

collection.

The carefully edited and beautifully produced book is a credit to Maya Daya and her team, led by graphic designer Marie B. Koya, who also collaborated in the layout design with Metuisela Tukana. The collection embodies an outstretched prayer to the readership to come into their lives and know them, before you judge them again, and again. *Shedding Silences* is a highly recommended read for the quality of the works as much for the brutal honesty with which the inmates confront their past, demons, angels, and lay down their hopes for a return to the folds of the community.

**Reviewed by: Mohit Prasad**

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**Valuable Stepping stone to Pacific Media South Pacific Islands Communication: Regional Perspectives, Local Issues,**  
 Edited by Evangelia Papoutsaki, Usha Sundar Harris. Auckland:  
 Pacific Media Centre (AUT).

Sadly, only a handful of books (and a few decent journals) deal specifically and in depth with communication and journalism practice in the Pacific Islands. With such a gap in the literature, South Pacific Islands Communication is a welcome addition for students and practitioners in the region.

This book is a spin-off from the first ever South Pacific Islands Communication forum hosted in Malaysia by the Asian Media Information and Communication (AMIC) Centre in 2006. With discourse about the 'Asia-Pacific' region usually dominated by 'Asian' giants like Japan, China and Malaysia, such a publication is a good - if long overdue - sign.

Featuring a collection of 14 analytical and empirically based research essays, the range of paper topics is wide, touching on themes like governance, training, political strife, and cultural influence.

However, more comprehensive and analytical work is still needed in each of the areas of focus.

This book is perhaps more research and policy-oriented and less engaging for students than another book of essays released around the same time *Media and Development: Issues and Challenges in the Pacific Islands*, published by the Fiji Institute of Applied Studies and the Pacific Media Centre.

The work is split into two sections - the first six chapters focusing on regional issues, while the eight latter chapters deal with detailed case studies

in specific countries.

In the introduction, editors Evangelia Papoutsaki and Usha Sundar Harris rightfully point out the complexity of covering a region that is often taken as a whole, but with extremely diverse populations (PNG's 6 million vs Niue's 1500), income levels (US\$700 in Kiribati vs. US\$8000 in Palau), and development (0.2 telephone lines per 100 people in the Solomon Islands vs 35 in the Cooks).

These politically and socially distinct places have to pool/pull together under the umbrella of 'Pacific Islandness' in order to learn from each other and successfully compete as a collective with the larger world.

While 'Pacific Islandness' is only vaguely defined by the editors as a unique feature to the region (versus Western or even Asian modes of thought), we can catch glimpses of this critical concept throughout the book, although more vigorous theoretical work needs to accompany the largely empirical/descriptive slant in many of the papers.

**'Watchdog' role**

One of the only two chapters explicitly involving critical theory in the book is offered in David Robie's piece on South Pacific notions of the 'Fourth Estate'. Here, Robie engagingly addresses how Pacific Islands journalists form news values, as well as engage in the 'watchdog' role of media as members of culturally imbued developing countries, drawing distinctions between journalists' views from Fiji and Papua New Guinea.

The other paper that seeks to grapple with theory is Mark Hayes' piece on the role of the Tino Tusalala (journalist) of Tuvalu. He calls for a 'reframing' of professional journalism in Polynesia to align with traditional cultural roles of orator or messenger.

While this is a fascinating topic, Hayes does not engage in it enough, not elaborating on what the Tuvaluan (or even Polynesian) cultural role of 'orator' entails, and how this concept, rather than learned Western skills, informs a journalist.

He does, however, give ample description of other disparate issues, such as the .tv internet domain, and global warming coverage.

Nonetheless, the shortage of solid theoretical underpinning in the book with regards to 'unpacking Pacific Islandness' does not detract from its mass of useful information and insights.

Two notable pieces are based on the remarkable personal experiences of two veteran journalists from Tonga and the Solomon Islands. Their firsthand accounts give an element of realism to the issues.

Publisher Kalafi Moala writes about Tongan media oppression in the case of the government ban of his newspaper Taimi 'o Tonga, later ruled as

unconstitutional. Robert Iroga draws on both his personal experience as a reporter during the height of the Solomon Islands violent ethnic conflicts, as well as extensive research, to explore the media's role in post-conflict peace building.

A third piece focused on political conflict comes from Shailendra Singh and Som Prakash, who write a concise but sound and well-researched comment on media, democracy and politics in the countries of Fiji, the Solomon Islands, and Tonga.

Again, the same theme of the Pacific Islands as united but distinct is echoed here in the differing social and political contexts in these three countries which inform the actions taken by the media.

The other chapters in the regional section of the book involve comprehensive descriptions and information about a range of topics.

### **Asian influence**

Ron Crocombe gives a detailed report of the communication activities between the political and professional elite of Asia with those of Pacific Islands.

While the paper only focuses on the elite, it prompts attention to notable trends amongst the non-elite that may warrant further research. For instance, the growing population and economic influence of Chinese immigrants in nations such as Tonga, and how they are portrayed in local media.

Helen Molnar gives a very useful inclusive overview of the relationship of the government, media, and civil society sectors in 14 Pacific Island countries. David Robie explores the problematic history and role of foreign aid in media education.

Steve Sharp and Evangelia Papoutsaki talk about the educational structures in PNG's Divine Word University and Fiji's University of the South Pacific. Given that this is a hefty subject to be discussed within 15 pages of text, they can only touch upon important issues, such the extent of Western influence in journalism education in the Pacific and its impact on local media.

The remaining chapters in the local section are mostly based on reports about projects or research carried out by the authors. These are useful in providing statistics and analysis of some very interesting topics.

Patrick Matbob and Evangelia Papoutsaki study the coverage of West Papua's independence movement in PNG newspapers; Usha Sundar Harris describes her project about involving rural Fijian women in videography; Joys Eggins surveys PNG populations about their impressions of local community radio; and Michael McManus' research reveal the extent of domestic and sexual violence in PNG and the media's role in alleviating the problem.

### **More 'unpacking'?**

David Robie compares the operations of three student newspapers from Fiji, PNG and New Zealand.

With such pieces, South Pacific Islands Communication generally provides a great amount of up-to-date information to do with Pacific Island media, especially in relation to policy and governance. However, it falls short of fully 'unpacking Pacific Islandness', as this would require clearer and more thorough theoretical framing and analysis.

Although the book does feature examples of 'Islandness' in its pages, these are not always explicit, and the reader will have to make the connection between the concept and the evidence him or herself.

It falls on Pacific Islanders to think critically about their profession in local and regional contexts, and contribute more present ideas and research. This book is a valuable stepping-stone to a more solid knowledge base for Pacific Islands media.

### **Reference**

Sing, S. and B. C. Prasad (2008) *Media and Development: Issues and Challenges in the Pacific Islands*, Lautoka: Fiji Institute of Applied Studies and the Pacific Media Centre.

**Reviewed by: Josephine Latu**

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