

An Australian Fusion introduces the reader to the trans-generational conversation; the older, angry Indo-Fijian voice countering the younger liberal voice of the new age generation. This is an important voice as it brings the indo-Fijian conversation full circle across generations.

The collection is relevant to anyone with an interest in the psychology of living in the Pacific. I recommend this book first and foremost as a must read for locals in Fiji as it provides an insight into the emotions and trials of the indo-Fijian rural experience. It makes a significant contribution to the dearth of literary works in the Pacific and immerses the reader in a reality that simply is. The opening sentence to the final chapter in the collection, *One life, three worlds*, summarises this paradox: 'To be an Indian from Fiji is to be a complex bundle of contradictions.' It is this complexity and multi-layered contradictions that Brij reveals. His stories come to life in the masterful painting of *Turnings* within the rural Indian community.

Reviewed by: **Cresantia Frances Koya**

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Shedding Silence – An Anthology of Writing from Fiji Prisons

by: Mary Daya (Ed), Pacific Writing Forum, University of the South Pacific: Suva. 2008

The power of the pen is legendary and in common usage quite the cliché. There is a toss up of the conjoined phrases 'prison writers' and 'writers who are prisoners' in discussion on writings from prisons. The binary is itself the subject of many a work of fiction and alludes to some sense of a circumscribing of space, internal or from outside. The collection *Shedding Silences*, published by the Pacific Writing Forum (PWF) at the University of the South Pacific, is firmly grounded in writing by prisoners from within the newly spangled Corrective Services department in Fiji. It features prose, poetry, life stories, and journal accounts by 37 inmates. The writing program became part of the wider Yellow Ribbon Program (YRP) with workshops in various rehabilitative programs including creative expressions in painting.

The book is the result of over twelve months of intense writing workshops and mentorship provided by PWF program assistant Mary Daya. Without getting into the formal set-up and membership to the PEN Prison Writing Program that was founded in 1971, the PWF program has achieved all the ideals of the global monolith. PEN believes in the restorative and rehabilita-

tive power of writing, by providing inmates with writing teachers, mentors and readership. According to the PEN website, 'The program seeks to provide a place for inmates to express themselves freely with paper and pen and to encourage the use of the written word as a legitimate form of power'.

This exercise of power is evident in the works in *Shedding Silences*. It is easy to be patronising or dismissive of such programs as a feel good exercise in demonstrative social agency for those outside the system. The work done by Daya in providing inspiration beyond just skilled teaching is evident in the writings. There is an easy lyrical quality to the poetry in the collection that is indicative of impact of her tutorship given that her own preferred writing area of expertise is prose. The polish is there too in the prose pieces with some evocative life stories and journal entries, as well as impressive forays into recounting myths and legends.

Daya writes in her editorial note of the creativity and freedom presented in writing to those who '...do not have a right to own a key to a door'. The collection has that haunting quality of the incarcerated. There is the presence of eyes that peer into the dark beyond steel grates. Ears tuned to the slightest sounds, like that of a slow dripping tap across the courtyard, or the sound of silence in solitary. The opening piece of the collection is the poem 'Wasted Time' by Alesi Tawake, and it sets the mood of firmly prescribed life behind bars with the poet's realisation that 'everything is gone/even my pride...when I face/myself...I am alone...' But there is always that quest for freedom. No where as universally expressed as in the childhood memories we all have of kites. Alfred John Holmes pays homage to his Flagstaff childhood and the windy season from May-September, when kite flights and kite fights were an initiation into ways of the city in his prose, 'Kite Running'.

There is that singularity of purpose in the words that these writers chose, and for the most part, they concentrate on sparse words, to express these haunting qualities. As you read the book there is a sense of walking across a desert of concrete and steel when by magic a bright flower springs upon. As welcome as an oasis or the mirage of rain misting across a harbour, and then the disenchantment sets, but not always despair. As in an expression of the value of 'A Spoon Redefined' by Aseri Talai as he does not '...own a kitchen that has many spoons'. And his disquiet when an officer does not return the sole prison issue spoon. There is always the quiet humour in these writings, as expressed by Azim Khan when he imagines the sound of silence as that 'of the human/body growing fat'. Humour undercut by the constant refrain that prison is also work is found in the poem, 'The Norm', by Eliko Raco.

The sense of being cut off from the world is strong in the collection. The loneliness and the silence that gathers around one like a wet cardboard on the homeless makes its own profound statements in many of the pieces.

Writing and friendship are two means of reaching of this silence and loneliness, as Eroni Baleinukulala does when he writes: 'Just/ a few/inches/below...my cell/window...are some pot plants...whenever/I am locked inside/I can reach out...touch it/talk to it...it is/so special/right now'.

Filimoni Raivalu brings in the personal and the communal in the prose piece *Veitabani*. He describes the legend behind the title of his story through the relationship between the men and women of Wainibuka and Vugalei. His brief piece is able to weave into the story his own intimacy in a marquee with 'a beauty' as his 'God-given wife' from Wainibuku. Personal stories distilled in a few hundred words of Josua Nabuto, Ifremi Tubuna, Romeo Ganilau, Shyam Murti, and Solomone Qurai provide some insights into their growing up.

Some of it innocent and some of that childhood not so innocent in marking out the pathway that make them inmates later in life. Inter-generational incarceration is the theme of Tevita Poese's honest and frank admission in 'A Good Life'; that he has abandoned his children and wife, just as his father had done to his mother and siblings. As he makes the ironic revelation that life in prison for '...three generations of able men behind bars' means that the real prisoners are '...our families that suffer'.

One of the outstanding features of the writing en masse in the collection is the singular lack of excuses from the inmates about their incarceration. There is a solid identification of the crimes and acceptance of the punishment. In the hope that their works will be foundational in reality as in the lyrical evocation of acceptance from beyond prison walls in these lines from Joseph Nonu's poem, 'Mask':

Behind my tattoos
and dangerous looks

is the real me
with regrets

to say it out loud
ain't my style

but look inside me
you will smile.

Shedding Silences marks a watershed year in the rehabilitation programs in Fiji's prisons. The law and order situation in Fiji has over the years deteriorated to the point that there is apathy at best and vigilante type retributive mentality at worst against inmates. Acceptance in society is a crucial part of rehabilitation and through these writings there is a clear call for understanding from inmates, and often expressed remorse for their crimes. And we can begin that understanding by reading about their lives in this spectacular

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.

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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