
Book Notes

DAVID ROBIE

Behind the New World myths

Whose Story? Reporting the Developing World After the Cold War, edited by Jill Spelliscy and Gerald B. Sperling, Calgary, Canada: Detselig Enterprises, 1993. 242 pp. Unpriced.

'I get terribly angry,' remarks Daniel Nelson, editor of Gemini News Service, 'when journalists take the phrase, which is completely manufactured, "New World Order"—it's absolutely meaningless. Personally I don't think there is a New World Order. I think we have the same world order, but without the Soviet Union which was never a major part of the world economy. And if you live in Katmandu or Kampala, there is no change.'

A provocative comment? It probably was at the time. But this statement, among many at the end of a three-day conference in Canada attended by dozens of journalists from around the globe, has become an increasingly common view.

The conference, organised by the University of Regina, Saskatchewan, and Gemini, the London-based de-

veloping world news agency well known in the Pacific, analysed media coverage of the developing world. Nelson and other critics characterised the 'New World Order' as an ideology pushed by the international corporate world.

As the editors of *Whose Story?* point out, the words and the agendas of the powerful are absorbed easily into the popular lexicon — weakening the capacity to be critical and the ability to distinguish between reality and illusion.

The difference between how people live in the West/North and how people live in the developing world/South remains unchanged. Injustice remains. In the midst of all this, journalists from the developing world see the Western media turning attention away from the South, looking for new hot spots of conflict and disaster.

Stimulating, absorbing reading but the presentation is rather dense. Although there is a diversity of backgrounds and views among the conference chapters making up the book, the Pacific was sorely under-represented. Joseph Ealodona, then a reporter with the National Broadcasting Commission and now a public relations officer for a PNG parliamentary agency charged with provincial government reforms, was the sole participant from the Pacific.

Unfortunately, his views were rather trite and less informative than many of the other contributors.

Nevertheless, this is a remarkably useful volume and it is bound to be adopted as a course text for development journalism programmes. —

DAVID ROBIE

Media hypocrisy on East Timor

A Critical View of Western Journalism and Scholarship on East Timor, by Geoffrey Gunn, Manila: Journal of Contemporary Asia Publishers, 1994. 272 pp. K10.

Shortly after the Dili massacre in November 1991, I was paid a 'kill' fee by one of New Zealand's largest dailies rather than publish a detailed account of the circumstances leading up to the massacre and an exposure of the Indonesian lies and distortions. The full-page broadsheet article had already been set up in type and laid out when it was 'pulled' from the paper. A New Zealander was among those who were brutally murdered by Indonesian troops that tragic day. Yet the New Zealand media were reluctant to publish the truth. My article was eventually published in *NZ Monthly Review*, a small circulation national magazine.

The incident was perhaps the most extreme example of mainstream media self-censorship on the issue that I have personally experienced. But it was always apparent to me that news editors had a mind set

over Indonesia and the East Timor issue. Australia was far worse than New Zealand (whose government and media, after all, take their cue from across the Tasman) and the Pacific media all but ignore the Timor issue.

Perhaps this mind set has at least partially been altered by John Pilger and the controversy over his *Death of a Nation* television documentary which have exposed the hypocrisy and blatant self-censorship practised by the *Australian* and several other Australian news media over the issue. But in many respects Pilger was simply reporting what many of us journalists in the Pacific reporting on Indonesian colonialism have been saying for years.

So it is refreshing indeed to see *A Critical Review of Western Journalism and Scholarship on East Timor*, Geoffrey Gunn's timely critique of news media responses to Indonesian colonialism. It comprehensively exposes the double standards and hypocrisy of Western governments — particularly Australia, given the heroic sacrifice of the East Timorese people in support of Australian commandos in the defence of Australia from Japanese fascism during the Second World War, the eagerness of Australia to militarily intervene alongside the forces on the side of the 'free world' in South-East Asia in the 1960s, Australia's special role in brokering the peace plan for Cambodia in 1990 to the defence of 'democracy' against tyranny in the rescue to Kuwait from Saddam Hussein.

'Again,' notes Gunn, 'we confront the paradox where the antipodean model of a "free press" has — seem-