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Editorial

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When free speech and investigative journalism confront vested interests or cultural prejudice, double standards unfold. Here, Peter Wilkin evaluates media and political responses to the Charlie Hebdo killings and the Wikileaks controversy. In 2015, twelve journalists at Charlie Hebdo's Paris office were murdered by two French citizens claiming to be members of Al Qaeda. The magazine had launched satirical attacks on the rich, the poor, refugees, Muslims and other minority groups. Subsequently, political and journalistic commitments to free speech against fanatical opponents became entangled with the defence of the West as the upholder of international humanitarian order. By contrast, Julian Assange's free speech initiatives precipitated official censure, persecution and imprisonment. His Wikileaks organisation acted as a conduit for secret information disclosed by whistleblowers who had exposed war crimes, forms of corruption and disinformation from states and corporate actors. Most controversially, in 2010, leaked video footage entitled "Collateral Murder" shows US helicopter gunship pilots in Iraq murdering civilian adults and journalists in 2007. Notwithstanding support for Assange's free speech rights, he has been smeared by Western political and media elites as a spy, sexual predator, supporter of Donald Trump's 2016 presidential bid, Russia's Putin regime and the UK Brexit campaign. From Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman's *Manufacturing Consent* (1988), Wilkin utilises the distinction between 'worthy' and 'unworthy' victims. In the former, Western capitalist states within the world system advance a geoculture of liberal freedoms against illiberal cultural enemies (e.g., Islamic fundamentalists). Charlie Hebdo's victims can be defended on this basis. Assange, however, was vilified because he presented US political and economic institutions in a negative light. This openly challenged Western geocultural values within the world system.

Researchers Kailash Koushik and Madhuri Gupta identify a major cultural obstacle to journalistic freedom—prejudice against 'untouchable' castes. Through a literature review, personal investigations and interviews, they reveal the intolerable working conditions of Dalit and Adivasi journalists. They experience exclusion, humiliation and exploitation throughout "the capitalist-Brahminical media ecosystem". Against untouchability, Koushik and Gupta advocate language, educational and affirmative action campaigns along with cultural rights charters to sustain minority caste journalism. Doing so would also entail the revival of India's Working Journalism Act to legally protect remuneration and conditions in news media organisations. Theoretically, the critical political economy of media and communication must acknowledge that the interrelation of power, wealth and knowledge has a caste dimension.

Victoria Fielding's examination of labour relations in media coverage elicits news framings which structurally advantage the language of employers over unions. During the 2016 Victorian Country Fire Authority industrial dispute, employer and news media organisations positioned the Victorian United Firefighters Union's attempt to advance worker safety initiatives as a threat to "take over" established managerial authority. Attempts by the union and their political allies in the Victorian Labour Party to contest this dominant frame could only be reactive. Liberal-pluralist conceptions of news journalism would suggest a framing competition between the two sides, but, as Fielding points out, employer and mainstream media conceptions of the dispute assumed an unassailable legitimacy. Publication and partial acknowledgement of a "defensive counter-narrative" effectively reinforced the liberal illusion of open debate. In reality, the capitalist political economy of labour relations was hegemonic without being totalitarian.

Lee Artz's extended commentary on Chinese media and transnational relations is a final dismissal of the cultural imperialism trope. He clearly distinguishes between international, multinational and transnational corporate power to show the latter's ascendancy. Contemporary capitalism is a globally networked system which cuts across national sovereignties and regional boundaries. In cultural production, the case is unanswerable. Artz cites numerous examples of transnational productions involving Chinese corporations, Hollywood, Bollywood, Nollywood and Asian television. Here, underlying national geoeconomic objectives, the intent is to distribute a "Chinese dream" of global capitalist prosperity.

Against the backdrop of preceding contributions, a review of Merja Myllylahti's *From Paper to Platform* explores the danger posed by Meta/Facebook and Alphabet/Google. Within the small democracy of Aotearoa-New Zealand, free speech and news discourses have become manipulable entities.