

***Bitter Flowers, Sweet Flowers: East Timor, Indonesia, and the World Community.* Edited by Richard Tanter, Mark Selden, and Stephen R. Shalom. Lanham (Maryland): Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2001. xviii + 291 pages, index, maps, 21 photographs.**

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"A time of inexperience perhaps, but also one of generosity, of enthusiasm, of energy, of greatness of spirit, a time which will live in imperishable memory." Would that such lines—originally penned by Alexis de Tocqueville on the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789—could now be the epitaph for the UN-supervised vote which ended the Indonesian occupation of East Timor (1975-99). After twenty-four terrible years, which saw the loss of perhaps as many as a third (over 200,000) of the former Portuguese colony's population, was it not too much to still hope at the eleventh hour for a miracle? After all President Habibie (in office from 1998-99)—Indonesia's very own Dr. Strangelove—had made the stunning promise on January 27, 1999 that the East Timorese should have their independence, in the event that a clear majority rejected Jakarta's autonomy package at the ballot box. A formal agreement had also been signed in New York on May 5 between Portugal and Indonesia, under UN auspices, setting out the modalities for the "popular consultation" (Jakarta refused to countenance the term "referendum," suggesting as it did a real political choice by a sovereign people). This vested responsibility for guaranteeing security in Indonesia, whose highest authorities had solemnly undertaken to ensure that its police force would keep the peace in the approach to the UN-administered vote (eventually fixed for August 30). Here at last was a chance, or so it seemed to Indonesia watchers the world over, for a morally and financially bankrupt Republik Indonesia to regain some its former reputation won long ago on the battlefields of the independence war against colonial Holland. Might we not at last see some glimmer of decency after the dark night of Suharto's "New Order" (1966-98) and its mountains of corpses?

To believe such things of Indonesia and its Western allies—those sanctimonious and hypocritical representatives of the so-called "Free World"—is, we now realize, to believe in the existence of a parallel universe, a tropical Never-neverland where people live happily ever after and Auschwitz was a holiday camp. This is the stuff of dreams. When it comes to Indonesia and East Timor, there were never going to be any happy endings. This remarkable book, whose title—*Bitter Flowers, Sweet Flowers*—reflects the East Timorese belief in the power of the human spirit to transcend the sorrow of death as the soul of a departed Timorese migrates from its earthly abode to the Loro Sae Valhalla on Mount Matebian, tells us why. Usefully divided into five sections ("East Timor: Resistance, Repression and the Road to Independence;" "Referendum and Independence;" "East Timor, the United States and the World Community;" "East Timor and Indonesia;" and "The Future of East Timor"), it contains chapters written by experts with long experience of Indonesia and East Timor. The carefully chosen black-and-white photographs by leading international photographers of East Timor such as Ross Bird and Steve Cox bring the suffering and reality of Indonesian-occupied East Timor vividly alive, as do the six poems by contemporary East Timorese writers.

The three editors, who originally commissioned many of the essays for a special issue of the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* (now *Critical Asian Studies*) written in the

immediate aftermath of the Indonesian army's post-referendum scorched-earth campaign and the insertion of the Australian-led International Force in East Timor (InterFET) on September 20, 1999, are to be congratulated for the care they have taken with their editorial task. Apart from a curiously hit-and-miss attitude to accents on Portuguese proper names, the misspelling of the monikers of several Javanese officers ("Tiasno Sudarno" rather than "Tiasno Sudarto," "Lt-Col. Sudrajud" rather than "Lt-Col. Sudrajad"), East Timorese leaders ("Leandro Izaacs" rather than "Leandro Isaac"), and Indonesian terms ("Pemesta" instead of "Permesta," "Gumtur Merah Putih" instead of "Guntur Merah Putih," "Departemen luow negeri" rather than "Departemen Luar Negeri," etc.), scholarly standards have generally been maintained. Most important, the quality of the contributions is high, the index serviceable, and there are useful maps and glossaries of key Indonesian, Portuguese, and East Timorese terms and acronyms. The only things missing from the original publication, which might have been found useful here, are the detailed chronology of events from the Portuguese colonial period (1513-1975) to October 1999, and the trenchant analysis of Australian-Indonesian relations in relation to the East Timor issue by the Deakin University-based international relations expert, Scott Burchill. Such omissions aside, this book will be read with profit by all those with a serious interest in East Timor and its post-independence future. Above all, it is a volume whose contributors have written with passion and commitment. Unlike so many Western-based Indonesianists, particularly in the elite groves of Canberra academe, they have not left their consciences at the door.

In terms of organization and layout, the book is interestingly conceived. Beginning with the specifics of the East Timorese response to the Portuguese and the Japanese (Geoffrey Gunn's essay on the five-hundred year Timorese *Funu* [state of war and struggle]), it goes on to consider some key aspects of the anti-Indonesian resistance during the 1975-99 period, and eyewitness accounts of the United Nations Assistance Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) period (May-September 1999), which prepared the way for the vote. It then opens out to consider how East Timor figured in (or, more accurately, was sacrificed to the interests of) US and international policy towards Indonesia during the Suharto era. Richard Tanter expands the theme by showing how the initial invasion and occupation formed part of the officially sponsored terror and surveillance methods of what he has dubbed the "Indonesian Intelligence State." The final three contributions analyze the impact of East Timor's sudden independence on Indonesia (in particular the current regional conflicts in Aceh and Maluku), and the political, strategic, and economic challenges faced by an independent East Timor.

The quality and depth of the contributions vary a great deal. This is particularly noticeable in the first section, on the East Timorese resistance to foreign invasion and occupation. Gunn's knowledge of the pre-1975 period is impressive, but there are some odd errors of detail in his text (for example, references to the Salazarist "Novo Estado" rather than "Estado Novo," and the dating of the brief Indonesian-fomented civil war, which pitted the conservative UDT against the main pro-independence party, Fretilin, to October rather than August 1975). He also fails to substantiate some of his bolder claims such as "Indonesia's annexation of the [former Portuguese] territory has been, as the world now recognizes, genocide." This may be so, but one looks in vain in his relevant notes for any references to the key texts, such as Gabriel Defert's *Timor Est. Le Génocide Oublié* (Paris: Harmattan, 1992), Gutman and Rieff,

Crimes of War: What the Public Should Know (New York: Norton, 1999) or even to Richard Falk, whose essay in this volume ("The East Timor Ordeal: International Law and its Limits") deals with precisely this issue and suggests that Indonesia's actions fall more squarely under the category of Crimes Against Humanity than the more planned and legally problematic genocide.

For those familiar with Constâncio Pinto's riveting personal memoir of the resistance (co-edited by Matthew Jardine), *East Timor's Unfinished Struggle: Inside the Timorese Resistance* (Boston: South End Press, 1997), there is precious little in Mark Selden and Stephen Shalom's interview with the former underground leader ("The Student Movement and the Independence Struggle in East Timor: An Interview") which adds to what we already know about the role of students in the Clandestine Movement and their contribution to the 1999 independence campaign. It is much the same with Arnold Kohen's well-informed overview of the relationship between the Catholic Church and the independence question in East Timor, which does not take us much beyond the basics. The complete lack of footnotes or references is also puzzling. One might have expected that at the very least he would have referred readers to the relevant passages in his recently revised biography of Bishop Belo (*From the Place of the Dead: The Epic Struggles of Bishop Belo* [New York: St. Martin's, 2000]) now the standard reference work on both the post-war East Timorese Catholic Church and its world-famous prelate. Only Sarah Niner's contribution in this section really breaks new ground through her detailed analysis of the origins and struggle of the main pro-independence movement, the National Council of Maubere (post-April 1998, Timorese) Resistance (CNRM/CNRT) from its pre-1975 origins to the August 30, 1999 ballot. Much of this material constitutes work in progress and brings together in useful compass what can only be found in a more scattered format in her edited autobiography and speeches of Xanana Gusmão—*To Resist is to Win: The Autobiography and Select Writings of Xanana Gusmão* (Victoria [Australia]: Aurora Books, 2000).

The second section contains four first-hand accounts by Westerners who were present as UNAMET Political Affairs officers or as independent election monitors. Two of these (Peter Bartu and Helene van Klinken) were based outside Díli in western *kabupatèn* (regencies), Bobonaro and Ermera, which were heavily affected by the actions of pro-independence militias. This is useful not only because it allows comparison between the referendum campaign in the two districts, but also because it affords an insight into how the militias were recruited, organized, and directed by the Indonesian army (TNI). According to Bartu and Van Klinken, far from having formed "spontaneously" as units of a "guerrilla army" to fight for integration, as Indonesian officials would have it, the two principal militias (Dadurus Merah Putih [Red and White Typhoon] and Darah Integrasi [Blood of Integration]) in Bobonaro and Ermera were very much creatures of the TNI. In their view, numbers were hugely inflated, morale low, and local East Timorese militia leaders, such as the self-styled *panglima prang* (supreme war commander), João Tavares, totally dependant on their TNI handlers. In Bartu's words, "on certain days he [Tavares] appeared what he was—a sick, old man [he was suffering from malaria at the time] at the beck and call of the TNI—and accorded minimum respect. TNI controllers followed him everywhere and he never met UNAMET alone."

Another reality vividly underscored by both Bartu and Van Klinken was the fact that the Indonesian police (Polri) were completely under the thumb of the TNI. Even if they had wanted to (and a few clearly were uncomfortable with their ambivalent role), they could have done nothing to prevent TNI and militia excesses against the civilian population. As one senior police officer confessed to Bartu, "if we arrest a militiaman, Dili and Jakarta will tell us to let them go. If we shoot one of them, they (the TNI) will attack our district headquarters." When, on one occasion, the local Polri in Maliana attempted to apprehend militia for the theft of cars and motorbikes from pro-independence households, a three-hour gun battle ensued with the local Dadurus Merah Putih militiamen and TNI regulars firing on the police. It is significant here that both the district commanders (*dandim*) and the local heads of the civil administration (*bupati*) were amongst the thirty-two Indonesian officers and others accused of crimes against humanity in East Timor by the Indonesian National Commission on Human Rights (KomnasHam) in their January 2000 report.

The UCLA Indonesia specialist and former Amnesty International representative, Geoffrey Robinson, who served in the UNAMET headquarters in Dili, had the terrible task of conveying the news of the UN's unplanned withdrawal to the 1,500 East Timorese who had taken refuge in the UN compound as the post-vote violence escalated. Although he is too modest to foreground himself in his contribution, it is clear that—along with a few others—he helped steel the resolve of a substantial number of UNAMET expatriate staff who refused to leave until all the Timorese refugees and local UN workers had been airlifted to safety. It is due to people like Robinson that there was no Rwandan-style UN debacle in East Timor. This was the first time in UN history that such an evacuation of local staff and refugees had occurred, and it meant that when the UNAMET mission did eventually pack its bags in mid-September 1999, it could leave with something approaching dignity.

Robinson's bitter experience highlights the principal weakness of the UN mandate—its lack of an international peacekeeping force with which to protect both UN staff and refugees against TNI-instigated violence. By vesting Jakarta with sole responsibility for security arrangements during the period of the vote, the May 5 Agreements gave the TNI and their locally sponsored militias the opportunity to step up their campaign of terror and intimidation against Timorese civilians. The ultimate aim of the TNI strategy seems to have been to take out the pro-independence civilian leadership and moderates with influence in the local community in an Indonesian version of the 1968 US Phoenix Program in South Vietnam, and so intimidate rural voters that they would either not cast their ballots at all or be persuaded that the cost of a pro-independence victory would be so high that it would better to vote for autonomy within Indonesia. Such assumptions showed just how ill-informed Indonesian military intelligence was about the true feelings of the East Timorese, assumptions depressingly illustrated in its abandoned secret documents (see Samuel Moore [pseud.], "The Indonesian Military's Last Stand in East Timor: An Analysis of Its Secret Documents," *Indonesia* 72 [October 2001]: 9-44).

Despite his own misgivings, Robinson acknowledges that East Timorese from all walks of life wanted UNAMET to proceed, despite the violence and militia threats. For them it was an historic opportunity to end the nightmare of the Indonesian occupation and one which they felt worth the sacrifice of 70 percent of their homes, the

death of perhaps as many as four thousand fellow East Timorese, and the displacement of over three-fifths of their compatriots, many to Indonesian West Timor where over eighty thousand still languish today (April 2002) in militia-controlled camps. And who can say they were wrong when one contemplates the present presidential line-up of the arch-nationalist Megawati Sukarnoputri and her hard-line military backers, who have been given *carte blanche* in their current counter-secessionist wars in Aceh and West Papua? Yet questions remain for which the present volume provides some interesting answers.

Amongst the most significant of these is Noam Chomsky's chapter on "East Timor, the United States, and International Responsibility: 'Green Light' for War Crimes," which, together with Allan Nairn's "US Support for the Indonesian Military: Congressional Testimony," provides a trenchant analysis of the complicity of the US and its allies (the UK in particular) in aiding and abetting the Indonesian invasion, occupation, and subsequent mass murder in East Timor. While the main outlines of this complicity have long been known—it even reached a point in the late 1980s and early 1990s where the British Government provided senior Indonesian commanders such as Yunus Yosfiah (responsible for the massacre of five Western journalists at Balibo in October 1975) and Prabowo Subianto (the infamous son-in-law of Suharto), who had carved their names in blood in East Timor, with scholarships to the Royal College of Defence Studies and places for their officers at leading British universities—its sheer scale and durability is shocking. Why wonder about the brazenness and impunity with which the Indonesian military planned its 1998–99 militia operations in East Timor when one realizes that as late as August 25, 1999 (just five days before the popular referendum), US and Indonesian forces were still engaged in joint-training exercises, and Britain was preparing to deliver its last batch of Hawk ground-attack aircraft to the Indonesian airforce? (They were flown in on September 23, just three days after the deployment of InterFET.) Senior officers commanding Indonesia's bloody end-game in East Timor—Generals Wiranto, Zacky Anwar Makarim, Kiki Sjahnakri, and Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin, along with Admiral Joost Mengko—appear to have acted secure in the knowledge that they would never be held to account for their actions before any international or domestic tribunal. Indonesia's continuing strategic importance for the US and its allies, coupled with the lack of political will on the part of the republic's weak post-Suharto civilian administrations, would see to that. The only warning they ever heeded—a warning apparently backed by the threat of retaliation by the Australian airforce, which brought its F-111 fighters up to its Northern Territory airbases to take out TNI military communications all the way back to Jakarta—was to desist from giving InterFET a bloody nose. But even that came too late to save the East Timorese.

When on May 20, 2002 (the twenty-eighth anniversary of the foundation of Fretilin), the new Republic of Timor Loro Sa'e celebrates its independence, it will continue to struggle with the terrible legacy of the events of 1999. Despite its three years under the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET), the new country will be one of the smallest (pop. 850,000) and poorest in the world (GDP per capita US\$168). Sorely lacking in the necessary human skills to administer and manage an independent state, East Timor's greatest challenge will be in the rebuilding of its infrastructure and the development of a viable, non-oil, agricultural economy. In the book's final two chapters on economic reconstruction and the challenges of the future,

João Mariano Saldanha and Richard Tanter, Mark Selden and Stephen Shalom all point up the problems which lie ahead. At least until 2004-05, when the first royalties from the Timor Gap Oil and Gas Field should begin to flow, East Timor will pass through some difficult years. Regional turbulence attendant on Indonesia's own continuing crisis as the Megawati government attempts to fashion a new political identity in the aftermath of the collapse of Suharto's "New Order" will inevitably add to Timor's problems. Both states will continue to confront the terrible legacy of the Suharto regime and the suffering it brought to both the East Timorese and the Indonesians for years to come. It is hard not to conclude after reading this powerful book that the West has a huge historical responsibility for this utterly avoidable tragedy. As Chomsky puts it:

Horror and shame are compounded by the fact that the crimes are so familiar and could so easily have been terminated. That has been true ever since Indonesia invaded in December 1975 relying on US diplomatic support and arms. . . . There has been no need to threaten bombing or even sanctions. It would have sufficed for the US and its allies to withdraw their participation and inform their close associates in the Indonesian military command that the atrocities must be terminated and the territory granted the right to self-determination that has been upheld by the United Nations and the International Court of Justice. We cannot undo the past, but [we] should at least be willing to recognize what we have done and to face the moral responsibility of saving the remnants and providing ample reparations, a pathetic gesture of compensation for terrible crimes.