

mainstream media organisations. Consequently, the public sphere is routinely shaped by market researchers, public relations practitioners and micro-managing spin doctors. The reception accorded to Hager's book illustrates this process. After initial controversy, Brash's departure allowed John Key, Bill English and their advisers to rejuvenate the National brand in a news world without political memory.

### References

- Miller, R. (2006, November 26). Brash would not have survived Hager's revelations, *Sunday Star-Times*, p. A11.
- Tucker, J. (2006). Hollow men, hollow victory? *Noted*. Wellington: NZ Journalists Training Organisation. (Retrieved 18 April 2007): [www.journalismtraining.co.nz/n200703a.html](http://www.journalismtraining.co.nz/n200703a.html)

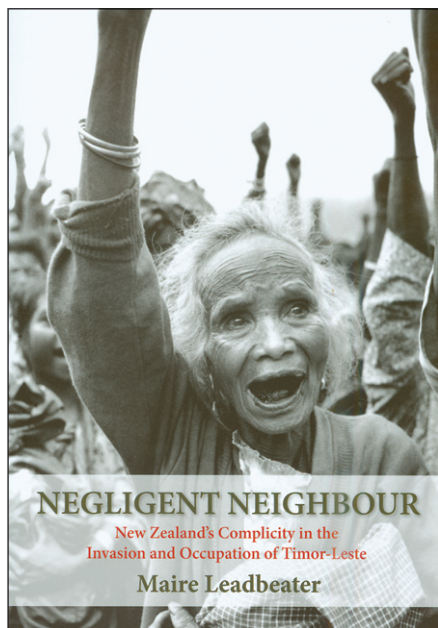
*MATT MOLLGAARD is radio curriculum leader in AUT University's School of Communication Studies. He researched an honours thesis on East Timor.*

## Tenacious, sad account of NZ complicity on East Timor

*Negligent Neighbour: New Zealand's Complicity in the Invasion and Occupation of Timor-Leste*, by Maire Leadbeater. Nelson: Craig Potton Publishing, 2006, 280 pp. ISBN: 13: 9781877333590.

THIS is an essential book for any one interested in the way that New Zealand formulates and carries out its foreign policy. It is also a stark reminder that New Zealand, a founding member of the United Nations, a vocal supporter of decolonisation and a country much-praised for its peacekeeping efforts all over the world has not always been willing to take a moral stance when balancing trade, security and human rights.

Maire Leadbeater has produced the most detailed account so far of New Zealand's involvement in the



tragedy that engulfed East Timor during and after the 1975 Indonesian invasion of the former Portuguese colony. My interest in this story comes from my own study of many of the previously unreleased or meticulously expunged documents detailing New Zealand's involvement in the East Timor crisis of 1974-1976 during my post-graduate research. During this research, Leadbeater's brother, Green Party parliamentarian Keith Locke, managed to secure the release of the most damning and often, disturbing, official memoranda, cables and policy recommendations relating to New Zealand's know-

ledge of and *de facto* acquiescence to Indonesia's invasion and occupation of East Timor. They present New Zealand policy-makers as confounded, complicit and even conniving during the escalation of the crisis and in its aftermath. They also show the geo-political structures that informed New Zealand foreign policy during and after the invasion. New Zealand worked closely with Australia and other Western powers to ensure the Indonesians could carry out their plans without overt criticism from its friends and neighbours (Mollgaard, 2002).

Leadbeater has combined these documents and others released since with insightful interviews with former New Zealand foreign affairs officials and the recollections of the activist community (of which she was a key figure) that fought long and hard to bring the plight of the people of East Timor to light.

This book diverges from the more measured approach to New Zealand's policy towards East Timor that is evident in writing by foreign affairs experts such as associate professor Steve Hoadley from the University of Auckland. Hoadley characterises New Zealand's policies as 'tempered by realist concerns about regional instability, outside meddling, and incapacity for self-governance' along

with a realisation that the bilateral relationship with Indonesia far outweighed that of one with East Timor (Hoadley, 2005). Leadbeater characterises New Zealand policy as 'pragmatism over principle', 'high-level subterfuge' as 'not counting the cost to the East Timorese' and that New Zealand 'shamelessly put its good name to the service of Indonesia' (Leadbeater, 2006, pp. 12-73).

Leadbeater's long involvement with the struggles of the people of what is now Timor-Leste, her personal relationships with some of them and her humanitarian background give colour and emotion to this story. This is an activist's account, not a dry textbook or theoretical treatise about foreign policy formulation.

Leadbeater also grapples with the ultimate impasse about New Zealand's involvement in the story—could we have prevented it? It is very hard to determine what impact New Zealand opposition would of had on Indonesia's desire to incorporate East Timor. This conundrum is evident in *Negligent Neighbour*. Leadbeater states that 'I believe it was in New Zealand's power to help stop the violence and support the right of East Timor's people to self-determination' but gives no real detailed policy suggestions or other critical actions that New Zealand could of taken (p. 14).

While the book criticises New Zealand's deference to Indonesian wishes, its links with the Indonesian military, its soft stance on the occupation at the United Nations and its attempts to ban opponents of the Indonesian regime from speaking in New Zealand, no solid alternatives are offered. Leadbeater does suggest that New Zealand could have called for the United Nations Security Council to take action, perhaps stimulating other countries to criticise Indonesia's activities in East Timor. However, as the book details, the United States was supportive of Indonesian policies and it is very likely they would have vetoed any serious resolution condemning them.

It is wrong to criticise *Negligent Neighbour* for this too harshly, but the context, both locally and internationally, in which New Zealand formed its policies on East Timor is vital to understanding what happened. During the build-up to the invasion, New Zealand politicians and the media were more concerned with the 1975 election that would see National replace Labour and keep control of the House until 1984. Unlike Australia, in New Zealand there was little public knowledge of the plight of the East Timorese. It took events such as the 1991 Santa Cruz massacre, when nearly 1000 East Timorese

where killed, injured or ‘disappeared’ by the Indonesian occupying forces for the New Zealand media to take notice of the tiny province. The 1999 riots and militia killings that followed the overwhelming vote to forge an independent Timor-Leste also focused attention on the province. Apart from these major cataclysms, very little news from East Timor reached the average New Zealander.

There is also New Zealand’s preference for ‘quiet over megaphone diplomacy’, an approach that has endeared New Zealand to Indonesia and smoothed the way for military, trade and aid cooperation. This private and gentle dialogue was developed during the years of the occupation of East Timor and still serves New Zealand today. Indonesian politician Sutradara Gintings has characterised the relationship between the two countries as ‘quite different to that of other Western countries’, as one of ‘fair and equal interactions’ rather than ‘dictating’ Western standards to Indonesia (Young, 2007).

Much of New Zealand’s policy on East Timor was formulated in this vacuum, outside of public scrutiny and heavily influenced by New Zealand’s desire to maintain good relations with Indonesia. Leadbeater does raise the issue of a ‘compliant media’ in New Zealand—one that

consistently failed to ask the questions that would have revealed more about New Zealand’s involvement in the East Timor story.

This is an interesting nuance that deserves further investigation. Would a more concerned, active and informed media have forced the New Zealand government to reveal more about its role in the occupation of East Timor, leading to a stronger public constituency on the issue and different policy outcomes in New Zealand? This lack of in-depth foreign affairs reporting from New Zealand’s mainstream media outlets continues today. None of the major media sources have specially trained local foreign affairs reporters who can penetrate what Leadbeater calls the ‘diplomatic art of double-speak’ and ask the questions about our foreign policy that produce unequivocal answers (Leadbeater, p. 15).

*Negligent Neighbour* may be due some criticism for downplaying the role of the East Timorese themselves. While the book acknowledges that the different factions that have fought for control and influence in the territory gave the Indonesians and their supporters cover for some Indonesian actions, there is more to be said about how the economic, religious, geographical and political divides in East Timorese society have been and

are still now detrimental to a stable nation. Without making excuses for the Indonesian occupation and the machinations of other nations behind the scenes, the confusion generated by the factional fighting and politics in Timor-Leste has helped foreign nations wash their hands of the situation before and more recently has led to significant international peacekeeping deployments, further raising tensions.

While Leadbeater characterises criticism of Timor-Leste inter-factional struggles as ‘blaming the victims’, there is genuine concern in the region that Timor-Leste sorts through its problems (p. 227). It is important now that stability and common cause drives Timor-Leste into the future. This is especially important as its politicians prepare to engage with Australia over the unfair allocation of oil resources in the Timor gap, a situation Leadbeater notes as critical to economic progress for Timor-Leste (pp. 229-230).

*Negligent Neighbour* is a thorough and well-researched book, covering 20 years of New Zealand’s involvement in one of the most murderous and corrupt repressions of a people in recent history, in considerable detail. Readers will be alarmed at the way in which New Zealand officials acted to deflect criticism of

Indonesia and distanced themselves from the human tragedy visited on the East Timorese by the Indonesian occupation. Many will question what else has been done in our name. Leadbeater reinforces this uneasy feeling by drawing comparisons between New Zealand’s involvement in East Timor and our reaction to the repression of independence movements in West Papua and Aceh by Indonesia (pp. 219-221).

The reader will also get a sense of the dedication and tenacity of the New Zealand humanitarian activist community, who spent many years struggling against pragmatic government policies and a largely disinterested media to bring the reality of East Timor and New Zealand’s complicity in its sad history into the public sphere.

## References

- Hoadley, S. (2005). Diplomacy, peace-keeping, nation-building: New Zealand and East Timor. In Smith, A.L., (Ed.), *Southeast Asia and New Zealand: a history of regional and bilateral relations*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Mollgaard, M. (2002). New Zealand and East Timor: 1975, the ‘regrettable’ invasion. Unpublished honours dissertation. Auckland: The University of Auckland.
- Young, A. (2007, April 10). Don’t tell us what to do, says visiting Indonesian MP. *The New Zealand Herald*. p. 5.