FITUN: A preliminary history of a clandestine movement

Michael Leach

The clandestine is a medium of struggle that consolidates subterranean forces against colonialism, to the final objective of national liberation and independence….a small group, consciously starting to consolidate and develop its force little by little until its transformation into a popular force….It is best to apply a struggle of a ‘semi-clandestine’ character, to separate the mass organisation from the small nucleus of an ultra-clandestine character, to secure the channel of communication to the armed front and the diplomatic front….If not separate, it is easy for the enemy to disrupt communication between the three fronts (‘FRS’, ‘Luta Clandestina’, 1990)²

The East Timorese resistance to the Indonesian occupation comprised three wings: the military resistance of FALINTIL, the external diplomatic front, and the civilian clandestine movements in both the territory of East Timor and in Indonesia. Unlike the military and diplomatic fronts, which were dominated by the generation of 1975, the clandestine front was dominated by the Juventude: significantly younger than their compatriots, and educated for the most part under Indonesian rule. As Fernandes (2011, 125) notes, the civilian clandestine resistance has as yet been relatively neglected by historians. In assessing the multiple factors that led the success of Timor-Leste’s struggle for self-determination, the significance of major clandestine actions such as the Santa Cruz protest in 1991, the Pope’s visit in 1989, and the embassy occupations of the mid-1990s cannot be ignored. A number of these youth and student groups were of a clandestine or semi-clandestine character and contributed to the wider goals of making the territory of East Timor increasingly ungovernable. Notable groups included RENETIL, OJETIL, OPJLETIL, FECLETIL, FITUN, Student Solidarity Council, Sagrada Familia and others⁴. Some like RENETIL operated primarily in Indonesia, others within the territory of East Timor. Among the latter groups, Babo-Soares (2003, 59) lists OJETIL, FITUN and OPJLETIL as most important⁵. This paper focuses on one of these groups, Frente Iha Timor Unidos Nafatin ‘Always United Front of Timor’ known by the acronym FITUN (literally meaning ‘star’ in Tetun).

Background: the evolution of resistance strategy

By 1979 the initial phase of Fretilin led military resistance in the zonas libertadas had broken down, and was followed after the surrender of the civilian population. By the early 1980s the military resistance was reorganised into cells and there was no longer a sustainable broad front. While early clandestine groups started in the late 1970s as informal means of supplying aid to military resistance FALINTIL⁶, and getting information from mountains to diplomatic front, they evolved by the early 1990s to become a core strategy of the Commando da Luta (CAVR 2005, ch.5, 44).

---

² Author’s translation. Original in Portuguese.
⁴ See Nicholson (2001) for a useful overview of clandestine youth groups. It is worth noting that many of these groups had overlapping memberships.
⁵ Key acronyms used in this article are RENETIL Resistencia Nacional dos Estudantes de Timor Leste (National Resistance of East Timorese Students); OJETIL Organização da Juventude e Estudante de Timor Leste (Organisation of East Timorese Youth and Students); OPJLETIL Organização Popular Juventude Lorico Ass’wain Timor Leste (Popular Organisation of Timorese Youth Lorikeet Warriors); FECLETIL Frente Clandestina Estudantil de Timor Leste Clandestine Student Front of Timor-Leste.
⁶ FALINTIL’s “very survival” depended on clandestine networks (CAVR 2005, Ch.5, 45)
The importance of new forms of clandestine action, such as the protests at the visit of Pope John Paul II in 1989, discussed further below, ultimately had a big influence on Commando da Luta’s thinking about the overall focus of the Timorese resistance. This led to a shift towards a clandestine strategy in the towns involving a “combination of clandestine activity and civil disobedience” by elements of the civilian population (CAVR 2005, ch.5, 44). From 1990, the focus would turn towards demonstrations, civil disobedience, educating other youth and civilians, and ultimately other protests such as asylum seeking in foreign embassies. Reflecting these changes, by June 1990, the clandestine movements were placed under joint command of CNRM Executive Committee of the Clandestine Front, under the Secretary Constancio Pinto, and CNRM / Commander in chief FALINTIL, Xanana Gusmao (CAVR 2005, 44). At this point, the organisation of various underground groups improved dramatically and the clandestine front was divided into sections: youth and mass mobilisation, agitation and propaganda, study and analysis, information and security, and finance. FALINTIL increasingly became a political symbol of the resistance, less active in a strict military sense and more important as the command and coordination centre of the CNRM (Avelinho Coelho cited in CAVR 2005, 44).

These clandestine groups would play a key role in key events such as the protests that preceded the infamous Santa Cruz massacre, which refocused attention on the world stage and greatly enhanced the capacity and effectiveness of the diplomatic front work to come to prominence. Critically, too, these groups demonstrated that the younger generation was as committed to independence as the previous: a hugely significant feat that demonstrated the essential failure of the Indonesian military-led project of integration.

As the CAVR report notes, though clandestine groups were self-regulating on a day-to-day basis, major actions were coordinated by Commando da Luta, which sought to develop a coordinated strategy across the three fronts. Some however “maintained their individual relationships with FALINTIL commanders in the forests” (CAVR 2005, 44-5). FITUN was a key example of this. As CAVR (2005, 45) noted, FITUN was “established after the formation of the executive committee, operated independently and maintained direct relations with the Chairman of CNRM/ Commander FALINTIL, Xanana Gusmao”. This remainder of this article is based primarily on an extended interview with one of FITUN’s leadership group, Elizario Ferreira, supplemented as relevant with additional interview material from OJETIL leader Gregorio Saldanha, and RENETIL leader Jose Neves.

Background

Elizario Ferreira traces his own family’s involvement in the independence struggle to a well-documented uprising in Suco Atara in Atsabe, Ermera against the Liurai Guilherme Gonsalves in the late colonial era. The harsh working conditions imposed by the Liurai were challenged by some 70 villagers in a Portuguese court in Dili in 1963. By 1970 the villagers had succeeded and had become an independent Suco, with Ferreira’s father playing a key role in events.

His own political consciousness was first roused as a young teenager in the 1980s. The Commando da Luta based in east was seeking to reactivate the resistance in the western sector (later Região 3). FALINTIL commander Venancio Ferraz was responsible, and sent an estafeta (messenger) to Atara. Among others, the estafeta contacted Elizario, then 13, and the Chefe de Suco, his father’s cousin. The Chefe agreed that the village would help provide food to FALINTIL by planting fields in the mountains. Elizario recalls:

---

7 Interview with Elizario Ferreira conducted with the author 1 March 2010. At the time of interview and of writing, Ferreira was a FRETILIN member of the National Parliament. Interview with Gregorio Saldanha conducted 2 March 2010; with Jose Neves 4 March 2010.
8 For more information on this conflict see Molnar (2006)
9 The Chefe said “whatever… food you find up there you can take to eat. Just don’t pull out the roots of the cassava so it can continue to grow. If you find potatoes, eat them, beans, eat them so you can survive but don’t come into the village because we now live with the enemy” (Ferreira interview, 2010).

256
At the time I didn’t really understand what it meant to join the resistance, to be involved in the clandestine movement or how to ‘do’ politics. That was in ’86….So when I went down [to Dili], I hung out with a group of young people in Kuluahun. We began to organise a small group. When we set up this group there were 49 of us, 49 people who would become part of the organisation called FITUN.

**Origins: SAFARI**

FITUN started with a small group of 49 students at junior high school; originally known as SAFARI and using the Indonesian acronym ‘Saya Anak Fretilin Anti-Republik Indonesia’ [I am a child of Fretilin against the Republic of Indonesia]. One of these members was Elizario Ferreira, who would later become a key leader. A critical moment of political development came through an intervention from the very top of the resistance hierarchy: Xanana Gusmao had heard news of a student group in Kuluahun who opposed the Indonesian occupation. In December 1986 several members of SAFARI met with Xanana Gusmao in Kablaki ranges:

Seven of us went. We are all alive today. When we got there, people were talking politics we didn’t understand a thing about politics! We just sat staring at each other, we didn’t understand politics. They taught us… Kattus [Xanana Gusmao] said to us: “Politics, nationalism, has to come from you, it must start with your small group. Not everybody can know about it. One or two people can come and see me, not a crowd. If not people will find out about our struggle”.

At this early stage the group would collect money, clothes or medicines for FALINITL. According to Ferreira, not even their parents knew what we were doing: “we were not yet part of the resistance, just people at the top knew what we did.” As with OJECTIL, one directive to the young group was to get involved with Church activities.

**The role of political education**

For a group of young Timorese with little political education, the meetings with Gusmao were electrifying. But these were irregular, and a more fundamental role in political education was played by other clandestine operatives, particularly people from the Externato, the sole Portuguese language school in Dili, set up to educate those who would ultimately leave for Portugal. Ferreira recalls in particular the role of Gregorio Saldanha of OJETIL, and older and more politically literate members of the group that would become FITUN, such as Marito Mota.

So, we said to each other, when you meet with these people [those from other schools or with higher education] you have to ask them: “What is a statute? What is a vision? What is an objective? What does clandestine mean…?” It was essential for us to ask other people about the meaning of these four things.

After such meetings, the younger students would meet at night to discuss what they had learned and commenced writing the statutes. The occasional visits to the military resistance in the mountains continued, leading to the first major action FITUN participated in.

**Tasi Tolu**

The visit of Pope John Paul II in October 1989 was a critical moment for the overall strategy of the Timorese resistance, leading to a move within the territory to a primary focus on the clandestine resistance in the towns. This was also a signal moment for the Indonesian administration, shortly after opening the territory to outsiders, as a high profile and smooth visit would suggest great progress toward integration. The presence of foreign guests and media at this event further heightened the significance.

The *Comando da Luta* issued instructions for a demonstration to be organised to highlight the ongoing struggle for self-determination. At this time Elizario and other members of FITUN were part of a
Keamanan (security group) in Becora parish, an organisation similar to the scouts. Taking advantage of their authorised role as extra security for the Pope’s visit, and with meticulous preparation, the group were able to organise a protest after the mass. The overall leader of this action was Luis Barreto, now sub-district administrator of Kristu-Rei. He was aided by Ferreira, in charge of the operational side, along with Jose Manuel, and Aleixu da Silva Gama, also known as Alex Cobra.¹⁰

Xanana came down from Kablaki, he stayed in Dili … about a week. When the day came, the Indonesian military LAPISAN had tight security. That week at Tasi Tolu… only those of us in charge of security wearing blue uniforms didn’t have to show what we were wearing underneath… the Indonesian’s didn’t open our shirts… So the banners we would use in the demonstration, we sewed them inside our vests. Every day we had to go and practice our role, from the 1st to the 11th…

It was to be a massive event, with some estimates holding that 200,000 people from all over East Timor had arrived. The Indonesian military remained unaware the extra ‘security’ provided internally by the Church, and wearing blue uniforms, were planning a protest. As planned, the protestors awaited the end of the Mass and the Pope’s blessing before the protest commenced. In their possession were also letters for the Pope from the Bishop and Priests. Ferreira recalls:

The place was full of high-level military. Many people started arriving on foot from all the districts of East Timor. The spirit of the Timorese began to take shape, became alive there. When the Mass was over everyone thought the Mass had been a success, even the Indonesians. Once the final blessing was made we took the banners out from under our shirts and jumped on the altar and made the protest, trampling over whoever was in the way. …. People were confused, they didn’t understand what was going on … there were almost 200,000 people in Tasi Tolu. So people just began fighting until in the end they detained many people.

Despite the many arrests that followed, the future FITUN members were not exposed. Nonetheless, they had to report daily to authorities as a result of ‘failing’ in their job as part of parish-based security. Ferreira attributes the relatively light consequences, compared to others who arrested the same day, to the influence of the Priest from his parish who had contacts with the DANREM.

Though the protest was relatively small in scale, the symbolism of this public protest on the world stage was felt strongly in the resistance hierarchy, effectively ending the enforced isolation of the territory, and highlighting civilian support in the ongoing struggle for self-determination. Ferreira recalls that it was at this time that Xanana then gave the group their name, declaring at their next meeting: “Your organisation is now called FITUN, Frente iha Timor Unidos Nafatin. Return to your members, may you become many like the stars in the sky and grains of sand at the shore”.¹¹ For Ferreira the success of this action marks not only the formal birth of FITUN, but also the first sign he was aware of a clear change in strategy from the Commando da Luta.

So after this we went back to the mountains to make an evaluation. When we arrived Xanana congratulated us because this meant that lots of young people would become involved. Nationalism had stirred among the young people. This was the first time we heard this policy: “Younger brothers and sisters, the struggle is no longer in the bush. The struggle in now in the towns. You have started this struggle”.

¹⁰ Cobra was later a key leader of OPJALTIL. See Nicholson 2001, 56.
¹¹ Ferreira notes that an earlier group had the same name; “FITUN existed prior to ’83… an older generation established FITUN in Dili during the 1970s. We just re-established the name FITUN. The old FITUN didn’t exist anymore…”.
Juramento

Political education was a cautious process, preceded by extensive cultivation of potential members to assess the likelihood of security risks to the organisation. Once selected, clandestine members went through various rituals that drew significantly on both the traditional Timorese practice of juramento (usually a process that takes place in alliance between clans), and also on the symbols and practices of Catholicism. As Nicholson (2001, 21) notes, FITUN was formally established in the Kuluohn area of Dili on 20 April 1990 by forty-nine youths in a midnight juramento in Santa Cruz, including a flag raising ceremony and a mixing of blood. Ferreira offers some details on the ceremony:

The original group of 49, we took an oath [juramento] at Santa Cruz… late at night we went and prayed, we wore rosaries and went to pray, then we cut our hands. At the time the best drink in Timor was called ‘Diplomat’. Fourteen of us we cut our hands and let the blood run into to bottle of whiskey. Once it was mixed in, we drank and swore: “Live or die, we will fight for independence”. When our new members came, before they became members they had to draw their blood into the bottle, the original bottle from the first time, mix the blood, pour and drink. We kept the whiskey in Marito Mota’s house. This blood-brother oath was firm: “If they arrest you, they arrest me, you die, I will die with you.” That’s the oath we took … We kept the same bottle right up until ’99 when it broke, destroyed in a house fire.

Structure, membership and recruitment

The operational structure of FITUN had three levels. At the peak was a council, consisting of Bonifacio Magno, Óscar Lima (now both members of Fretilin Central Committee) and João Barreto. At the operational level, FITUN had an initial president, before a major split in the organisation (see footnote 16), along with vice-president Marito Mata, and two secretaries: Ferreira’s cousin Anacleto Bento Ferreira and Elizario himself, who had a dual role in charge of ‘agit-prop’. The third level was the general membership. At its peak it claimed to have had a general membership of 39,000 (Nicholson 2001, 21), though the core group based in Dili was clearly much smaller. Like other clandestine groups, FITUN established a ‘kaixa’ system of cells. This structure, as Ferreira explains it, clearly reflected the ‘semi-clandestine’ structure described by ‘FRS’ – with a small, ultra-clandestine leadership and a wider mass membership of affiliated members, contacted through smaller groups.

As Nicholson (2001, 21) notes, FITUN was formally established in the Kuluohn area of Dili on 20 April 1990 by forty-nine youths in a midnight juramento in Santa Cruz, including a flag raising ceremony and a mixing of blood. Ferreira offers some details on the ceremony:

It wasn’t as if we called for big meetings…. there was a coordinator in every district. Our system of education was based on pendidikan berantai. It was like this… when a group of cadre met; members of this group would then go and meet with other groups. So one group would go and meet with the next, right down to the suku level.

A system of recruitment targets created an expectation that each member would recruit another into the clandestine network. Such recruitment often occurred through the networks of the Church and their youth activities, and through schools. One recruitment strategy was one employed more widely by other clandestine groups such as RENETIL (Interview, Jose Neves 2010); seeking to turn individual grievances into a national political consciousness, for example, by actively recruiting family members of those mistreated by Indonesian military.

Agitation and Propaganda

‘Agit-Prop’ elements of the clandestine movements had several roles. One was simply to transmit information, including letters or recordings from the resistance in the mountains throughout, or beyond the territory, or to circulate foreign news stories about East Timor. They were also involved in coordinating civil disobedience campaigns, aimed at making the territory ungovernable. One such action was the attempt

12 As Fernandes notes (2011, 129), these practice reinforced a sense of Christian identity. This was especially so with RENETIL who had strong connections with Christian communities in Indonesia’s eastern archipelago.
to disrupt the Indonesian general elections of June 9, 1992. FITUN members were told to tear up people’s electoral registration cards, burn the electoral registration posts, and to encourage a boycott of the elections. More broadly, agit-prop’s role was aimed at countering the Indonesian military’s own strategy of setting East Timorese groups against one another. Ferreira explains:

The Indonesians were also implementing a dual-strategy. One of the Indonesian policies was *ila kawin sila* [interracial marriage]. This was seen as a policy of Islamisation. The Indonesians sent women over to marry Timorese men, or they would encourage young men or young women to become Muslim. With a view to setting up a situation where Muslims would fight Christians. The other Indonesian policy of ‘divide and conquer’ was to divide the youth into different groups so that they could pit one group against another. SGI *Satuan Tugas Inteligen* – sought to use the youth and were very dangerous at that time. This was a deliberate strategy of destabilisation.

In response, FITUN and other clandestine groups implemented a strategy to counter these policies. These counter strategy also had a dual character. On the one hand, they sought to promote unity among Timorese youth: “we had to continue to agitate inform, support the youth so that they wouldn’t turn against each other.” On the other, FITUN and other groups engaged in agit-prop to disrupt the Indonesian administration and spread confusion. As Ferreira and others note, one of the most critical events in occupation history was in part of product of this counter strategy:

> every day we would make pamphlets, how we would make things up! For example, now we are getting to the point, if we take the pamphlet we made which eventually led to the events of November 12 1991. That was the result of a pamphlet...

‘Anti-Islamisation’

While working closely with the Church, (with whom OJETIL and FITUN maintained good relations through the Scout movement) some clandestine groups sought to maximise participation and promote secular nationalism to maximise membership. Nonetheless the clandestine movement also used affiliations with Catholic Church to maximise popular mobilisation, and work to destabilise the Indonesian administration. A key example is the prelude to Santa Cruz massacre. The cancellation of a scheduled visit by Portuguese parliamentary delegation led to increased tensions between independence activists and Indonesian authorities. At this time, as part of a wider strategy to maximise disorder, OJETIL and FITUN activists spread the word that an attack on nuns and convents was imminent. A pamphlet was circulated widely throughout East Timor, and proved quite influential in mobilising youth. As Gregorio Saldanha put it “sometimes we had to make false propaganda to achieve our objectives. Bit sometimes you run risks, you can encounter many, big risks.” Ferreira recalls:

> We asked all young East Timorese to go and provide security for the churches, convents and priests houses. Because the Indonesian military is planning to attack the priests and attack and rape nuns. When we spread this word, sent out this appeal, many people went to provide security to the Church in October. When the young people went to the Church, it created a feeling of heightened tensions. At night the youth guarded the Nuns… then on the 28 October Sebastião was killed in Motael. And Sebastião’s death led to the events of the 12th November. That was the pamphlet we sent out. We were reacting to the policy of Islamisation, that’s why we issued that pamphlet. That’s how it happened.

---

13 An important example was the shift from OJECTIL *Organisacão da Juventude Catolica de Timor Leste* (Organisation of East Timorese Catholic Youth) to OJETIL. As Gregorio Saldanha (interview March 2 2010) notes, this change was made because “we know that Timor is not only for Catholics, but we are open to the other religions like the Muslims or Buddists so we wanted to be open for all people.” This move was supported by instructions from Xanana, Mau Hudu and Mau Hunu, though some students continued to use the acronym OJECTIL.
The death of Sebastião Gomes \(^{14}\) led shortly afterward to the major protest now known as the Santa Cruz massacre of November 12 1991, which would put East Timor firmly back in international headlines.

**Three questions from Bishop Belo**

One story from the prelude to the Santa Cruz massacre demonstrates the close relationship between the Catholic Church administration and the clandestine groups. On the night of the 9 November 1991, several members of clandestine groups went to speak to Dom Carlos Belo.

Maria Dias’s younger sister Joana, Liurai Tasi, L4 and me\(^{15}\), we went to see the Bishop to ask him if he would say the Mass at Motael. We asked him if he would say mass he was taken aback: “How many people do you plan to bring to this mass?” We told thousands: because we included Sagrada Familia, FITUN, RENETIL, OJETIL. We told him we planned a mass at Motael and then from Motael walk along the road, praying and singing all the way to Santa Cruz. … once we had laid flowers at the grave we would make a demonstration at Santa Cruz.

Ferreira recalls that the Bishop was surprised, and began pacing around his yard with his Rosary, thinking. He then asked three questions of his young visitors which still resonate strongly with those present twenty years later. The Bishop was supportive, but tested the young activists with a series of questions.

The Bishop asked us ‘If Timor becomes independent, if you lose your hands or your feet, if you are not able to govern, if the well-educated children of those who support integration rule over you… how will you feel?’ After he asked us this question he walked a little, then he returned and we replied: ‘Father we want Timor to be independent’.

So then he asked us another question: ‘What if you are disabled and nobody will employ you, rule over you, and don’t acknowledge you?’ We replied we were prepared to accept that.

Finally he asked ‘what about those who are now overseas, their children have gone to good schools, those who today support the Indonesians, who don’t want to participate in the struggle? What if they come and rule over you, and don’t look after your families after you are dead?’ We told him that we were prepared to live with the consequences….

Ferreira recalls that as the mass was planned for Motael, Bishop Belo told them to ask the Motael Priest Father Ricardo do the mass, offering to do it himself if Ricardo refused. Despite his reservations, Father Ricardo agreed, “since there are so many of you I am ready, I am ready to die for you.”

**Santa Cruz**

Along with OJETIL and others, many FITUN members took part in the demonstrations 12 of November now known as the Santa Cruz massacre.

So, when Sebastião was killed. We all got together and got ourselves organised. The organisations that gathered were OJETIL, Sagrada Familia, FITUN, RENETIL. Those were the main promoters. We chose Giri [Gregorio Saldanha] as the coordinator because he had political experience and he was from the Externato. And, OJETIL was established before FITUN, it came out of the Externato.

Several of those in positions of responsibility in the clandestine organisations, particularly those in agitation and propaganda, travelled out to the districts on the afternoon of the 11th to encourage young people to

---

14 See Fernandes (2011, 89) for details of this incident.

15 ‘L4’ is the brother of the well-known former guerrilla commander, now UNDERTIM leader, ‘L7’. Liurai Tasi was an OJETIL leader.
come down to Dili. Ferreira was among these, travelling up to his home district of Ermera to mobilise people. The plan, as reported by Ferreira, involved a coordinated strategy for attendance:

People had to carry rosaries and had to wear three shirts… a ‘Loriku Aswain’ ['Lorikeet Warriors'] shirt for the procession, under a proper shirt for mass… then just in case they had to run away or there were problems in Santa Cruz, to have another neutral t-shirt to run away and hide with… The information was passed on word by mouth. At the time, there was something we called ‘politika corrente’ ['running politics']. All we had to do was say something today, and tomorrow all of Timor knew.

Ferreira would never make it to Santa Cruz himself. After arriving in Ermera on the 11th he was arrested and held until the 28th November, after which he was refused permission to return to Dili, and sent to his home suku of Atara.

Later strategy

So after the demonstration [Santa Cruz], the leadership of the resistance organisations broke-down and the Indonesians had the upper hand again in Timor. Many people were taken away. Many people were put in jail. People were afraid.

In the wake of Santa Cruz, clandestine operations became extremely difficult, with mass arrest of clandestine activists both inside the territory and within Indonesia (Fernandes 2011, 101). On the other hand, the level of world engagement with East Timor increased dramatically after Max Stahl’s massacre footage made international headlines. The clandestine movements thus had increasing covert contact with western journalists after Santa Cruz, and through the 1990s. The long years of internal resistance and international solidarity slowly began to bear fruit, aligning also with the fall of the Soviet bloc and a weakening of the cold war ties that sustained much of the international support for the Suharto regime. For FITUN activists, one new focus after Santa Cruz was the ‘Youth Cross’ campaign, which provided a cover for a territory-wide strategy of political education for youth. Under the banner of the Church, and hence tolerated by authorities, the clandestines:

organised a Youth Cross in March and after Easter… when we took the cross from one parish to the next. We would all have Mass together, then organise a seminar for the youth… but the seminar programme was political. Every time a seminar was held it turned into a demonstration.

Following a major split in FITUN in 1991, occasioned by Indonesian intelligence infiltration16, the remaining key leaders of the group then known as ‘FITUN–resistencia’ – including Marito Mota and the Ferreira cousins - were frequently picked up and detained and beaten whenever any major events or demonstrations took place, or were expected. Ultimately, in November 1992, FITUN was formally banned by the Indonesian authorities and forced to publicly dissolve itself in an event covered widely in the Indonesian press (see e.g. Jawa Pos 1992)17. As the ETAN news service (1992) noted “its leaders have

16 Though it cannot be addressed at length in this short article, a dramatic split in the FITUN group occurred on 20 August 1991, when, according to the rest of the group, a key leader (unnamed in this article) was turned by Indonesian intelligence. The remaining leaders of the group, including Marito Mota and the Ferreira cousins were invited to a FITUN conference in Taibesi, at which Indonesian military figures were present, and asked to choose between the Indonesian Flag, the RDTL flag and the Fretelin flag. The former leader publicly chose the Indonesian flag. The rest of the group left the meeting, returning to Kuluhun to form a new group ‘FITUN-Resistencia’, electing Marito Mota as the new President and Elizario Ferreira as secretary. All of the well-known members of the ‘FITUN-resistencia’ group were arrested shortly afterward.

17 ‘The East Timorese youth in the organization Fitun which aided the Fretelin security disrupters and planned various demonstrations in East Timor officially dissolved itself Sunday evening in Dili. An official statement of dissolution and oath by members of Fitun was read out and then immediately signed by its General Chairman Mariano [sic]
been forced to recant publicly in obviously insincere acts of contrition. The Army is apparently reluctantly to arrest more than a small proportion of this network -- and perhaps still unable to do so”.

As the 1990s progressed, the increasing importance of the clandestine front in the overall resistance strategy saw increasing political education conducted by the armed resistance

So, Falintil they came down from the mountains they went to every suku and conducted political education at suku level. Preparing people, so that when the referendum came they would be politicised. We were prepared… from 1992 onwards. This went on until they captured Mau Hudo, Mau Huno… the resistance continued and FITUN was still strong, we had strong links with Falintil… until… CNRT was established.

In the lead up to the 1999 referendum, FITUN was placed under the Presidium Juventude Lorico Ass’wain Timor Loro Sa’e (Presidium of Youth Lorikeet Warriors) umbrella organisation for youth movements in April 1999 (de Araujo, 2003, 104) which coordinated activities with CNRT throughout 1999. At this time, in the pre- and post-referendum violence, male members of FITUN were told to stop attending school so that they could guard their neighbourhoods at night (Nicholson 2001, 46-7).

Conclusion

As Fernandes (2011, 125) notes, the history of the clandestine front movements, and their “vital yet often unacknowledged role” in the independence struggle is yet to be fully documented18. It is to be hoped that a new generation of East Timorese historians will approach this task, and build on – and perhaps correct – the early attempts made by external historians, and the relatively few East Timorese accounts made following independence (Pereira 2009, de Araujo 2003, Babo-Soares 2003). It is also the case that the critical contributions of the clandestine resistance are yet to be fully recognised in the history curriculum and memorial landscape of the independent state (Leach 2009). Though November 12 it is a national public holiday, there is as yet no monument at Santa Cruz, and the extent of the juventude’s contribution tends to be neglected in the relative domination of military veteran’s issues and histories in post-independence politics. As Gregorio Saldanha recalls, the clandestine phrase “If not now, when? If not us, then who?” captured the courage and determination to mobilise a national consciousness among the juventude, whose rejection of Indonesia’s occupation in some ways stung harder than the resistance of the older generation, striking as it did at the heart of the entire forced integration project.

Bibliography

CAVR 2005, Chega! The Report of the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation, Timor-Leste, Dili,

Fatubai Mota, 22, and witnessed by Commander of Military District (Kodim) 1627/Dili Lt. Col. (Infantry) Syarifudin Zein, religious figures, and local community figures. They swore to dissolve, not to form a new organization with the same guidelines as Fitun, and to join the youth organizations legally approved by the government and unified state of the Republic of Indonesia based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. “We take this oath consciously and motivated by the faith of our religious community. If we violate this oath, then we accept religious sanctions, customary law sanctions, and the sanctions of the unified state of the Republic of Indonesia,” Mariano [sic] said loudly. ' (Jawa Pos 1992).
18 “The juventude… made enormous contributions and sacrifices. They bore the brunt of the Santa Cruz massacre and were captured, interrogated, tortured, imprisoned or killed for their convictions. … It is my hope that this rich historical vein will be mined extensively in the years ahead.” Fernandes 2010, 125.
The Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (CAVR).
Ferreira, Elizario 2010. Interview with author, 1 March.
http://amrtimor.org/docs/?lingua=en
ETAN 1992, East Timor Documents, Volume 19. November 30-December 11,
Neves, Jose 2010, Interview with author, 4 March.
Bachelor of Arts (Honours) Thesis, Department of History, the University of Melbourne, October.
Pereira, Nino 2009, Catatan Seorang Peompat Pagar, RENETIL, Dili.
Saldanha, Gregorio 2010, Interview with author, 2 March.