

Clinton Fernandes on Flood's memoir excerpted in Public Sector Informant

Dear Editor,

The Timor excerpts of Mr Flood's memoirs (PSI September 2011) are riddled with errors. Leaving aside when Portuguese adventurers first visited Timor or when Portugal took possession of the eastern part of the island, Mr Flood's account of more recent events, including events in which he was personally involved, are highly problematic.

The Indonesian military killed six Australian journalists, not five. "General Antonio Salazar" was not a general. Civil war did not "break out" in East Timor but was fomented by Indonesia's intelligence services in a campaign known as Operation Komodo. Indonesia did not "invade East Timor while the civil war raged"; the internal conflict was essentially over by 30 August 1975, and Indonesia invaded on 7 December. Flood's account, a well known tactic of Indonesian apologists, is designed to provide a fig-leaf of legitimacy for Indonesia's conduct. In a similar vein, the Indonesian leadership was concerned not by Fretilin's "appeals to China and Vietnam" but by Fretilin's programs of land reform, administrative reform, popular education and the development of small industries. For this reason, Michael Curtin, the head of the Indonesia section at Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs, wrote that Fretilin was "the sort of party we would have welcomed, even encouraged, anywhere else than in Timor." But its programs would have shown the Indonesian public a successful alternative to the Suharto regime in their geographic midst. Michael Curtin acknowledged this frankly when he wrote, "If an independent and politically radicalized East Timor were to make a go of it, with political and economic help not to Indonesia's liking, it would certainly become something for discontented Indonesians to look to."

The so-called Provisional Government of East Timor was not a government; it was hand-picked by Indonesia, and performed only one task – to call for annexation. This was a repetition of the fake Act of Free Choice in West Papua – something Flood doesn't mention. Flood writes that "Indonesian rule brought many benefits to East Timor"; would these include the systematic sexual enslavement of women? East Timor's Truth Commission concluded that this practice occurred "without fear of reprisal, inside military installations, at other official sites and inside the private homes of women... with the knowledge and complicity of members of the Indonesian security forces, the police force, the highest levels of the civilian administration and members of the judiciary." But Flood passes over this shameful record briskly, noting that Indonesia "failed to win the hearts and minds of the East Timorese people" and that "the rapid expansion of education" combined with "few opportunities for employment, saw the emergence of a pool of disaffected young people".

Finally, the massacre in the Santa Cruz cemetery in 1991 – it has since become public knowledge that, as Australian ambassador to Jakarta, Mr Flood was informed soon after that Indonesian soldiers and intelligence agents had killed even more civilians around Dili after the massacre. In 1994, Flood's successor, Allan Taylor, wrote to Canberra: "During a review of files we came across a private Minute written by Philip Flood with a note ... that its contents would not be reported. I subsequently wrote to Philip to ask whether elements of his minute might now be provided to Canberra..." This led to accusations that Flood kept the

information confidential, in line with the wishes of the Kopassus officer who conveyed it to him, Lieutenant-Colonel Prabowo Subianto. The excerpt of his memoirs do not deal with this episode at all. Instead, we are treated to his descriptions of “freshly fried slices of breadfruit and sweet, finger-thin bananas” at a local convent, and his regular gifts of whisky to an expatriate Catholic priest. I have no idea whether the rest of his memoir has a similar relationship to reality.

Clinton Fernandes

The unease that follows massacre; [Books: Philip Flood]

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The Public Sector Informant

When I took up my appointment as ambassador in Jakarta, East Timor had formally been an Indonesian province for 12 years. Before July 1976, it had been a Portuguese colony for over 350 years. Seeking sandalwood and spices, Portuguese adventurers first visited Timor in 1460, and Portugal took possession of the eastern part of the island in the 17th century. Under Portuguese rule, East Timor languished as a neglected colonial backwater. Less than a quarter of the size of Tasmania, East Timor is 640km north- west of Darwin. Most East Timorese are of mixed Malay and Melanesian descent. A wide variety of languages and dialects are spoken, with Tetum the most common language. East Timor has a savannah climate. In the dry season the coastal plains resemble a desert and in the often short wet season

the country appears tropical. The Timorese soil - like that of eastern Indonesia but unlike that on Java - is not rich, and only a minor part is volcanic. A rugged spine of mountains stretching from the west to the east, rising to nearly 3000m at its highest point, has long tempered Timorese economic, political and cultural life. The harshness of nature, and the backwardness of Portuguese colonial rule, impoverished the East Timorese peasant for centuries. East Timor's only significant export during the colonial period was coffee, which was introduced by the Portuguese in the 19th century. Naturalist and evolutionary theorist Lord Alfred Wallace visited Dili in 1861 and later wrote: The Portuguese government in Timor is a most miserable one. Nobody seems to care the least about the improvement of the country, and ... after 300 years of occupation, there has not been a mile of road made beyond the town ... All the government officials oppress and rob the natives as much as they can. Little had changed by the time Portugal walked out on East Timor in August 1975.

In Portugal in April 1974, the leftist Armed Forces Movement overthrew the regime of Marcello Caetano, the successor to General Antnio Salazar. The new regime ended nearly half a century of authoritarian rule and committed Portugal to a program of decolonisation. In July 1975, Portugal signalled its intention to establish a provisional government in East Timor and constitute an elected popular assembly that would determine the eventual status of the territory. However, before these

steps could be implemented, and in a region devoid of any credible administration, civil war broke out between East Timor's principal political groups, Apodeti (Popular Democratic Association of Timor), UDT (Timorese Democratic Union) and Fretilin (Revolutionary Front for the Liberation of East Timor). Portugal threw up its hands and abandoned the territory. Fearing the establishment of a communist state on its eastern flank, and also concerned about the encouragement this tiny state might give to secessionist groups in Maluku province, Indonesia invaded East Timor while the civil war raged, and seized control. Tens of thousands of Timorese and five Australian journalists were

killed by Indonesian forces in the course of their military operations. Indonesia set up a so-called provisional government of East Timor, which convened a People's Assembly that voted for integration with Indonesia. Suharto's invasion of East Timor was brutal. It was also unusually sudden. Suharto had been president for almost 10 years before he went into East Timor. He had been happy to leave the impoverished territory to Portugal, since East Timor was of no economic or political value to Indonesia. Indonesians assert that Suharto had been reluctant to use military force against East Timor but became alarmed by the behaviour of the leftist Fretilin, and especially by its appeals to China and Vietnam for help. Both sides of Australian politics gave high importance to maintaining working relations with Suharto's Indonesia, and effectively concluded that Australia's interests and those of Indonesia and East Timor were best served by East Timor's being part of Indonesia. The United States took the same position. At the time of the invasion, Australia was in no position to take any constructive initiatives. The Whitlam government had been dismissed, there was a caretaker government in Canberra, under caretaker prime minister Malcolm Fraser, and no initiatives could be taken until after the elections, to be held on December 13, 1975. Australian military intervention was out of the question and, besides, as this was just after the end of the Vietnam War, such action would not have been favoured by the electorate. On the day of the invasion of East Timor, the caretaker foreign minister, Andrew Peacock, said that the Australian government regretted the course that events in East Timor had taken. On July 17, 1976, Suharto formalised the integration of East Timor with Indonesia. The United Nations did not recognise the integration, and the UN Security Council called upon all states to respect the right of the East Timorese people to self-determination. Subsequently the Australian government urged that the Security Council take practical measures to enable the people of East Timor to exercise this right. In January 1978, however, Peacock announced that the Fraser government had decided to accept East Timor as part of Indonesia, for the reason that Indonesian control was effective and covered all major administrative centres. In December 1978, Peacock announced that Australia would give de jure recognition to the Indonesian takeover, in commencing negotiations with Indonesia early the following year over the delineation of the seabed boundary between East Timor and Australia. The government's policy attracted strong domestic criticism, including - but not only - from those who believed Australia had a special debt to the East Timorese, arising from their help to Australian forces when Japan occupied Timor during World War II. Apart from Australia, 31 other states, including Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Norway, Pakistan and Sweden, came to recognise Indonesian

sovereignty over East Timor, either expressly or by implication. A greater number of states declined to recognise Indonesian sovereignty. After its election in 1983, the Hawke

government took the same position as had been taken by the Fraser government. This then was the situation at the time I became ambassador to Indonesia. Indonesian rule brought many benefits to East Timor - more widespread education; greatly improved access to electricity; hospitals and medical health centres; and a vast increase in the number of roads - and East Timor was the recipient of the highest per capita allocation of development funds from Indonesia to any of its provinces. But the administration in East Timor, which was heavy-handed and dominated by the military, failed to win the hearts and minds of the East Timorese people. Indonesia had expected that its numerically superior military forces would eliminate Fretilin elements within a fairly short time frame. This was not to be the case. Fretilin enjoyed solid support, and attempts to deny it access to basic necessities resulted in devastating consequences for the local population. They suffered destruction of crops and property, and in the early years suffered large-scale loss of life because of famine, and the response of the Indonesian military. And those East Timorese who did not cooperate with Indonesian rule were brutalised. Meanwhile, the rapid expansion of education for the East Timorese, at a time when there were few opportunities for employment, saw the emergence of a pool of disaffected young people. When Indonesia invaded the province, barely 5 per cent of the population were literate, in either Portuguese or Tetum. Indonesia introduced Bahasa Indonesia as the national language in East Timor and provided many new schools. As a result, literacy levels increased dramatically. But the lack of jobs for young people led to acute frustration. In a society where men are required to produce a dowry in the form of a herd of cattle, a young man without any source of income had a slender prospect of marriage. Job opportunities were not only limited for young people. East Timorese were excluded from senior positions in the public sector, and the removal in 1989 of restrictions on access to and from East Timor led to an influx of people from Java and Sulawesi, who displaced Timorese from many roles in the private sector, including small-scale trading. At the same time, East Timor's coffee industry - long the principal driving force in the local economy, and a major source of employment for local people - was now controlled by the Indonesian military. Indonesia had long opposed Australian aid to East Timor, but in the new climate of cooperation, and with the support of foreign minister Ali Alatas, I secured the approval of other key Indonesian ministers, and the military, to initiate an Australian aid program in the province. One of our most valuable, visible and sustainable projects involved providing clean water and sanitation for Dili and nearby urban and rural areas. Some problems facing Indonesia in its administration of East Timor were cultural. East Timorese culture was totally different from the cultures of Indonesia's other provinces. The Indonesian war of independence against

the Dutch had bound together Indonesians from every ethnic and cultural group, in the common cause of ridding their country of its colonial rulers, but the East Timorese had not shared this experience. Moreover, under Portuguese rule, East Timor had operated as a large collection of autonomous chiefdoms. Indonesia sought to impose on the province a unified system of

administration, but ran up against traditional power structures at the local level, particularly in rural areas, where there was a strong hierarchy of landowning families and established ritual for the appointment of village chiefs, invariably elderly men. The Indonesian objectives were sensible but because Indonesia failed to understand Timorese customs, and hence failed to pay respect to traditional Timorese elders, these efforts were not successful. In the course of six visits to "Tintim", as Indonesians called East Timor, I came to know well many members of the Catholic Church, including Bishop Carlos Belo; Father Domingos da Cunha from the church of San Antonio in the Motael district of Dili; the scholarly German Jesuit, Father Albie Karim, who was head of the local Jesuit seminary; and another Jesuit, Father Marcus Wanandi, who ran a high school. Karim thirsted for books about Indonesia and, when I visited him at the Jesuit seminary in Dili, I always took him some. The Indonesian military would murder

Karim in 1999. Two special friends my wife Carole and I made were sisters of the Salesian order. Sister Paola Battagliola, who had left Italy in 1988 to work as a missionary, had established an orphanage at Venilale in central East Timor, with a health clinic nearby to serve poor families. She and her subordinate, Sister Marlene, sought my help in setting up a high school for girls at Venilale. I raised funds from Church contacts, and from Australia's aid agency, to help Battagliola establish the St Maria Mazzarello Professional School for Girls. It was a special honour for Carole and me to stay overnight at Venilale Convent and hear the nuns and novices singing, enjoy Battagliola's coffee - for which she was renowned - and savour freshly fried slices of breadfruit and sweet, finger-thin bananas. Just across from Venilale, at Fatumaka, was an older Salesian initiative, the Don Bosco Technical School. Built in 1980, the school offered courses in carpentry and in electrical and mechanical studies. A driving force behind the school was Father Eligio Locatelli, who had come to East Timor in 1964. He was a much-loved man who had helped give hundreds of East Timorese boys skills for useful jobs. I met him several times, always with a bottle of whisky, as I knew he enjoyed it but could not secure it locally. I mention the Catholic Church because from my first visit to Timor I was enormously impressed by the role its priests and nuns played in helping

the East Timorese. Catholic religious were also one of the most objective sources of advice about what was happening at the grassroots level in the province. The local priests were not saints - some had wives, some had mistresses, and several had children - but all were committed to helping their people.

The Church had not been especially strong in East Timor in the period of Portuguese rule but became very influential in the course of Indonesian rule. The East Timorese felt they could talk openly to priests and nuns. Just as Indonesia had alienated traditional elders, it also alienated the Church, by failing to heed sensible advice from

nuns and priests and by curtailing privileges enjoyed by the clergy and generally making life difficult for them. When Locatelli wanted to visit his ailing mother in Italy, he was told that if he left he would

not be readmitted to East Timor. When he was physically threatened by the Indonesian military, I intervened with Indonesian defence minister Benny Moerdani to ensure Locatelli's protection. Philip Flood is a former senior diplomat, secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and director-general of AusAID. This is the first of two excerpts from his memoir, *Dancing with Warriors*, that the Informant will publish. DFAT secretary Dennis Richardson and former governor-general Sir William Deane will launch the book on September 27 at the National Library of Australia.