

Book Reviews

Media & Development: Issues and Challenges in the Pacific Islands, by: Shailendra Singh and Biman Prasad, eds. (2008), Fiji Institute of Applied Studies, Pacific Media Centre.

Development journalism is the theme of this ambitious book edited by Shailendra Singh and Biman Prasad. The editors are to be congratulated for bringing together 21 authors to write on a wide range of issues affecting the Pacific with the aim of producing a publication that contributes 'towards the understanding of the concept of development, and the link to journalism' (p. xii). The central tenet is that 'journalism with a focus on development can contribute towards effective and appropriate policy making in the context of the unique problems experienced by Pacific Island countries' (p. xii).

The book starts with a background to the topic by David Robie, who is well-known throughout the region for his work in educating and training journalists. He provides definitions of development media, including a four worlds' news values template that he has constructed (p. 17). According to Robie, the islands of the Pacific fall neatly into the third world category. In this model, the news is generally about infrastructure growth, national integration, social responsibility and education and includes international events. To accommodate these third world interests, a different form of journalism to that practised in the west has evolved. This is development journalism, which emphasises news about grassroots achievements and deals mainly with socioeconomic development. Robie has produced a second model, this time comparing the differences between conventional and development journalism. Development journalists, the model shows, run the risk of being subjective rather than objective, as is expected from journalism in the west, and their stories may be worthy but dull. Consequently, there is a danger that media consumption will be low, with a consequent drop in profits for the media owners (p. 24).

Journalists reading this book might feel that some of the subsequent chapters are an attack on their profession and their ability to report news from a 'development journalism' perspective. For example, Pramila Devi and Ganesh Chand appear frustrated by the media and suggest that journalists should be held to account for paying too much attention to the 'elite, the ruling classes and tradition' (p. 259). The authors seem to be blaming journalists, not poor policy-making, for what they perceive to be negative publicity being

accorded the military government in Fiji. Yet it is difficult to see how the media can be held responsible for financial decisions taken by business enterprises (p. 261) especially when the chapter lacks empirical evidence, making it difficult to assess the strength of their argument.

In response to these perceived problems with the media, Devi and Chand contend that the Pacific region needs an 'analytical press' that can process information about resource allocation (p. 270). They suggest that a remedy for newsroom shortcomings could be to devise checklists 'of items that need to be analysed for any analysis of policy measures' (p. 262). Journalists would refer to these checklists when writing their stories and in this way bias would be prevented. The authors also suggest the Pacific region encourages a 'conscientious press', a model first mooted in the United States in 1947. A conscientious press would obviate the requirements for development journalism because it would fulfil all the criteria needed to provide citizens with information they could utilise and understand (p. 266).

Kevin Barr believes the media have been 'muzzled' when it comes to reporting the facts about poverty but that they could, and should, act 'as the conscience of society'. Barr suggests that human interest stories could be used to 'shock people out of their complacency' as well as providing 'information about the wider picture' (p. 108). In this way, Barr believes, journalists could assist in the elimination of poverty. Also on the topic of poverty, Biman Prasad worries that journalists who report negative news appear to adopt a certain kind of 'pro-poor position' when they could be creative and positive in their approach to the topic (p. 159). He calls for balance, stating that 'reporting on the negative consequences of poverty is important but it is equally important to report on best practices and positive examples of how people climb out of poverty' (p. 159). According to Evangelia Papoutsaki, Pacific journalists need to be 're-educated' to work 'with their communities as agents of positive and sustainable social change' (p. 28). Perhaps alluding to the work of the sociologist Robert Park and the Chicago School in the 1920s, which saw the beginning of participant observation in social research, Papoutsaki suggests that journalists need to immerse themselves in the communities about which they are writing and suggests that they should participate in the 'designing and execution of solutions to certain problems' (p. 37). These tasks mesh well with Robie's description of development journalism (p. 24) mentioned earlier.

Papoutsaki's ideas are mirrored in a chapter by Kalinga Seneviratne, who gives an Asian perspective to development journalism. Seneviratne recounts how he was able to spend four days investigating a story in Sri Lanka, which his agency subsequently published in over 30 newspapers across Asia (p. 233). While this form of investigative journalism may appear pedagogically attractive to those wishing to improve journalistic standards, many me-

dia outlets in the Pacific are private companies and consequently profit oriented. So, while Seneviratne and Papoutsaki paint an environment unencumbered by the trappings of everyday news collection, it seems unrealistic to expect media owners to give journalists with tight deadlines the freedom to spend long periods away from the newsroom and out in their communities. Rarely will journalists in the Pacific be given the luxury of four days to write one story, nor will that story be taken up by 30 outlets, thereby adding to the profits of their news organisation.

Red Batario, a journalist from the Philippines, is the only author in the book to canvass the topic of public journalism, a form of reporting that allows citizens, rather than editors or media owners, to determine what topics will be covered by the media. Topics could include community achievements and problem-solving by the people. Even while operating at community level, high journalistic standards are maintained. The reason why public journalism is so compelling, Batario argues, is that 'the media can transcend its mindset by finding its connection with citizens to determine common solutions for common problems' (pp. 253-55). Batario sees public journalism as a new philosophical approach and places it within the mainstream media. But Batario is writing about Asia, where markets comprise millions of people. This approach may not be possible in the comparatively tiny media markets found in the Pacific region. For example, a well-documented experiment in public journalism occurred in Wellington, New Zealand, where a citizens' cooperative launched a weekly newspaper, *City Voice*. The paper managed to survive for eight years, funded by advertising revenue, before folding in 2001 because the cooperative could not sell enough advertisements to keep afloat.

Two significant omissions from the book are sport and religion, which is surprising as both play an important part in the lives of Pacific people and, arguably, contribute to the region's development. To the editors' credit, they have ensured that women's issues are well covered. Julie Middleton's chapter provides useful information and includes a toolkit for practising journalists as well as a glossary that appears in the Appendices. Carol Fiore-Smrecznik discusses the importance of 'promoting a respectful and nuanced image of women's multiple roles in society' when writing about the millennium development goals (pp. 178-179) and the aforementioned Seneviratne calls for journalists to take a wide view of the issues relating to the trafficking in women and children and also to consider the social impact on rural communities of the migration of female domestic workers to countries around the globe (pp. 238-40).

In addition to the chapters discussed above, the book has sections on the media, governance, rule of law, the economy; millennium development goals, ICT, language issues, and Asian approaches to development journalism. Contributions from the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and the Pa-

cific Islands Forum appear in the Appendices. Authors include Mark Borg, Rajni Chand, Trevor Cullen, Prangtip Daorueng, Ron Duncan, Nicole-Gooch, Jaap Jasperse, Paresh Narayan, Nazhat Shameem, Shaista Shameem, Charmaine Rodrigues, and Lisa Williams-Lahari.

The book will be a useful source of information for scholars and students although there are a few niggles. Most annoying is the lack of an index. Also, more rigorous editing would have removed minor errors. In some chapters, mention is made of useful websites but the reader must search to find them in the Appendices. The acronyms do not appear in alphabetical order, as should happen, and the binding of my review copy proved so insubstantial that pages fluttered to the floor on first opening.

References

- Collins, Simon and Jeremy Rose (2004), 'City Voice, an alternative to the corporate model', *Pacific Journalism Review*, 10 (2), pp. 32-45. Also Venables, David (2002), 'Public Journalism', Judy McGregor and Margie Comrie, eds., *What's News: Reclaiming Journalism in New Zealand*, Dunmore Press, Palmerston North.

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Turnings: Fiji Factions by: Brij V Lal. 2008, Fiji Institute of Applied Studies, University of the South Pacific, Suva Fiji

As a student and academic, I have read Brij Lal's scholarly writing with interest for some years now. I find his commentary in social and economic debates succinct, thought-provoking and fresh. I picked *Turnings* up with interest, curious to see if a gentler voice resided behind the hard-line statements of political crisis and reform in Fiji and I was not disappointed.

The writings of Brij V Lal are a treat for avid readers familiar with the rural Pacific context. His first hand experience comes to life in the vibrant descriptions and animated characters of stories, which emerge from the pages in this small collection. His talanoa style is filled with poignancy, nostalgia and a truth that is both painful and real.

The influence of his own educational experience is clear and by his own