

trates the whole tone of this greatly researched work.

NEWS on a knife-edge



GEMINI journalism and a global agenda

Richard Bourne



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Independent news champion of the developing world

News on a Knife-edge: Gemini Journalism and a Global Agenda, Richard Bourne. London: John Libbey, 1995; (available in the Pacific from UPNG Press), 216 pp. ISBN 0-86196-486-1. Price: K25 approx.

'BIAFRA is dying bloodily and terror stricken. The triumphant Nigerian Army is advancing into the chaotic heart of General Ojukwu's breakaway country. The demoralised Biafran

Army has been stunned by the *blitzkrieg* onslaught mounted by the Federal forces and is now offering little resistance and feeling.

'Five million civilians are running rabbit-like from the remaining crowded areas. Several Nigerian MiG fighters added to the confusion by rocketing and machine-gunning lines of refugees ...

'As I went north — the only foreign correspondent left inside Biafra — I saw appalling sights of Biafra's death throes. They are burned in my memory: men, women and children carrying pathetic belongings, some collapsing weeping at the roadside. There is nowhere for them to go.'

This was the introduction to Richard Hall's moving report that he filed from São Tomé on 19 January 1970 after being the last foreign correspondent to leave collapsing Biafra. It was also a world exclusive — one of many over almost three decades — for the tiny independent news agency Gemini News which has forged a remarkable reputation in the developing world.

Among other 'hot' stories were 'The day I had a knife in my back,' a report by an air hostess in the hijacking of British West Indian Airways flight 400 from Kingston to Miami in December 1970; the inside story on how Nazi leader Hermann Goering cheated the hangman; the courageous Sinhalese editor who became a go-between in 1987 in a peace bid between the Sri Lankan government and Tamil militants; and a report by one of the first

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outside journalists allowed to visit Burma in 1992.

But beginning life in 1967 as a news agency with a commitment to the Commonwealth, Gemini has become best known for its own distinctive brand of development journalism — trying to balance the news flow between the South (Third or developing world) and the North (or West) while fiercely defending its independence.

While others were busy arguing over the concept of development journalism at the height of the stormy debate over the New International Information and Communications Order, Gemini was busy doing it — leading by example. Throughout the world, the black and white twins Gemini logo became a benchmark for fine journalism independent of the agenda set by the world's major Western news agencies and more recently by CNN.

But Gemini's independence has been hard won as for most of its life the London-based agency has grappled with serious financial problems. Three crises seriously threatened Gemini's continued existence — one crisis in 1982 leading to its suspension for 10 months when its then owner, the British liberal newspaper *The Guardian*, cut it adrift.

But the perseverance and determination of Gemini's 'father' figure Derek Ingram, a former London *Daily Mail* deputy editor and champion of the Commonwealth who is respected around the globe, and a small team of loyal, talented and dedicated colleagues

kept it afloat.

Today Gemini is run by an independent foundation, NewsConcern International, which is supported by Canadian and Swedish grants. Founding editor Ingram has retired but is now chairman of the foundation while Daniel Nelson has succeeded him as editor.

Author Richard Bourne points out that the growth of regional news services in the South — CANA in the Caribbean, Pacnews in the Pacific, PANA in Africa — has not challenged the niche service provided by Gemini. The agency has also successfully fought off direct challenges, such as the Compass feature service backed by the formidable resources of the Aga Khan. Gemini's distinctive and innovative graphics have played no small part in this unique role.

"Although a small player Gemini had sought to make a reality of the intentions behind the New International Information Order," writes Bourne. "Its service has been direct and, with regard to journalists from developing countries, often personal."

My own long involvement with Gemini stretches back to Africa, some 24 years ago. Among my many assignments over the years was travelling the route of the proposed Trans African Highway from Mombasa to Lagos in 1973 — at almost 5000 km by road, probably the longest assignment undertaken by a Gemini correspondent.

The story and pictures about the state of the "highway" at the time — on one road near Kisangani it took nine

Battle over the Narmada mega-project



The project

Planned 31 major dams, 450 medium dams, 3,000+ minor dams
 Cost: \$8 billion Time-scale: 40 years
 Benefits: Hydro-electric power, pisciculture, tourism, irrigation, urban water supply, flood control

Narmada Sagar dam
 Power: 1,000 MW
 Irrigation: 123,000 hectares

UNDER REVIEW BY WORLD BANK

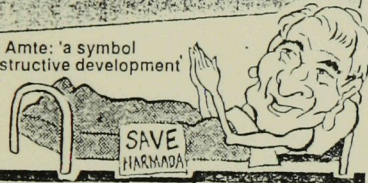
ONGOING

Sardar Sarovar Dam
 Power: 1,450 MW
 Irrigation: 1.9m hectares

The environmental cost

Submerged: 250 villages
 Displaced: 70,000+ tribals
 Ecological damage: unknown

Baba Amte: 'a symbol of destructive development'



Sources: Indian Dept of Environment, Environmental Services Group, World Bank

A Gemini news graphic — on the Narmada dam project in India in 1991.

hours to drive three kilometres — and a rundown on the border customs and corruption problems ran as a cover story in *African Development*, then a sister publication of Gemini.

Since then I have reported for Gemini from elsewhere in Africa, France, New Zealand and all round the Pacific.

At least half a dozen newspapers I have worked with have taken the service or been influenced by it — from the largest, *Rand Daily Mail* in South Africa, where I was night editor, to the smallest, *Daily Nation* in Kenya, where I was group features editor.

Yet curiously while Gemini has been popular with many news media in Africa, Canada and Asia it has always encountered resistance in Australia and New Zealand.

My one small complaint with Bourne's book is that among 33 news service articles representing a smorgasbord of world events, offbeat angles and pioneering developments, the Pacific is not represented. At least one of several environmental and development stories from this region deserved a place.

Nevertheless the impact of Gemini in the Pacific in a global context is discussed — with a glowing mention of the *Cook Islands News* — and the book's insights into the rest of the developing world are interesting, entertaining and valuable.

News on a Knife-edge is essential reading for a development journalist and we show our endorsement by adopting it as a course reader.