‘Is it justice, or just us?’ Sourcing practices in radical and local media coverage of an Aboriginal death in police custody

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Abstract
In 1993 in Brisbane, Australia, an 18-year-old Aboriginal man was arrested by police for disorderly conduct in an inner-city suburb. In the 21 minutes it took for the police to take the young offender to the local watch-house, he had died in the back of the police van. The untimely death of Daniel Yock became a trigger for the re-invigoration of the Aboriginal ‘deaths in custody’ movement, a political cause which had previously received significant public attention through mainstream and alternative news media coverage during a Royal Commission into the issue in the late-1980s. Since the Royal Commission finished its investigations in 1989, a further 51 Aboriginal people had died in police custudy – Yock was the 52nd in 1993. Altercations between local Indigenous groups and police followed Yock’s death, political rallies were called and government reports produced. Rallying cries from the Aboriginal community at thousands-strong protests asked – ‘Is it justice, or just us?’ This paper examines the sources used in the news media coverage of the death of Daniel Yock to consider which voices are most prominent in the representation/s of the event itself, and the broader social movement surrounding deaths in custody in the early 1990s. This study extends the treatment of the source to consider the approaches of Indigenous and other alternative newspaper outlets alongside mainstream metropolitan and rural newspapers. This is significant because news sources are an under-used element in media analysis (Simpson 2012) and there has been particularly limited study of the ways alternative, community and/or Indigenous news media use sources to distinguish their practice. An unexpected component of this study has highlighted important nuances in our understanding of ‘community’, ‘local’ and alternative media which deserve further attention from media researchers.

Keywords: Indigenous peoples Australia; radical media; community media; deaths in custody; news sourcing

Introduction

Australia’s Indigenous peoples – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders – have long held a marginalised position since the nation was settled by Europeans in 1788. In the 225 intervening years, the Indigenous population’s status in terms of life expectancy, infant mortality, socio-economic status and employment rates fell well below the general population (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2011). One of the important markers of social standing can also be found in crime statistics, and it is here that we see significant differences between non-Indigenous and Indigenous populations in our

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country – Indigenous Australians represent 2.5 per cent of the 23 million-strong Australian population yet they are significantly over-represented in the criminal justice system. Statistics from the 2011 *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* report show Indigenous people are incarcerated at 14 times the rate of non-Indigenous people, and this increases to 23 times the rate when we consider juveniles (Steering Committee 2011). That is, Indigenous Australians comprise just under 3 per cent of our population yet comprise more than a quarter -- 27 per cent -- of our prison population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013). In 1987, a Royal Commission was announced into Aboriginal deaths in custody following a series of deaths of mainly Aboriginal men either in prison, or while in police custody after arrest. Indeed, at the time of the Royal Commission 99 deaths had been reported between 1980-87, and all the deaths were investigated as part of the Commission which operated between 1987-1989. Its overall findings were that no charges could be laid against specific police officers (despite the protests of the Indigenous community), although Commissioner Hal Wootten did recommend that several of the deaths be referred on to authorities to determine if further action should be taken. Nothing came of this. The report did confirm that there was a link between poor police behaviour and Aboriginal deaths in custody. That is, Aboriginal people were more likely to be arrested for minor offences such as public drunkenness, and obscenity, than members of the non-Indigenous community, and it was in many cases such as this that highly intoxicated people died in police custody (Johnston 1991a, p. 22-25). There were also documented cases of officers using stronger force than necessary in carrying out a number of arrests, but no definite allegations of misconduct or assault were ever blamed for individual deaths (Nagle and Summerrell 2002). When the Royal Commission finally released its report in 1991, improved training methods were implemented within many of Australia's police forces, including cross-cultural training; and avenues alternative to arrest were encouraged in minor cases of public drunkenness, obscenity and other incidences such as 'resisting arrest'. Importantly, the Commission also found that media portrayals of Indigenous people had marginalized this group to a significant extent, impacting upon their ability to take part in mainstream society, to be educated, to gain employment, and so on. Media reports about Indigenous issues which included very little Indigenous voice were also identified as a key reason why Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people felt excluded from the main conversations occurring about their communities and their lives – and their deaths (Johnston, 1991b, p. 133-134).

The Royal Commission emerged following significant pressure from both the Indigenous community, juvenile workers and prison advocates who continued to report high levels of death and trauma among incarcerated Aboriginal people. Certainly, a social movement had developed around the issue of deaths in custody and this movement became publicly visible each time a new death occurred. It was a part of the broader struggle for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land rights, which had gained significant momentum as a political cause since the mid-1960s. The struggle for land rights in Australia can be paralleled with the resurgence of First Nations' struggles in Canada and the United States, and indeed the fertile 1960s period saw many Australian Aboriginal activists draw on the campaigns of both the Native Americans, and African-American activists such as Malcolm X (Foley 2001). As the years wore on following the Royal Commission, the initial impetus of the recommendations which held hope for significant changes to both police and media practices in dealing with Indigenous people and their issues dissipated. So, by the time of young Daniel Yock's death in 1993, Aboriginal community members' anger boiled over in response to the fact that, despite the millions of dollars poured into researching, understanding, and mitigating deaths in custody, one of their young people could still die in such circumstances.

This paper examines the media's treatment of the death of Daniel Yock, and in particular the sources used by the news media to report on Yock's death and the protests that came

afterwards. We wish to examine both mainstream and alternative coverage of this issue in a variety of newspaper publications. We achieve this through an analysis of coverage in the weeks after Yock's death, and again six months later when a statutory body established to deal particularly with police and political misconduct (the Criminal Justice Commission) released its final report into the circumstances surrounding Yock's death. Our aim is not only to consider the use of sources but to also interpret how different mastheads within a variety of media sub-sectors treat the issue. We do this to illuminate some of the nuances of local, alternative, and Indigenous media practice and in so doing, to contribute to current debates about the different roles these diverse media forms fulfill.

While this death and the ensuing media attention occurred more than 20 years ago now, the issue of Aboriginal deaths in custody remains ever-present and therefore a subject that different disciplinary areas – including media analysis – must continue to unpack. This paper emerges from a much larger ARC-funded project which investigates community representations of the Queensland land rights movement, both from the perspective of the community activists involved and their media which flowered as each campaign grew.

News sources and Indigenous voices in the media

There is ample research in Australia critiquing the mainstream media's portrayal of Indigenous people and the impact these representations have on establishing a 'common sense' understanding of Indigenous issues and events (e.g. Langton 1993; Mickler 1998; Meadows 2001; Molnar and Meadows 2001; Hartley & McKee 2000; Forde et al 2009; Burrows 2009). Meadows (2001), in his analysis of media coverage surrounding the Australian Bicentenary celebrations in 1988 and the pioneering 1992 Mabo judgement (which, for the first time, recognized in Australian law the existence of Indigenous people at the time of settlement, and therefore their natural title to land), notes the role Australian journalism has played in 'creating and sustaining the current environment of uncertainty and division in Australian race relations through its systematic management of information' (Meadows 2001, p. 7). In an earlier study, van Vuuren and Meadows (1998) also emphasise the impact of dominant media structures on misrepresenting Indigenous peoples in Australia.. Indeed, during the Daniel Yock case, the statutory authority which regulated broadcasting in Australia, the Australian Broadcasting Authority, upheld a public complaint and found that the commercial Channel 7 nightly news had used commentary and footage in a way that portrayed Aboriginal people as "untrustworthy, aggressive and threatening and the community is justified in being wary of them", thus inciting contempt (ABA 1995)).

News sources – those organisations, people, publications and documents that provide information to journalists – play an important role in how stories are told, how groups within society are represented and how information is managed in the public eye. Reese (1994, p. 87) describes news sources as the basic building blocks of news structure, emphasising 'no analysis of news media content is complete without a close look at the sources of that content'. Sources are important because they can 'exert an effective control over the flow of information entering particular arenas of the public sphere' (Manning 2001, p. 147). Tiffen et al (2014, p. 375) argued in their international comparative study of news content and sourcing that 'the study of source structures, relationships and activities -- in all their complexity -- remains central to understanding news content'. The person, or institution, provided with a voice is of primary importance when evaluating how news is constructed. This includes examining who gets to speak, who achieves the pre-eminent placement within the story, who is given more space, whose opinions are valued and who is given more direct and privileged access (Conboy 2007). Focusing on sources highlights that much of the actual 'power' of media comes from its ability to 'amplify the views of certain powerful sources' (Reese 1994,

p. 87). Hall et al (1978) also identify the privileged access of elite sources to media; and the impact this has on the way coverage of certain issues is shaped.

Studies of Australian media have found that elite sources enjoy a privileged status as news sources, especially those representing government (Simpson 2012; Burrows 2004; Meadows, Hippocrates and van Vuuren, 1997; Sercombe 1995). Burrows' (2004) analysis of Corroboree 2000 — a national reconciliation event designed to improve relations between black and white Australians — found some improvement in reportage but noted a continuing lack of context, a tendency toward 'adversarial reporting' and identified a continuing pattern of poor sourcing of Indigenous comment. When Meadows, Hippocrates and van Vuuren (1997) had earlier analysed newspaper and commercial television coverage of a series of Aboriginal deaths in custody and land rights rallies they found Indigenous sources were under-represented and the stories lacked context around the reasons for the march, and the arguments put forward by the protesters. Overall, this study which carried out a discourse analysis of both television news scripts and image and newspaper coverage found the daily *Courier-Mail* newspaper, with a specialist Indigenous Affairs reporter, offered a far more balanced and contextualized version of the deaths in custody protest, and the broader land rights issues surrounding it, than either commercial or public broadcasting television news. Meadows, Hippocrates and van Vuuren concluded that:

> '[t]his case study revealed all too clearly the superficiality of television news coverage. It revealed an almost complete absence of Indigenous voices with selected grabs serving to reinforce the framework of 'violence' set up to explain the events as news. There was an almost complete lack of context for the march in TV news coverage. Important explanation of background that would have had a significant impact on how the stories might be 'read' by TV audiences was missing' (1997, p. 84).

Bacon (2005) also provides a comprehensive analysis of media reportage of Aboriginal deaths in custody over a 20-year period, finding that too often the Australian news media coverage 'faded away' or failed to give comprehensive coverage in the aftermath of the Royal Commission – despite the alarming statistics which showed Aboriginal people continued to die in police and prison custody.

Beyond mainstream news media sourcing practices

While other studies (see for example Burrows 2004; Meadows, Hippocrates and van Vuuren 1997) have focused on Indigenous sources in coverage of Indigenous issues, these have focused on mainstream news media. This study extends the treatment of the source to consider the approaches of Indigenous and other alternative newspaper outlets alongside mainstream metropolitan and rural newspapers. This is significant because news sources are a largely neglected research field in media analysis (Simpson 2012) and there has been even more limited study of the ways rural (or 'community'), Indigenous and/or alternative/radical news media utilise sources within the context of traditional news reporting.

Carpenter (2008) found that traditional journalists were more likely to rely on routine external sources such as government and business organisations as sources, and were significantly more likely to feature an official source – that is, a person who officially represents a recognised organisation or other legitimate body. Comparative non-traditional journalists were less likely to be influenced by routines' and tended not to rely on official sources as much as their mainstream counterparts, partly because they were less reliant on daily news-gathering routines (2008, p. 541).

Lauterer (2006, p. 1) defines the community newspaper as 'a publication with a circulation under 50,000, serving people who live together in a distinct geographical space with a clear

local-first emphasis on news, features sport and advertising'. He considers community journalism the 'heartbeat of American journalism…Journalism in its natural state' due to its focus on local people and community life (2006, p. 1-2). This definition aligns with the local regional/rural newspapers included in this study. Such publications deserve individual treatment as, while they may be similar to metropolitan newspapers in terms of their commercial model, circulation is more volatile at community newspapers, and it is possible the journalists working for these papers operate in 'environments so different (from large papers) that they probably need to follow different rules' (Meyer in Weinhold 2008, p. 480).

Pretty (1993) and Simpson (2012) both found regional/rural or local newspapers rely on easily accessible sources who are less costly and considered reliable and trustworthy by journalists. This reliance assists with the maintenance of consensus within the communities and demographic areas they serve, which is a significant concern to smaller publications (Pretty 1993). Simpson (2012, p.88) also found that sources used in these newspapers 'could not be considered diverse enough to be broadly representative of the community voice' with elite, particularly government, sources, enjoying a privileged status.

Considering the second category of media analysed in this study, Indigenous Australians have established their own media in response to more than 200 years of problematic mainstream media representation of Indigenous affairs, characterised, at best, by a silencing of Indigenous voices and, at worst, by a damaging misrepresentation of Australia's Indigenous peoples. Research in this area (Langton & Kirkpatrick 1979; Rose 1995; Burrows 2004; Meadows 2001; Molnar and Meadows 2001; Forde, Foxwell & Meadows 2009; Rennie and Featherstone 2008) has identified this sector as a 'first level of service' for Indigenous communities – the primary source of information apart from word of mouth. Lauterer's definition of community journalism certainly extends to communities 'of interest' rather than just geographical communities -- he considers this a 'more liberal' definition of community journalism, but appropriate nevertheless (2006, p. 1).

Importantly, the Indigenous broadcasting sector also offers a cultural bridge between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Burrows (2010) identifies Aboriginal newspapers and news magazines produced since the early 1900s as evidence of the development of the Indigenous public sphere in Australia, a place for community members to express their voice on key issues, and an attempt to infiltrate those issues and perspectives through to the mainstream public sphere debates.

Finally, the term, 'alternative media' is a broad term that covers a wide variety of media sub-sectors. Chris Atton (2001) offers the term 'alternative' media as an extension to earlier interpretations of non-mainstream media forms such as 'radical' and 'independent' media (Downing 1984, Forde 1999). Atton defines alternative and radical media as not limited to political and resistance media but which may also account for newer cultural forms such as hybrid forms of electronic communication and zines. While the term 'alternative', adopted by Atton, is relevant to the organisations we examine in this paper, the 'alternative' media of concern in this paper are more in tune with the definition of radical media from Downing (1984, 2001).

Downing (2001) uses the term radical media to describe alternative media in terms of its opposition to hegemonic power structures. He refers to radical media as the media of social movements — dynamic expressions of resistance — as opposed to more enduring or stable institutions such as parties or unions. Indeed, the broader struggle for Indigenous land rights and justice in Australia resonates strongly with Downing's identified underpinnings of radical media and activism. He notes that radical media activists have very often experienced state repression. While Aboriginal activists operating in a 'first-world' advanced democracy like Australia may not have experienced bombings or executions, historical accounts of police surveillance, jailing, beatings, threats and harassment are littered through the experiences of

many Indigenous activists operating in Australia from the 1930s on (Foley 2001; Sykes 1998; Burrows 2009).

Langlois and Dubois (2005) start to move even closer to the media analysed in this study– a sub-sector of alternative media that they term 'autonomous media'. The main purpose of autonomous media is to '...amplify the voices of people and groups normally without access to media' (2005, p. 9); and to work autonomously from dominant institutions such as the state, corporations, the church, the military and so on.

Alternative media, in its many forms, has received little academic attention on the specific use of sourcing. While there is ample scholarly writing about the theory and histories of alternative media, little work has been done to showcase the everyday routines and processes of alternative journalism, as a set of practical possibilities for news reporting and feature writing. One exception is Harcup's (2011) case study of alternative print publication *Leeds Other Paper (LOP)*, and its coverage of the Miners' strikes in the mid 1980s. Harcup found a 'rich record of reporting and of direct and sustained journalistic contact and engagement with a wider range of sources, most notably the so-called ordinary' (Harcup 2011, p. 35). Sixty-eight per cent of *LOP* stories in his study cited sources 'typically rendered 'voiceless' in much of the mainstream media: that is, the 'ordinary' men and women involved in the strike in the villages, on the picket links, in the kitchens and in the support groups' (Harcup 2011, p. 31). These sources, Harcup (2011) argues, gave readers a much more rounded picture of life in striking communities than was available in mainstream media. Similarly, Forde's work examining alternative journalism practices in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States identifies a series of 'professional traits' which characterise the practices of alternative journalists (2011, p. 174ff). This includes a range of activities, including sourcing practices, which encourage readers to participate; which prioritise community-based or local news over other content; and which enable alternative journalists to better represent 'the unrepresented, the voiceless, the downtrodden'.

Method

This study used content analysis, a 'recognised systematic method of determining media content and practice' (Hansen et al 1998), to categorise and count sources and examine a number of key features of these sources. In a manner similar to Simpson (2012), importance was placed on the types of sources that were used. This reflects an approach fundamentally different to many content analyses which tend to organise coverage by issue or topic. The data will be used to explore how sources are used by both mainstream and alternative publications, with comparisons carried out across all newspapers.

This study uses content analysis to examine the following questions:

- What sources were most frequently cited when reporting on the Daniel Yock death in custody, and how do these sources compare across the different newspapers in the sample?
- How often did Indigenous sources appear, and how does this compare across the different media outlets in the sample?
- What do findings regarding the research questions above indicate about the historical way both radical and local media have covered social movements such as the Aboriginal deaths in custody movement?

The analysis focused on print newspapers, a 'key data source used in quantitative studies of collective action' (Wilkes and Ricard 2007, p. 231). Given that the case study occurred in 1993, the Internet was still in its infancy and online news sites were yet to be established as

part of the wider mediascape. Previous research suggests that broadcast news does not always align with newspaper coverage (Meadows, Hippocrates and van Vuuren 1997, Curran 1990), and as a result, it was decided to focus on newspapers alone which dominated the news environment – and public opinion – in a much clearer way in 1993 than might currently be the case.

To provide important background for our sample, some geographical context is important. Daniel Yock died in Brisbane, Queensland. Brisbane is Australia's third-largest city with a population of 2.24 million. His home community was Cherbourg, a small Aboriginal community of about 2000 people in Queensland's south-west region. The nearest large regional town is Toowoomba, population 110,000; with a closer country town called Kingaroy the nearest centre, with a population of about 10,000 people (Australian Government, 2013). In short, an appropriate analysis of the death of Daniel Yock needs to take account of Brisbane media coverage, as this is where the event occurred, along with regional and local media coverage due to Daniel Yock's connection to the communities of Cherbourg and other towns in the region known as the South Burnett.

The sample was comprised of six newspapers: the only state-wide daily newspaper, *The Courier Mail* (published six days a week); leading national Indigenous newspaper, *The Koori Mail (*published fortnightly); alternative publications *Green Left Weekly* (published weekly) and *Socialist Worker* (published monthly); and two regional newspapers, *The Toowoomba Chronicle* (published six days a week) and *The South Burnett Times* (published twice a week). These last two newspapers service the Cherbourg area where Daniel Yock was from, so it was expected these publications would have covered the story even though his death occurred in Brisbane.

Every edition of each newspaper was sampled during two specific timeframes. The first was from Monday, November 8, 1993 to Wednesday, December 1, 1993, to include coverage of the death in custody and the official rally against deaths in custody that was organised in response to Yock's death. The second time period was from Tuesday, April 5, 1994 to Thursday, April 21, 1994 to include coverage of the Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) findings following an investigation into the death. These dates take into consideration the different publication schedules of the newspapers. Coverage between these two timeframes was quite intermittent, focusing on the hearings for the CJC investigation, and was therefore considered outside of the scope of this research.

Stories from *The Courier Mail*, *The South Burnett Times* and *Toowoomba Chronicle* were manually identified using microfilm archives. *The Koori Mail* and *Green Left Weekly* both have online archives and articles from *The Socialist Worker* were identified and retrieved by a staff member from *Solidarity Sydney*, a more recent incarnation of *The Socialist Worker* that still holds the newspaper's archives. The data set comprised all formal news reports that directly related to Yock's death, representing 100 per cent of the coverage from the six newspapers at the time. Newspaper content identified as editorials, letters to the editors and commentary were excluded from the analysis as these formats do not tend to directly use sources, the major focus of the study (Klocker and Dunn 2003; Simpson 2012). In total, 60 articles were identified, collected and analysed. As expected, the vast majority of these articles (34) were published in the metropolitan daily newspaper, *The Courier Mail*. Nine were published in the small bi-weekly regional newspaper *South Burnett Times*, six in the daily regional the *Toowoomba Chronicle*, five in *The Socialist Worker*, three in *Green Left Weekly* and three in the fortnightly national Indigenous newspaper, *Koori Mail*.

A coding instrument was developed with content categories decided upon under the guidance of the research questions, but also based on a review of previous research and literature (Weekakoddyn 2009, State of the News Media 2011, Simpson 2012), as well as a pilot coding period of the actual data. The coding instrument included eight separate elements

for coding – technical details such as the newspaper name and date of edition, followed up by more descriptive information such as the number of the page the story appeared on, the number of paragraphs dedicated to the story, where sources appeared within each story, and the names of sources. Importantly, we coded to determine if a source was Indigenous or not, and within that categories of 'official' and 'community-based' Indigenous sources were made. One of the researchers conducted all of the coding following an initial pilot period which involved both authors, and as there was no latent content analysis that required significant subjective decision making it was decided not to implement an intra-coding reliability check during the analysis. Some cooperative discussion occurred around the use of 'official' and 'community-based' Indigenous sources as a category to acknowledge "the catch all term 'official sources' is problematic in that there is not always a sharp demarcation between official and non-official sources' (Miller 1993, p.402).

For the purposes of this study a source was defined as a person or organisation that was either directly quoted or paraphrased in the news story, in a manner that gave the impression that the source provided this information to the news outlet/journalist either directly through an interview, at a press conference or other public gathering or via a press release. The study was also concerned with the *type* of sources used in the story, so sources cited in each article were coded both by name and placed under one of 21 source type categories. Some source categories were listed as *a priori* categories in the coding instructions, such as Community Leader, or Police Spokesperson, while other categories arose from the data as emerging categories as the coding went along. These categories, such as Cherbourg Council Officials and Health Representatives, were added to the Coding Sheet after a pilot coding session of 10 per cent of the items included in the data set was conducted.

The second research question, relating to the volume of Indigenous sources, was answered by coding the sources cited in each unit of analysis as 'yes', 'no' or 'unknown'. Both researchers were familiar with many prominent Indigenous community members in and around the Brisbane area during the time period being investigated, and as such, some sources could be coded as Indigenous even if they were not specifically identified by the newspaper story. Sercombe (1995) also includes features such as Aboriginal names, references to people as Aboriginal in previous reporting and probable Aboriginal identity from appearance or address as identifiers that can be used for such coding although the authors note this is not always reliable. The Indigeneity of the various sources was therefore verified through overt identifiers in the story; the authors' personal knowledge of the local Aboriginal community; desk-based research on unknown source names; and contact with local Indigenous community members to determine if unknown sources were indeed Indigenous.

Findings

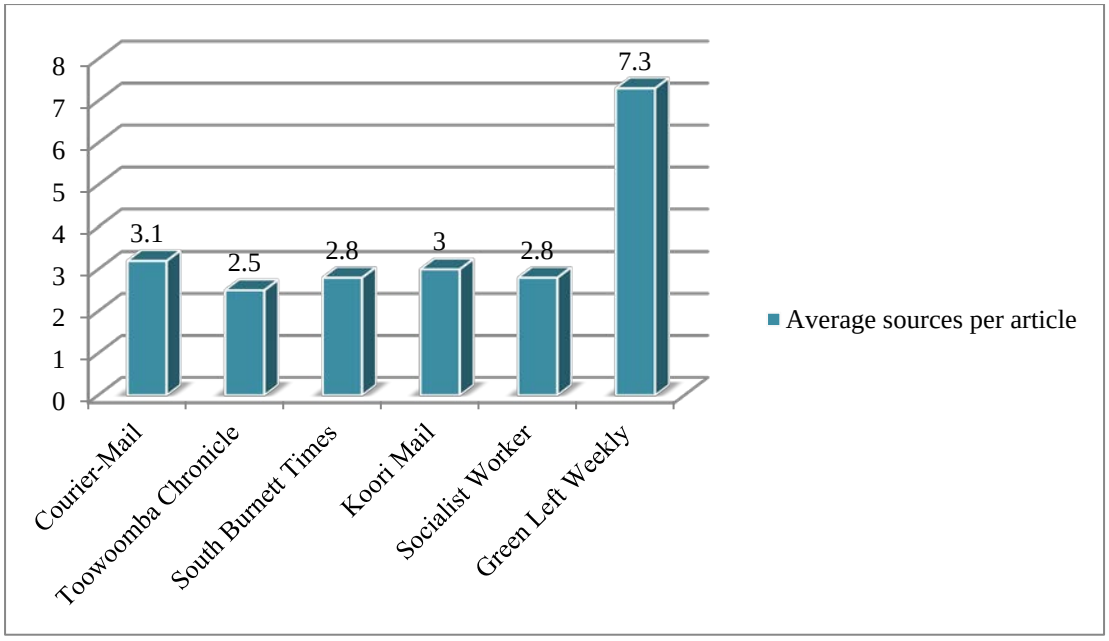
As expected, the largest number of stories appeared in the daily metropolitan newspaper, *The Courier-Mail*, published in the city where young Daniel Yock died. *The Courier-Mail* published 34 articles over the two selected time periods, out of a total of 60 articles examined. This is due to its regularity of publication – in comparison, the *South Burnett Times* only produced six issues in the timeframe examined, publishing a total of nine stories about the Yock issue. The *South Burnett Times* is a regional newspaper produced in Kingaroy, the town nearest Daniel Yock's home Aboriginal community of Cherbourg. The only Indigenous paper we have examined here, the national fortnightly *Koori Mail*, produced only two issues during the time period under examination which led to a total of three stories. Alternative newspaper *The Socialist Worker* published five stories, while its left-leaning alternative counterpart, *Green Left Weekly*, published three stories. Overall, we examined 49 stories covered by metropolitan or regional newspapers which generally fit into the

'mainstream' definition of news, and 11 stories published in the alternative and community media. Regularity of publication was identified as the key factor affecting the number of stories published.

It is important, at this point, to preface all of these findings within the limitations of the numbers of stories before us. While we collected all coverage within the given timeframe from all publications examined, due to the frequency of publication only small number of articles published in alternative and community newspapers, were analysed. Still, we feel the results presented here do show how this tragic event was covered by different media.

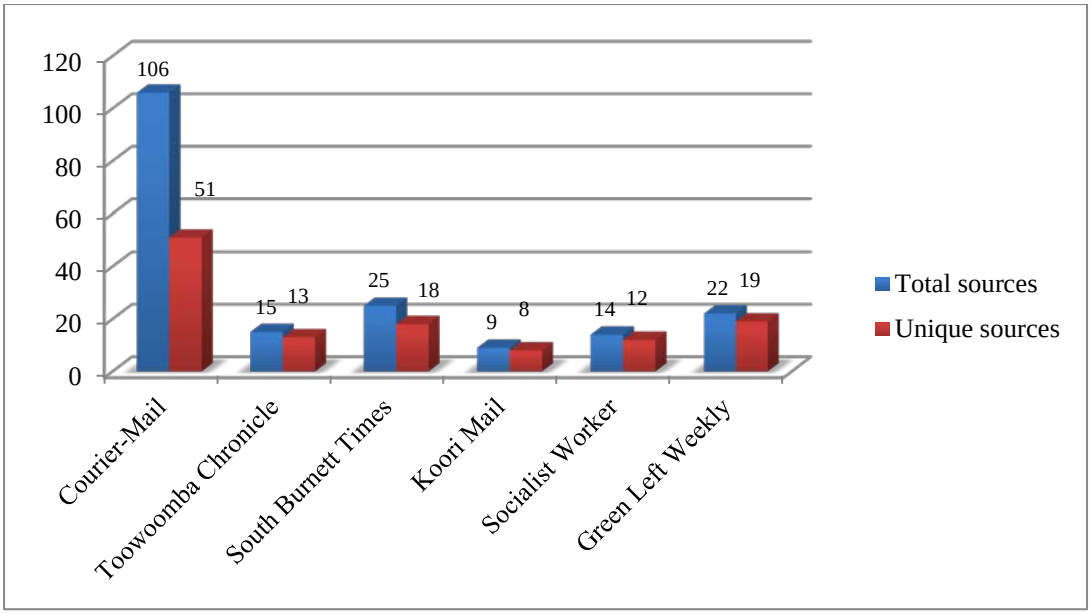
If we look at the number of sources used in each newspaper, the large number of stories in *The Courier-Mail* does, of course, reflect the largest number of sources used. A total of 106 sources were quoted in *The Courier-Mail's* 34 stories – although not all were 'unique' sources. We will look at unique sources shortly. The daily *Toowoomba Chronicle* presented 15 sources in its six news articles, and the bi-weekly *South Burnett Times* presented 25 sources in its nine news articles. The *Green Left Weekly* was notable for its large number of sources – 22 – in just three articles. In a comparative sense, the data around the average number of sources used per story gives more insight into the level of research and newsgathering that occurred in each of the publications. Overall, the left-wing *Green Left Weekly* was by far the most diverse in its use of sources (Figure 1). In only three stories published within the timeframe of this study, the *Green Left Weekly* cited 22 sources, reflecting an average of 7.3 sources per article. By comparison, the national Indigenous newspaper *Koori Mail* cited an average of three sources per story, while the metropolitan daily *The Courier-Mail* cited 3.1 sources per story. Apart from *Green Left Weekly,* all the other newspapers were about on-par in terms of the volume of sources used per story. Tiffen et al (2014, pp. 378-79) acknowledge that the range of sources used in news coverage is a fair indicator of attempts to 'balance' out certain perspectives and demonstrates more active form of newsgathering on the part of the journalist – wider sourcing certainly challenges Nick Davies' (2008) concerns about desk-based 'churnalism' which sees journalists passively disseminating already-packaged news.

Figure 1: Average number of sources per article



If we examine sourcing further, we can see that while *The Courier-Mail* cited 106 sources, only 51 of these were unique (see Figure 2). This reflected the highest incidence of 'repeat' sourcing – in the local *South Burnett Times*, for example, out of 25 total sources 18 were unique, and in the national Indigenous *Koori Mail*, out of nine sources, eight were unique. *The Courier-Mail* was notable for its repeated use of the same sources in different articles, day after day. This fits with what we know of professional journalistic routines, such as newsgathering and sourcing practices – a reliance on regular, official sources and the development of close journalist-source relationships that enable efficiencies in the newsgathering processes (McChesney 2004; Tiffen et al 2014). The daily publication schedule of *The Courier-Mail* would certainly anticipate some repetition of sources – but the repetition of sources found in this study surpasses the proportions identified in all other publications.

Figure 2: Number of sources, and use of unique sources

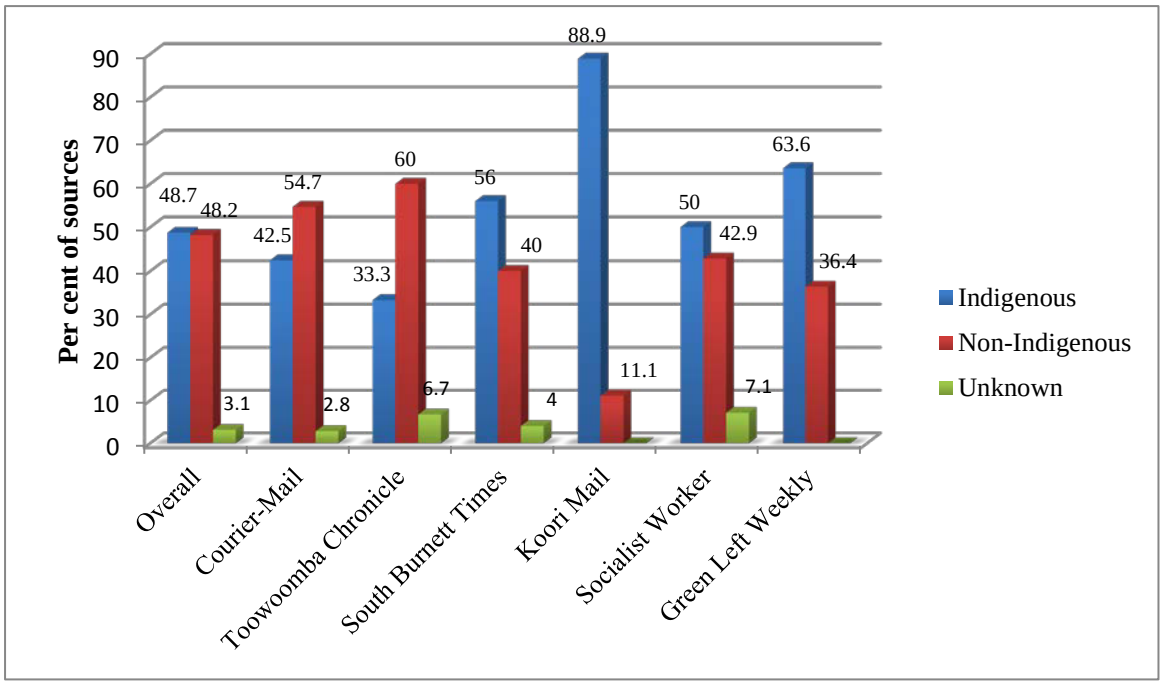


Indigenous sourcing was one of the key foci of this research – we wanted to examine the use of Indigenous sources, particularly given the findings of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody regarding the marginalisation of Indigenous voices and the propensity of mainstream news organisations to focus on official (usually non-Indigenous) sources (Johnston 1991b). If we look at both the mainstream and the alternative/community newspapers together, the sourcing is fairly evenly split – 48.7 per cent of all sources used were Indigenous, 48.2 per cent were non-Indigenous, and for the remaining 3 per cent (n=6) we were unable to discern Indigeneity. However, this balance regarding sourcing is due to sources used by the alternative press, the *Koori Mail*, *Socialist Worker* and *Green Left Weekly*, *and* the local (commercial) community newspaper, the *South Burnett Times*. Particularly notable here is that the large regional newspaper, the *Toowoomba Chronicle*, had the poorest proportion of Indigenous sources, with only one-third of sources quoted being Indigenous – and at least 60 per cent were non-Indigenous (one source could not be identified as Indigenous or non-Indigenous). *The Courier-Mail* also favoured non-Indigenous sources in this news event that centred on the Brisbane and Cherbourg Aboriginal communities – 54.7 per cent of their sources were non-Indigenous, and 42.5 per cent were Indigenous. Importantly, then, the local community newspaper, the *South Burnett Times* was the only non-alternative paper to favour Indigenous over non-Indigenous sources – 56 per cent Indigenous sources vs 40 per cent non-Indigenous (see Figure 3). We will discuss this in more detail below (see Figure 3).

The *South Burnett Times* is part of the diverse regional chain, Australian Provincial Newspapers (APN), produced in the medium-sized regional town of Kingaroy (and servicing a number of much smaller surrounding communities; Kingaroy's population is around 10,000). The *Toowoomba Chronicle* is a larger, daily newspaper servicing a nearby, albeit more substantial, regional centre. The contrast in the much higher use of Indigenous sources in the *South Burnett Times* might be evidence that the local ties forged by a community-based newspaper – whether not-for-profit, or commercially-based – do have an impact on the way they source and approach stories. While the *Toowoomba Chronicle* was more likely to follow the lead of *The Courier-Mail's* metropolitan reportage, the *South Burnett Times* was more likely to produce original stories, written by local journalists with unique interviews. Considered alongside other findings – the *South Burnett Times'* more comprehensive coverage (nine stories vs the *Chronicle's* six), a higher number of sources interviewed per story, and the fact that more of the *Burnett Times* sources were Indigenous – this does

indicate that, at least in sourcing practices, the local community newspaper *South Burnett Times* more closely reflects the practices of 'community' media, rather than the practices and content of its larger commercial counterparts in regional centres and metropolitan areas.

Figure 3: Use of indigenous and non-indigenous sources



The national Indigenous newspaper the *Koori Mail* is, as anticipated, notable for its heavy reliance on Indigenous sources, with 88.9 per cent coming from the Indigenous community (n=8). This demonstrates that such media prioritises—or at least, gives substantial news space over to—Indigenous voices on issues such as this. The *Green Left Weekly*, with a larger number of sources also featured about two-thirds Indigenous, and one-third non-Indigenous sources. These findings certainly show that alternative media, on the deaths in custody issue, were giving more prominence to Indigenous community and Indigenous spokespeople than they did to the non-Indigenous community. The exception here is the mainstream (at least in terms of ownership) local *South Burnett Times* and this finding certainly bears out recent research which suggests the 'community newspaper' has close and enduring links to its communities (Bowd 2012; Richards 2013)—and prioritises the views of this community over others. While Richards (2013, p. 640) notes local media do sometimes have issues with 'inclusivity' – not taking account of marginalised and minority groups within the regional setting – this is not evident in this study (albeit small), with the *South Burnett Times* providing comprehensive coverage of the views of local Aboriginal people about the Yock death.

We took our analysis further, and drilled down in to the *types of sources* interviewed by the various newspapers. It is important to examine these findings in more detail, and to consider not just the Indigeneity of the sources used but the nature of the sources – police, politicians, government spokespeople, family members, 'official' Indigenous sources such as legal service lawyers, and so on. This is to recognise that some non-Indigenous sources may still be classed as marginalised while certain Indigenous voices are placed in positions of power or legitimacy.

In the deaths in custody issue, too, the police play a particular role in providing information to journalists and the public as the police are usually involved in the event as key witnesses.

True to this, *The Courier-Mail* ran very strongly with police sources, these sources comprising more than one-quarter (27.4 per cent) of the paper's sources overall. This represented the most concentrated focus on and use of police sources out of all the newspapers examined. Enders' (1995) examination of *The Courier-Mail's* coverage of two Aboriginal deaths in custody explains this trend:

> The ease with which police and government officials can establish and implement a media plan to deal with a potentially damaging incident, such as a death in custody, is demonstrated by the large percentage of reports which can be sourced to government, police or Criminal Justice Commission representatives.

Enders notes that this also means when Indigenous sources were consulted, they are usually responding to comments from police or government sources rather than providing the angle of the story (1994; also Bacon, 2005). Representatives of Daniel Yock's family, the key spokespeople on this issue, represented about 16 per cent of *The Courier-Mail's* sources, followed by the more official Aboriginal Legal Service (12.3 per cent), then the Queensland State government (also 12.3 per cent), and finally Aboriginal leaders or community spokespeople (8.5 per cent). The reliance on police sources is also reflected in findings regarding the regional daily *Toowoomba Chronicle*, with one-fifth of their stories featuring police comment while only 7 per cent featured comment from the Yock family. The Aboriginal Legal Service and the Aboriginal community did comprise about one-third of the *Chronicle*'s 15 sources used, and together with data on sources from the Yock family there was a higher use of the Yock family and other Aboriginal sources than police alone. However, non-Indigenous sources still substantially outweighed Indigenous sources in the *Chronicle* overall.

Notable in the data is the high level of 'eye-witness' sources in the *Socialist Worker* newspaper, with around 42 per cent of their sources coming from eyewitness accounts (n=6). This would be due to this newspaper's – and indeed, the socialist press's – propensity to use quotes from members and activists who attended rallies, sit-ins and other forms of protest as their key source of information. Also notable in this data is the national Indigenous *Koori Mail's* reliance on what we might term official Indigenous sources – the Aboriginal Legal Service, and Aboriginal spokespeople – rather than local sources directly related to the Yock family. This is indicative of the *Koori Mail's* position as a national newspaper that may not have the local connections and presence that, say, the local Aboriginal news station, Triple A, might have. Such presence is important to foster trust and potential access to a wider variety of sources. Again, the local commercial newspaper, the *South Burnett Times*, distinguishes itself from both the metropolitan newspaper and the larger regional daily, with much less reliance on police sources (16 per cent, or four of the total 22 sources quoted), and higher reliance on local community sources, particularly the Yock family (32 per cent). Indeed, these figures represent almost a reverse of the proportion of sources used by *The Courier-Mail* in terms of both the ratio between Indigenous and non-Indigenous comment, and the types of sources drawn upon. It also indicates a closer connection to the *local* Aboriginal community – people associated with the Yock family – than even the national Indigenous newspaper, the *Koori Mail*, which suggests the importance of the 'local-ness' of newspapers in reporting on local and community issues. Similarly, the *Green Left Weekly* and *The Socialist Worker*, in their sourcing practices, show good regard for Indigenous sources but are also closely connected to their own community – the activist community (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) involved in the protests – more than any other media studied here. This coincides with one perceived role of such alternative publications, being to amplify the voices that normally do not have access to media, autonomous of dominant institutions (Langlois

and Dubois 2005).

Concluding thoughts: Sourcing in alternative, community and 'local' news

This study relates to a particular point in time, before the impact of the internet on news forms and practices. The deaths in custody movement, which brought to public attention the high rate of Indigenous incarceration and therefore the disproportionate rate of Aboriginal deaths in custody, was part of the broader struggle by Indigenous peoples. In this study we examined newspapers only during times of heightened coverage of one of the deaths in custody, and due to the different publication schedules of the metropolitan daily, regional daily, community and alternative newspapers, there was disparity in the level of coverage, and the level of sourcing analysed. We note this limitation of the data in reaching our conclusions, but reiterate that the patterns identified are consistent with previous studies, and point to the need for more research about media practices such as sourcing, in not only mainstream news media, but also alternative and community coverage. While most of the newspapers examined reflected similar levels of diversity of sources – quoting about 2.5-3 sources per story, the radical *Green Left Weekly* was notable (in its three stories analysed in this study) for quoting a significant range of protest leaders, protest participants, and official sources. A notable number of 22 people were interviewed in *GLW's* coverage, representing an average of 7.3 sources per story and demonstrating a high level of newsgathering – certainly no evidence of 'churning' a copy from a desk, or of relying on official statements. This fits with the practices characteristic to radical media, which are tied to protest movements – and are therefore unique in the alternative media sector. On the issue of source diversity, the Indigenous *Koori Mail* used the highest proportion of unique sources, citing a total of nine sources altogether, eight of which were unique. In contrast, the daily metropolitan newspaper, *The Courier-Mail*, demonstrated the highest 'repetition' of sources, confirming the routinisation of professional news practice and the over-reliance on readily available official sources who can regularly provide written statements or quick comment. This is further confirmed in the types of sources used – police and government sources dominated *The Courier-Mail's* coverage, and also the large regional *Toowoomba Chronicle's* coverage which tended to reflect its metropolitan counterpart quite closely. *The Courier-Mail* performed better than its large regional counterpart in terms of Indigenous sourcing; while Indigenous sources were still less than half of *The Courier-Mail's* coverage, they were only one-third of the *Toowoomba Chronicle's*.

As expected, the majority of the voices available in the Indigenous national newspaper were Indigenous -- eight of its nine sources were Indigenous – although they were 'official' Indigenous sources from the legal service and known organisational spokespeople rather than family or community sources. Both the *Socialist Worker* and the *Green Left Weekly* showed a good variety of sources, and a reduced reliance on official sources, as we would expect, and as their role as the 'counter' to the mainstream would require (Harcup 2013; Forde 2011; Atton and Hamilton 2008). The surprise in the findings is undoubtedly the local commercial newspaper, the *South Burnett Times*, which not only used a good diversity of sources (and lacked the levels of repetition of the other commercial newspapers), it was the only commercial newspaper to prioritise Indigenous voices over non-Indigenous on this issue. Furthermore, it was even more likely than the Indigenous newspaper to rely on sources closest to the issue – family and community members – thereby creating strong, locally-focused community journalism. It gave good coverage to the story – publishing a total of nine stories – and its position as the paper servicing the area in which Daniel Yock and his family lived put this small local paper at the forefront of community-based coverage on this issue.

These findings confirm the role of alternative and Indigenous media in representing their communities – respectively the activist and Indigenous communities (and often both). All three alternative and radical newspapers prioritised 'ordinary' voices or Indigenous voices over official sources such as the police, government and representatives of the Criminal Justice Commission which went on to investigate Daniel Yock's death. Their sourcing practices confirmed connections between radical media and the social movements they connect with (Downing 2001), with *Socialist Worker* relying heavily on the 'activist eyewitness'. Similarly, the local small town newspaper serviced its immediate community and produced news of interest to its immediate readership by identifying local people – more often than not, from the local Indigenous community – as sources of information for its stories. This suggests closer synergies between 'community' and 'local commercial' newspapers than might have been expected (at least at the time of publication in 1993) and implies further studies carried out on a variety of issues, over longer and different periods of time, will illuminate this relationship further.

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