

## **7. International Media (Conspiracy of Silence, Disinformation)**

International media reporting on East Timor obviously was not of a piece. We must distinguish between periods, national medias, international press organizations, media proprietors, and the role of individual news gatherers. It was not absolutely the case, as Herman and Chomsky (1986) declared in the first major indictment of international media coverage on East Timor, that Western media covered up or ignored the issue, but the way that sections of the media, including even the Western liberal press, capitulated to government pressure. While at certain junctures, such as the invasion and the Dili massacre of 1999, state and media entered an arena of contestation on East Timor, increasingly through the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, it was Jakarta, and the ASEAN countries, along with Canberra, Washington, and Tokyo, that set the parameters of tolerance and respectable debate on the East Timor issue. Contra the assertions of some media analysts and practitioners (eg. Tiffen 2001), the assumption of Western “media independence” on East Timor is not sustainable. It is also true that, unlike just about any other conflict of modern times – Vietnam, the Falklands, Iraq, Bosnia – East Timor was subject to a virtual media ban in line with the cordon sanitaire thrown over the island by the Indonesian military authorities. Nevertheless, the “opening” of East Timor in 1989 facilitated the presence of foreign witnesses at the 1991 Dili massacre.

Unquestionably, the media exposure of this event changed the way that civil society in a range of Western countries perceived the dictatorship, even if Western governments persisted in treating the event as an “aberration.” While the bloody event raised the threshold of human rights awareness in

international media reporting, careful analysis of media content reveals that few, if any, mainstream Western newspaper proprietors editorialized for self-determination (Gunn with Lee 1994, 169-204). The Chomsky position on U.S. media reporting on East Timor is very clear and repeated and recycled in a number of seminal books, presentations and films. Simply, he states, U.S. reporting on Timor, substantial before the invasion in the context of concerns over the collapse of the Portuguese empire, reduced to zero in 1978 at the time when Indonesian atrocities in East Timor peaked (Chomsky 1995, 130). Chomsky has also seen in the East Timor case a demonstration of a Western liberal media model in which “newsflow” is governed by market forces that “filter” according to newsworthiness and production exigencies. In reality, the media environment is characterized by increasing levels of concentration of ownership and is obliged to operate in a political/bureaucratic setting defined by extreme degrees of State intervention and secrecy. Western reporting on Indonesia/East Timor was a case in point. While the Indonesian New Order proved a serviceable milch cow for Western investors, no breach in the consensus could yet be tolerated, not even under the Clinton administration in the U.S.

As illustrated below, appeals to national honor, trade, business, and education links along with a Cold War security perspective that saw Indonesia as a key link in Asia-Pacific defense against Soviet expansionism, all became hostage to good relations with Jakarta while the East Timor self-determination issue became relegated to the level of, say, the Bougainville secessionist issue. To the extent that the Indonesian and ASEAN media reported the issues, a pro-integrationist position became tantamount to national and regional loyalty. While the argument wore very thin as time went by, anticommunism became a touch-stone in the elite presentation of viewpoints on East Timor, a view serviceable to both Jakarta and the West. Not only had decolonization been consummated via integration but resistance to the Indonesian “rescue” of East Timor was

tantamount to support for colonialism, again a view serviceable to a collaborating class inside East Timor as much Jakarta's supporters in ASEAN and the Non-Aligned Movement. By this logic, opponents of integration within East Timor remained “outlawed.” Their troublesome supporters internationally, in the language, of Chomsky remained delegitimized by the dominant elite otherwise eager to preserve the new international status quo.

It is hard to escape the conclusion that East Timor remained a marginal issue for the world press and remained so even with the collapse of the Suharto dictatorship in the cauldron of the Asian economic crisis. But even when the advent of the Habibie administration in April 1998 offered a window of opportunity to East Timor youth to demonstrate their support for a referendum then being mooted between Indonesia and representatives of the UN, few Western journalists even troubled to follow events in East Timor at this juncture or, in the words of one who dared, were “fobbed off” by editors (Martinkus 2001).

### ***The Invasion in the Australian Media***

Taking the long view, it is clear that despite media outrage on the part of both individual journalists, editorialists, and even newspaper proprietors over the Indonesia invasion and annexation of East Timor, key sections of the media nevertheless capitulated to Jakarta or their respective Indonesia lobbies, particularly around the new emergent economic rationalist doctrine of “Asia links,” an ideology that placed trade and investment with Asia over and above such traditional Western concerns as defense of democracy, and labor and human rights. In the case of Australia, this translated from a position of support for the principle of self-determination for East Timor to acquiescence in the divisioning of the economic patrimony of the territory between

Australia and Indonesia. [see Diplomacy, Australia] Such a convergence between Jakarta and Canberra not only tested the model of the media as consensus builder but raised the issue of press management in (Australian) foreign affairs reporting in particular.

While the Australian press had been well conditioned by the circumstances surrounding the death of five young television reporters killed by the Indonesian military at Balibo in October 1975 as to what to expect from Indonesian blandishments concerning non-intervention, the invasion of Dili by main force units of the Indonesian armed forces in December 1975 appeared to take the Australian press by surprise, a view not discouraged by Canberra. Nevertheless, the event gained major coverage, even though the Balibo deaths were subject to a major “cover-up” as exposed by author-journalist Jill Jolliffe (2001).

In the Australian print media, at least, front pages of newspapers across the country were hardly large enough to accommodate the stories. It was the Canberra government's day of reckoning. Nevertheless, media outrage seldom strayed beyond the bounds of acceptable discourse, few journalists challenged the doctrine of national interest, indeed most proved a willingness to subordinate the watchdog and societal purpose of the “free press” in their eagerness to please. Hence, in the reporting of the events leading up to the invasion, we see the press misleadingly portray Fretilin as radical/leftist – as opposed to say, “nationalist” – and, by falling dupe to Indonesia propaganda, “communist” or at least “communist stalking horse.” Ipso facto, the major alternative to Indonesian propaganda, willingly recycled in the Australian press, namely Fretilin news agency reports, were deemed unreliable. Sections of the press helped to reinforce Indonesian and Australian government rhetoric that “pro-Indonesia forces” and volunteers, as opposed to

armed Indonesian regulars, were engaged inside East Timor, and, moreover, that Indonesia was engaged to put an end to a civil war (Gunn with Lee 1994, 136).

According to Jolliffe (1978, 198), from August 1975 the main concern of the Indonesian disinformation campaign was to give the impression to the outside world that several rival parties existed in East Timor besides UDT and Fretilin, including an enhanced KOTA and Trabalhista, that anti-Fretilin forces were making great military advances against Fretilin, and that the territory was in a state of turmoil. She convincingly demonstrates that the incidence of false reports, many carried uncritically in the Australian press, increased after the fall of Balibo. For example, between 28 October and 4 November, the Sydney Morning Herald, and the Canberra Times both published erroneous reports based on Indonesian Antara news agency reports, even though journalists on the spot were able to prove these reports false. She writes that, in reality, the military situation was unchanged, the border fighting continued to and fro while life in Dili was orderly and peaceful. From Dili, until evacuated on 3 December, Michael Richardson supplied a steady stream of articles to the Fairfax press in Australia. In “Indonesia attacks” (The Age, 26 November 1975), this journalist offered the first press acknowledgments of Indonesia's growing military – as opposed to intelligence – involvement in East Timor. The Age (4 December 1975) also published Richardson's photograph of the historic Fretilin UDI along with stories on the Indonesian dragnet, all filed from Darwin. Rather than sounding the alarm bells of an imminent Indonesian invasion, however, the press reacted to the Fretilin UDI with shock and horror, again a view not out of line with Western thinking.

Nevertheless, with time, major newspapers in Australia gave due prominence to East Timor with the emphasis shifting from the spectacle of the invasion to the political. As the Sydney Morning

Herald (15 January 1976) editorialized, "...if there is a sense of outrage in Australia it has found less than full throated expression in Mr. Peacock's protests...Jakarta, it now appears, can no longer be bothered to clothe the nakedness of its aggression with even tatters of post-hoc respectability." The sentiments expressed by Indonesian Foreign Minister Adam Malik in mid-January, that "No force on earth" can stop the people of East Timor wishing to integrate with Indonesia (Sydney Morning Herald, 15 January 1976) were greeted with outrage in this paper. In "Timor: Uglier and uglier," The Age (16 January 1976) editorialized that going by the statements of Adam Malik, East Timorese might not even be given the chance of a "rigged plebiscite." This paper also deplored the news blanket over East Timor and, specifically, the exclusion of its correspondent Michael Richardson from the territory.

For all the outrage, the formal act of "integration" of East Timor as Indonesia's twenty-seventh province passed by Indonesia's parliament on 16 July 1976 and signed by Suharto on 18 November was barely mentioned at all in the Australian press and raised no outcry. Only the Sydney Morning Herald baldly reported the fact and offered no comment on what the Australian government would subsequently endorse as the non plus ultra of Indonesia's de jure annexation of East Timor. While analytical comment like this should have prepared Australian public opinion to reject the blandishments of Canberra and Jakarta alike, one should not ignore the active processes of what Noam Chomsky called the "manufacture of consent."

### ***The Seizure of the Fretilin Radio Link***

An especially egregious example of censorship over East Timor by a Western liberal democracy was the act by Australian authorities to seize the only Fretilin radio link with the outside world and

to effectively gag the voice of the East Timorese resistance. This occurred at a time when the East Timorese were suffering the full brunt of the land and air onslaught and at a time when population loss was at its greatest. It was not the most honorable episode in a sorrow saga on the part of the Australian government.

While East Timor solidarity activists in Darwin managed to establish a radio link with Fretilin on 7 December 1975, the day of the invasion, it was not until just prior to the intended visit to East Timor the following month by the UN Special Envoy, Winspeare Guiccardi, that the Canberra government decided to close down the “illegal” link. The seizure occurred ten days before Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser was due on an official visit to Indonesia. Fraser, described the radio link as embarrassing to all Australians. As the Sydney Morning Herald (28 January 1976) wrote of this act, “The new government is slinking into Labor's escape hole. Like Labor, the Government is espousing a cause (Timorese self-determination) which can be evaded, legalistically, by off-loading responsibility for embarrassing action on to a Portugal too incapacitated to meet its obligations and so unable to embarrass our ruthless neighbor.” [see Diplomacy]

### ***The Jenkins Article Affair (April 1986)***

As a general statement, the Australian media and the Indonesian government entered a long period of frosty relations, eventually leading to blanket bans on visiting Australian journalists, at least until the Australian media became socialized in the basic tenets of non-confrontational/non controversial ASEAN-style media reporting. Claims made by Australian government officials and political

leaders (Whitlam, Woolcott) that Australian journalists mounted a media vendetta against Canberra stemming from the Balibo killings, never held water. [see Diplomacy: Australia]

But, in April 1986, press tolerance of reporting on Indonesia breached the limits of tolerated elite discourse both in Indonesia and Australia. Indonesian hostility to the publication on 10 April 1986 by David Jenkins, the foreign editor of the Sydney Morning Herald, of an article on Suharto's private riches deemed offensive to the Indonesian President might be considered as a watershed in Australia's relations with the Indonesian New Order. In an unprecedented reaction, the Indonesian government moved quickly to impose sanctions upon, not only the Australian press, but Australian tourists and the Australian government itself. Both Australian and U.S. journalists seeking to cover the ASEAN summit meeting in Bali between U.S. President Ronald Reagan and President Suharto were also sanctioned. At the end of the day, the huff and puff, the recriminations, the blandishments and the editorial interventions on Australian-Indonesian relations all pointed in one direction, namely that the doctrine of good bilateral relations should not be undermined by irritants such as human rights issues, press freedoms, democracy issues and, once and for all, the question of Indonesian sovereignty over East Timor.

### ***Inside East Timor***

As John Taylor (1985, 135-37) has written, the whole thrust of the Australian government position on East Timor after 1975 was its “self-proclaimed ignorance” of what was actually occurring inside the territory. The absence of hard evidence as to resistance to Indonesian rule was evidence of de facto Indonesian integration and additional argument in favor of de jure recognition of Indonesia's takeover. In any case, the facts could be ascertained by visiting delegations of which the



Indonesians were usually more than pleased to facilitate. Additionally, Indonesian propaganda had long put about that only 200 odd Fretilin or so-called “peace disturbing elements” remained. To the extent that the resistance was reported in East Timor, it was dominated by speculations as to the actual numbers of armed Fretilin “remnants,” a view encouraged by both Indonesia and its Western backers, while missing the point as to the burgeoning nationalist resistance from among even those young East Timorese deemed “re-socialized” under Indonesian rule. When, by the 1990s, Fretilin/Falintil could no longer be dismissed as a symbol of the national resistance, a false “civil war” discourse came to be swallowed in the Western media, entirely serviceable to the Jakarta view. In a similar vein, media reporting on human rights excesses in East Timor seldom saw through the woods for the trees, seldom conveyed the big picture story of accumulated acts of human and cultural genocide perpetrated by the army of occupation over 24 years and seldom identified the *causas bellus* of injustice in East Timor.

While, as discussed below, the Dili massacre was exceptional in the sense of the presence of foreign witnesses, other massacres obviously escaped direct foreign observation. The Kraras massacre of August 1983 was a case in point. This is a reference to the massacre committed at the strategic village of Kraras near Viqueque on the south coast with others subsequently killed in a “clean sweep” operation. Even when the story got out, largely thanks to the testimony of Bishop Ximenes Belo who witnessed the graves at Kraras, it was marginalized in the Western press. One exception was Peter Millership, (Reuters, Dili), “Timor Bishop accuses military of massacring 84 villagers” (1 March 1984). (cf. Taylor 1985, 182).

Taylor (1985, 59) writes that journalists who were permitted to enter the territory since 1985 and who asked about troop deployments found the level of fighting greater than the military was

prepared to admit. Citing Jacques Guillon of AFP, "Report from Dili" (7 July 1985), Taylor notes that when a group of foreign correspondents sought to visit Baucau in July 1985, their trip was cancelled "because of recent incidents in the area between Fretilin and the army" entirely contrary to the "return to normalcy" line purveyed by foreign governments, Australia included. Taylor observed that media attention swung to the trials of prisoners in Dili, not to the conditions under which they were held. "Playing down the continuing war, much of the international press focused on the trials as evidence of an improving process of normalization."

One exception to the kind of reporting that relegated the resistance in East Timor to the interior columns of wire service reports, obscure Church publications, and to such organs of support groups as *Tapol Bulletin* and *East Timor News*, was "Fretilin fights on, hoping for support" by Queensland historian Ross Fitzgerald, published in *The Bulletin* (3 March 1987) and articles based upon smuggled photographs of Falintil guerillas on the move in the East Timor bush supplied by Fitzgerald and published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (15 April 1987). Based upon interviews and investigations conducted in Portugal, Fitzgerald showed that, contrary to popular belief and contrary to the campaign waged by Jakarta and the Western capitals to delegitimize the resistance in East Timor, the war raged on.

The visit by Pope John Paul II to East Timor on 8 October 1989 was an event fraught with difficulties for the Indonesian authorities, not only offering major propaganda advantages but also exposing East Timor to close scrutiny. While an unprecedented number of journalists accompanied the Pope to East Timor – in excess of one hundred – the promise of complete freedom to report what they saw proved somewhat illusory, indeed, certain journalists had their visas denied, while others had film seized and exposed. But it was the act of demonstrators who unfurled banners in

front of the Pope calling for the salvation of East Timor that upstaged the Papal visit in the world press. Even so, this was episodic reporting, and in the general sweep of time, soon forgotten. [see Church]

The visit to East Timor by U.S. Ambassador John Monjo on 17 January 1990 obviously afforded an opportunity for East Timorese to advance their claims. As it happened, photographs of the violence committed by the Indonesian military authorities against the demonstrators duly squirreled out of Dili appeared on the pages of the world's press. Freelance writer Andrew McMillen (1992, chap.7) writes that “The photographs and our accounts are among the first graphic evidence from presumably reliable Western sources giving an indication of life under the gun in East Timor.” This was but a prologue to Western reporting on the Dili massacre, again by freelancers and amateurs, not major news agencies

### ***Press Reporting on the Dili Massacre***

Media analyst Jefferson Lee writes that over the long period of Indonesian occupation of East Timor, restrictions on the entry of foreigners meant that very few visual accounts of the destruction reached the outside world. He continues that, without question, “the most consequential aspect of media coverage of the Dili massacre was the successful smuggling out of film showing the actual massacre of the mourners at Santa Cruz cemetery,” a reference to film taken at considerable risk by British television journalists, Chris Wenner (Max Stahl) and Steve Cox. “Not only was the film graphic evidence of the carnage but it showed that the victims were unarmed civilians and included in their ranks women and children” (Gunn with Lee 1994, 176).

To be sure, video footage of the massacre had tremendous impact upon audiences around the world. As a Yorkshire television documentary entitled “In Cold Blood,” impact of the video became magnified as it came to be played back countless times to international audiences. Governments were forced to respond in response to enraged civil societies. In Portugal, a day of national mourning was declared. In Australia, demonstrations for solidarity with East Timor along with calls by trade unions for boycotts recalled the days of 1975. The U.S., the EU, the Scandinavian countries, Japan, and the Vatican, all expressed their condemnation of the massacre. Led by Canada, half a dozen countries suspended aid to Indonesia. Lee continues that, in a statement justifying the U.S. Congress call for an aid boycott of Indonesia, one Congressman stated that it was the viewing of an unedited version of this film which swayed the unanimous vote of the U.S. Congress” (Gunn with Lee 1994, 176).

Even so, exacting analysis of media reporting on the Dili massacre and its sequels, especially as it related to Australia, reveals a pattern whereby the human rights discourse on Indonesia/East Timor was not allowed to override the “legality” (read illegality) of Australia's de jure support for Jakarta's annexation. In other words, the state in Australia sought to draw the line between human rights reporting and agitation on the self-determination question. For the Keating Labor government, an Australian press readjustment was essential to the public relations hype surrounding his April 1992 visit to Jakarta. This visit, in turn, would pave the way for Canberra's business-driven “Asia links” campaign, and an enduring dalliance with the dictatorship that would culminate with the secret Australian-Indonesian Defense Treaty of December 1995.

### ***Manufacturing Media Responses***

Just as the East Timor self-determination issue become marginalized in Western media in the years following the Dili massacre, the international solidarity community creatively moved to raise East Timor's profile. In the face of ASEAN media management, for example, the APCET cycle of conferences ensnared the media in the Philippines and in Thailand in legal and moral debates on East Timor's status, although the controlled medias in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia closed ranks. [see International Solidarity]

U.S. President Clinton's presence at the APEC conference in Jakarta in November 1994 was another media opportunity, this time exploited by East Timorese, namely in the way of a spectacular break-in to the U.S. Embassy compound in Jakarta. Author-journalist Sonny Inbaraj (1995, 156) relates that Suharto was actually “robbed of his glory” by the Embassy sit-in. Raising the stakes in their quest for self-determination, East Timorese activists began a series of high profile Embassy break-ins beginning in 1995, including the Dutch Embassy on 14 November, and the Japanese Embassy on 21 December. Taking Japanese media as emblematic, East Timor momentarily returned to NHK evening news for the first time since a visit to Dili in mid-1994 by Japanese Diet members, but for only for thirty seconds, and without meaningful analysis. Print media in Japan offered little space and even less analysis (cf. Gunn 1996, 73-76).

### ***Nobel Peace Prize and Sequels***

As would be expected, and no doubt as intended by the Norwegian Nobel Peace Prize Committee, the award of the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize to two sons of East Timor, Bishop Carlos Ximenes Belo and José Ramos-Horta, attracted major global media coverage on the award and on the plight of East Timor, at least momentarily. Taking the case of Japan, Gunn (reg.easttimor, 11 October 1996)

wrote that the Nobel had produced in that country “a small avalanche of media publicity.” But still, even major news agencies were not beyond generating factual and interpretive distortions on East Timor's legal status.

While the two laureates were widely feted around the globe, they also had to bear the full brunt of Indonesian disinformation, and even vilification. Indonesian censorship of issues of the March 1996 Readers' Digest, which carried a cover story on Bishop Belo, is just one case in point. But Jakarta also hired public relations organization Hill & Knowlten to advise on damage control after the massacre. Jefferson Lee (2000, 172-73) relates that in June 1997 Canberra contributed to the malaise by shutting down its Radio Australia transmitter, thus denying Bahasa Indonesia news programs to East Timorese. Even so, he continues, “the significant point” about reporting in this period was that there were still no permanently based Australian correspondents inside East Timor, “mindful of their visa renewals” and with added pressure from the Australian Embassy, echoing the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) policy line.

### ***Downfall of Suharto (May 1998)***

Writing of the economic crisis in Indonesia and the downfall of Suharto in May 1998, Jefferson Lee (2000, 176) demonstrates that the Canberra government defended the collapsing Indonesian regime to the end. While, obviously, responses to the economic crisis varied, in Australian media the DFAT continued to uphold military links at the expense of human rights. Paradoxically, while Canberra was praising Indonesian defense chief General Wiranto for a constitutional transition, the Indonesian media emerging from dictatorship was taking a far more robust position on military

abuses than even the Western (at least, Australian) liberal press. With few exceptions, the Western press did not respond to this opening.

In early June 1998 Japanese national broadcaster NHK commenced reporting the chaos unfolding in Jakarta. Analysis was provided by Taizo Watanabe, ex-Japanese Ambassador to Jakarta, standing in front of a map of the archipelago entirely missing the Nusa Tenggara islands including Timor. East Timor was absent from this discussion. Timor only returned to the NHK map in a report of 12 June, graphically highlighting the East Timorese protest outside the Indonesian Foreign Ministry.

Lee (2000, 178) argues that Australian media preoccupation with the events in Jakarta surrounding the burgeoning *reformasi* movement led to a neglect of hard reporting on East Timor. This was particularly the subtext in the Murdoch press flagship in Australia, The Australian, which persisted in playing up the strategic links-real politik dimension over and above a human rights perspective. Taking The Australian as exemplar, Lee (2000, 180-81) also exposes the way this newspaper uncritically upheld the fiction of Indonesian troop withdrawals from East Timor (July-August 1998), namely the reporting of journalist Don Greenless who joined 100 Indonesian and international journalists invited to witness the fake withdrawals. The charade was only exposed by solidarity activists, but the message appeared lost alongside DFAT press releases offering credibility to the Indonesian position.

Through 1998, activist journalists also took strategic aim at Gareth Evans, long dominating the Australian Labor Party's position on East Timor. An interview between activist Andrew McNaughton with Bishop Belo played on ABC TV sharply contradicted Evans' assertion that only

19 or so people had been killed in the Dili massacre. Importantly, McNaughton followed through with an opinion piece in *The Age* (29 November 1998). With Evan's resignation, foreign affairs spokesperson, Laurie Brereton began to push for UN peacekeepers in East Timor, a populist sentiment embarrassing the Howard government over TNI violence and militias. The point is that Australian media reporting on East Timor in the context of the shifting Labor Party position (confirmed at the ALP Federal Conference in Tasmania in January 1998) more or less forced Howard to write his now famous letter to President Habibie. [see Diplomacy, Australia]

Still, as Lee writes of the Alas “incident” of November 1998, “the vast gulf between official versions and observations from people on the ground typifies most media coverage of the time which supported the official line.” The Alas massacre and coverup, he reminds, us was “arguably the turning point in the implementation of Indonesia's plans to 'leave nothing but ants.’” Allowing that there may have been exaggerations, he concludes, the voices of East Timorese were closer to the truth than the sanitized official reports. John Martinkus, the only journalist to investigate the massacre, experienced increasing frustration in getting his reports published. But, by early 1999, when over 6,000 refugees fled Covalima, the Australian public became increasing aware of the escalating violence and, accordingly, it became more difficult for the Australian government to “keep a lid on things” (Lee 2000, 183).

### ***Press Reporting on UNAMET***

Taking Japanese media as a bell-weather of media coverage of East Timor, reporting only began to ratchet up in response to the dramatic. Such was NHK coverage of East Timorese participation in the occupation of the Indonesian national parliament. As with other international media, Japanese media coverage on East Timor picked up with news of the 5 May New York Agreement and with



the arrival in East Timor of an increasing number of international, including Japanese journalists in the two month period before the ballot. A long history of media closure over East Timor was coming to an end in the international media, but there was an abiding sense that academia and journalism lagged far behind even UN planning on East Timor's future.<sup>1</sup>

To be sure, as academic media analyst Rodney Tiffen (2001, 86) has written, media coverage on the historic ballot reached saturation point in Australia and garnered widespread interest around the world. All major international media was represented, print, electronic, and photojournalist. These included CNN, which provided near real-time footage, all major Japanese news agencies, including NHK, all major Australian news agencies, along with a raft of freelancers including veterans of many international conflicts and interventions.

One could count scores of foreign journalists at UNTAET press briefings, along with a dozen or so camera crews. A special briefing in Bahasa Indonesia was also provided to the large contingent of journalists arriving from Indonesia, including national television broadcaster, TVRI, as well as local journalists from Timor-Leste. Never before in the history of the half-island, had the attention of global media been so focused. Numbering some hundreds, and representing every major country and region, the press contingent filmed, probed, interviewed, analyzed, and dissected the UNAMET process, as well – crucially – documented the violations and assassinations committed by the TNI and the militia.

The contrast could not have been greater with the period only twelve months earlier when East Timor needed all the media attention it could get. Through July-August 1998, student activists in the Student Solidarity Council headed by Antero Bendito da Silva, had courageously staged East

Timor-wide meetings to hear views on the prospects of a referendum as canvassed by the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative Jamsheed Marker. International press interest in East Timor was negligible. As alluded, the sole correspondent consistently reporting these risk-fraught events was freelancer John Martinkus (2001, 51-61), joined by the odd visiting correspondent dispatched from Jakarta (cf. Gunn 2000).

While the media presence increased incrementally in the run-up to the ballot, the ballot itself became the media event for most. Still there was a paucity of hard analysis on the militia build-up, despite information supplied by East Timor international solidarity groups. Looking back, there was little effort made on the part of international media to expose the disinformation disseminated by the Canberra government that militia killings were the work of “rogue” elements, as opposed to the work of a military chain of command. As Jefferson Lee argues, the Western press continued to report every denial of TNI involvement by General Wiranto, President B.J. Habibie, and Foreign Minister Ali Alatas “as though it may have had some credibility.” Added to that, “the reporting of obvious fabrications became part of a bargaining chip to entice the Indonesian side into accepting the May 5th agreement for the popular consultation” (Lee 2000, 186).

Exceptional was the work of Australian independent filmmaker Carmela Barenowska who, on 17 April 1999, recorded the words of militia commander Eurico Guterres ordering the murder of East Timorese pro-independence supporters. Importantly, her documentary “Shoot them Dead” was shown on Australian SBS on 23 June, with the Guterres clip appearing on a number of international television stations, including Japan's NHK. She later produced the acclaimed “Scenes from an Occupation, East Timor 1999.” Some sectors of the international media, appear to have been swallowed Indonesian disinformation as gospel, Japan's national broadcaster included. But sections

of the print media in Japan also frequently recycled the Indonesian “civil war” theory, thus offering legitimacy to Indonesian claims to police the ballot. [see Diplomacy, Japan] But satellite technology also offered immediacy to the East Timor violence in a highly competitive media environment, and attempts at filtering out the truth at this stage risked alienating increasingly aware audiences and readerships across the world.

There is no question that the international media, through its exposé of Indonesian crimes, raised the threshold of awareness of the ballot and the East Timor self-determination to rare heights over a relatively long period, at least from a global media perspective. Just as media coverage of East Timor came to be fed back to various national medias, so in its day of glory or rather, infamy, East Timor became a global media icon. Tiffin (2001, 84-85) estimates that, in quantum terms, media coverage of the ballot may have exceeded the sum total of coverage since 1975. Unusual even by international standards, extended media coverage of East Timor generated a wave of global sympathy, undoubtedly contributing to the building a new international consensus as to humanitarian intervention. In Australia (and Portugal), where huge public demonstrations were held, East Timor emerged as a national political spectacle and treated in the media as such (cf. Lee 2000, 191). But, as should be expected, even at the height of the violence, distant East Timor competed with a plethora of international and domestic stories, especially in the U.S. press. Tiffin (2001, 85) allows that some media reporting was prone to exaggeration in the heat of the moment, but the violence was also real. Amazingly, no foreign journalists were killed during the ballot, although certain were threatened, some severely assaulted, some targeted and hunted, just as all endured risks. One who was targeted and killed, as captured by a Newsweek photographer and subsequently published in a series of iconic color photographs, was East Timor journalist Bernardino Guterres, a freelancer working for *Liberta*, a newsletter published by the East Timor

student organization, Impetta. Undoubtedly, the small number of journalist casualties owes to explicit instructions from TNI, although the perception at the time was that violence was random and often uncontrolled.

Tiffen (2001, 86) allows that such saturation coverage makes analysis difficult, especially as various discrete stages were involved, each with a different tone, and posing specific challenges. However, in such crisis circumstances, he writes, there is a tendency “to exaggerate the significance of the most immediate happenings.” For example, upbeat reporting on the relative peacefulness of the ballot, had to be contrasted with the violence of the following week, especially after the announcement of the result of the ballot. Most foreign reporters simply left by special charter flights on 5 September, with a further evacuation on 10 September. Three of them joined East Timorese fleeing to Dare, offering a sporadic telephone link to the world.

Obviously Timor did not immediately disappear from the international media spotlight, but reporting lacked the immediacy of the preceding weeks, undoubtedly contributing to a sense on the part of the East Timorese of abandonment. Media then shifted to speculation as to international intervention. The creation and entry of INTERFET into East Timor offered a new opportunity for international media reporting. East Timor would remain a major international media story through October, although reporting became more sporadic in subsequent months.

Two foreign journalists did pay the supreme sacrifice. They were Financial Times reporter Sanders Thoenes, shot on 21 September by members of the Lospalos-based Battalion 745 as they entered Dili, and Agus Mulyawan, an Indonesian reporter working for a Japanese news agency, killed on 25 September by TNI-support Team Alfa militia in Lospalos. Tiffen (2001, 69) is critical of certain

journalists who not only endangered themselves, but placed grave risks upon their East Timorese interpreters and assistants. Tiffen also acknowledges that Australia media reporting was at this stage biased towards reporting upon the Australian INTERFET contribution, but, perhaps understandable given the security provided and a relatively open attitude to the role of media alongside. Even so, this analyst finds much imprecision in reporting casualties with little attempt to investigate the conflicting casualty reports from the high hundreds to the thousands (Tiffen 2000, 75).

According to Jefferson Lee (2000, 195) the real significance of the Australian media coverage of INTERFET was that it allowed the Canberra government to exonerate their earlier collaboration with the TNI and emerge as champions of the humanitarian rescue. Seen this way, the Howard government was adroitly able to rework Australian nationalism to political advantage. This argument is not without reason, as the events of 1999 opened up festering wounds in the Australian media between solidarity groups and certain of the key political actors driving policy on East Timor in Australia over the previous 25 years. As Alison Browinowski (2003, 167-86) has written, in *About Face: Asian Accounts of Australia*, regional Asian (especially Indonesian and Malaysian) media reporting on Australian participation in UNAMET, INTERFET and even UNTAET was both hostile and deceptive in its depiction. But all this hostility went unnoticed in the Australian media which was overwhelmingly triumphant in its portrayal of the Australian role.

The international media basically stayed with East Timor through until independence. Although the number of resident and visiting journalists never reached the heights of August 1999 and, while East Timor was by now relegated to the inside pages, if reported at all, specific events nevertheless attracted major media attention through the UNTAET period, namely the August 2001 Constituent

Assembly elections, and the 20 May 2002 independence extravaganza. Over a hundred international journalists and all major news and television agencies reported these events. The UNTAET process itself offered “employment” to a number of news agencies that supported staff in Dili. In turn, the UNTAET media section offered weekly briefings, interview opportunities, along with widespread access to foreign media. It might be said that no other country in the region offered such transparency and access to foreign media as East Timor under UN stewardship. Even so, following the independence spectacular, the East Timor “story” soon died, with international media attention moving to other situation, regions and stories. Few journalists report development issues, as opposed to the sensational and headline-making, just as East Timor's needs today are developmental not crisis-driven. Besides, the media turned to post-mortem studies, of which John Martinkus' *A Dirty Little War* is exemplary.