
Reviews

IAN BODEN

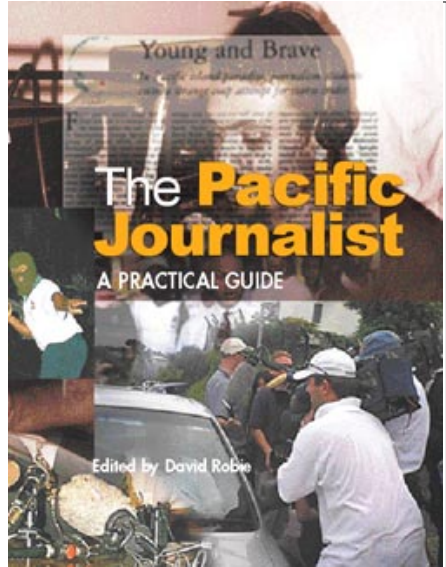
Executive Editor and Training
Coordinator of *The National* (PNG)

An unusual, insightful Pacific book

The Pacific Journalist: A Practical Guide, edited by David Robie. Suva: University of the South Pacific Journalism Programme/USP Book Centre, and South Pacific Books (NZ), 2001, 372 pp. ISBN: 982-01-0385-1.

VERY rarely does a book appear in the South Pacific that is generated within the region and intended for those working here. Even more unusually does such a book address itself to the needs of Pacific Islands journalism, to the rights of the public to be informed, and to the responsibilities and obligations of journalists.

Add to that an attempt to cover not only the print media, but to address television, radio and on-line news dissemination and you have a book with the potential to become a landmark publication.



The Pacific Journalist, edited by David Robie and jointly published by the Journalism Programme at the University of the South Pacific (USP) and the USP Book Centre comes close to fulfilling that potential. It is an interesting concept, this combined how-to-be-a-good-journalist manual and commentary on Pacific issues.

Robie, who by this stage of his career has amassed a great deal of experience and knowledge of this region, writes cleanly and with a sense of direction, giving easily accessible and readily absorbed information that

many younger journalists will find most welcome.

Historically journalism in the region has perhaps flowered best in Papua New Guinea, although Fiji through USP — and one suspects with strong prodding from Robie — is producing qualified journalists in increasing numbers.

The editor of *The Pacific Journalist* spent five years in PNG as the head of a high-profile journalism department at the University of PNG. That course produced a number of distinguished journalists, people of the calibre of Kevin Pamba, a regular contributor to *The National*, now lecturing at PNG's other journalism school within Divine Word University at Madang.

Robie is now the University of South Pacific's journalism coordinator. *The Pacific Journalist* sets itself modest aims. "I hope this book will contribute to raising professional and ethical standards among journalists around the region," the editor says at the end of his acknowledgements.

One of the admirable qualities of this book is the emphasis on student journalists, their opinions, their reasons for wanting to join the profession, and their hopes for themselves and their countries.

The first section of 'The Pacific Journalist' concerns itself with news values, but begins by posing the ques-

tion "why do Pacific Islanders want to become journalists?" The answers to that question, quoting students from three Pacific countries, make an excellent springboard for what follows, which takes the reader from the basic consideration of journalism — the functions of the media, the qualities needed to become a journalist — through to questions all journalists should ask themselves when they write.

Is it significant? Does it have human interest? Is it topical and relevant? Robie's approach is sensible. The text is interspersed with quotes underlining the points he seeks to make, and illustrations, generally of reproduced news pages give both good examples of appropriate and even courageous writing and a fair sprinkling of clangers, some of which have led to defamation cases against writers and publishers alike.

And that is the concern of the second section of the book — media law and ethics. There is an informative chapter on the legal systems of the Pacific as they effect journalists, by Philip Cass and an article on corporate pressure and ethics by Mala Jagmohan, a former editor of Fiji's *Sunday Times*, which will generate a few wry smiles among those writing in a region notorious for the heavy hand of commercial interests.

A useful chapter on reporting and the courts by Robie follows; and then

REVIEWS

a fascinating article on political reporting and editorial balance by Jale Moala, who is one of the region's most distinguished journalists, and former editor of *The Fiji Times*, the *Daily Post*, the *Pacific Islands Monthly*, and *Islands Business*.

There is a section devoted to the print media, with strong articles on feature writing, layout and sub-editing, followed by another for the broadcast media. That section includes a chapter by Pat Craddock — “Radio journalism and the interview” — who like Robie works at USP [he has recently moved to Mozambique where he also trains broadcasters], and who has had experience in Kiribati, Tonga, the Solomons, as well as PNG, where I recall working with him at our own NBC some 20 years ago.

Television reporting is covered by Ingrid Leary, who produced the remarkable *Maire*, the documentary about living with AIDS in the Pacific. The last two sections deal with online reporting, including web publishing and editing, and there is an excellent finale “Issues in the Media”. This forms an invaluable postscript to the book with four outstanding articles.

Samantha Magick is the political and communications officer with environmental group Greenpeace, and she is the former news editor of Communications Fiji Ltd. Magick writes on the relationship between the Pa-

cific media and non-governmental organisations, an issue of major concern to many journalists in this region.

Anna Shadbolt contributes a valuable chapter on trauma as it affects journalists covering disasters, military confrontations and unexpected deaths. Ms Shadbolt is a psychologist who was a lecturer at USP.

The third article comes from Trevor Cullen, long known for his advocacy of journalism that addresses AIDS in the Pacific, and a former lecturer at Divine Word University in Madang. This is a trumpet call to Pacific journalists to wake up to what is no longer a threat, but has become a sad fact of life — the Pacific and especially PNG are now among the world's growth areas for the disease.

Cullen makes many valid points in his article. Let's stop being politically correct, he says, because the issue is bigger than that — but let's observe the sensitivities of covering AIDS. Cullen emphasises the human face of the disease and the need for Pacific journalists to be proactive rather than reactive to coverage of AIDS in the community.

The last article in *The Pacific Journalist* is contributed by the ABC's regional journalist Richard Dinnen, who is based in Port Moresby. Dinnen's article “Outside looking in — foreign correspondents” is alone worth the price of this book. He gives

a rare insight into the thinking of a scrupulous and ethical journalist working in an environment and covering issues as remote from his own culture as the Earth is from Pluto.

Dinnen writes with precision and a fine understanding of the joys of using the English language. In an article that covers 33 pages, he begins by pointing out the ironies of fly-in, fly-out foreign correspondents in the Pacific, those “who don’t know a vatu from a ratu, an atoll from an Ayatollah, or Polynesia from Indonesia”.

There are significant sections that broadly cover decision-making. He seeks to establish the bases for determining what Pacific stories are newsworthy, and in what context, writes of covering conflict and regional relationships and includes an excellent section on being a stringer, which should be required reading for every Pacific island freelancer.

All of the chapters in *The Pacific Journalist* have resource and further reading lists, there is an excellent glossary and a chronology of Pacific events, legal terms and their meanings and a detailed index.

The book is clearly the initiative of David Robie, and the sub-title, “A Practical Guide” is the best brief description of the book’s value to Pacific journalists.

It is hard to imagine any Pacific newsroom twelve months hence with-

out a much thumbed copy of *The Pacific Journalist*, simply because it brings together under one cover so much information that is of value to journalists working in the region.

Robie and those who have contributed the excellent articles deserve commendation for this publication, which I have no hesitation in recommending to students and young journalists, those who would like to be journalists, and grizzled old hacks like myself who sometimes need to be reminded of the basics of our profession. □

REVIEWS

BOB HOWARTH

Queensland Newspapers' Editorial Technology Manager, who has taught subbing, design and internet courses for the Commonwealth Press Union in Papua New Guinea

Lesson for the internet Down Under

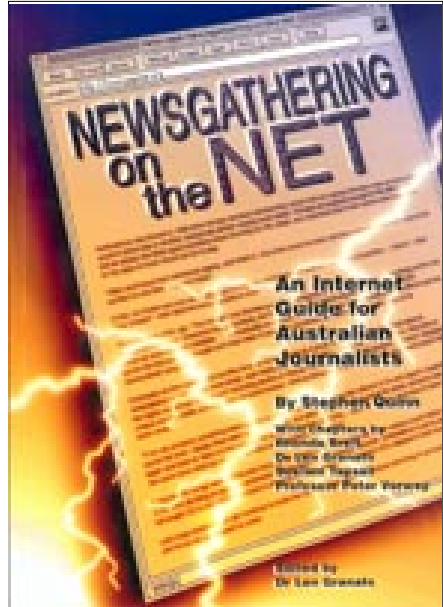
Newsgathering on the Net, edited by Stephen Quinn. Second edition. Melbourne: Macmillan, 2001. 80 pp. ISBN 0-7329-5599-8

AFTER REVIEWING the first edition, then using it as a teaching tool, a new review is simple: It should be on every reporter's bookshelf and in every newspaper reference library.

I'm also pleased to report our head librarian ordered three copies a month before I got my review copy.

Dr Stephen Quinn, director of the Research Unit for Computer-Assisted Reporting at Deakin University, Geelong, Victoria, and if anything has simplified the message in the second edition. Chapter One covers journalistic skills for the new millennium and my favourite subject CAR — computer assisted reporting.

Other simply presented chapters



include explaining the jargon of the Net, managing bookmarks, email for newsgathering, listservers and newsgroups for news gathering, assessing information quality, and a look at the future.

“If the internet seems a huge project, don’t despair,” Dr Quinn advises. “remember the best way to eat an elephant — one spoonful at a time.”

I had two copies of Dr Quinn’s first edition.

One is currently in use in Papua New Guinea and the second graces the book shelves of the journalism reference library of the Gambia Press Union in Banjul, Gambia, West Africa.

One of the most useful tips in this

new edition is about how the Net can help that threatened industry species — freelancers.

“Even a student just coming out of university can opt for self-employment. It just takes great ideas, creativity, vision and perseverance — and not necessarily a large bank account,” Dr Quinn wrote.

“This is not an easy option, but the young ‘techno-journalists’ have the ability in the internet environment to make a living without a corporate parent.”

With the widespread industry semi-freeze on hiring new staff, this book, if you’ll pardon the old cliché, is an absolute must for any journalism student and for that matter, Net-deficient news executives.

PS: My review copy has gone to a bookshelf in Dili, East Timor — even though East Timor’s journalists still have (to their great disadvantage and the shame of the UN) very restricted Net access. □



NOORA ALI

Final-year double major in journalism at the University of the South Pacific

Frozen in time? Not so likely in tropical Fiji TV

Fiji Waves, produced/directed by Natalie Gouin.
Canadian television documentary, 57min, 2001.
Montreal, Quebec: Écran Total.
ecrantotal@qc.aira.com

FIJI WAVES starts with a moving glimpse of Fiji. But it isn’t meant for Fijians.

In fact, the almost hour long docu-

REVIEWS

mentary shot in Fiji in late 1999 is meant to enlighten those that live in the “first world” — Canadian viewers.

The major and the most interesting part of the documentary deals with how globalisation, modernisation, new imperialism is affecting the minds, lifestyle and culture of the people who live in Fiji with the introduction of television.

The intro doesn't last very long and doesn't really make much sense either. Maybe it would, from a “first world” perspective, certainly not from where I stand in the so called “third world”.

It goes something like isolated, not connected, spread like flowers in the largest ocean of the world, frozen in time, giving whoever watch it a picture of the cliché “paradise island lost in time image”. Which wouldn't be very true to hang on the shoulders of Fiji. It just wouldn't fit too well.

However, there are good things to come, including the more than relevant issue of the part television plays in Fijian society. Television in all senses — including the introduction of videos and *Fiji One*.

The documentary focuses heavily on Fiji Television and shows that more than 90 percent of what is aired on Fiji TV happens to be western serials and sitcoms.

A wide range of media people and community advocates talk about the

irrelevance of the programmes we get on television, the effect of them on the Fijian society, youth, culture, traditions and way of life.

From the start of the documentary, Fijian villages, little, big and bigger Fijians come into view in close range. The romantic picture of the Pacific Islands comes into view.

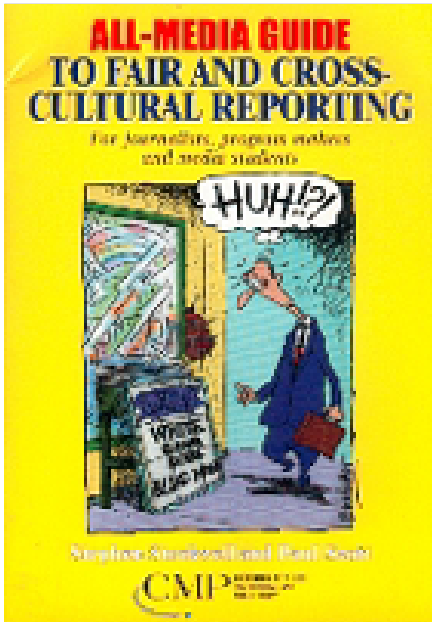
This would appeal to the outside world. The documentary shows what outsiders like to see of Fiji — drums beating, grass skirts shaking, kava ceremonies and friendly smiling faces with lovely beaches in the background.

It looks untainted by the serials and sitcoms which air diligently every night from 7pm onwards on *Fiji One*.

But this isn't so, according to the interviewees. These voices belong to well known media personalities from Fiji, and some from outside, working in Fiji, including a couple of our very own journalism students, a very confident villager with a flower behind his ear and also a Fijian village chief.

This documentary not so loudly says that globalisation in the form of television is slowly erasing an identity of a nation and its people with an efficient eraser. It is sensitive in portraying Fijian culture — it makes us think, it makes some of us angry.

But then it's not made for us Fijians. It's Fiji packaged for the outside world.



PRIESTLEY HABRU

A Solomon Islands double major in journalism at the University of the South Pacific

Handy guide for dealing with ethnic reporting

All-Media Guide to Fair and Cross-Cultural Reporting, by Stephen Stockwell and Paul Scott, Australian Key Centre for Cultural Media Policy, Griffith University, 2000.

TO BECOME an effective reporter in any multi-cultural society, avoid embarrassment for using wrong terms and be able to adapt to the culture and

lifestyle of people different from your own, then this survival booklet is a must.

Imagine a country with 250 language groups with different cultural norms and ethnicity and as a reporter, you're striving to get across news coverage that will be accepted by these diverse people.

This is the scenario this media guide is aiming to educate for journalists. In 1788, Australia had 250 language groups. This is year 2001 and no doubt there will be more than 250 language groups in the country now.

A product of two former working journalists who are now both educators, it has proved very useful. Co-authored by Dr Stephen Stockwell and Paul Scott, this 40-page media guide is designed for journalists, programme makers and media students.

Employed as a reporter for 4ZZZ, JJJ and *Four Corners* programme of ABC Television in Australia, Stockwell is a senior lecturer in the Journalism Department of the School of Arts at Griffith University. He has written five books and more than fifteen reviews, journals and academic papers.

Paul Scott has worked as a producer and a documentary worker before his current position as a lecturer at the Department of Communication and Media Arts at the University of Newcastle. His research interests are in the

REVIEWS

Media and Indigenous Australians, professional education and surfing media.

Published last year at the Nathan Campus of Griffith University, the book targets Australian media workers in addressing the hindrances of covering stories in such a diverse people with diverse cultures.

Yet the book itself cannot be limited to Australian audiences only. It is also highly relevant in our case in the Pacific Islands. Read the book and put Fiji, Solomon Islands or any other Pacific Islands country in the place of Australia and the parallels are clear.

With more than 80 languages in the Solomons and more than 600 languages in Papua New Guinea, the Pacific region itself covers almost three quarters of the world's languages.

The fourteen chapters highlight in many instances the treat that Australian journalists for that matter should undertake when it comes to covering issues such as that of its indigenous people, ethnicity and multi-cultural setting of its society.

With the all-too-familiar rules for media workers to strive for truth, objectivity, fairness and accuracy, balance and honesty, the book tells how a journalist should approach these goals in its diverse communities and people.

On the whole the contents of the book, seek to erase findings by "both the National Inquiry into Racist Violence

and the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, that the media in Australia play an unintended but significant role in creating and maintaining intolerance and prejudice based on race". (Preface, page iv).

This media guide tries to "combat that tendency with a straightforward account of how to report cross-cultural issues fairly, combined with some practical tips to covering the diverse communities and individuals in Australian society." (Preface, page iv).

Illustrated with cartoons to portray their points, the authors also provide references to the legislation, guidelines and codes that are relevant to be followed by all media industries in Australia.

For instance, there is mention of the Commonwealth's 1995 Racial Hatred Act and Various State's Racial Vilification, the New South Wales Anti-Discrimination Act, the Western Australia Criminal Code and the Queensland Anti-Discrimination Act as guidelines to abide and prosecute those who are not complying. (Chapter 7, page 14-15).

The authors simplify the text into an everyday vocabulary that even a high school student can easily understand. With each chapter ranging from one page to just four pages at the most, it makes for very comprehensive but thorough information in a short and journalistic style of writing.

With input from Scott, whose research interests is in the media and indigenous Australians and from the wealth of experience of Stockwell, it is easy to identify that their intention, is to avoid the stereotyped images of racism, aboriginality, ethnicity and culture which the media can be led to pursue in their coverage and reporting.

“A stereotype is never the full story.” (Chapter 6, page 12).

The pre-conceived idea by the dominant culture and its practices in any particular society can undermine other ethnic and language groups thus regarding their own as what they want the world to be. This has to be discouraged at any cost. A reporter of Fijian or Indian background has to accept the multi-culturalism of his or her society and report with dignity, fairness, without fear or favour.

Aboriginal should not be used as a noun, because it is a term with general application to the people, flora and fauna that existed in any country. (Chapter 12, page 28).

Words that they recommended be avoided are “half caste”, “quarter-caste” and the overuse of collective pronouns such as “them”, “they” and “those people”. If they are “them”, then who are “we”? (Chapter 12, page 29).

Although they acknowledge the fact that it is quite hard to get a full

account of the story in a multi-cultural society like Australia, they emphasise the need to get to know the customs, preferences, codes of conduct and dislikes of the indigenous people like the Aborigines and the Torres Strait Islanders.

This is relevant in the Pacific Islands context. Take Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, or even Fiji, Vanuatu and New Caledonia where the society is heterogenous. Thus each nation has different language groups and ethnic backgrounds.

Customs and codes of conduct in Malaita Province in the Solomons differ from those of Santa Isabel province, as do those those of Tolai people in the East New Britain Province of Papua New Guinea from those of Chimbu province in the PNG Highlands. Differences in religion, language, customs and norms exist between the Fijians and Indians, Rotumans, Melanesians, Micronesians, Polynesians and Chinese in Fiji.

So a journalist has to really get to know the chiefly system, landowning groups, the indigenous Fijian protocol or the Chimbu people protocol and their views before trying to write a news story about them.

To guarantee fairness prevails and assuring their reporting is accurate, balance and ethical in “Australia’s diverse culture and also in the Pacific

REVIEWS

means media workers also need a high degree of cross-cultural competence,” (Chapter 2, page 2).

This means that the journalist “who aspires to tell the full story has to leave behind the familiar and approach the unfamiliar with curiosity, sensitivity, respect and moral imagination to understand the world from a cultural perspective that may differ from their own.” (Chapter 5, page 10).

An appropriate approach when covering the indigenous and diverse Australian society “is to ask around and see what protocols apply in the community with whom you want to work.” (Chapter 14, page 31).

One of the strengths of the book is that the authors are able to put together their wealth of experience and research in a sort of a formula-like medium that workers in Australia and the Pacific countries will find very useful.

Perhaps what they say in the book, reflects what they themselves have experienced and would like their successors to be more competent than them. It isn't selfish after all for Stockwell and Scott to help young Australian and Pacific Islands journalists today with this valuable contribution.