

KEEBLE, Richard (2001)

Ethics For Journalists, Routledge, London.

Reviewed by Ian Richards

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At the height of the “cash for comment” scandal in 1999, former Australian radio talkback host Derryn Hinch was asked on ABC Radio about “king of talkback” John Laws’ defence that he was an entertainer not a journalist (and so not bound by journalistic ethical considerations). “Just because you’re an entertainer, it doesn’t mean you rob a bank,” Hinch replied. A few minutes later, in the same interview, Hinch was asked whether he had been made aware of Australian commercial radio’s codes of practice at any of the stations which had employed him over the years. “Didn’t have them, didn’t know about it, didn’t need it,” he replied. Such comments reflect a contradiction inherent in the thinking of many, possibly most, journalists – the view that, on the one hand, ethics are irrelevant while, on the other, there are ethical standards which one must respect.

This helps explain why books such as Richard Keeble’s *Ethics for Journalists* are so important. Written primarily for practitioners and students, *Ethics for Journalists* is the latest in Routledge’s useful *Media Skills* series. Keeble, director of undergraduate journalism studies at London’s City University and well-known as the author of *The Newspapers Handbook*, attempts to address in a simple and straightforward way some of the most important underlying ethical issues in journalism. Unlike most who have tackled this area before him, he does not focus exclusively on what could be described as the standard journalistic ethical dilemmas – chequebook journalism, accepting “freebies”, conflicts of interest and so on. While these are all mentioned, Keeble’s underlying focus is somewhat broader — journalism’s ethical relationship with some of our more pressing contemporary issues. Although he begins with the less-than-shattering assertion that ethical dilemmas are especially difficult today, he quickly moves on to discuss the contemporary “moral panic” over the media, before raising some of the most contentious ethical issues journalists face.

Briefly, Keeble’s approach is to ask basic but important questions — Why bother with ethical codes? Is a privacy law necessary to restrain the media? Do you feel the employment of

more women will improve news values? — then follow each with a short but pointed discussion. This approach is not as simplistic as it might at first appear. Thus, on the subject of what he calls “race/anti-racism matters”, for example, Keeble quickly moves from a brief discussion of the major ethical issues surrounding the media’s coverage of ethnic minorities to such key questions as whether racist groups should have a voice in the media and whether, at least in the eyes of the media, “Arabs/fundamentalists/terrorists” have replaced communists as the new enemies of Western civilisation. This leads into such practical matters as the influence of language in covering race issues and suggestions as to how journalists might improve their coverage of ethnic minorities.

The book adopts a similar approach to a range of other issues, from ‘sleaze’ coverage, privacy, surveillance and journalistic subterfuge to the debate over the ‘dumbing down’ of the media and the ethical problems of war reporting. The book concludes with a brief but potentially useful chapter, which addresses the various ways in which individual journalists might respond to the ethical challenges they face, ending with the transcripts of interviews with four journalists (including internationally-acclaimed expatriate-Australian Phillip Knightley) on the ethical aspects of their professional lives.

It must be said that, from an academic perspective, much of Keeble’s discussion is superficial, to say the least. This feeling is heightened by the absence of ethical theory at those points where one might reasonably expect to find it. Presumably this is because the publishers feared that many of those at whom the book is aimed would be put off if they encountered so much as a whiff of theory. While such a position might be economically defensible, it means that the end product is somewhat less than it might have been.

A more general criticism, at least from the point of view of those of us who don’t reside and work in the United Kingdom, is the overwhelming Britishness of the examples with which Keeble chooses to illustrate his various points. This does not matter when it involves a quote from a British journalist with the international standing of Robert Fisk or a reference to Diana, Princess of Wales, but it’s quite another thing when the multitude of British rules and regulatory bodies are allowed to dominate discussion about media regulation, or where a discussion of the plight of investigative journalism is posed in terms referring directly to “comedians such as Mark Thomas”.

As a result, *Ethics for Journalists* is unlikely ever to become a text outside the UK, and unlikely to become a ‘must read’ for non-British practitioners. This is a pity, because it contains some

excellent material presented in a very accessible way, and many people – not least practitioners such as Derryn Hinch – would benefit from considering the issues it raises. ■

ADAMS, Sally with HICKS, Wynford (2001)

Interviewing For Journalists, Routledge, London, 185pp. ISBN 0 41522913 (hbk)

Reviewed by Desley Bartlett

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As Adams notes in her introduction, interviewing is central to journalism — but recent books that recognise the reality of dwindling journalism resources and the bean counters' push to produce more stories more quickly, are thin on the ground. Hence, their review of telephone interviewing is an essential element for both beginning journalists and more experienced practitioners as is their 15-page section on "understanding interviewees".

The latest in the how-to Media Skills series, this book ably demonstrates what Adams and Hicks explored in their 1999 text *Writing for Journalists* – it's succinct, informs and entertains. From the chapter on "basics" (basic interviewing, basic principles, vox pops, press releases, rounds and conferences) to interviewing "special cases" (reluctant interviewees, children, vulnerable people and 'death knocks'), Adams gets to the point quickly but with clear and concise examples.

Adams sets the parameters early and offers her own definition for interviewing: "Here interviewing is asking people questions to gather material for publication, both information and quotes" (p.2).

The core of the book is the prearranged set-piece interview but with plenty of variations — telephone interviews, following-up press releases, tips and shared interviews.

The authors do not rehash basic newswriting skills, except for a few pars that restate "the six indispensable journalistic questions – who?, what?, when?, where?, why? and how? (p.7) But they might have included a chapter on structuring a news story and the always-important topic of style that Adams and Hicks explore in depth in *Writing for Journalists*.

The book is organized into 12 chapters: Introduction; Basics; Preparing and getting started; Interviewing techniques; Understanding interviewees and avoiding problems; Checking and editing quotes; Telephone interviewing; Note-taking and recording; Different interviewees (politicians, celebrities, special cases); Law and Ethics.

There are four excellent appendices that highlight unusual interviews or subjects and a comprehensive glossary of journalism terms that appears in each of the Media Skills texts.

For journalism students and trainees Adams and Hicks cover fundamental issues, such as numbering the pre-determined interview questions and matching up the answer to avoid confusion (p.25), plus an explanation of some body language signals. "Rubbing the back of the neck is read as a sign of frustration – dealing with something or someone that's a 'pain in the neck'." (p.61) And even some sage words about how to interpret handshakes (p.27).

They tackle head-on the influence of PR and in the section "What Can Go Wrong", they warn against allowing media advisers and PR operatives to take control of the interview (pp 67-74).

There are, however, a few recommendations that may raise ethical debates for some readers. In the section "Checking and editing quotes", Adams advises journalists to change quotes "as little as possible" (p.80), but to always quote accurately: "Just as they [sources] know how to spell their own names, they know what words they use – so don't rewrite quotes without prior permission." Purists would argue quotes are sacred and cannot be changed, with or without permission.

Other advice, although reflecting reality, might equally raise some eyebrows. "If you worry about the recording acoustic being audible, let your interviewee know you are recording them"; and "To make notes they [journalists] use shorthand, longhand scribble, tape recorders or memory...Some write reams during the interview, some write nothing. Some write surreptitiously on notebooks under the table or even in their jacket pockets..." (p.89-90).

These minor points are diluted by the extent and scope of the book, a highlight of which is Chapter 9, which provides an insight into the political interview. Here Adams extensively quotes political media advisor Harold Frayman, who spills the beans on the tricks politicians learn to use to 'handle' journalists. "So a study of your quarry is essential and the word 'quarry' is deliberately chosen. Few other interviewees today are so skilful or need such a careful, well-planned approach" (p.100).

There is no mention of the cultural sensitivity or diversity that one might expect to find in the "Different interviews – special

cases" section and this is a pity given the cross-cultural application of this otherwise excellent journalism text.

Interviewing for Journalists is British-centric with references to print and broadcast organisations that may not be familiar to other readers. For example, when discussing the preliminary research phase for an interview, there is an abstruse reference to "the Lady Porter investigation" (p.23), and the entertaining interviewer profiles of Andrew Duncan (p.117) and Lynda Lee-Potter (p.126) assume knowledge of their work.

Despite this, Adams and Hicks have come up with another highly useful journalism textbook that would suit journalism students or trainees anywhere as either an introductory or advanced studies reference. ■

MA, Eric Kit-wai (1999)

Culture, Politics and Television in Hong Kong

Routledge, 242pp, ISBN 0-415-17998-x

Reviewed by John Herbert

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This book is a fascinating insight into the way Hong Kong works in media terms and the mind of Hong Kong pre- and post-handover. It has an excellent historical development of television in Hong Kong since the 1960s. It has highly relevant case studies drawn from television programmes to show the mind of the present and past (and to some extent the future) Hong Kongers. It is a work of scholarship, most certainly, and this sometimes gives it an air of difficulty and occasional impenetrability which will probably appeal to media scientists the world over. But that is a small price to pay for the more general reader to learn some important truths about Hong Kong media and its people.

The book moves beyond the obvious media toward comparisons of the life and work of the Mainland Chinese and the Hong Kongers. It is somewhat of a model of how to study the media in a particular location. Hong Kong of course is a good place to do such a study because of its relative homogeneity and size. Right from the start the author sets out his stall clearly by referring to 'the

missing link' (p7) at the heart of media studies. He describes this as the bridge between academics and practitioners and as such it is intended to be a "multi-dimensional exploration of HK TV programmes" (p6). And it is. It also is fascinating on the submersion of the Chinese identity in Hong Kong under colonial rule and its return to China after 1997 — another fascinating and important insight into TV in HK from this comparison

The difficulty of course is that HK TV is so Americanised — even the Chinese channels seem to have moved this way, while keeping a definite Hong Kong Chinese flavour to the entertainment, news and drama programmes. And it was so before 1997 as well. I would perhaps have liked more of this flavour to come out in the book, but then you can't have everything. Likewise, I would have liked some more cultural comparisons between the Chinese and English channels run by the two major Chinese television companies. It is good though that the author includes the Public Service broadcaster, RTHK, although again more on this would have been welcome.

This book starts with an in-depth and insightful look at identity, culture and the media, which I found particularly interesting and original. It is a book firmly rooted in the 1997 changeover and is intent on looking at what has happened since then. As such, it is an important addition to any library shelf and media course; not just in Asia or Australia, but everywhere because of the relationship it builds between these events and the culture of the media.

Chapters 2 and 3 look in great detail at the Hong Kong identity in two parts: de-sinicisation and re-sinicisation in which the author uses a socio-historical analysis to identify the factors which have shaped television and culture in Hong Kong.

Have no fear that this is therefore a parochial book. It is local only in the sense that Hong Kong is a case study used in depth. Its lessons and implications are totally international. As Ma points out in this chapter why a study related to the specifics of Hong Kong should be any different to a study related to the specifics of the United States or Britain. And he is absolutely right. The lessons that can be learned from this kind of study are universal and international. This is not a local book in any sense; it merely uses the local to generate the global.

The historical approach highlights the TV dimension in a fascinating way. Likewise, the discussion of what is described as "the local generation" (those Hong Kongers who know no other country than Hong Kong) and their impact on local TV is also very interesting. He also believes that the new cultural identity that emerged had a direct correlation to HK TV and he traces the development of television in Hong Kong thoroughly. Then, having

dealt with this cultural growth, Ma moves to the section on re-sinicisation to show that the reversion of HK back to China focussed cultural identity in a new way. Again, with the help of television.

I particularly enjoyed in this and the next chapter his discussion of some Chinese TV serials. To anyone who spent time in Hong Kong the 'Ah Chians' ("primitive mainlanders coming to HK" — p 57) are a big point of discussion. I was very glad that the author brings this issue into the book and highlights it by looking in detail at several relevant programmes. This is pursued in the next chapter, "Outsiders in Hong Kong". He ends the book with a summary of his thoughts on the subject called "rethinking television culture". The book ends with three excellent appendices of great value as well as copious notes, bibliography and index. ■

Aliansi Jurnalis Independen (AJI) (2001)

Annual Report 2000-2001: Euforia, Konsentrasi Modal dan Tekanan Massa (Euphoria, Capital Concentration and Public Pressure), Jakarta, AJI Indonesia. 128 pp. ISBN 979-95689-7-8

Reviewed by Dedy N. Hidayat

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The significance of this annual report, from the Indonesian Alliance of Independent Journalists, is that it immediately plays a part in the broad debate about the compatibility between economic liberalisation and democracy. Free-market fundamentalists postulate that "the greater the play of the market forces, the greater the freedom of the press; the greater the freedom of the press, the greater the freedom of consumer choice". Advocates of the liberal political-economy perspective also tend to uphold the proposition that liberalisation or deregulation of Indonesia's media industry will support a process of democratisation, creating a free-market place of ideas where the public has sovereignty to determine which media industry products they will consume. However, the concerns of Indonesian journalists, which are poured into this annual report, offer a competing proposition. In the context of capitalistic development in post-New Order Indonesia (i.e. May 1998 onwards), the media industry's liberalisation is not proving compatible with the freedom of the press, operation of public sovereignty and expression of public interest that are vital for the process of democratisation of national life.

The AJI report proposes that the end of the New Order's

authoritarian corporatist regime, which lasted from 1966 to 1998, has already created a new political environment for the growing Indonesian media industry. Signs of this are the dissolution of mechanisms of government control, such as disbandment of the Department of Information and the end of requirements for print media organisations to obtain publishing licenses. The emergence of new media organisations and a swift inflow of fresh capital from local and foreign investors have increased the intensity of marketplace competition in Indonesia's media industry.

However, the market's invisible hands have taken a role that resembles that of the New Order's Department of Information, effectively eliminating those media organisations that do not aim or are not able to apply the principles of "market ideology". Many new media organisations have been pushed out of the free market place of ideas. Of the 1,398 new media organisations that were licensed in the months following the end of the New Order, only 487 are still active in 2000. Market logic and principles have enabled the largest media groups, like the Jawa Pos and Kompas-Gramedia Group, to position themselves as the dominant forces in the post-New Order media structure. Regional media companies have generally been absorbed into the large Jakarta-based press groups.

Many of the failed new media organisations were not professionally managed, but it would be inappropriate if this report were to only blame the professionalism of human agencies for their media organisation's failures. The problem is more structural, connected to issues of economies of scale, product diversification or the ability to engage in vertical and horizontal integration in the market, as can be executed by media groups with large capital bases.

The annual report also shows that in a free market (or, more precisely, unregulated) such as in Indonesia, the bargaining position for media industry workers is weak, and the more so as advances in communication technology increasingly changes the media industry into a capital intensive sector. Capital holders are progressively positioning journalists as just another production factor in the processes of manufacturing information and entertainment, with efficiency being easily reduced by the wages and working conditions. In short, journalists are no longer craftsmen or warriors for free expression of idealism and journalistic creations. Rather, they have become a group of strangers in a market not of their making.

The report also depicts the nightmare for media industry workers who are not just washed away by the dynamics of economic liberalisation but are also rooted in the anomie that results from processes of political liberalisation. On the one hand, political liberalisation can give birth to a civil society that does

not obey the old rules and orders. On the other hand, it may not be possible to establish new rules and orders. The Indonesian public no longer accepts the old ruling that only the government can control the press; members of the public feel that they can take part in governing the press. However, the new rules for how the public will control the media effectively have yet to be agreed upon and implemented. What is happening in the interim is the emergence of public pressure, which is led by vested interests and political groups in political society. These impose physical or psychological pressures on the media.

Several efforts to formulate policies for media industry regulation have generated new challenges for journalists. In the draft, Broadcasting Laws, for example, contain a passage that gives authority to a Broadcasting Commission to control issues relating to broadcasters, including powers to withdraw permission to broadcast.

This annual report is structured primarily from the thoughts and viewpoints of media industry workers themselves. Although the report writers identify only one interest that journalists fight for, that is the public interest, this report does not in fact sufficiently encapsulate the viewpoint of public interest. For example, there is no place in this report for the efforts by the public and non-government organisations to establish public television or to turn the state-owned broadcasters – *Televisi Republik Indonesia (TVRI)* and *Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI)* – into public media.

Finally, the authors from the start should present a description of the ideal communication situation or an idealised conceptualisation of the way the Indonesian media industry should be regulated. Should it be regulated according to the Scandinavian model? Or by another model? Without this, the reader may reach the conclusion that the journalistic struggle for independence is based only a fight for freedom for freedom's sake. ■