

JILL JOLLIFFE'S *EAST TIMOR: NATIONALISM AND COLONIALISM*:  
A REVIEW

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It is clear who has suffered most and benefited least from the forced *anschluss* of East Timor with Indonesia. By current estimates almost certainly more than 100,000 Timorese--one-sixth of the total population--have died as the direct and indirect result of the December 1975 invasion and subsequent occupation. There are no favorable accounts by neutral observers of the general behavior of Indonesian troops toward the local population during or after the actual invasion. The main object of Indonesian government activity even in 1979 appears to be the pursuit of a few hundred tenacious guerrillas rather than the reconstruction of a shattered economy and society.

Indonesia has also paid a price for its victory. Tens of thousands of troops--sometimes, in the initial invasion, accidentally deployed against each other--were unable to quell Timorese resistance, exhibiting to themselves and others the poor preparation, disorganization, and lack of battle readiness of the Indonesian armed forces. They now face the prospect, as in Irian Jaya, of protracted sporadic guerrilla warfare. Malaysians and Singaporeans were, at least briefly, disturbed by what sounded like an echo of Sukarno's aggressively nationalistic foreign policy. The Conference of Non-Aligned Nations, first in Sri Lanka and most recently in Havana, has by large majorities condemned Indonesian aggression. Australia's government has been accommodating enough, but many of its citizens have been sympathetic to the plight of the Timorese, giving what help they could to the resistance movement, and becoming the main conduit to the outside world of accurate information about events in Timor. They continue today to prick the world's conscience, keeping the issue alive despite an Indonesian-imposed wall of silence around the territory.

What did Indonesia's government get in return for Timorese suffering and its own diminished domestic and international standing? Not the fulfillment of a sovereign claim, since East Timor, while a Portuguese possession, had never been a part of Indonesian territorial ambitions. Not wealth, as Timor was both impoverished and neglected by its distant rulers. Rather, Indonesia rid itself of a left-nationalist independent Timor that would probably have pursued a domestic development strategy and an accompanying foreign policy at odds with Jakarta's economic and political dependence on the industrialized capitalist world. Was this achievement worth the costs even for Indonesia?

Jill Jolliffe, an Australian journalist who was in East Timor from September to December 1975, thinks that Indonesia should not have intervened at all. Like those who fought for Indonesian independence in 1945, she is an uncompromising nationalist. "[N]o matter which arguments are employed to support the indepen-

dence case--cultural, economic, historical--there is one overriding argument, the right of the East Timorese to determine their own destiny. If as the evidence suggests, there exists a widespread will to independence, that is a sufficient argument, irrespective of questions of 'viability', of the preparedness of the population, of the sensitivity of the region in the eyes of neighbouring countries" (p. 304).

Much of Jolliffe's book, which is the most complete account to date of the Indonesian invasion, set in a broad context of Timorese history and contemporary regional (mainly Indonesian and Australian) politics, is designed to support this argument. A long first chapter describes the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the island and traces its colonial history, from the arrival of the first Portuguese Dominican friars in the sixteenth century to the collapse of the Caetano government in 1974. Jolliffe emphasizes precolonial political and cultural differences between East and West Timor, the separate development of the two halves of the island--one under Portuguese, and the other under first Dutch, then Indonesian rule--the absence of serious Indonesian interest in East Timor until the 1970s, and the emergence in Dili in the 1960s and 1970s of a small politically conscious, Portuguese-speaking, educated elite, with reformist and eventually nationalist ideas. The second chapter details the brief organizational histories and ideologies of the colony's three principal political parties: Apodeti (Associação Popular Democrática Timorese), UDT (União Democrática Timorese), and Fretilin (Frente Revolucionária do Timor Leste Independente). Apodeti was the smallest of the three, pro-Indonesian, and concentrated in the western part of the colony near the Indonesian border. UDT was closely tied to the Portuguese establishment and gradualist in its political and social aims. Initially the largest group, it apparently lost substantial support to the more radical and militant Fretilin. The core of the book is an account of the political events of 1975, from the UDT-Fretilin coalition formed in January to the August UDT coup, the brief civil war which ended with Fretilin victory in September, the declaration of independence in November, and the Indonesian invasion on December 7. Jolliffe's main concerns here are to demonstrate Fretilin's growing popular support and its full control of East Timor between September and December, and to draw a contrast between Indonesia's public position of watchful concern and its covert interventions calculated to achieve the destruction of Fretilin and the incorporation of the territory.

In the telling of this story it is clear that Jolliffe's sympathies are given not only to the abstract cause of Timorese nationalism but to Fretilin as its concrete embodiment. Of necessity she makes majoritarian claims (difficult to prove since elections were never held, but eyewitness accounts tend to support her), but her greater interest is in the qualities of Fretilin leaders and their programs for economic and social development. Fretilin modeled itself after the independence movements in Portugal's African colonies, specifically Mozambique's Frelimo. It was certainly not communist (as Indonesian propaganda charged, and as many Indonesian leaders may even have believed) but left-nationalist, populist, and egalitarian. Its programs "called for economic reconstruction through the creation of cooperatives of production, distribution, and consumption as the basic unit of economic life, the elimination of 'excessive' dependency on foreign imports, the discouraging of monoculture and the implementation of agrarian reform defined as the expropriation of all large farms and the utilisation of unused fertile land to be worked within the cooperative system" (p. 75). In late 1974 and early 1975, it actually initiated some pilot consumer and agricultural cooperative projects and a village literacy program influenced by the work of the Brazilian educational theorist Paulo Freire.

Jolliffe's evident sympathy for the Fretilin leaders' social ideas and personal dynamism may have led her to weigh too lightly their weaknesses--for example, a tendency to factional disputes and organizational disarray, and a casual disdain, common among Third World populists, for democratic procedure--and the magnitude of their problems, especially the enormous gap between their developmental ambitions and the natural and human resources available. But she is surely right in believing that Fretilin threatened no vital interest of Indonesia, and in faulting the Australian government for not supporting East Timor's cause.

Writing primarily for an Australian audience, Jolliffe has little to say about the role of the United States. Noam Chomsky's 1978 testimony to the Fourth Committee of the United Nations' General Assembly (published in *Inquiry*, February 1979, under the title "East Timor: The Press Cover-up") describes a Ford Administration concerned only with the larger issues of geopolitics, Indonesian oil, and American business, and an American press which combined ignorance of the facts with its usual readiness to be frightened by the specter of a "Marxist takeover." We have since learned, in the cases of Rhodesia-Zimbabwe and Nicaragua, that American support for populist revolutions is not a total impossibility, but Timor is not likely to benefit from that knowledge. "Isolation," writes Jolliffe, "is the traditional enemy of the East Timorese: it was so during the harshest years of Portuguese colonial rule . . . and today, under Indonesian occupation, the old enemy has returned" (p. x).