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# THE INDONESIAN WHO JOINED FALINTIL<sup>1</sup>

**Preface, by Gerry van Klinken**

The Indonesian who joined Falintil, like the American who joined Al Qaeda or the Dutchman who joined the 1945 Indonesian revolutionaries, has power to shock because such a person questions the fundamental categories of the conflict. What after all is an Indonesian, an American, or a militant Muslim? What is this contest about? Muhammad Nasir crosses boundaries most see as so natural they are insuperable. He transforms himself from the street kid, Ketut Narto, to the policeman's adopted kid, Muhammad Nasir, and from there to the "oddball" guerrilla Klik Mesak (and presumably from Hindu to Muslim to whatever) and travels from Bali to Comandante Ular's Region 4 headquarters in the mountains of East Timor. For Nasir, these boundaries have little power to exclude. All the communities they enclose have a claim on him, but none more than others.

Meanwhile, other boundaries do have authority for him. The eloquence with which this high school dropout describes the boundaries of "rights" is striking. Taking what he needs from a bankrupt school system, he discovers truths in history text books their authors never intended him to find: East Timor, being Portuguese, wasn't available for the taking by the former Dutch colony of Indonesia.

The camaraderie of the school yard in Baucau and Dili does not distinguish between names. But here Nasir discovers the rights of "we" locals. "I wouldn't want anyone to take away my rights." The real divide is not between Indonesian and East Timorese, let alone between Muslim and Hindu or Catholic. It is between the arbitrary oppressor from outside and we who live here, for whom "the important thing is that they have enough to eat and enjoy freedom." With wonderfully lucid assurance, he reminds President Xanana that this divide remains a challenge even after the May 20, 2002 independence celebration.

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<sup>1</sup> This interview first appeared in *Inside Indonesia*, no. 71, July-September 2002 ([www.insideindonesia.org](http://www.insideindonesia.org)). Falintil: Forças Armadas de Libertação Nacional de Timor Leste, The National Liberation Armed Forces of East Timor. Falintil is Fretilin's armed wing. Fretilin: Frente Revolucionaria Timor Leste Independente, Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor.

**M. Nasir, Interviewed by Nug Katjasungkana<sup>2</sup>**

*Where are you from?*

I was born in Bali in 1975. My parents named me Ketut Narto. I was the youngest of three. My parents died when I was still small, and my two siblings disappeared until the present day. I became a street kid. Then I met a policeman who adopted me. He changed my name to Muhammad Nasir. But in the forest among the guerrillas my name is Klik Mesak, which means “odd-ball,” since I was the only Indonesian. When my father was sent to Baucau, Timor Lorosae, he took me with him. In Baucau I finished my primary school in 1990. I then moved to Dili, where I studied as far as year two in senior high school.

*How did you become involved in the Timor Lorosae freedom struggle?*

When I moved to Timor Lorosae there were very few outsiders. I mixed with the local kids. I became attracted by the struggle. The Indonesian government said East Timor was the youngest province, the twenty-seventh. So then why was there always trouble here? I wanted to know. I read a history book. West Timor (Kupang) was colonized by the Dutch, East Timor by the Portuguese. Indonesia was the former Dutch colony. It can't just take East Timor. Perhaps if it was a federation. I feel Indonesia robbed others of their rights. I wouldn't want anyone to take away my rights. What's mine is mine, no one else can have it.

Most of my friends supported independence. Some were active in the clandestine movement. In 1995 Maun Afonso, my adopted older brother and an independence supporter, took me to Fatubessi. All the villagers there, up to the village head, were independence supporters. The people were suspicious when they saw us. Who are these strangers coming here? This village often got visits from Rajawali [Kopassus<sup>3</sup>] troops. When I asked the village head about it, he said, “Just the way it is, this is an operations area.”

After some time I met a Falintil member called Mau Kulit, who followed Comandante Dudu of North Sector, Region 4. After that the villagers stopped being suspicious of me. I became an *estafeta* [runner] for Falintil, whose job was to carry letters, food, look for information and so on. I lived in Fatubessi and became a primary school teacher. Some of my ex-students are now in junior high school.

*What made you decide to fight for Timor Lorosae's independence?*

In 1995 my step-father was transferred to Oecussi to become the deputy police commander there. I stayed behind in Dili with the West Dili police chief, a Javanese man from Trenggalek whom I called “Uncle.” But I often mixed with the “naughty boys” at the markets and the bus terminal. I made more and more friends. Some were in the clandestine. So were most of my Baucau friends. One day in Dili in 1995, a pro-independence demonstration happened near my school. All the school kids joined in,

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<sup>2</sup> Nug Katjasungkana is an Indonesian human rights worker living in Dili.

<sup>3</sup> Kopassus: Komando Pasukan Khusus, Special Forces Command.

from five different senior high schools. A fight broke out with the newcomer kids from outside Timor Lorosae. I had a rock and threw it. It happened to hit a policeman who knew me. He looked at me and threatened: "Look out, you be careful!" I was afraid and ran away. When I got home at night, my room was locked from the outside. I went in by the window and took my graduation certificate. Then I stayed with a friend in Kampung Alor. I became scared and confused when I heard the news on the radio about a disappearance, mentioning my name. I wasn't game to go home, and I also didn't want to cause trouble for the people who had adopted me. If I went back, my step-father would certainly be punished because his adopted kid was in a pro-independence demo.

That's when I got to know Maun Afonso, who took me to live in his family's house in Fatubessi, the pro-independence village where the resistance made me an *estafeta*. From two Falintil members named Mario Kempes and Leão Timur I got military lessons, like how to attack an enemy fortified position. I learned how to shoot guns like the Mauser, M-16, AR-16, G-3, and the SKS. I can use a machine gun.

In 1997 Falintil decided to launch attacks against TNI<sup>4</sup> posts everywhere the day before the election. The TNI were saying Falintil no longer existed. If there was no gunfire it would prove that indeed Falintil was finished. In Fatubessi, the job went to the youths [*juventude*]. I was a *juventude* leader. We just had three grenades. Our targets were the TNI post, the house of the village chief, and a shop owned by the Catholic catechist. The village chief and the catechist were our own people. We attacked them with a grenade without pulling the pin. So they were safe. TNI didn't suspect them because they were among our targets. TNI shot off an enormous amount of ammunition. But none of us was hit. After that the soldiers arrested a lot of youths and tortured them. I wasn't arrested because they didn't suspect me. I was a primary school teacher.

I became a member of Falintil in 1998. At that time leaders of the struggle like Region 4 Comandante Ular and Regional Secretary Riak Leman and others went from village to village. I was active in those meetings too. After that I spent most of my time at the Falintil command. When many of the villagers fled because of intimidation from the [pro-Indonesian] Besi Merah Putih militia, my friends and I sent food. When the militias began to act up in Liquiça, I was often sent to Liquiça town to meet with pro-independence youths. When the clash occurred between Besi Merah Putih and the youths in Liquiça on April 4, 1999, I was in town. That night I joined a sub-regional meeting with the Region 4 Deputy Secretary Qouliati. The next day an attack occurred against the Liquiça church. The youths were only armed with arrows and swords. But the militias had automatic weapons. Behind them was the TNI also with automatic weapons. I wasn't in the church so I was OK. I tried to contact the Falintil command to ask them to send troops to stop the militias and TNI at the church. But news came from the city that should Falintil become involved all those still in the church and those taken to the military base by the militias/TNI would be killed. So Falintil didn't come down.

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<sup>4</sup> TNI: Tentara Nasional Indonesia, Indonesian National Army. Though when literally translated, TNI refers to "army," in fact the TNI includes all service branches of the Indonesian armed forces.

After that I went back to Maun Afonso's house in Fatubessi. They thought I had died in the church. Maun Afonso suggested I not leave the village. "If you're safe, we're safe. If anyone comes looking for you, I'll say 'Nasir has gone home to Bali.'" After that I stayed at Falintil command. Things improved once Unamet (United Nations Mission in East Timor) arrived. I was able to go out and buy food and clothes for the guerrillas. On the day of the referendum, I was at the command post, while my guerrilla friends voted.

### Cruelty

*Did any other Indonesians become guerrillas or join the underground resistance against the Indonesian occupation?*

Jeffrey, from Atambua in East Nusa Tenggara, now lives in Ermera. He used to be a Falintil member in Region 4 under Comandante Sabis. Ahmad, from Bima [Sumbawa], also lives in Ermera now. He was an *estafeta* since the 1980s. Lots of others quietly supported the movement by donating stuff to the clandestine. Ramlan, for example, from Sumatra. He is dead. Lots of them I don't know where they are.

*What do you think of Indonesian soldiers?*

I don't have vengeful feelings. What I don't like are the abuses they commit. Just imagine, we are the hosts here, and they come and step on us continually. I don't like that. The soldiers come to Timor Leste on instructions from their superiors to look for Falintil guerrillas. But the ones they arrest are just ordinary young people, uneducated and who don't speak Indonesian. Maybe they're carrying a small knife or a machete. Men in Timor Lorosae always carry a knife. They were sometimes tortured to death. Instead of going up into the forest, soldiers who were told to go and find Falintil would just go into the villages. They took people's cattle, chickens. Those who protested were called rebels.

Indonesia said they wanted to root out evil communists. But those doing the rooting out were even worse. They even attacked a place of worship like the church in Liquiça. Before I joined the independence movement, I often saw Indonesian cruelty. When I was still living at the West Dili police station I saw the police arrest innocent people. During interrogation they would torture them so bad that they confessed. That's not good.

It's true that Indonesia brought development even to remote areas. But many officials were corrupt. What was wrong they called right, what was right they called wrong. That's what made people dissatisfied. I didn't like it either.

I think that if after the referendum Indonesia had given up Timor Lorosae properly, without giving weapons to the militias, the Timorese would have been very grateful to Indonesia. That one Indonesian act not only caused great loss to the people of Timor Lorosae but also to the people of Indonesia. The money was wasted on militias when the Indonesian people needed it very much.

*What are your hopes for the future of Timor Lorosae?*

For me the important thing is that people should be safe and there should be justice. If I'm allowed, I want to live in Timor Lorosae. I have a wife and she is pregnant with our first child.

Right now I feel my rights have not been fulfilled. Almost all my ex-Falintil friends who weren't accepted into the Timor Lorosae armed forces were given US\$500 in assistance, but I didn't [receive it]. I was sick for the test so didn't get in. I know we didn't fight to get this or that job, but for our independence and our rights. But it's strange all the same.

For little people like myself, the important thing for the future is that the people have enough to eat and enjoy freedom. I hope President Xanana Gusmão will remember that.

*Recorded in Kampung Alor, Dili, April 24, 2002. Nug Katjasungkana (manu\_mean@yahoo.com) is a human rights activist in Dili.*

