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## Book Reviews

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Karen Neill & Morris Shanahan (eds.) (2005) *The Great New Zealand Radio Experiment*, Victoria: Thomson Learning / Dunmore Press. ISBN 0-17-0124-800.

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In 2003 Auckland, New Zealand's largest city, had 40 radio stations serving a population of 1.2 million people. Citizens of Christchurch had even more choice per capita – 330,000 people and twenty radio stations, the same number as Greater London with its 7.2 million inhabitants (Neill 2005, 154). This book attempts to explain and critique the policies, work practices and technological developments that led to this situation. Overall, the authors convincingly detail what in other countries is often only a thought experiment – what happens when a government chooses to regulate broadcasting along strictly market lines?

In choosing “experiment”, Neill and Shanahan explicitly link the enquiries here to critiques of New Zealand “deregulation” that derive from Kelsey's (1995) groundbreaking work. Within media studies, this approach has been used as the basis for enquiries into television (see Horrocks 2004) but *The Great New Zealand Radio Experiment* represents the first focus on radio. This is long overdue. Radio studies is but one area where there are significant gaps in the literature, perhaps because of the relatively recent emergence of media studies as an academic discipline in New Zealand.

Providing a thorough and relatively rigorous background is the main strength of this book. Chapters focus on the impacts of deregulation from news to talk radio, and from the spread of “entrepreneurship” to the “rise” of New Zealand music. Some reinforce the somewhat counter-intuitive claim that deregulation can result in increased local programming (Horrocks 1996). Others examine more specific issues, such as role of digital technology. As Andrew Dubber shows, digitalisation has become crucial to New Zealand radio – in Auckland, for instance, the BBC World Service was only broadcast because the digital signal could be ‘compressed locally in order to allow each hour of programming to contain several minutes of

commercial messages' (Dubber 2005, 78). Dubber's chapter also highlights the main drawback of the book – its lack of methodological diversity. Like the majority of the authors, Dubber augments a range of secondary sources with data gathered from interviews and personal communications with industry insiders. Although this is understandable, some important issues – for instance, audience reactions to the changes wrought by deregulation – do not feature. A more complete index – the one provided is barely adequate – would likewise also be the book.

Overall, however, this is a very timely piece of scholarship. It provides a base for more detailed enquiries and gives overseas readers an appreciation of the lived realities of “deregulated” broadcasting. Most importantly, *The Great New Zealand Radio Experiment* clearly demonstrates the consequences of acquiescing to the inexorable “logic” of the market.

### **References**

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