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"It's Trauma on a Deadline": Change, Continuity and Harm After the "Racial Reckoning"

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ABSTRACT

This article argues that, in an era of digital journalism marked by increased demands for racial and media justice, moves by Australian media institutions to employ Indigenous journalists to demonstrate their commitment to equity and diversity may place these journalists at risk of harm. This is not only because of their increased exposure to harm online, but because the burden of change is placed on these same journalists, while news organisations fail to acknowledge how race continues to structure white newsrooms. We draw on 11 interviews with practising Indigenous journalists in Australia. Following Indigenous methodologies, we work with their shared knowledge to identify a series of interconnected problems: the colonial roots of journalism and norms of white expertise; the paradox of diversity; the burden of change expected of Indigenous journalists; the racialised dynamics of microaggressions, tokenism and exploitation they experience; the traumatic nature of reporting on Indigenous affairs; and the political economy and white cultural norms embedded in news values. We suggest that there is much continuity in the racial structures of newsrooms in the era digitisation and diversity that requires a more substantial epistemological and structural shift within journalism than has thus far been enacted.

Introduction

In the digital era, media institutions internationally have increasingly been subject to a "racial reckoning" seeking to highlight problems of institutionalised and structural racism (Clark 2022). This process gained increased visibility through the international #BlackLivesMatter movement and the global response to the 2020 murder of George Floyd. The take-up of #BlackLivesMatter by First Nations activists in Australia was catalysed by the obvious parallels between Floyd's murder and the 2015 killing of

Dungatti man David Dungay Jr (who also died being restrained, in judicial custody in Sydney's Long Bay prison, while repeatedly uttering the words "I can't breathe"). This contributed to a moment in which the institutional (re)production of racial inequality and violence by and through the media attracted heightened public criticism. Both the existence of racism within newsrooms, and journalism's failure to platform the voices of racialized minorities, were called out by campaigners, including Indigenous journalists who sought to raise awareness of how newsrooms are not culturally safe spaces for First Nations people (33CR 2020; Hayman-Reber, 2020).

In the face of such critiques, hiring Indigenous journalists has provided a common response among media institutions that seek to publicly demonstrate organisational commitments to principles of diversity and inclusion. The increased adoption of diversity and inclusion agendas within journalism coincides with a rhetoric, as Zelizer (2019) describes, that has positioned the shift to digital journalism as "progressively instrumental to democracy" (2019, 346). Zelizer is notably sceptical of such rhetoric, while Steensen and Westlund (2021) caution against the "hidden normativity" of technological optimism in digital journalism studies. Karlsson et al. (2015) similarly found utopian claims of a digital "participatory journalism" supporting an increased range of voices did not match reality. Nevertheless, as Waisbord notes, the shift to digital journalism has "expand[ed] the opportunities and spaces for news," providing increased potential for critiques of journalism to circulate (2019, 352). Callison and Young (2020, 30-34) argue that the digital era, rather than producing a journalism that is progressively inclusive of marginalised voices, has instead facilitated new forms of critique that have exposed "ruptures in the fabric of modern journalism", related to "gender, race, indigeneity and colonialism." They suggest that digital media platforms have facilitated a "digital diagnostic" which can expose digital journalism's continued exclusionary practices, encouraging efforts by journalism and journalists to "repair, reform and transform" journalistic practices.

This article considers how news media institutions' response to these critiques, and attempts at reform through diverse hiring practices, may be reproducing, and exacerbating, the problems of diversity that they aim to address. Through engaging with the first-hand experiences of 11 Indigenous journalists described in interviews, its analysis explores the different dimensions of racialised structures and practices that contribute to the persistence of exclusionary racial dynamics in news organisations in the digital era. In doing so, it highlights an enduring absence of engagement with problems of everyday and structural racism by news organisations, and a lack of investment in initiatives to shift deeply embedded problems. Rather than contributing to meaningful change, such hiring practices may magnify the exposure of Indigenous journalists to harmful and frequently traumatic experiences. These are not only attendant to the work they do, and the ways they are targeted in racist online abuse, but their experience in news institutions themselves. We found that for the journalists' interviewed, recruitment practices acted as a signal that support for their aspirations in news organisations is genuine. Instead, journalists describe finding themselves demeaned and exploited, and their work stymied, at the same time as they are burdened with changing the very institutional culture that presents obstacles to their advancement. We argue that such approaches to achieving diversity may not only facilitate the reproduction of relations that prevent

Indigenous journalists rising to positions where they are empowered to make change, but actively contribute to experiences of workplace trauma and outcomes that are both professionally and personally debilitating. In what follows, we first outline our methodology and articulate our positionality, and explain the development of our six themes, before moving on to develop those themes and consider their implications.

Methodology and Situating the Study

This article is based on 11 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with practising Indigenous journalists on the east coast of Australia, between 2022 and 2023. The journalists were working across both public service and major commercial media outlets at the time of the interviews. They were interviewed as part of two concurrent research projects that focused on the contributions of Indigenous journalists to changing media practices in Australia.

We approach the analysis here in a non-traditional fashion that positions the interviewees as theorists and knowledge holders (AIATSIS 2020; Bargallie 2020). In the process of conducting these interviews and developing our analysis, it became apparent to us that these practitioners were theorists of their experiences, highly cognisant of the dynamics of both structural and everyday racism, and engaged in processes of systemic analysis to interpret and understand their own position. We have developed this article in a way that foregrounds these intellectual contributions. In the sections that follow, we intertwine what is traditionally understood as "literature review," "data," and "analysis" to focus on distinct areas that were theorised by the interviewees. We explore six distinct but overlapping themes: the colonial roots of journalism and norms of white expertise; the paradox of diversity in white-dominated institutions; the "cultural load" and burden of change expected of Indigenous journalists; the racialised dynamics of microaggressions, tokenism and exploitation they experience; the traumatic nature of reporting on Indigenous affairs and the absence of organisational support; and finally the political economy and white cultural norms embedded in news values that continue to govern mainstream newsroom cultures. We explore these themes in this order, commencing with the interviewees' theorising of journalism, before moving more concretely into everyday workplace experiences, and subsequently their relationship with news production.

We developed our findings and thematic foci through an iterative process of consultation informed by Indigenous methodologies. The institutional Ethics approval and initial project design was developed in consultation with an Indigenous scholar in the field, following the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Code of Ethics (AIATSIS, 2020). After transcription, interviewees were able to review and edit transcripts to ensure anonymity and accurate representation. After initial coding of data and development of themes, the interviewees reviewed drafts to ensure that they were comfortable with how we framed their contributions to the analysis, and with their specific quotations. This also included interviewees' contributing feedback on the emergent project and our arguments. In this process we received positive and encouraging responses, with interviewees articulating how this project may be of use in their advocacy for change in their profession.

Our process of engaging with the interviewees has also been driven not only by recognition of their knowledge but also their precarious position as practicising journalists who are both contractually and otherwise limited in their abilities to speak publicly about their experiences in newsrooms. As a result, we have anonymised the interviewees for safety reasons. The mainstream media sector in Australia is already a small pool, and the numbers of Indigenous staff are at most in the low hundreds (Nolan et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2023; Thomas, 2024). We have also taken care to anonymise details in stories and to remove references that would reveal information about interviewees.

We have engaged in these processes as two non-Indigenous, white settler scholars working across journalism studies and Indigenous studies. Identities of "settler" and "Indigenous" are not homogeneous nor capable of articulating the intersectional complexities of identity and power (Mellor 2022). However, we start with them to recognise that, as white settlers, we not only occupy positions of white privilege that have been historically produced and that work to maintain racialised exclusion, but are inheritors of research approaches that have served to objectify, homogenise and appropriate Indigenous identity in support of settler colonial projects (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2021). We work to both recognise and challenge this through our approach. Yet we lack the understanding that derives from lived experience of Indigeneity, a key weakness of our position and thus analysis. The "insider" critique of research in Indigenous studies seeks to overturn the idea of the researcher as expert who is uniquely and neutrally able to understand the experiences of others, instead positioning researchers as "outsiders" whose standpoint(s), life experiences and subjectivity shape their (in) ability to relate to and understand other forms of knowledge (Brayboy and Deyhle 2000). Our "outsider" status places particular importance on privileging ways of developing research that highlight the knowledge of "participants" generating a more collaborative understanding of how academic knowledge is crafted in the interface between researchers, "subjects" and standpoints (Nakata 2007). Our approach of framing this contribution through the interviewees' knowledge, and our iterative process of consultation, is modelled on this recognition, and also informs our considerable engagement with Indigenous scholarship (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2021). However, in doing so, we take ownership of the analysis as our own, and do not claim to represent or speak for Indigenous journalists individually or collectively. As Mellor has argued, "non-Indigenous positionality may draw upon Indigenous standpoints but cannot claim Indigenous epistemological and ontological authority" (2022, 27). We recognise the limitations of our own standpoint and welcome critique and reflection on our contribution.

Journalism's Colonialism Problem

Callison and Young argue that the recognition of journalism's colonial relations of power "has largely been relegated to media or critical studies scholars" (2021, 1228-9). They are part of an emerging group within journalism studies across settler colonial contexts such as Canada, Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand turning to Indigenous studies, settler colonial studies and critical race methods to explore, critique and seek solutions to journalism's often-invisibilised racialised power relations (see Dreher and Waller 2022; Ross 2023; Thomas, 2024). In contrast to journalism's preferred self-image

as a "fourth estate" that stands as a watchdog against state power, these scholars have called attention to how news institutions in settler colonial contexts are part of historically enduring assemblages of power that have devastating impacts on colonised peoples (Callison and Young 2020; McCallum and Waller 2017; Nolan et al., 2020). Several journalists in our interviews were insistent on reframing journalism to understand it as a foundational plank of settler colonialism in western settler colonial contexts, and to understand this as crucial to its structural conditions and standpoints of knowledge production (Nolan et al., 2023). Interviewee 6, for example, articulated the lack of historical and systemic engagement with colonialism by many mainstream news journalists:

> [Journalists] forget how recent the Stolen Generation was, forget how recent stolen wages were. We lose perspective that 250 years since the first invasion is not actually a very long time, is not many generations of people … the issues that our communities face stem to such a large degree from invasion and the ongoing effects of invasion and the intergenerational trauma.

Similarly, Clark argues that journalism's roots endure in its whiteness in standpoint as well as personnel:

> Journalism, like all institutions in Western society, is the product of colonialism, patriarchy, power and racial exclusion…Who decides what is and what is not news? Who chooses the issues and events that must be covered in the public interest? Who determines the voices that will appear in news discourse, and which ones will be left out? Who decides what is salient to the discussion and what can or should be ignored? In most cases, the answer to all these questions has been predominantly white men. (Clark 2022, 49-50)

These critiques of settler colonial knowledge relations in journalism highlight how dominant settler epistemologies and perspectives are neutralised, made natural and awarded authority, while alternative epistemologies are invisibilised, made primitive, or exoticised (Dreher and Waller 2022; Goodall and Jakubowicz 1994). The assumption of the journalist as the objective, neutral, unimplicated knower—what Callison and Young (2020) call journalism's "view from nowhere"—has often served to obscure the very real subjectivity of the usually white journalist in settler colonial contexts.

The "white standpoint" of journalism has often created a position for venerated outsider-journalist experts on Indigenous issues who regularly "embed" themselves in Indigenous contexts, taking the responsibility of communicating Indigenous stories to a wider audience as a presumed neutral voice (McCallum and Waller 2017; Nolan et al., 2023). Some interviewees reflected on how these practices and ways of knowing were experienced as they entered the profession in the 1980s and 1990s:

> Whenever they did Indigenous stories, it was very anthropological. It was like 'I'm the white journalist and I'm going to discover them … fascinating, oh you speak so well.' (Interviewee 4)

This notion of Indigenous people as "out there," operating in homogeneous groups, separate from settler cultures and urban centres, voiceless and ready to be given voice by others, has served to reproduce and extend a settler colonial tradition of a racial anthropological lens in Indigenous reporting (Nolan et al. 2023; Thomas et al., 2019; Thomas, 2024). It has also served to uphold ignorance about the real lives of

Indigenous people, reflected in the lack of understanding and recognition of the potential and knowledge that Indigenous journalists who joined the profession could bring. As Interviewee 4 explained about their recruitment in that era:

> They didn't know what to do with us. They didn't really know anything about us or what we were capable of … I think things have improved a fair bit since then.

As Callison and Young (2020) argue, journalism's "racial reckoning" presents both the challenge and opportunity for journalism to contend with foundations in colonialism and the epistemological consequences of this. Yet, as we outline below, one current response to this reckoning—diversity in hiring in newsrooms—may not be enacting the structural and epistemological shifts necessary and may be placing journalists at risk of harm.

The Promise of Change and the Paradox of "Diversity"

A recruitment drive for Indigenous journalists has seemingly been the most immediate response in Australia to critiques of journalism in the wake of #BlackLivesMatter. Several of our interviewees recognised this trend as a strategy to address the under-representation of Indigenous voices and perspectives in news. This, however, raised concerns that hiring was positioned both internally and publically as a solution to the lack of diversity—while there remained a relative paucity of support to those workers and little commitment to ensuring their cultural safety. As Interviewee 3 articulated:

> When I see jobs advertised or people ask me, 'oh, should we have an identified role?' I think we need to kind of think, well what will be the support structure for that person? Are they stepping into an all-white newsroom? Who's going to be checking in on them? Who do they go to if they've got concerns?

Notably, media institutions prefer to use the language of diversity and inclusion to describe and justify these hiring practices, and tend to be far less comfortable positioning their organisations as anti-racist. As Ahmed has noted, discussion of structural and institutional racism "is heard as an injury to the institution, and as damaging to an institutional reputation for 'being diverse'" (2012, 17). Hiring initiatives are offered to address and demonstrate a commitment to diversity that, Ahmed argues, displaces a focus on racism:

> I suggest that diversity can be offered as a narrative of repair, as what allows us to 'recover' from racism by recovering the very signs of injury. In exploring the risks and necessity of speaking about racism…my aim is not to suggest that we should stop doing diversity, but that we need to keep asking what we are doing with diversity (Ahmed 2012, 17).

Ahmed implores us to continue to emphasise and discuss racism, and its persistence in the face of "diversity" responses. Indeed, Ahmed suggests that too often diversity programs can serve as a substitute for action and thus "participate in the idea of the institution that allows racism and inequalities to be overlooked" (2012, 14). As Harker has noted, moments where racism is brought into the spotlight as a societal problem often lead to "a flutter of activity" responding to demands for change. He cautions,

however, that these were "mostly small changes," and "the gains were, over time, mostly reversed" (Harker in Al-Kaisy 2023, 4). Nevertheless, Ahmed argues, we should not "stop doing diversity," or limit debate to being "for" or "against" diversity *per se*. Instead, Ahmed implores us to consider the relationship between "equality regimes" and "inequality regimes" (namely, the relations that contribute to perpetuation of various inequalities) as an open question. This "requires not only that we do not assume that an equality regime is necessarily aimed at the overcoming of an inequality regime but also that we recognize that an equality regime *can be* an inequality regime given new form, a set of processes that maintain what is supposedly being addressed" (Ahmed 2012, 8).

Echoing Ahmed's idea of diversity as a substitute for action, Douglas (2022) argues that diversity initiatives in newsrooms can represent a means of extracting economic value from race without having to deal with racism. In this respect, the recruitment of racially diverse journalists can serve as a means of visible repair in the face of accusations of racism, and can be read as news institutions seeking to enhance their brand through, for example, presenting public profiles of journalists from racialised minorities as a promotional technique. Douglas's analysis suggests that such hiring practices can be motivated by a concern for optics, PR and branding, arguing that political economy is both part of what informs diversity initiatives themselves and represents part of the obstacles to change they encounter. Her analysis does not, however, reduce diversity initiatives to political economy. Douglas draws on Bourdieuian field theory to consider the journalistic field as a product of the relationship between agency of journalists, understood as a product of *habitus*, and the structure or *doxa* that are prevalent within different news institutions (Benson and Neveu 2005; Bourdieu 1990). In Bourdieu's work, "doxa" refer to the normative language, beliefs, rules, values and modes of practice that are characteristic of particular institutional settings at a given time. "Habitus" refers to the perspectives, dispositions, values and capacities that individuals have gained through their social trajectory, and inform their exercise of personal agency. Importantly, in Douglas's work, she recognises that the promotion of increased diversity within news organisations is not merely a product of institutional concerns to manage brand image and "optics," but the ethical values and dispositions of particular individuals (their habitus). Indeed, she notes, "the insertion of [diversity practitioners'] habitus into the doxa of news organisations can act as an ethical counter to market logics that underpin racialised exclusion and inclusion" (Douglas 2022, 2107).

This is important for considering those whose ethical dispositions may lead them to be champions of increased diversity within news institutions, and how this may appeal to the habitus of Indigenous journalists. Previous research has shown that, informed by their own cultural and social relationships, many Indigenous journalists are motivated to promote Indigenous perspectives and highlight community needs rather than passively accept prevalent norms of objectivity and newsworthiness (Burrows 2018). In this respect, the promise of contributing to cultural change can be a strong motivating factor in recruitment. Interviewee 11, for example, discussed how, after being employed in the wake of criticisms of one outlet for their lack of diversity, their role was initially supported by a sympathetic editor who wanted to address this and amplify Indigenous perspectives:

> [When I was employed] we were doing something innovative here in terms of having an Aboriginal person telling Aboriginal stories that is closely connected with community… [and] able to bring those genuine black voices into [the outlet] and provide, you know, perspectives and opinions on things that [the outlet] just didn't really pay attention to [in the past] (Interviewee 11)

In this case, recruitment was not only premised on an ethical commitment to diversity, but also a recognition that the employment of Indigenous journalists could deliver Indigenous perspectives, and improve coverage by bringing cultural knowledge to reporting. Here, we can see how such moments can contribute to Indigenous journalists' aspirations for their work. Another journalist, Interviewee 7, discussed how #BlackLivesMatter provided a moment where they could hold governments to account. However, while such comments are indicative the interviewees' aspirations for change, others observed that these windows of opportunity tend to close. As Interviewee 3 recognised, moments where change is promised without greater attention to structural reform can contribute to both frustration and the perpetuation of an unsafe working environment. This issue was also strongly articulated by Interviewee 10:

> because that's all they do is just recruit, recruit, recruit. Young people are the cheapest thing going… they're setting young people up to deal with stuff that they've not signed up for, and they have no idea what they're walking into. … all have work trauma because of it.

This critique of diversity practices as an exploitative one raises the question of whose interests they ultimately serve. In the next two sections, we delve deeper into the traumatic consequences of the aim to 'recruit, recruit, recruit' while deeper structural and epistemological forms of racism remain unaddressed, ignored or normalised.

Tokenism, "Cultural Load" and Racialised Exploitation

Bargallie (2020), in her analysis of structural racism in the Australian public service, identified a range of microaggressions experienced by Indigenous workers, many of which were also experienced by our interviewees. Primary among these was a sense of Indigeneity being tacitly, if not explicitly, positioned through "deficit" frames of deficiency, failure and deviance (Gorski 2011; K. McCallum, Ryan, and Caffery 2022). This, Bargallie found, was manifest in a range of ways. These included assumptions that Indigenous workers lacked intelligence, the ability to perform professional tasks, and a devaluation of Indigenous cultural knowledge and expertise. At the same time, paradoxically, Indigenous workers are tasked with both the load of being what Bargallie describes as "the native informant," who is "expected to continually provide cultural advice to culturally ignorant co-workers" (2020, 104), as well as being presented with the "burden" of representing highly diverse Indigenous cultures to non-Indigenous audiences. A particularly injurious aspect of this paradox is that, despite such substantial challenges, a broader devaluation of Indigenous culture contributes to assumptions that performing such tasks represents an easy ride. Interviewee 10 described this experience:

> People thinking that what I did was easy … Having to sit on all these committees that were just - didn't want to make any change. When you were with other non-Indigenous

colleagues and people in power, people who were managers, who just weren't understanding what it was that you were saying, when they were all about recruitment rather than retention, or that they needed to resource things properly.

Sue et al. (2007, 273-274) define microaggressions as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative racial slights and insults." Here, Interviewee 10 refers to what could be described as a "microinvalidation" (Sue 2010). Sue (2010) explains that microinvalidations are highly pernicious and often present daily, meaning those faced with them must not only deal with the acts themselves but also the problem of how they should interpret what are often subtle slights, and how to react to them. Speaking out may lead to further negative consequences, while a decision not to may also lead to feeling angry, resentful and alienated. Sue's work shows how racial microaggressions effectively communicate to racialised workers that they are unwelcome, will be uncomfortable if they remain, and have limited opportunity for advancement. While individual slights may appear small, their systemic, chronic, persistent and ongoing nature can result in major impacts on mental and physical health, and contribute to the denial of opportunities for workplace inclusion and advancement.

Despite being faced with such daily slights, the Indigenous journalists interviewed also explained that they were also required to shoulder the burden of "diversity work" that was also experienced as devalued. An approach to newsroom diversity that centres on recruitment alone, without any broader commitment to or resourcing of cultural change or support for Indigenous staff, rests on a simplistic assumption this will serve as a means of changing the culture of an organisation. This presents a double bind, whereby the same people whom prevalent norms and practices serve to exclude are presented with the task of somehow changing such norms and practices themselves. It is here where even well-intentioned diversity initiatives become *tokenistic*, as Indigenous employment represents the main, if not sole, substantive commitment to change pursued. Bargallie (2020) identifies such tokenism as another source of damaging microaggressions experienced by Indigenous workers, and argues that one of its pernicious impacts is that employees come to be viewed by some colleagues as "token hires." This contributes to a perspective that they have lesser merit than their non-Indigenous counterparts. The consequences of this were highlighted by Interviewee 3:

> There's a few incidents where I just felt really othered and I very much felt a sense, even though this wasn't my impression of how I got the job, very much felt a sense of that I was an Indigenous hire. That was really crushing, actually…. direct comments from particular people like, 'oh, well you're the Indigenous cadet.' Or 'you'll be fine because [you're Indigenous]' … I think people don't realise just how upsetting that can be. (Interviewee 3)

Such microinvalidations not only suggest that Indigenous staff have not achieved their position on merit, but also position Indigeneity itself as a source of privilege. This denies the existence of racism and invalidates the lived experience of racialised subjects, reproducing a racial status quo and "myth of meritocracy" (Sue 2010, 38-39).

This devaluing of Indigenous knowledge and community connections meant that Indigenous journalists were also sometimes seen as a ready resource for non-Indigenous

colleagues to exploit for their own benefit, interviewees explained. Interviewee 4, for example, described the experience of how non-Indigenous colleagues approached them for contacts:

> [Non-Indigenous journalists seem to assume] we have some magic way where we know each other and everything's good. I have to say often, yes, I know this person. Yes, this person is a long-term friend, but I'm not giving them your phone number. I'm not opening my contact book. Would you do that?…No. (Interviewee 4)

Interviewee 11, similarly, described a situation where, in 2022, colleagues frequently approached them for information and to increase their understanding of the proposal for an Indigenous Voice to Parliament that had developed following the 2017 National Constitutional Convention. Following the election of a new federal government in 2022, a commitment was made to hold a national referendum to determine whether a Voice would be enacted through a change to Australia's constitution. As they describe, as this became a major national issue, producing stories about the Voice became a far more competitive process. At this point, where their input into stories had previously been sought and credited, they were now increasingly sidelined:

> [You had] people recognise that they could gain prestige by reporting on this by becoming the person, the go to person. I was completely shouldered out of anything to do with the Voice. And that vacuum was occupied by all non-Indigenous people who I know for a fact four to six months earlier were asking me about what a Voice was, how it worked, where it came from, all that sort of stuff. And now they just…they do it and I don't get asked to participate, to look over it. To share a byline or anything because of that. As I said, they have recognised that they can make their name or they can, you know – acquire professional capital by being the person that is reporting on that, and it doesn't matter if they didn't know anything about it not so long ago. (Interviewee 11)

For Interviewee 11, this experience was both deeply offensive and hurtful, and contributed to a distrust of colleagues. They described how this led them to avoid the office or socialising with colleagues, contributing to an increased isolation in their workplace:

> I don't talk to them because…they're looking to take whatever they can from me. So I'll just keep my head down going to the office….and work quietly and then leave. (Interviewee 11)

We found that interviewees, often ready to embrace the opportunity presented in their recruitment, found themselves bearing the brunt of change in reporting and newsroom culture. Positioned as the 'native informants', in Bargallie's words, multiple journalists felt obliged to compensate for the lack of knowledge, connections or sensitivity of non-Indigenous colleagues. This included requests from those whose anxiousness to "get it right" often involved placing a burden of consultation on an Indigenous staff member. As one interviewee explained:

> I'll still get people calling me. Can you look over this? Just to check for whatever. Whether it be you know, some faux pas in terms of its wording, or you know, 'Are we allowed to show this photograph or is it going to be, you know, offensive to Aboriginal communities? Or whatever. So I'll still get asked to do things like that, but I don't get any extra money for any of that. (Interviewee 11)

This meant stepping in to counsel non-Indigenous colleagues whose willingness to "do the right thing" was often hindered by a sense of paralysis and a fear of making mistakes. As Interviewee 9 commented: "They [non-Indigenous journalists] want to do the right thing, but they get so nervous…that they don't do it properly."

The concept of "cultural load" has been used to refer to specific Indigenous-related work that only Indigenous employees are tasked with, including demands such as educating non-Indigenous colleagues, and the expectation that Indigenous individuals speak on behalf of Indigenous people (Australian Public Service Commission 2023). The interviewees expressed that these expectations were ingrained, while at the same time invisible. They were not reflected in their position descriptions, workloads or pay arrangements. Such demands were not specific to editorial or managerial positions but were expectations placed on reporters at all levels. However, such expectations, implicitly informed by assumptions of racial hierarchy and the devaluing of Indigenous expertise, suggest practices of racialised exploitation that go beyond current definitions of cultural load. In a recent review of work conditions of Aboriginal people in the Victorian public service Bargallie, Carlson and Day argue that cultural load, and related concepts like "identity strain," can suggest that Indigenous cultures are the "load." They instead reframe demands on Indigenous staff as "additional, often forced, unpaid labour" that is "rarely acknowledged, let al.one remunerated" (Bargallie, Carlson, and Day 2023, 12). They reposition the problem as a racialised, industrial injustice with unique dimensions for Indigenous people and particularly women. As they note, and as our interviewees articulated, "many do this with the hope it will make a difference to Aboriginal people and communities" (Bargallie, Carlson, and Day 2023, 14); fuelling the sense of duty to carry out the work, and live out the promise of their recruitment to the organisation. The demand to adequately recognise this work, and to compensate for it, was one solution advocated:

> If you aren't confident and you want to involve Indigenous consultants or other – you want to go and ask advice from the Aboriginal journo about how to do it, you pay those people for their time and you find an arrangement that's mutually beneficial. (Interviewee 3)

Compounding Trauma

In recent years, an increasing number of studies have focused on the long-standing problem of the impact that reporting on traumatic and triggering events can have on journalists' mental health (Macdonald, Hodgins, and Saliba 2017; Ogunyumi & Akanuwe, n.d.; Wake, Smith, and Ricketson 2023). Such risk is particularly heightened for Indigenous journalists, given the documented impacts of "intergenerational trauma…rooted in colonisation of and dispossession from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lands and in subsequent (and continued) oppressive colonising policies and practices" (Darwin et al. 2023, 5). The legacy of such historical practices contributes to increased risk of "trauma-on-trauma" (McCallum 2021). These factors have been shown to increase the prevalence of mental ill-health among Indigenous Australians (Darwin et al. 2023). The particular risk this presents to Indigenous journalists was discussed by several of our interviewees. Interviewee 3, for example, recounted that:

> [Another Aboriginal journalist] said, 'it's trauma on a deadline', which I thought was an incredibly good and insightful description of this job.

"Trauma" here refers to much content covered in Indigenous affairs reporting, which focuses not only on the contemporary "trauma-on-trauma" experienced within Indigenous Australia, but the continued impacts of settler colonial violence, including Indigenous deaths in custody and continued racially motivated attacks on Indigenous people. Murawi journalist Allan Clarke (2020) discussed the impact of long-term reporting on racial injustice following his decision to step away from the profession after a breakdown. Interviewee 10, likewise, spoke about the effect that the reporting of stories that held personal resonance:

> I got very triggered … but I just really had - I started getting - I guess it's anxiety. I don't even know what to call it because I've never had it. But I would have heart palpitations before going on air, and I had instances where going to sleep started to become a problem for me.

The personal nature of such reporting gained public visibility in November 2022 when Whadjuk Noongar journalist Neralda Jacobs spoke through tears when reporting on the murder of 15 year-old Cassius Turvey, who was attacked and beaten to death by vigilantes in Perth, in a racist killing that was also a case of mistaken identity (Fowler 2022). Turvey was Jacobs's cousin. The risks of trauma for Indigenous journalists reporting in Indigenous Affairs were strongly articulated by an Aboriginal journalist interviewed in another recent study:

> …you're reporting on your communities, you're reporting on your families, you're reporting on issues that impact you personally, impact your family personally. There is no objective disconnection from the events, you are in it and you are rehashing it and you are reliving it and you are re-traumatising yourself. (quoted in Valencia-Forrester et al. 2023, 51)

Other respondents in the same study questioned the adequacy of mental health support available to journalists. One recounted this was limited to three phone calls a year, which journalists were unwilling to take up because they felt it might be held against them as a sign of weakness (Valencia-Forrester et al. 2023, 41). This lack of support was also discussed by Interviewee 11, who told of their experience reporting on a truth-telling process into historical injustices experienced by First Peoples:

> After reporting on the [process] and particularly around the child protection/child removal system, which was fucking triggering for me, not a single inquiry from my manager or from editorial about how I'm going with it. So the onus really folded back on me just to take leave. I just didn't go into work for a week afterwards to get past it…A lot of those stories are - they are triggering. They are traumatising, they are resurfacing lived experiences. So there probably should be some acknowledgement of that within a workplace.

In addition to the traumas of reporting itself, Indigenous journalists also frequently become the target of racial abuse online simply for their visible existence, for representing Indigenous perspectives in public life, or both. The targeting of journalists online based on race, gender and sexuality has provided a strong focus of recent research in both industry and the academy (Posetti et al. 2021; Waisbord 2022). In 2023, this was highlighted when the prominent Wiradjuri journalist Stan Grant resigned

from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), following his targeting in other media outlets after his reporting of the Coronation of Charles III. In an article published in the wake of his resignation, Grant explained he had been relentlessly racially targeted online for mentioning the impacts of colonisation during the coverage, and that the ABC had failed to make a statement of public support for him during this period (Grant 2023). Carlson and Day (2023) have documented how Indigenous Australians experience virulent abuse online, characterising this as another form of settler colonial violence that contributes to ongoing trauma. Online abuse is a significant source of harm and trauma for Indigenous journalists which poses significant risks to wellbeing (Valencia-Forrester et al. 2023). Reciprocally, Valencia-Forrester et al.'s work and Grant's experience emphasise that a dimension of the problem lies in the newsroom itself, which makes journalists into targets of such abuse, and often also fails to provide support in the event of it happening. Indigenous and other "diverse" journalists frequently report their abuse is seen as "not a big deal," leaving them feeling "isolated and alone" (Valencia-Forrester et al. 2023, 46).

White News Agendas

In addition to experiences of microaggressions, racialised exploitation and experienced of compounding trauma, interviewees also suggested that despite the initial enthusiasm for the perspectives they could bring to the newsrooms, their journalistic practices and they themselves were simultaneously devalued for their failure to conform to the stubborn norms of white news agendas and values. As discussed previously, journalism's power to define and shape knowledge is rooted in the modernist values of the twentieth century, themselves rooted in colonialism and white supremacy (Callison and Young 2020; Clark 2022). Determinations of whose values, perspectives and lives are worthwhile have been shaped by these roots, engendering a monocultural western lens (Ross 2023) that largely approaches stories from a "white standpoint," assuming a "white audience" (Thomas et al., 2019).

This has particular consequences for news practices. In a recent study of the National Apology to victims of child sexual abuse in Australia in 2018, Dreher and Waller (2022, 1688) argue that "the operations of routine professional news practices and news values" work to normalise "everyday white supremacy and settler amnesia." Persistent notions of objectivity and balance continue to haunt newsroom practice, and express themselves in ways that neutralise white subjectivity while making Indigenous and other subjectivities and standpoints, and by extension people, suspicious (Clark 2022). In newsrooms, this can lead to assumptions that Indigenous journalists are unable to practice objectivity while non-Indigenous white journalists are. Valencia-Forrester et al. (2023) report how an Indigenous journalist was removed from presenting a story she pitched and researched, and the story given to a white male colleague. Other journalists similarly recalled "their professionalism and objectivity is still often questioned when reporting on specific issues." Interviewee 11 expressed the frustration:

> You know, for decades, Aboriginal people are [deemed] incapable of reporting on Aboriginal affairs because they're too tied up in it … that establishes what is known as this credibility deficit. If an Aboriginal person says it, it's, you know, it's sus. You can't

report on it unless it's verified, whereas [when] a non-Indigenous person says it, they are credible.

This expresses how racialised structures are expressed in everyday newsroom decision-making, themselves shaped by political economic structures. In 2000, Cottle detailed how racial inequalities come to be reproduced in newsrooms. He focused on a range of production factors that contribute to "racialised and racist media representations" (16), going beyond individual attitudes and prejudices to consider: the ethnic composition of newsrooms; processes of socialisation and training of journalists; how competition and marketplace pressures contribute to agendas and perspectives that reflect the interests and opinions of a white elite; the routine dependence of other racially structured institutional sites of social power and authority as sources of stories and perspectives; and the role played by deep-seated news values that position ethnic minorities in othering, sensationalised and limited ways (21). Notably, Cottle's work emphasises how these influences come to be reproduced through the competitive, relational dynamics of newsrooms themselves where career advancement depended on "conformity to a news policy and news organization goals, not their disruption" (2000, 19).

The consequences of these everyday routines and practices were noted by some interviewees, who could be made to feel that they were impinging on other colleagues' journalistic independence by raising issues or proposing changes to practices. For example, Indigenous journalists' critique of racism in news was responded to in defensive ways:

> It's also because the newsroom knows everything. They just don't think they have anything to ever learn … if you speak out, you can expect to have a target on your back. (Interviewee 10)

The journalists reflected how this was reproduced in enduring pressures to conform to journalistic types that were rooted in upper class white male norms, reflecting the replication of norms of social power across political institutions. For example, in voice training:

> I was told … I have a higher pitch, I sound young, I sound female, and I have a certain accent that makes it clear that I've been undereducated, I would probably lose authority when I'm talking to my audience… (interviewee 1)

Such pathologisation of difference across multiple identity signifiers delivers a message that both communicates non-belonging and an expectation of assimilation to the dominant culture. Interviewee 4 combats such exclusion through mockery, declaring that they found their news organisation to be "one of the most white, uptight, ridiculously white places I've ever been."

The cultural whiteness of the institution was amplified in the continuing salience of marketplace agendas, driven by assumptions of white audiences, which were seen to create an enduring pressure to generate "hooks" for Indigenous stories. The growing demand to conform to digital norms and make decisions based on metrics, clicks and popularity often undercut attempts to take more systemic approaches and to consider the difficult work of historicising and contextualising in Indigenous news

reporting. This meant, as one journalist explained, a consistent lack of interest and engagement in major concerns in Indigenous affairs, such as proposals for treaty and truth-telling commissions in some states and territories, which were considered too complex, niche, uninteresting or unmarketable:

> It's the same old news practices that the newsroom's looking for anything that's gonna have a hook for the audience and…it's not providing much in the way of understanding of the nuances of any story. And any story that contains or is difficult to tell that contains these elements, they're not interested in, so there's still, you know, demands on time, lack of resources, right throughout the newsroom that defines the sorts of product that they're putting out for readers. That extends into Aboriginal affairs. And just a lack of understanding across why a…truth and justice commission into the impacts of colonialism would be a thing. (Interviewee 11)

Recalling Douglas's reference to the journalistic habitus of the Indigenous journalist—often informed by a desire to improve representation and help secure justice—what we see at work here is how it runs into the "doxa" of the newsroom and its racialised structures, informed and reproduced by obstinate processes, routines and values that Cottle's analysis identified over two decades ago.

Conclusion

Despite the increased prevalence of a digitally-facilitated "diagnostic" to expose its shortcomings, critical scholars have argued that to date journalism has largely failed to contend with historical and ongoing harms caused by "colonial, racist and gendered structures and power relations" that continue to be manifest in its material institutions and practices (Callison and Young 2021, 1225). The journalists that contributed to our analysis overwhelmingly shared a critique of journalism's colonial roots and the growing desire to reckon with them. However, as a response, diversity initiatives were, they recounted, largely restricted to hiring and the sponsorship of occasional and often voluntary "awareness" training workshops. They saw such measures as being of little value, precisely because they did little to address the deeply structural problems they confronted. We contend that such meagrely resourced initiatives represent fig leaves that do little to disguise the emperor's new clothes of "diversity." Our analysis suggests that in the digital era, there is continuity in the racial structures of newsrooms that requires a more substantial epistemological and structural shift within journalism than has thus far been enacted.

Our analysis also suggests that shifts in hiring represent a mere tokenism that can contribute to the reproduction of racialised microaggressions and the devaluation of Indigenous expertise in the newsroom. Interviewees observed practices that promote racialised exploitation, in the form of the additional labour of both diversity work itself, and the provision of "cultural expertise" that is exploited by non-Indigenous colleagues that are unscrupulous, unthinking, or both. Such approaches provide little if any substantial support to journalists, who are deployed to cover traumatic issues precisely because of their personal knowledge of and connections to them while, as public figures, they are exposed to online abuse. Despite being hired in response to often digitally-fuelled critique of newsroom practices and often through the initiative of well-intended colleagues promising change, Indigenous journalists find themselves

being confronted on a daily basis by newsrooms that dismiss their agendas, experience and aspirations because these do not conform to news values underpinned by commercialism and a normative white supremacism, serving to reproduce a sense that both they and their knowledges are held in little value. The feelings of distrust and alienation this engenders were pointedly expressed by Interviewee 11:

> That's you're kinda left with, the sense of they don't want you there. That's what they want. They wanna break you. So you fuck off and you're not around anymore.

Considering the findings that we have presented and the exclusionary structures and practices they reveal, such an interpretation appears not only unsurprising but quite rational, and it is easy to see how demotivation, demoralisation, distrust, anger and unresolved trauma may compound on an individual level.

On an institutional level, this study also points to structures and practices that continue to prevent Indigenous journalists from attaining positions of power and status in order to contribute to cultural change. We have suggested in this article that, despite our concerns about the ways in which it is manifest, we do not entirely dismiss the potential of diversity initiatives to make positive contributions. As Valencia-Forrester et al. (2023) note, work environments that seek to regularly monitor and provide reporting mechanisms to track racist incidents do contribute to engendering safer workplaces than those that do not. This serves to reiterate Ahmed's argument that the promotion of diversity must necessarily include, rather than negate, a focus on the problem of racism. Too frequently, however, a focus on diversity that rests on increasing numbers without substantial shifts in newsroom cultures and practices not only reproduces inequalities rather than addressing them, but exacerbates problems. A "paradox" of diversity occurs where institutions recruit ambitious journalists with a promise of change in the profession, then primarily burdens these same journalists with the task of that change. In the process those journalists become the problem when they seek to fulfil the promise of their role and challenge the enduring racialised cultures and epistemic structures of the newsroom. This not only fails to produce change, but exposes journalists to traumatic experiences, online abuse without safeguards, unsafe and unsupported work environments and, ultimately, the long-term impacts of psychological harm.

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