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# Tell Me No Lies

John Pilger

## About the Book

At a time when journalism is under attack as never before, *Tell Me No Lies* could not be more timely. It is a celebration of the very best investigative journalism, and some of the greatest practitioners of the craft: **Seymour Hersh** on the My Lai massacre; **Paul Foot** on the Lockerbie cover-up; **Wilfred Burchett**, the first Westerner to enter Hiroshima following the atomic bombing; Israeli journalist **Amira Hass**, reporting from the Gaza Strip in the 1990s; **Gunter Wallraff**, the great German undercover reporter; **Jessica Mitford** on ‘The American Way of Death’; **Martha Gelhorn** on the liberation of the death camp at Dachau. The book, a selection of articles, broadcasts and books extracts that revealed important and disturbing truths, ranges from across many of the critical events, scandals and struggles of the past fifty years. Along the way it bears witness to epic injustices committed against the peoples of Vietnam, Cambodia, East Timor and Palestine. John Pilger sets each piece of reporting in its context and introduces the collection with a passionate essay arguing that the kind of journalism he celebrates here is being subverted by the very forces that ought to be its enemy. Taken as a whole, the book tells an extraordinary ‘secret history’ of the modern era. It is also a call to arms to journalists everywhere – before it is too late.

## About the Author

John Pilger grew up in Sydney, Australia. He has been a war correspondent, author and film-maker. He has twice won British journalism's highest award, that of Journalist of the Year, for his work all over the world, notably in Cambodia (of which an extract is included here) and Vietnam. Among a number of other awards, he has been International Reporter of the Year and winner of the United Nations Association Media Peace Prize. For his broadcasting he has won France's Reporter Sans Frontières, an American television Academy Award, an Emmy, and the Richard Dimbleby Award, given by the British Academy of Film and Television Arts. In 2003 he received the Sophie Prize for thirty years of exposing deception and improving human rights. He lives in London.

ALSO BY JOHN PILGER

*The Last Day*

*Aftermath: The Struggle of Cambodia and Vietnam* (with Anthony Barnett)

*The Outsiders* (with Michael Coren)

*Heroes*

*A Secret Country*

*Distant Voices*

*Hidden Agendas*

*The New Rulers of the World*

To the memory of Paul Foot

# Tell Me No Lies

Investigative Journalism and Its Triumphs

Edited by John Pilger

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## NOTE ON THE TEXT

Some of the extracts and articles collected in this book have been abridged, and notes and references have been omitted. A deletion of text is indicated by a one-line space; a two-line space indicates a section break in the original, or the place where a new chapter originally occurred. Readers who would like to read the full text of an extract, or a book in its entirety, are referred to the bibliographical information in the Sources.

Unless marked 'Author's footnote', the footnotes have been added by the editor to provide the reader with explanatory detail or background information.

# INTRODUCTION

## John Pilger

*Disobedience, in the eyes of anyone who has read history, is man's original virtue.*

*Oscar Wilde*

Printed on the back of this book is a favourite quotation of mine by the American journalist T. D. Allman: 'Genuinely objective journalism', he wrote, is journalism that 'not only gets the facts right, it gets the meaning of events right. It is compelling not only today, but stands the test of time. It is validated not only by "reliable sources", but by the unfolding of history. It is journalism that ten, twenty, fifty years after the fact still holds up a true and intelligent mirror to events.'

Allman wrote that as a tribute to Wilfred Burchett, whose extraordinary and often embattled career included what has been described as 'the scoop of the century'. While hundreds of journalists 'embedded' with the Allied occupation forces in Japan in 1945 were shepherded to the largely theatrical surrender ceremony, Burchett 'slipped the leash', as he put it, and set out on a perilous journey to a place now engraved in the human consciousness: Hiroshima. He was the first Western journalist to enter Hiroshima after the atomic bombing, and his front-page report in the London *Daily Express* carried the prophetic headline, 'I write this as a warning to the world'.

The warning was about radiation poisoning, whose existence was denied by the occupation authorities. Burchett was denounced, with other journalists joining in the orchestrated propaganda and attacks on him. Independently and courageously, he had exposed the full



horror of nuclear warfare; and his facts were validated, as T. D. Allman wrote when Burchett died in 1983, 'by the unfolding of history'. His dispatch is reprinted on page 10.

Allman's tribute can be applied to all those whose work is collected in these pages. Selecting them has been an immense privilege for me. The opportunity to honour the 'forgotten' work of journalists of the calibre of Wilfred Burchett, Martha Gellhorn, James Cameron and Edward R. Murrow is also a reminder that one of the noblest human struggles is against power and its grip on historical memory. Burchett on the meaning of Hiroshima, Gellhorn on genocide, Cameron on resistance: each work, together with that of contemporaries such as Paul Foot, Robert Fisk, Linda Melvern and Seumas Milne, not only keeps the record straight but holds those in power to account. This is journalism's paramount role.

The reference to investigative journalism in the title needs explaining, even redefining. T. D. Allman's description is a sure starting point, rescuing 'objectivity' from its common abuse as a cover for official lies. The term, investigative journalism, did not exist when I began my career; it became fashionable in the 1960s and 1970s and especially when Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein exposed the Watergate scandal. In making my selection, I have applied a broader definition than detective work and included journalism that bears witness and investigates ideas. Thus, Phillip Knightley's account of the London *Sunday Times's* tortuous disclosure of the scandal of the drug thalidomide, which caused terrible foetal malformations in the 1950s and 1960s, sits easily alongside historian, poet and satirist Eduardo Galeano's exposé of the propaganda of war, consumerism and mass impoverishment.

I have preferred the great mavericks, whose work continues to inspire, over those perhaps more celebrated and whose inclusion would merely commemorate their fame. Although Seymour Hersh's exposé of the My Lai massacre in Vietnam helped make his name, it is his consistent work over forty years, calling power to account, that has earned his place in these pages.

I hasten to say that, in making this selection (with 1945 as an arbitrary starting year), I have had to leave out some remarkable

work rather than further reduce the length of each essay. I apologise to those who could rightly expect to see their names included here. In my original list was I. F. Stone's investigation into the 'hidden history' of the Korean War (1952), which demonstrates that the fraudulent reasons for the Anglo-American attack on Iraq in 2003 were not the first of their kind. Inexplicably, Jeremy Stone refused to allow the inclusion of this landmark work of his father 'Izzy', who fought censorship all his life.

The best investigations are not always the work of journalists. In the section on Iraq, Joy Gordon, an academic, contributes an essay ([see here](#)) that draws on her study of a tragedy many journalists avoided and still suppress: the effects of the United Nations sanctions imposed on Iraq between 1990 and 2003. This medieval-style siege cost the lives of up to a million people, many of them young children. Compared with the misdeeds of Saddam Hussein, whose devilry was, for a time, a headline a day, this epic crime of 'our' side is little known.

My other favourite quotation belongs to the great Irish muckraker Claud Cockburn. 'Never believe anything,' he wrote, 'until it is officially denied.' That the state lies routinely is not what the media courses teach. If they did – and the evidence has never been in greater abundance – the cynicism that many young journalists believe ordains them as journalists would not be directed at their readers, viewers and listeners, but at those in false authority.

Secretive power loathes journalists who do their job: who push back screens, peer behind façades, lift rocks. Opprobrium from on high is their badge of honour. When the BBC refused to show James Cameron's filmed report from wartime North Vietnam, Cameron said, 'They whispered that I was a dupe, but what really upset them was that I was not *their* dupe.' In these days of corporate 'multimedia' run by a powerful few in thrall to profit, many journalists are part of a propaganda apparatus without even consciously realising it. Power rewards their collusion with faint recognition: a place at the table, perhaps even a Companion of the British Empire. At their most supine, they are spokesmen of the spokesmen, de-briefers of the briefers, what the French call

*fonctionnaires*. It is the honourable exceptions who are celebrated here, men and women whose disrespect for authoritarianism has allowed them to alert their readers to vital, hidden truths.

In his superb exposé of the secret government and media role in the attack on Arthur Scargill and the National Union of Mineworkers, (page 284), Seumas Milne identifies the subtle collaboration of journalism with power in the ‘dogmatic insistence’ of many mainstream journalists

that events are largely the product of an arbitrary and contingent muddle . . . a chronic refusal by the mainstream media in Britain – and most opposition politicians – to probe or question the hidden agendas and unaccountable, secret power structures at the heart of government . . . The result is that an entire dimension of politics and the exercise of power in Britain is habitually left out of standard reporting and analysis. And by refusing to acknowledge this dimension, it is often impossible to make proper sense of what is actually going on. Worse, it lets off the hook those whose abuse of state authority is most flagrant . . .

The Indian writer Vandana Shiva had this in mind when she celebrated ‘the insurrection of subjugated knowledge’ against the ‘dominant knowledge’ of power. For me, that describes the work in this collection. Each piece stands outside the mainstream; and the common element is the journalist’s ‘insurrection’ against the ‘rules of the game’: Burchett in Japan, Cameron in Vietnam, Melvern in Rwanda, Max du Preez and Jacques Pauw in apartheid South Africa, Greg Palast and David Armstrong in the United States, Günter Wallraff in Germany, Amira Hass in Gaza, Anna Politkovskaya in Chechnya, Fisk in Lebanon and Iraq.

Thus, Paul Foot’s eleven-year investigation of the sabotage of Pan Am 101 over the Scottish town of Lockerbie in 1989 and the injustice of the subsequent trial and judgement concludes with these words of outrage:

The judgement and the verdict against Megrahi [one of two Libyans accused] were perverse. The judges brought shame and disgrace, it is fair to say, to all those who believed in Scottish justice, and have added to Scottish law an injustice of the type

which has often defaced the law in England. Their verdict was a triumph for the CIA, but it did nothing at all to satisfy the demands of the families of those who died at Lockerbie – who still want to know how and why their loved ones were murdered.

Why is journalism like this so important? Without it, our sense of injustice would lose its vocabulary and people would not be armed with the information they need to fight it. Orwell's truth that 'to be corrupted by totalitarianism, one does not have to live in a totalitarian country' would then apply. Consider the hundreds of journalists who have been persecuted and murdered in Guatemala, Nigeria, the Philippines, Algeria, Russia and many other oppressive states because their independence and courage are feared. When the Turkish parliament responded to the overwhelming public opposition to Turkey joining the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and voted against the demands of Washington and the Turkish generals, this unprecedented show of real democracy in a country of murderous shadows was due, in no small part, to those journalists who have often led the way in exposing the criminality of the state, particularly the repression of the Kurds. Ocar Isik Yurtcu, the editor of *Ozgur Gundem* (Free Agenda), is currently serving fifteen years for breaking a law which classifies all reporting of the oppression and rebellion in Turkey as either propaganda or 'incitement to racial hatred'. His case is emblematic of laws used against those who challenge the state and the military; and he and dozens of other independent journalists are an inspiration.

In Europe, the United States, Canada and Australia, journalists generally do not have to risk their lives. The writer Simon Louvish recounts the story of a group of Russians touring the United States at the height of the Cold War. They were astonished to find, after reading the newspapers and watching television, that all the opinions on the vital issues were more or less the same. 'In our country,' they said, 'to get that result we have a dictatorship, we imprison people, we tear out their fingernails. Here you have none of that. So what's your secret? How do you do it?'

In his unpublished introduction to *Animal Farm*, Orwell described how censorship in free societies was infinitely more sophisticated and thorough than in dictatorships because ‘unpopular ideas can be silenced and inconvenient facts kept dark, without any need for an official ban’. It is more than half a century since he wrote that, and the essential message remains the same.

None of this is to suggest a ‘conspiracy’, which in any case is unnecessary. Journalists and broadcasters are no different from historians and teachers in internalising the priorities and fashions and propriety of established power. Like others with important establishment responsibilities, they are trained, or groomed, to set aside serious doubts. If scepticism is encouraged, it is directed not at the system but at the competence of its managers, or at popular attitudes as journalists perceive them.

From the Murdoch press to the BBC, the undeclared rules of the modern media club vary not a great deal. The invisible boundaries of ‘news’ allow false premises to become received wisdom and official deceptions to be channelled and amplified. The fate of whole societies is reported according to their usefulness to ‘us’, the term frequently used for Western power, with its narcissism, dissembling language and public omissions: its good and bad terrorists, worthy and unworthy victims. This orthodoxy, wrote Richard Falk, professor of international relations at Princeton University, is conveyed ‘through a self-righteous, one-way moral/legal screen [with] positive images of Western values and innocence portrayed as threatened, validating a campaign of unrestricted political violence’. This is so ‘widely accepted’ that ‘law and morality [are] irrelevant to the identification of rational policy.’

It seems exquisitely ironic that as media technology advances almost beyond our imagination, it is not just the traditional means of journalism that are becoming obsolete, but its honourable traditions. What of Edmund Burke’s concept of the press as a ‘fourth estate’, as a counter to the state and its ‘interests’? The question is perhaps answered in the country where I was apprenticed, Australia, which has a rich history of fierce, independent journalism, yet today offers a microcosm of the demise of a free media in a relatively free

society. In its 2003 index of press freedom, the press monitoring organisation Reporters Without Borders listed Australia in 49th place, ahead of only autocracies and dictatorships. How did this come about? And what does it tell us?

To most Australians, the name Edward Smith Hall will mean nothing; yet this one journalist did more than any individual to plant three basic liberties in his country: freedom of the press, representative government and trial by jury. In 1826, he launched his weekly, eight-page, eight-penny *Sydney Monitor* by giving prominence to a letter from a reader who described the function of the journalist as ‘an inveterate opposer [rather] than a staunch parasite of government’.

The measure of Hall’s principled audacity can be judged by the times. He started his newspaper not in some new Britannia flowering with Georgian liberalism, but in a brutal military dictatorship run with convict slave labour. The strong man was General Ralph Darling; and Hall’s defiance of Darling’s authority in the pages of his newspaper, his ‘insurrection’, brought down great wrath and suffering on him. His campaigns for the rights of convicts and freed prisoners and his exposure of the corruption of officials, magistrates and the Governor’s hangers-on made him a target of the draconian laws of criminal libel. He was routinely convicted by military juries, whose members were selected personally by General Darling. He spent more than a year in prison, where, from a small cell lit through a single grate and beset by mosquitoes, he continued to edit the *Monitor* and to campaign against official venality. When Darling was recalled to London and free speech took root in Australia, it was the achievement of Edward Smith Hall and independent journalists like him.

When Hall died in 1861, there were some fifty independent newspapers in New South Wales alone. Within twenty years this had risen to 143 titles, many of which had a campaigning style and editors who regarded their newspapers as, in Hall’s words, ‘the voice of the people . . . not the trade of authority’. The Australian press then, wrote Robert Pullan, was ‘a medley of competing voices’. Today, the medley is an echo chamber. Of twelve principal

newspapers in the capital cities, Rupert Murdoch controls seven. Of the ten Sunday newspapers, Murdoch has seven. In Adelaide, he has a complete monopoly save one new weekly; he owns everything, including all the printing presses. He controls almost 70 per cent of principal newspaper circulation, giving Australia the distinction of the most concentrated press ownership in the Western world.

In the 1970s and 1980s, one remarkable newspaper, the *National Times*, bore Edward Smith Hall's legacy. The editor, Brian Toohey, refused to subvert his paper's journalism to the intimidation and manipulations of politicians and their corporate 'mates'. Toohey had suitcases of leaked documents hidden all over Sydney (see some of them in 'The Timor Papers' [here](#)). His small editorial team, in exposing a catalogue of Australia's darkest secrets, posed a real threat to political corruption and organised crime. Although owned by the establishment Fairfax family, which then controlled a newspaper, radio and television empire, the *National Times* had limited resources and was vulnerable to libel actions, and political intimidation.

In the mid-1980s, the Labor Party Prime Minister Bob Hawke and his Treasurer Paul Keating openly campaigned for the paper's demise, accusing its journalists of distortion. Finally removed from the editorship, Toohey wrote a seminal piece that described 'a new Australia forged by a new type of entrepreneur [whose] fortunes are built on deals where nobbling official watchdogs or bribing union bosses eliminates much of the risk . . . [where] tax cheats become nation builders'. Hawke and Keating, he wrote, 'do more than enjoy the company of the new tycoons: they share their values while the sacrifices are being made by the battlers for whom they once fought.' The article was never published.

As a small media pond inhabited by large sharks, Australia today is a breeding ground for censorship by omission, the most virulent form. Like all his newspapers throughout the world, Murdoch's harnessed team in Australia follows the path paved with his 'interests' and his world view (which is crystallised in the pages of his *Weekly Standard* in Washington, the voice of America's 'neo-conservatives'). They echo his description of George W. Bush and

Tony Blair as 'heroes' of the Iraq invasion and his dismissal of the 'necessary' blood they spilt, and they consign to oblivion the truths told by history, such as the support Saddam Hussein received from the Murdoch press in the 1980s. One of his tabloids invented an al-Qaida training camp near Melbourne; all of them promote the Australian élite's obsequiousness to American power, just as they laud Prime Minister John Howard's vicious campaign against a few thousand asylum-seekers, who are locked away in camps described by a United Nations inspector as among the worst violations of human rights he had seen.

The Australian experience is what the British can expect if the media monopolies continue to grow in Britain and broadcasting is completely deregulated in the name of international 'competitiveness' (profit). The Blair government's assault on the BBC is part of this. The BBC's power lies in its dual role as a publicly-owned broadcaster and a multinational business, with revenues of more than \$5 billion. More Americans watch BBC World than Britons watch the main BBC channel at home. What Murdoch and the other ascendant, mostly American, media barons have long wanted is the BBC broken up and privatised and its vast 'market share' handed over to them. Like godfathers dividing turf, they are impatient.

In 2003, Blair's ministers began to issue veiled threats of 'reviewing' the whole basis of licence fee funding of the BBC which, with this source taken away, would soon diminish to a version of its progeny, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, which relies on direct government grants and is frequently intimidated. Indeed, privatisation was almost certainly on the hidden agenda behind Blair's spin master's attack on the BBC over one radio report by the journalist Andrew Gilligan, who exposed the government's manipulation of the evidence and intelligence reports in a dossier that sought to give credence to the 'threat' posed by Saddam Hussein's non-existent weapons of mass destruction.

The genesis for this is not hard to trace. In 1995, Rupert Murdoch flew Tony and Cherie Blair first class to Hayman Island, off the Queensland coast. In the tropical sunshine and standing at the blue



News Corp. lectern, the future British prime minister effused about his 'new moral purpose in politics' and pledged safe passage of the media from 'heavy-handed regulation' to the 'enterprise' of those like his host, who applauded and shook his hand warmly. The next day, in London, satire died once again when Murdoch's *Sun* commented: 'Mr Blair has vision, he has purpose and he speaks our language on morality and family life.'

Until recently, these matters were rarely discussed in the media pages of British newspapers, which preferred the arcane manoeuvres of media executives and their cleverness in securing generous rewards for themselves. There was the usual hypocritical tut-tutting over tabloid intrusions into the lives of the rich and famous. Critical ideas about journalism were mentioned in passing, or defensively, if at all. The publication of Lord Hutton's now notorious report in January 2004, attacking the BBC and absolving the government in the Gilligan affair, has broken the silence, though for how long, we shall have to see.

With the exception of Edward R. Murrow's radio broadcasts, the journalism in this book was published, not broadcast. It is only thirty years since newspapers relinquished their mantle to television as the main source of public information. The power of broadcast journalism's immediacy brought a form of censorship that the press had never known: insidious and subtle, dressed in terms that were often euphemisms, such as 'impartiality', 'balance' and 'objectivity'.

A pioneer of a very different kind of visual journalism was Peter Watkins, whose astonishing work *The War Game* created on film the effects of a nuclear attack on Britain: the celluloid equivalent of Wilfred Burchett's 'warning to the world'. Commissioned in 1965 by the BBC, it was immediately banned. The BBC's director-general, Sir Ian Trethowan, said it would disturb those of 'limited mental capacity and the elderly living alone'. What the public were not told was that the then chairman of the BBC Board of Governors, Lord Normanbrook, formerly Secretary to the Cabinet, had already written to his successor in Whitehall, Sir Burke Trend, inviting the government to censor the film. *The War Game*, he wrote,

is not designed as propaganda: it is intended as a purely factual statement, and is based on careful research into official material. I have seen the film and I can say that it has been produced with considerable restraint. But the subject is, necessarily, alarming; and the showing of the film on television might have a significant effect on public attitudes towards the policy of the nuclear deterrent. In these, I doubt whether the BBC ought alone to take the responsibility of deciding whether this film ought to be shown.

So they agreed, and *The War Game* was suppressed for twenty-one years, and when it was finally shown, the studio presenter, Ludovic Kennedy, merely said it had been 'too shocking and too disturbing' to show when it was made, and the deception remained.

What Watkins's film showed was the danger to the population of a country which had more nuclear bases per head of population and per square mile than anywhere on earth. So complete was the suppression of this that between 1965 and 1980 Parliament did not once debate the nuclear arms race, arguably the most urgent and dangerous issue facing humanity. A parallel silence existed in the media, buttressed by the 'lobby system'. Journalists were either put off the scent or given briefings that were exercises in outright lying. There were twelve bases, said the Ministry of Defence, 'and no more'. This was not challenged until 1980 when Duncan Campbell, a *New Statesman* journalist, revealed that Britain was host to 135 bases, each presumably targeted by the Soviet Union.

The Falklands War in 1982 gave the game away. Journalists who had defended their objectivity as 'a matter of record' were, on their return from the South Atlantic, outspoken in their praise of their own subjectivity in the cause of Queen and Country, as if the war had been a national emergency, which it was not. If they had any complaint it was that they had not been allowed to be sufficiently 'on side' with the British military so they could win 'the propaganda war'. (The same complaints were heard following the 1991 Gulf War and the 1999 NATO attack on Yugoslavia.)

During the Falklands conflict, the minutes of the BBC's Weekly Review Board showed that the coverage was to be shaped to suit 'the emotional sensibilities of the public' and that the weight of the

BBC's coverage would be concerned with government statements of policy and that an impartial style was felt to be 'an unnecessary irritation'. This was not unusual. Lord John Reith, the BBC's founder, established 'impartiality' as a principle to be suspended whenever the establishment was threatened. He demonstrated this, soon after the BBC began broadcasting in the 1920s, by secretly writing propaganda for the Baldwin Tory government during the General Strike.

Some eighty years later, in 2003, the traditional right-wing press renewed its refrain, together with the Blair government, that the BBC's journalism was 'anti-war'. Such irony, for the opposite was true. In its analysis of the coverage of the invasion and occupation of Iraq by some of the world's leading broadcasters, the Bonn-based media institute Media Tenor found that the BBC had permitted less coverage of dissent than all of them, including the US networks. News of anti-war demonstrations, which reflected views held by the majority of the British public, accounted for merely 2 per cent of the BBC's reporting.

The honourable exceptions stand out. The often inspired *Independent*, the intermittent *Guardian* and a reborn *Daily Mirror* exposed the unprovoked and bloody nature of Bush's and Blair's attack. The *Mirror's* support for the two million who filled London in protest, the largest demonstration in British history, was a phenomenon, as was its bold, informed and thoughtful coverage. The very notion of the tabloid as a real newspaper was reclaimed from the Murdoch *Sun*, which looked feeble and out of step by comparison. However, when Baghdad fell, the *Mirror* stumbled too. 'Patriotic' readers had raised objections, it was said, the circulation had faltered, and a new corporate management ordered the paper's return to the realm of faithless butlers, witless celebrities and support for the Blair Government.

During the invasion of Iraq, a new euphemism appeared: 'embedding', invented by the heirs of the Pentagon's language assassins who had dreamt up 'collateral damage'. 'Embedding' was not just true of journalists in the field. Standing outside 10 Downing Street, the BBC's political editor reported the fall of Baghdad as a

kind of victory speech, broadcast on the evening news. Tony Blair, he told viewers, 'said they would be able to take Baghdad without a bloodbath, and in the end the Iraqis would be celebrating. And on both these points he has been proved conclusively right.' Studies now put the death toll as high as 55,000, including almost 10,000 civilians, a conservative estimate. One of Robert Fisk's pieces in this collection is his investigation in September 2003 that showed that at least 500 Iraqis die or are killed every week as a result of the Anglo-American occupation (page 566). And this apparently does not constitute a 'bloodbath'. Would the same have been said about the massacre of 3,000 people in New York on September 11, 2001? What distinguishes the honourable exceptions from other journalists is, above all, the equal value they place on life, wherever it is. Their 'we' is humanity.

In the United States, which has constitutionally the freest media in the world, the suppression of the very idea of universal humanity has become standard practice. Like the Vietnamese and others who have defended their homelands, the Iraqis are unpeople: at worst, tainted; to be abused, tortured, hunted. 'For every GI killed,' said a letter given prominence in the *New York Daily News*, '20 Iraqis must be executed.' The *New York Times* and *Washington Post* might not publish that, but each played a significant role in promoting the fiction of the threat of Saddam Hussein's weapons arsenal.

Long before the invasion, both newspapers cried wolf for the White House. The *New York Times* published front-page headlines such as '[Iraq's] SECRET ARSENAL: THE HUNT FOR GERMS OF WAR', 'DEFECTOR DESCRIBES IRAQ'S ATOM BOMB PUSH', 'IRAQI TELLS OF RENOVATIONS AT SITES FOR CHEMICAL AND NUCLEAR ARMS' and 'DEFECTORS BOLSTER US CASE AGAINST IRAQ, OFFICIALS SAY'. All these stories turned out to be crude propaganda. In an internal email (published in the *Washington Post*), the *New York Times* reporter Judith Miller revealed her principal source as Ahmed Chalabi, an Iraqi exile and convicted embezzler who ran the Washington-based and CIA-funded Iraqi National Congress (INC). A Congressional inquiry concluded that almost all

the 'information' provided by Chalabi and other INC exiles was worthless.

In July 2003, as the occupation was unravelling, both the *Times* and the *Post* gave front-page prominence to the administration's carefully manipulated 'homecoming' of twenty-year-old Private Jessica Lynch, who was injured in a traffic accident during the invasion and captured. She was cared for by Iraqi doctors, who probably saved her life and risked their own lives in trying to return her to American forces. The official version, that she bravely fought off Iraqi attackers, is a pack of lies, like her 'rescue' from an almost deserted hospital, which was filmed with night-vision cameras by a Hollywood director. All this was known in Washington, and some of it was reported.

This did not deter the best of American journalism from uniting to help stage-manage Private Lynch's beatific return to Elizabeth, West Virginia, with home-town imagery and locals saying how proud they were. The *Post* lamented that the whole affair had been 'muddied by conflicting media accounts', which brought to mind Orwell's description of 'words falling upon the facts like soft snow, blurring their outlines and covering up all the details'.

In Washington, I asked Charles Lewis, the former CBS *60 Minutes* star, about this. Lewis, who now runs an investigative unit called the Center for Public Integrity, said, 'You know, under Bush, the compliance and silence among journalists is worse than in the 1950s. Rupert Murdoch is the most influential media mogul in America; he sets the standard, and there is no public discussion about it. Why do the majority of the American public still believe Saddam Hussein was behind the attacks of 9/11? Because the media's constant echoing of the government guarantees it.'

I asked him, 'What if the freest media in the world had seriously challenged Bush and Rumsfeld and investigated their claims, instead of channelling what turned out to be crude propaganda?' He replied, 'If the media had been more aggressive and more tenacious towards getting the truth, there is a very, very good chance we would not have gone to war in Iraq.'

Jane Harman, a rare dissenting voice in the US Congress, said of the invasion: 'We have been the victims of the biggest cover-up manoeuvre of all time.' But that, too, is an illusion. What is almost never reported in the United States is the pattern of American colonial interventions. Only 'anti-Americans', it seems, refer to the hundreds of illegal 'covert operations', many of them bloody, that have denied political and economic self-determination to much of the world.

This has been suppressed by a voluntary system of state-sponsored lies that began with the genocidal campaigns against Native Americans and the accompanying frontier myths; and the Spanish-American War, which broke out after Spain was falsely accused of sinking an American warship, the *Maine*, and war fever was whipped up by the newspapers of Randolph Hearst, the Murdoch of his day; it lived on in the 1960s, in the non-existent North Vietnamese attack on two American destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin for which the media demanded reprisals, giving President Johnson the pretext he wanted.

In the late 1970s, a free, silent media allowed President Carter to arm the Indonesian dictatorship as it slaughtered the East Timorese, and to begin secret support for the mujaheddin in Afghanistan, from which came the Taliban and al-Qaida. In the 1980s, an absurdity, the 'threat' to the United States from popular movements in Central America, notably the Sandinistas in tiny Nicaragua, allowed President Reagan to arm and support the bloodthirsty terrorists known as the *Contra*, leaving an estimated 70,000 dead. That George W. Bush's administration gives refuge to hundreds of Latin American torturers, favoured murderous dictators and anti-Castro hijackers, terrorists by any definition, is almost never reported in the mainstream media. Neither is the work of a 'training school' at Fort Benning, Georgia, the School of the Americas, where manuals teach methods of intimidation and torture and the alumni include Latin America's most notorious oppressors.

'There never has been a time,' said Tony Blair in his address to Congress in 2003, 'when the power of America was so necessary or so misunderstood or when, except in the most general sense, a study

of history provides so little instruction for our present day.’ He was warning us off the study of imperialism, for fear that we might reject the ‘manifest destiny’ of the United States and his embrace of an enduring, if subordinate, imperial role for Britain.

Of course, he cannot warn off anybody without the front pages and television and radio broadcasts that echo and amplify his words. By discarding its role as history’s ‘first draft’, journalism promotes, directly and by default, an imperialism whose true intentions are rarely expressed. Instead, noble words and concepts like ‘democracy’ and ‘freedom’ and ‘liberation’ are emptied of their true meaning and pressed into the service of conquest. When journalists allow this corruption of language and ideas, they disorientate, not inform; or, as Edward S. Herman put it, they ‘normalise the unthinkable for the general public’.

In June 2002, before an audience of robotically cheering West Point military cadets, George W. Bush repudiated the Cold War policy of ‘deterrence’ and said that the United States would take ‘pre-emptive action’ against potential enemies. A few months earlier, a leaked copy of the Pentagon’s Nuclear Posture Review had revealed that the administration had contingency plans to use nuclear weapons against Iran, North Korea, Syria and China. Following suit, Britain has announced for the first time that it will ‘if necessary’ attack non-nuclear states with nuclear weapons. There has been almost no reporting of this, and no public discussion. This is as it was fifty years ago when British intelligence warned the government that the United States was ready to wage a ‘preventative’ atomic war against the Soviet Union, and the public knew nothing about it.

Neither did the public know, according to declassified official files from 1968, that Britain’s most senior Cold War planners were convinced the Russians had no intention of attacking the West. ‘The Soviet Union will not deliberately start general war or even limited war in Europe,’ advised the British chiefs of staff, who described Soviet policy as ‘cautious and realistic’. This private truth was in stark contrast to what the press and the public were told.

‘When truth is replaced by silence,’ the Soviet dissident Yevgeni Yevtushenko said, ‘the silence is a lie.’ There is a surreal silence today, full of the noise of ‘sound-bites’ and ‘grabs’ of those with power justifying their deception and violence. This is presented as news, though it is really a parody in which journalists, variously embedded, gesture cryptically at the obvious but rarely make sense of it, lest they shatter the ‘one-way moral screen’, described by Richard Falk, between ‘us’ and the consequences of political actions taken in our name. Never has there been such a volume of repetitive ‘news’ or such an exclusiveness in those controlling it.

In 1983, the principal media were owned by fifty corporations. In 2002, this had fallen to nine transnational companies. Rampant deregulation has ended even a semblance of diversity. In February 2004, Rupert Murdoch predicted that, within three years, there would be just three global media corporations and his company would be one of them. On the internet, the leading twenty websites are now owned by the likes of Fox, Disney, AOL Time Warner, Viacom and a clutch of other giants; just fourteen companies attract 60 per cent of all the time Americans spend online. Theirs is a global ambition: to produce not informed, freethinking citizens, but obedient customers.

It is fitting that *Tell Me No Lies* ends with a selection of the work of Edward Said. Prophetically, he wrote in *Culture and Imperialism*, ‘We are beginning to learn that de-colonisation was not the termination of imperial relationships but merely the extending of a geo-political web which has been spinning since the Renaissance. The new media have the power to penetrate more deeply into a “receiving” culture than any previous manifestation of Western technology.’ Compared with a century ago, when ‘European culture was associated with a white man’s presence, we now have in addition an international media presence that insinuates itself over a fantastically wide range.’

Events in Venezuela illustrate this. Since he swept to power with a popular vote, the reformist President Hugo Chavez has had to defend himself and his government in an all-out war waged by the corporations that control the country’s media. ‘While Chavez



respected the rules of democracy,' wrote Ignacio Ramonet, the director of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 'the media, in the hands of a few magnates, used manipulation, lies and brainwashing [and] abandoned any role as a fourth estate. Their function is to contain demands from the grass roots and, where possible, also to seize political power.' This is how the Chilean press helped ignite events that led to a coup against Salvador Allende in 1973.

It is more than 400 years since the first great battle for the freedom of the press was fought by dissenters, dreamers and visionaries, who begged to differ from the established guardians of society. They suffered terrible penalties. Thomas Hytton was executed for selling books by William Tyndale, who translated the Bible into English. Richard Bayfield, John Tewsbury and other booksellers were burned at the stake. For the crime of printing Puritan books in Holland, John Lilburne, the Leveller, was given 500 lashes in the streets of London, pilloried and fined the fortune of £500.

'What is deeply ironic,' wrote David Bowman in *The Captive Press*,

is that, having thrown off one yoke, the press should now be falling under another, in the form of a tiny and ever-contracting band of businessmen-proprietors. Instead of developing as a diverse social institution, serving the needs of a democratic society, the press, and now the media, have become or are becoming the property of a few, governed by whatever social, political and cultural values the few think tolerable . . . you could say that what we are facing now is the second great battle of the freedom of the press.

Never has free journalism been as vulnerable to subversion on a grand, often unrecognisable scale. Giant public relations companies, employed by the state and other powerful vested interests, now account for much of the editorial content of the media, however insidious their methods and indirect their message. Their range is ideological: from corporatism to war. This is another kind of 'embedding', known in military circles as 'information dominance', which in turn is part of 'full spectrum dominance': the global control of land, sea, air, space and information, the stated policy of the

United States. The aim, as the media analyst David Miller has pointed out, is that eventually ‘there is no distinction between information control and the media’.

‘How do we react to all of this? How can we defend ourselves?’ asks Ignacio Ramonet. ‘The answer is simple. We have to create a new estate, a fifth estate, that will let us pit a civic force against this new coalition of [media] rulers.’ He proposes an international association of journalists, academics, newspaper readers, radio listeners and television viewers that operates as a ‘counterweight’ to the great corporations, monitoring, analysing and denouncing them. In other words, the media, like governments and rapacious corporations and the international financial institutions, itself becomes an issue for popular action.

My own view is that the immediate future lies with the emerging *samidzat*, the word for the ‘unofficial’ media during the late Soviet period. Given the current technology, the potential is huge. On the worldwide web, the best ‘alternative’ websites are already read by an audience of millions. The outstanding work of Dahr Jamail, a Lebanese-American reporter, who has provided a source of eyewitness truth-telling during the bloody occupation of Iraq, rarely appears in the Western press, yet is published frequently on the worldwide web. The courageous reporting of Jo Wilding from besieged Iraq is a striking example (page 573). She is not an accredited journalist, but one of a new breed of ‘citizen reporters’. In South Korea, where political dissent is expressed mostly on the internet, the Ohmynews website claims no less than 33,000 citizen reporters.

Together with independent newspapers and radio stations broadcasting the likes of Amy Goodman and Denis Bernstein, it is this network that has helped raise the consciousness of millions; never in my lifetime have people all over the world demonstrated greater awareness of the political forces ranged against them and the possibilities for countering them. ‘The most spectacular display of public morality the world has ever seen,’ was how the writer Arundhati Roy described the outpouring of anti-war anger across the world in February 2003. That was just a beginning and the

cause for optimism. For the world has two superpowers now: the power of the military plutocracy in Washington and the power of public opinion. The latter ought to be the constituency of true journalists. This is not rhetorical; human renewal is not a phenomenon; a movement has arisen that is more diverse, more enterprising, more internationalist and more tolerant of difference than ever and growing faster than ever. I dedicate this collection to the best of my fellow journalists, who are needed now more than ever.

John Pilger

August 2005

# MARTHA GELLHORN

## Dachau

1945

WHEN HE SENT me to report the war in Vietnam in 1966, Hugh Cudlipp, then editor-in-chief of the *Daily Mirror*, handed me an article by Martha Gellhorn. 'We are fighting a new kind of war,' it began. 'People cannot survive our bombs. We are uprooting the people from the lovely land where they have lived for generations; and the uprooted are not given bread but stone. Is this an honourable way for a great nation to fight a war 8,000 miles from its safe homeland?'

The piece was published in the *Guardian*; in the United States, no newspaper would touch such an exposé of American methods and motives. The Johnson administration quietly saw to it that Martha was never allowed back into South Vietnam. To Cudlipp, here was a war reporter who had finally made sense of the war. 'All I did,' she later told me, 'was report from the ground up, not the other way round.'

Martha and I corresponded for almost a decade before we met and became close friends. In scribbled notes, often written in transit in places of upheaval, we agonised over the gulf between the morality in ordinary people's lives and the amoral and immoral nature of power: a distinction she believed journalists were duty-bound to understand. 'Never believe governments,' she wrote, 'not

any of them, not a word they say; keep an untrusting eye on all they do.'

Martha was born in St Louis, Missouri; her father was a doctor of powerful liberal instinct and her mother a campaigner for female suffrage. The family was well-connected; Eleanor Roosevelt, the president's wife, was a friend. During the Depression years in the 1930s, Harry Hopkins, who ran the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, sent her across the United States to report on how people were surviving. With her beauty, intelligence and disrespect for authority, she caused her first stir when she encountered the suffering of poverty and demanded that officials all the way up to President Roosevelt do something about it. Her book *The Trouble I've Seen*, a collection of her reports, led her naturally to journalism.

She learned her craft in Spain during the Civil War, feeling, along with many of her contemporaries, that here was the place to stop fascism: the battleground of democracy. Her dispatches to *Collier's* magazine set an intense style that was both humane and sparse, firing bullets from the heart. It was here that she met up with Ernest Hemingway, her future husband. She was audacious, incorrigible and very brave. In 1944, with women banned from the front line, she stowed away in a hospital ship heading for the Normandy beaches and landed with the troops. A year later, she was one of the first to enter the Nazi death camp at Dachau.

She made Britain her base after the war. During the miners' strike in 1985, at the age of seventy-five, she drove into the Welsh valleys and went from pit village to pit village, listening. She phoned me from a telephone box in Newbridge and said, 'Listen, you ought to see what the police are doing here. They're beating the hell out of people at night. Why isn't that being reported?' I suggested she report it. 'I've done it,' she replied.

At the age of eighty, she flew to Panama in the wake of the American invasion in pursuit of its former client, General Noriega. The death toll of civilians was said to be in the hundreds. In the *barrios* of Panama City, Martha went from door to door, interviewing the survivors; she reported that the true number of dead was close to 8,000. She, an American, was accused of 'anti-

Americanism', to which she replied, 'The truth is always subversive.' She told me:

I used to think that people were responsible for their leaders, but not any more . . . individuality and the courage and bravery of people is amazing, isn't it? In El Salvador just now some young people are running a thing called the commission on human rights. They're kids, and they work in a shack behind an office collecting information on murder, torture, kidnapping and disappearances connected with government security forces. It's the most dangerous work possible. Nobody rewards them, and the moral and physical guts to do this are colossal. They are the best of human beings. We must always remember not only that they exist but they guard the honour of all of us.

Such words make her following dispatch from Dachau, taken from her book of reportage, *The Face of War*, all the more remarkable. Few pieces of journalism are finer.

## DACHAU

We came out of Germany in a C-47 carrying American prisoners of war. The planes were lined up on the grass field at Regensburg and the passengers waited, sitting in the shade under the wings. They would not leave the planes; this was a trip no one was going to miss. When the crew chief said all aboard, we got in as if we were escaping from a fire. No one looked out the windows as we flew over Germany. No one ever wanted to see Germany again. They turned away from it, with hatred and sickness. At first they did not talk, but when it became real that Germany was behind for ever they began talking of their prisons. We did not comment on the Germans; they are past words, there is nothing to say. 'No one will believe us,' a soldier said. They agreed on that; no one would believe them.

'When were you captured, miss?' a soldier asked.

'I'm only bumming a ride; I've been down to see Dachau.'

One of the men said suddenly, 'We got to talk about it. We got to talk about it, if anyone believes us or not.'