

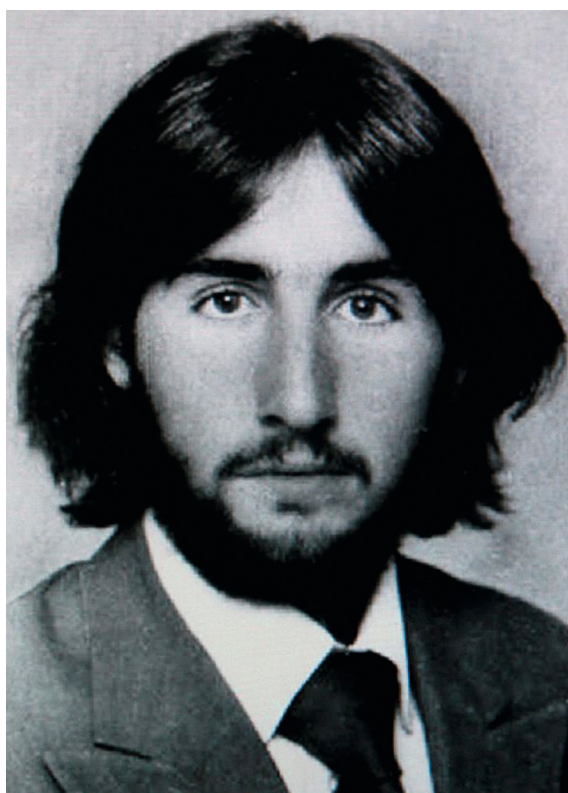
the independence lion Sukarno, playing footsie with Moscow and Beijing, and ushered in Suharto's 30 years of military-led kleptocracy. Indonesia has not undertaken any sort of Truth and Reconciliation Commission into this dark period, as did post-Apartheid South Africa. And yet the slaughter, the grief, the corruption and the abuse was on a far larger, industrial scale, a political Rwanda. I don't think I've seen a reference to a TRC anywhere, much less heard a call for one. The 1960s are not something anyone wants much to talk about.

There are other monumental events still to be reckoned: the 1998 Trisakti University killings when students rose against Suharto rule, ousting the corrupt old crook but not the crony regime around him. The Suharto era poses serious questions, with no one called to account for his looting of the economy. I was in Jakarta as Suharto was dying last year. He'd ripped Indonesians off for decades and they knew it. And yet they responded with love and weeks of mourning at his eventual passing: an end of certainty, or perhaps a national Stockholm Syndrome. Indonesians came to love their captors and abusers. The great and good streamed to his deathbed for weeks to pay their last respects to a man to whom they owed their sinecures and their private bank accounts safe in Singapore. His staggering corruption — \$30 billion-plus pillaged by Suharto and his family — was as if had never happened. It was impolite to raise it as he was lionised.

East Timor too is a stain — 300,000 killed during a 24-year occupation. The closest any Indonesian official has come to admitting atrocities was two years ago when the late foreign minister Ali Alatas was launching his memoirs, his take on Indonesian history in East Timor, which he dismissed as a 'pebble in Indonesia's shoe'. Dino Djalal was once one of his bright charges in the ministry. Now he's foreign affairs advisor to Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, an avuncular ex-general who served as a young officer in East Timor and became Indonesia's first democratically elected president in 2004.

'East Timor became sort of a police state, where intelligence controlled all activities,' Djalal said at the Alatas book launch. 'Our strategy for winning hearts and minds was bribing people who we thought were loyal to us and fighting off and probably doing horrible things to those who were not.' Djalal's take is about as generous as it will get.

So where does the national navel-gazing end? Or, more to the point, begin? There's the Aceh civil war, too, and the myriad of minor ethnic and separatist conflicts. And should Indonesia examine why it allowed a violent Islamist death cult to emerge in its islands? The authorities have done well to kill its leaders, but they can't even bring themselves to call it Jemaah Islamiah, or 'Islamic Community'. President



Tony Stewart, one of the five Australian journalists killed in East Timor in 1975

Yudhoyono simply calls it 'that group'.

For Australian journalists of a generation — mine — East Timor was the defining issue. In a sense it was our Watergate, a story of rank injustice that outraged and fired us up. That generation now edit our newspapers and magazines, run our newsrooms, which explains why the story has been kept aflame for so long. It happened when I was 14 and I was fascinated by it. Hailing from the innocent pastures of rural Victoria, it was probably the first time I had any real sense that a violent world existed beyond the cricket-playing pink bits of the Commonwealth that illustrated school maps. Sure there was Vietnam, but Greg Shackleton was real, and an Australian, one of the first 'foreign correspondents' the media presented to me. His death in some fetid hellhole seemed almost romantic and noble. As it turned out, he wasn't one at all. He and his inexperienced colleagues were simply assigned abroad, ambitious to make their careers. They did, tragically, but as is often said in this business, no story is worth dying for.

When I became a cadet journalist at the old *Melbourne Sun* in 1982, I became — and remain — close friends with a fellow cadet called Paul Stewart, younger brother of the murdered Channel 7 sound recordist Tony. His death in Balibo spurred Paul to become an eloquent and eccentric activist for the disenfranchised East Timorese in Australia. A uniquely Melbourne character, Paul's way of dealing with the prolonged grief of his family was to parody the brutal Indonesians, which the East Timorese loved. Paul became a rock

star, almost a parody of one, first fronting a piss-taking Melbourne band called the Painters and Dockers and then, with some Timorese diaspora musicians, the Dili Allstars. I was in Dili when in front of 20,000 delighted Timorese Paul taunted Indonesia's faraway military commander General Wiranto, the man who had unleashed the pro-Indonesian militias during the independence ballot in 1999, that he'd soon be 'going home in the back of a divvy van'. The crowd crowed in delight.

Paul supports the Balibo Five war crimes push on Jakarta for justice for his brother, arguing that 'if we are still going after Nazis for Holocaust crimes 60 years on, so why should Indonesian war criminals be any different? I think Indonesia needs to do it for the sake of its democracy.'

Those who forget history are condemned to repeat it, as the saying goes, but nations with recent violent histories sometimes find it convenient to forget. 'There is no amnesia about the past in Indonesia,' says Dr Jeffery Winters, professor of political economy at Chicago's Northwestern University. 'Instead there is a keen awareness that many of the figures involved in decades of atrocities are not only still around, but solidly ensconced in positions of

respect and power.' It is only when a regime overthrow is profound that criminals from the previous regime face serious risks. If the incoming government is a different group of thugs with few leftovers from the old order, says Winters, there will be show trials, jail sentences and executions.

'This has not happened in Indonesia,' says Winters. 'The powerful actors from the past remain fully empowered — both the criminals and their influential friends. There has been no justice whatever for past atrocities in any case of significance. Things are so bad that even extreme cases that occurred after the fall of Suharto have not been handled satisfactorily.'

Winters cites Suharto's son Tommy, who ordered the murder of a sitting Supreme Court judge because the judge dared to uphold a corruption conviction. Tommy got 15 years in jail, served a little over five years and mostly spent it in Jakarta having 'medical check-ups'. One of Indonesia's nastier people, Tommy is now free to dynastically run for leadership of his late father's fiefdom, Golkar, which he hopes to rebuild into the force it once was under his father.

'The problem is that the perpetrators remain strong and the government is overflowing with people who not only support them, but continue to believe that the invasion of East Timor was fully justified,' says Winters. 'Their reaction to opening the [Balibo] case and others like it tends to be: "You've got to be joking!"'

Reckoning for the Balibo Five might uncork a very ugly genie for Indonesia. And Jakarta is not going to go there.