

Australia's plot to plunder East Timor's oil

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Cassandra Sorrell as Joanna and Jose Da Costa as Meta in Greater Sunrise.

Greater Sunrise

A play by Zoe Hogan

Directed by Julia Patey

Belvoir Theatre, Sydney

Until April 21

"In 2004, Australia placed a bug in Timor-Leste's presidential cabinet room, in order to gain the advantage in negotiations over resources in the Timor Sea. The bug was placed under the cover of an aid program. The bug ended up costing Timor-Leste billions of dollars in lost resources," playwright Zoe Hogan notes about her new play, *Greater Sunrise*.

"It is a story so shocking in terms of Australia's brazen breach of international law, yet it is so utterly,

disappointingly predictable. The big guy who takes advantage of a smaller neighbour is an all too familiar story. This play draws on my own experiences living and working in Timor-Leste, in addition to many conversations, interviews and hours of research."

The play is a revealing and dramatic interpretation of the clandestine events surrounding this illegal conspiracy involving both the Australian government and mining giant Woodside Petroleum, and the personal conflicts that accompany the unfolding plot.

Joana (Cassandra Sorrell), an Australian aid worker with Timorese roots who has just arrived in Timor-Leste is unwittingly caught up in the drama, becoming involved politically and personally with the scheming Mike (Alexander Stylianou), who appears to be working for both the government and the company in setting up the spy plot.

Her advisor/translator Meta (Jose Da Costa) provides a local grounding for her, as counterpoint to the scheming all around her — assisting her in organising dinner parties and village ceremonies to greet Timorese and Australian dignitaries, in particular the visiting Australian foreign minister.

The action shifts between Timor-Leste and The Hague, Netherlands, where Joana is later drawn into testifying about what she knows of the Australian spying plot. Lawyer (Laurence Coy) does a good job of preparing her for the upcoming attacks from Australian representatives in the hearing exposing Australia's crime.

Jose Da Costa, a long-time activist for Timorese independence, who plays Meta, spoke to *Green Left Weekly* about *Greater Sunrise* and its message to Australian audiences.

"I'm very happy with the play and the story it tells the Australian people," he said. "It informs audiences about the Australian government's bullying and patronising of a small country, Timor-Leste.

"It takes a stand for what is right and what is wrong. Australia has been pushing Timor-Leste to give up 80% of its resources in the Timor Sea. We are determined not to give up our sovereignty to a powerful neighbour like Australia.

"The play gives an insight into the issues behind the maritime boundary negotiations. It underlines the need for countries to talk peacefully, not fight a war, to achieve a just agreement.

"The play has had a great impact on audiences at the Belvoir Theatre. I have talked to members of the audience after performances.

"Many were not aware of the issues between Timor-Leste and Australia. The play assumes a significant role in educating Australians about the reality of this country's relations with our northern neighbour — the newest nation of the 21st century."