harbinger of democratic reform.

Sworn in a day after his father's death on September 10, the new king faces pressure from pro-democracy campaigners pushing for change.

Signs that the childless bachelor will usher in a more transparent state have already emerged.

Within a week he announced he would be giving up all his business interests – a vast and lucrative variety of enterprises ranging from telecommunications to electricity to beer.

It is a start in the significant reform many say is needed to bring the country back from the brink of economic collapse.

Gathering in Auckland last weekend for the Pacific Islands Media Association (PIMA) conference, three leading Tongan media personalities gave their views on what can be expected under the new monarch.

Welcoming the move is *Taimi 'o Tonga*



PHOTO: ALAN KOON

KALAFI MOALA: Optimistic.

publisher and author Kalafi Moala, a key spokesperson in support of the pro-democracy movement.

Moala is optimistic this "non-religious

modern guy, who is not linked to Tongan traditions whatsoever," will be open to change.

Moala's confidence stems from the new king's opposition to legislation restricting media freedom back in 2003.

The law gave the government power to vet the media by setting up a registration system which all publications had to apply for.

It also allowed a maximum of 20 per cent foreign ownership – a step that took *Taimi 'o Tonga* off local shelves for nine months (Tongan-born Moala is an American citizen).

The laws were repealed by the Supreme Court in 2004, a move supported by then Crown Prince Tupouto'a.

But allegations of meddling in the media have been made against the prince.

The Freedom House media freedom website accuses the prince of using his power company monopoly to block a planned broadcast covering the nationwide civil servants strike.

It also says he threatened a radio station for broadcasting anti-government views.

Tonga is currently placed 74th out of 194 countries in the Freedom House rankings.

Overall, media freedom is improving with two privately owned television stations and three private radio stations, a number of privately owned newspapers

and magazines and 3000 internet users registered in 2006.

Radio 531Pi managing director Sefita Hao'uli is not expecting the new king to stifle the relatively free media environment.

"It wouldn't be worth it for him to create problems where problems don't exist. He'll have his hands full dealing with the many changes people are asking for," he says.

He cites a recent demonstration in Nuku'alofa's town square as evidence of a political climate which is tolerant of free speech.

Protesters were able to hold up banners disparaging the royal family, without being arrested for civil disobedience.

Hao'uli says Tupou V is far more tolerant than his father and "seems far more willing to bring Tonga into the 21st century".

Tagata Pasifika and *Fair Go* reporter Sandra Kailahi is adopting a "wait and see" approach to the new king, an attitude she says is shared by many Tongans on the street.

Kailahi has just returned from Tonga where she covered the late king's funeral.

Although she was able to access key figures such as Prime Minister Feliti Sevele without constraint, members of the royal family were unavailable "out of respect".

She says Tongans are divided over the man who calls himself "a business man not a basket maker".