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## The struggle continues

If the cultural elements of sacrifice and popular suffering provide insights into an East Timorese sense of belonging that spans national boundaries, it is through the dynamics of their political mobilisation that their belonging and citizenship are performed. By perform, I am not referring to an individual action. Rather, my focus is on East Timorese collective action manifest in community and political associations and activism. I am interested in the way this collective action has rebuilt and transformed East Timorese political activities through long-term engagement in the complex politics of occupation, migration and democratisation.

Studies of political activities among conflict-affected communities show that institutions in the host country provide opportunities for refugees or IDPs to channel their political interests. Scholars (Tarrow 1996: 54) interpret the host institution as a ‘political opportunity structure’, which they define as a ‘consistent—but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national—signal to social or political actors which either encourages or discourages them to use their internal resources to form social movements’. According to this view, the political activities of immigrants or newcomers tend to grow when the state’s political system provides avenues for the free expression of dissenting opinions. These opportunities, however, often place protesters in a reactionary position against government policies.

In this chapter, I explore the character of East Timorese political mobilisation, and the ways in which Indonesian citizenship has been exercised in response. East Timorese in West Timor are often considered demanding and sometimes ungrateful and stubborn citizens because they

continue to demand government assistance despite the ongoing housing and livelihood projects delivered to them since their chaotic arrival in late 1999. I challenge this assumption by examining East Timorese political mobilisation to shed light on how they have transformed the political landscape in contemporary Indonesia. To explain the changing nature of their civic participation, I draw on Engin Isin's (2009: 380) idea of an 'activist citizenship', which goes beyond participation in political processes to explicit engagement in resistance and oppositional work to create 'a break, a rupture and a difference'. For the East Timorese in West Timor, 'making a break' does not refer to secessionist activity or resistance against the nation-state. Rather, it is directed to a separation of the past from a vision of future renewal.

It has been widely recognised that pro-Indonesia East Timorese associations were formed and directed by the Indonesian military to demonstrate their allegiance to Indonesia during the occupation and referendum. But, on their arrival in West Timor, these people changed their political direction and mobilised around a new agenda of struggle to make the state more accountable to its citizens. Many have said to me, 'Our struggle continues but in a different direction now'. This narrative of change from collaborating with to challenging the state makes East Timorese political mobilisation distinctly potent. Once we see the ongoing demands of East Timorese for state responsibility as more than simply the action of stubborn citizens, we can consider citizenship practice in a new light. The confrontational character of East Timorese public rallies and demonstrations then becomes not so much an interruption to service delivery as a catalyst for remedial policy and accountability. As my focus is restricted to East Timorese politics within Indonesia, I will not discuss political unions and associations formed during the Portuguese decolonisation process in East Timor. Rather, my point of departure is the political change following the Indonesian invasion and occupation. In this section, I situate East Timorese associational life in the context of Indonesian politics during the New Order regime. The section discusses continuity and change within East Timorese associations and how these associations were mobilised for political activity and active citizenship. Beyond this, I discuss the notion of citizens' struggle and the way East Timorese transformed their rights as citizens after they migrated to West Timor. I will then move on to explore East Timorese alliances with established Indonesian associations. The final part of the chapter discusses the changing perspective of citizen activism.

## Era of political reticence

As soon as the Indonesian military invaded and occupied East Timor, radical changes were instituted, including severe restrictions on political activities. Although Indonesia's constitution guarantees citizens' the right and freedom to associate, the New Order regime imposed the so-called *organicism* ideology, uniting state and society in an organic form. This ideology, combined with the idea of the 'floating mass' (*massa mengambang*), allowed Indonesian citizens to express their political rights in elections every five years, but did not permit oppositional political activities in the intervening period (Beitinger-Lee 2009: 43–4; Fernandes 2011: 25). As a result, citizens' associations had to comply with government categorisations and function in accordance with government edicts. Associations that did not comply were dissolved, through coercive measures if necessary. Although some associations such as NGOs remained active during the 1970s and 1980s, their interests were directed mainly towards community development. A focus on active citizenship and political mobilisation was not permitted (Acciaioli 2001: 17; Beard 2003: 22).

In East Timor, throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, political associations, unions and political parties formed during the decolonisation process were dissolved and their activities integrated into three mainstream Indonesian political parties, the Party of the Functional Groups (Golongan Karya, or Golkar), the Indonesian Democratic Party (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia, or PDI) and the United Development Party (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, or PPP). Indonesia's coercive attempts to curb East Timorese political activities were not limited to political parties. East Timorese traditional alliance structures were also coopted and manipulated for the purpose of integration within the unitary state of Indonesia. Just as had occurred under the Portuguese, the former *dato* and *liurai* who were aligned with Indonesia were installed as official leaders of administrative units in the village (*desa*), subdistrict (*kecamatan*) and district (*kabupaten*). Others served in the Indonesian military, police force and government offices. Their followers were recruited by the Indonesian military and trained to function as village-based vigilantes (known as Babinsa or Hansip) or armed paramilitary groups (Perlawanan Rakyat-Wanra and Rakyat Terlatih-Ratih). Formation of vigilante groups was a common practice across Indonesia and was known as the 'universal people's security system' (*Sistem Pertahanan Keamanan Rakyat Semesta*), but it was subject to greater intensification in East Timor than elsewhere and formed up to the village level.

Regardless of such government restrictions on association, East Timorese traditional alliances remained active and functioned in a clandestine way to support the resistance movement. In March 1981, defeated and near-extinguished Fretilin supporters and Falintil guerillas consolidated their organisation and established the Revolutionary Council of National Resistance (Conselho Revolucionário de Resistência Nacional, or CRRN) with Xanana Gusmão as their president and the commander in chief of Falintil. The CRRN linked armed guerilla activities in the mountainous areas with clandestine activities in residential areas and operated as a shadow opposition to the Indonesian-installed administrative structure. East Timorese kinship alliances were utilised to develop a network of resistance that spanned the occupied territory, with each village possessing a 'nucleus of popular resistance' (Núcleos de Resistência, or Nurep) and every hamlet a community cell (Célular da Comunidade, or Celcom) (McWilliam 2005: 35).

In 1985, the Indonesian Government enacted Law No. 8 on Civic Organisations, which forced all civic associations to accept the state's ideology of *Pancasila* ('five principles')<sup>1</sup> as their sole foundation and to adopt it in their statutes. This law incorporated community associations within state functions and directed their activities in accordance with state interests. In East Timor, such associations included the Union of Military Wives (Persatuan Istri Tentara), which ran a maternity clinic in the Dili neighbourhood of Colmera, and the Union of Public Servants' Wives (Dharma Wanita), focused on family welfare activities. The regime also worked with the East Timorese Students and Youth Association, which organised sports and youth events, and the Indonesia-wide youth Scout movement. Village shadow organisations such as Nurep and Celcom, regardless of their fragmentation, were classified as prohibited organisations (*organisasi terlarang*) as they were considered agents of resistance. This labelling legitimated Indonesian military efforts to curtail Nurep and Celcom activities.<sup>2</sup>

1 The five principles of *Pancasila*, as outlined in the Indonesian constitution, are: belief in one God, just and civilised humanity, Indonesian unity, democracy under the wise guidance of representative consultations and social justice for all Indonesians.

2 In spite of the state's effort to prohibit organisations, Nurep cells, which were mostly 'motivated by family ties' (Budiardjo and Liang 1984: 179), continued to grow—reaching 1,700 cells across East Timor (Cristalis 2002: 57). In Indonesia, parallel growth occurred in the establishment of NGOs (Beitinger-Lee 2009: 64).

Until the mid-1980s, almost all East Timorese associations were formed inside East Timor. Many solidarity groups and movements existed overseas, but none was yet established in other parts of Indonesia.<sup>3</sup> It was in June 1988 that a group of nine East Timorese students in Bali formed a student association under the banner of the National Resistance of East Timorese Students (Renetil). Clandestine Renetil cells later formed in various cities in Java (Bexley 2009). On 1 November 1988, president Suharto visited Dili to open the Indonesian National Assembly of the Youth Scout Organisation and addressed delegates from across Indonesia on the importance of youth participation in national development. The next day, the president inaugurated major construction projects and declared that development in East Timor had moved in step with that in other Indonesian territories. On his return to Jakarta, Suharto issued Presidential Decree No. 62 to lift travel restrictions and open East Timor to foreign visitors. This not only opened East Timor to foreign observers, but also provided an opportunity for greater political mobilisation.<sup>4</sup>

## Era of political openness

The late 1980s were also marked by a growing demand for political reform and democratisation in other parts of Indonesia. ‘Magazines, newspapers, seminars, public meetings and television talk shows dealt almost incessantly with topics such as democracy and the 1945 Constitution, democracy and Indonesian culture, and democracy and globalisation’ (Bourchier and Hadiz 2003: 185). President Suharto recognised the mounting debates in his state address to commemorate 44 years of independence. He said:

[B]oth in Indonesia and in the world more generally, we are witnessing the end of an era that began in 1945 with the end of the Second World War. As the twenty-first century approaches, we are entering a new era in the history of human kind; new perspectives, new aspirations, and new forces are emerging everywhere ... let us regard the recent voicing of political proposals and aspirations with calm hearts, clear heads and a great feeling of responsibility. (Cited in Bourchier and Hadiz 2003: 192–3)

3 For a discussion of solidarity movements overseas, see Fernandes (2011: 91–100).

4 At the time this policy of opening up East Timor was implemented, the resistance organisation CRRN underwent structural changes, and changed its name, first, to the National Council of Maubere Resistance and, later, to the National Council of Timorese Resistance.

Exactly one year later, and also at independence commemorations, the president reflected: '[S]ome time ago I stressed that we did not have to worry too much about the diversity of viewpoints and opinions in society.' Having considered the mounting demands for democratisation, Suharto said:

[D]emocracy indeed requires a lot of consultation, discussion, exchanges of views and dialogue, both between the government and the society and between various groups in society. We should see differences of opinion as the very source of life's dynamism. (Cited in Bouchier and Hadiz 2003: 195)

With this clear signal of political openness (*keterbukaan*) in Indonesia, more dissenting groups emerged to express their critical views of the regime (Bouchier and Hadiz 2003: 192; Beittinger-Lee 2009: 65). This situation resonated in East Timor, with more frequent mass mobilisations, student rallies and peaceful demonstrations. Increasing numbers of youth and student associations were formed to organise these efforts,<sup>5</sup> which reached a crisis in November 1991 when the Indonesian military opened fire on East Timorese students participating in a funeral march at the Santa Cruz Cemetery in Dili. Hundreds of participants were shot and killed, and the massacre was broadcast around the world. The events shattered Indonesian assurances about the situation in East Timor and encouraged the formation of solidarity groups around the world and also within Indonesia.<sup>6</sup>

To counter the growth in clandestine activities, in 1995, the Indonesian military stepped up their counter-resistance efforts by forming East Timorese youth associations (which were in fact militias) called Young Guards Upholding Integration (Garda Muda Penegak Integrasi, or Garda Paksi). Members of Garda Paksi 'appeared to be drawn largely from

5 In the early 1990s, such organisations included the East Timor Catholic Youth Organisation (Organização da Juventude Católica de Timor-Leste, or OJECTIL), which later became the Organisation for Youth and Students of Timor-Leste (Organização de Jovens e Estudantes de Timor-Leste, or OJETIL); the Always United Front of Timor (Frente Iha Timor Unidos Nafatin, or FITUN); and the Popular Organisation of East Timorese Women (Organização Popular Juventude Lorico Ass'wain Timor-Leste, or OPJLATIL).

6 Within East Timor, these associations included: OPJLATIL; Movimento Buka Dalan Foun (MOBUDAN); the Apodeti Youth Union (Persatuan Pemuda Apodeti, or PPA); the Front of East Timorese Students (Frente Clandestina Estudantil de Timor Leste, or FECLETIL); the Sacred Family (Sagrada Família); and the Association of Anti-Integration Youths and Students (Himpunan Pemuda, Pelajar, dan Mahasiswa Anti-Integrasi, or HPPMAI) (see Nicholson 2001; Babo-Soares 2003; Leach 2012). More specific organisations, such as the East Timorese Human Rights and Legal Aid Foundation (Yayasan HAK), were formed in 1994.

unemployed East Timorese youth' and their main role was 'to infiltrate the underground resistance and provoke disturbances among East Timorese' (Robinson 2010: 75–6).

In the late 1990s, after the resignation of president Suharto and the process of political reforms leading up to the East Timor referendum, the Indonesian military-backed Garda Paksi groups were transformed into fully fledged militia groups called the Integration Fighters Force (Pasukan Pejuang Integrasi, or PPI), which organised intimidation and extrajudicial killings of pro-independence supporters. Other Indonesian supporters were integrated into three additional groups: East Timor People's Front (Barisan Rakyat Timor-Timur, BRTT), Forum for Unity, Democracy and Justice (Forum Persatuan, Demokrasi dan Keadilan, or FPDK) and the Timorese Alliance (Aliansi Orsospol Pendukung Otonomi).<sup>7</sup>

## An era of political opportunity

On 23 June 1999, with referendum day approaching, the East Timorese political groups in favour of the option of special autonomy within Indonesia came together as the United Front for East Timor Autonomy (Front Persatuan Pendukung Otonomi, or UNIF). When the result of the referendum—rejection of continued autonomy within Indonesia in favour of independence—was announced, members of the four factions making up UNIF were displaced into West Timor. But as early as January 2000, UNIF leaders gathered in Kupang for three days of discussion—and dispute (the conference venue was moved three times). The '*biti bot Timoris*' (lit., 'Timorese large mat') congress agreed to dissolve UNIF and its four foundational organisations. In response, UNIF members formed a new organisation, called Union East Timorese in Indonesia (Uni Timor Aswain, or UNTAS).

The transformation of UNIF into UNTAS was arguably the most ambitious political project of the East Timorese in West Timor. Two striking features of the UNTAS manifesto distinguished it from previous East Timorese associations. First, its rejection of the referendum result clearly indicated that it had been formed to deal with political issues not

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<sup>7</sup> During this period, another resistance association formed under the banner of the Student Solidarity Council was their organisation wing, called the Young Women's Group of East Timor (Grupus Feto Foin Sa'e Timor Lorosa'e, or GFFTL).

only in the homeland (East Timor) and the receiving society (Indonesia), but also at an international level (at the United Nations). Second, it suggested that East Timorese who previously supported Indonesia had started to express dissenting opinions towards the state that formed them.

The Indonesian Government, however, did not buy into UNTAS's demands. Instead, president Abdurrahman Wahid, during a visit to Dili, acknowledged the result of the referendum—a move that was followed by formal recognition in the Indonesian national parliament. The Indonesian military also dissolved vigilante groups formed during the occupation and referendum and confiscated their weapons. Without the support of the Indonesian Government, UNTAS's political activism lasted only until late 2000.

The departure of UNTAS from the political stage resulted in the formation of a growing number of new East Timorese associations.<sup>8</sup> An attempt to crowd out these associations occurred in 2005 when the Indonesian Government announced the end of humanitarian and development assistance for displaced East Timorese.<sup>9</sup> Again, however, more associations emerged in response.<sup>10</sup> Since 2000, more than 10 East Timorese associations have formed in West Timor to represent their interests. Some were established to bring together people from the same origin in East Timor, while others pursued social welfare, human rights and social justice issues. Regardless of their seemingly fragmented relations, all associations acknowledged that they had grown out of UNTAS. In 2010, the younger generation of these East Timorese manoeuvred to organise a congress to wrest the leadership of UNTAS from the older generation. The latter responded by deeming this plan illegal, reporting it to the

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8 In subsequent years, various new groups emerged to represent the voices of East Timorese in West Timor, such as the National Committee of East Timor Political Victims (Komite Nasional Korban Politik Timor Timur, or KOKPIT); Front of Indonesia Defenders (Front Pembela Bangsa Indonesia, FPBI); Front of Red and White Defenders (Front Pembela Merah Putih); East Timorese Community Association (Masyarakat Komunitas Timor Timur, or Makasti); and the Union of Displaced East Timorese (Persatuan Pengungsi Timor Timur). These associations, however, did not have clear associational platforms and faded away with time. Only KOKPIT remains active.

9 The theory of crowding out is inspired by de Tocqueville's classic work *Democracy in America* (1835–40). In this view, state intervention acts in opposition to community organisations and consequently works to undermine it (for a discussion of this theory in the context of immigrant organisations, see Bloemraad 2005; Caponio 2005; Hooghe 2005).

10 The following year, various associations, including the Atsabe Family Union (Himpunan Keluarga Atsabe, or Hikbat), the Association for the Protection of Indonesian Timorese Community (Lembaga Perlindungan Masyarakat Timor Indonesia, or LPMTI), the Forum for the Defenders of Justice (Forum Pembela Keadilan, or FPK), the Baucau Indonesia Union (Persehatian Oan Timor Baucau Indonesia, or POTIBI) and the Humanitarian Forum, emerged to represent East Timorese in West Timor.

police and asking the authorities to dissolve it. The congress went ahead and eventually elected a leader from the younger generation, signalling an end to the monopoly of authority by the older representatives.



Plate 7.1 Banner for Arnaldo Tavares, the chief of UNTAS in Belu district  
Source: Andrey Damaledo.

The first political mobilisation of the younger generation saw them reclaim the political mission of UNTAS and renew their focus on social and welfare issues affecting East Timorese. This contrasted with the agenda of the older generation, who had viewed UNTAS as a forum for East Timorese solidarity and communitarianism. Since 2010, East Timorese political mobilisation and demonstrations have been represented by the younger generation of UNTAS. In late January 2013, I was invited to be an observer in the annual working assembly of UNTAS in Kupang. During his opening address to the assembly, notorious former militia leader Eurico Guterres, the chief of UNTAS, declared that ‘UNTAS [was] a *house* that united all East Timorese in Indonesia as one family’. He indicated that the UNTAS assembly was a symbolic representation of all East Timorese associations that had transformed their citizenship practices in contemporary Indonesia. In late January 2017, I attended the inauguration of UNTAS’s central committee in Kupang. Guterres

retained his position as UNTAS's top leader. However, this time, I noted significant differences with the congress I had attended four years earlier. There were more politicians from Indonesian mainstream political parties attending the event, including top Indonesian politicians from Jakarta. Guterres also changed his tone from an inward-looking plea for unity to an outward-looking appeal for more government attention to East Timorese civic engagement and their struggle to perform their citizenship in Indonesia.

## Integrating mainstream political parties

For the East Timorese, adapting their civic engagement to contemporary Indonesia meant integration into Indonesian mainstream politics. When I asked a senior East Timorese politician about this, he replied:

Having an association like UNTAS is great, but in order to make it effective we also have to become active members of Indonesian political parties and play the game of governance, decision-making and resource allocation. By doing so, we can sustain our struggle, and our voices and demands will be heard.

The process of mainstreaming politics began as early as mid-2003 in the lead-up to the 2004 Indonesian general election. During this period, East Timorese politicians began to consolidate and mobilise their networks within Indonesian mainstream political parties.

This tactic proved fruitful, with one of their senior politicians, Armindo Mariano (Golkar), elected to the NTT parliament. The East Timorese tendency for fission, however, has led many to decline the opportunity to unify their voice through Mariano and undertake their own political manoeuvres. For example, Arnaldo Tavares, son of former top militia leader João Tavares, chose to join president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's Democratic Party (Partai Demokrat, or PD). An East Timorese legal practitioner, João Meco, joined general Wiranto's Hanura Party. Ali Atamimi, who was a representative from East Timor in Indonesia's People Consultative Assembly between 1997 and 1999, maintained his allegiance to the PPP.



Plate 7.2 Campaign poster for East Timorese politician Fatima Ferrao, from the National Mandate Party

Source: Andrey Damaledo.

A surprising decision was made by Eurico Guterres to join another quasi-Islamic party, the National Mandate Party (Partai Amanat Nasional, or PAN). Another significant change occurred in early 2009, when Prabowo Subianto—regarded by many East Timorese as their comrade due to his military service in East Timor—formed the Great Indonesia Movement Party (Gerakan Indonesia Raya, or Gerindra) as his political machine to run for the Indonesian presidency. Many East Timorese acknowledged a narrative of shared comradeship and struggle with Prabowo, which led them to join Gerindra. Armindo Mariano, for example, resigned from Golkar and aligned himself with Gerindra, securing the position of party secretary in NTT.



Plate 7.3 Campaign poster for East Timorese politician Agustinho Pinto, from Gerindra (who was elected to office)

Source: Andrey Damaledo.

## Struggling citizens

In addition to their involvement in mainstream political parties, East Timorese have always been active in their own political rallies. Since early 2000, various East Timorese associations have organised rallies and demonstrations to challenge the way the Indonesian Government delivers services to them. These public demonstrations have become part of their life in West Timor. To attract media attention, they always seek to stage their rallies in prominent government spaces such as parliamentary buildings or the office of the governor and/or head of the district (*bupati*). If a rally targets a specific government agency—whose service provision is the subject of the protest—dramatic action may be performed, such as chaining the gate, blocking the entrance and shutting down the activities of that office. At some rallies, groups have performed a theatrical war dance.

Perhaps the largest rallies ever staged took place in Atambua (Belu) during 2006 in response to the allocation of compensation funds managed by the Indonesian Ministry of Social Affairs. According to the policy, each East

Timorese household would receive a total of IDR4 million (approximately A\$400) to support their livelihoods in West Timor. In Belu district, it was reported that only 1,500 East Timorese households were entitled to this allocation. The majority of the East Timorese population in the district perceived this as discriminatory, as the total number of households far exceeded that figure, and, in their view, all East Timorese deserved compensation. Protest rallies were organised and a census was conducted to provide precise information about the number of resident East Timorese households. Finally, after nearly a year of rallies that culminated in the destruction of the Belu House of Parliament and detention of three East Timorese, the Indonesian Government agreed to meet their demands, although it insisted no additional budget allocation would be made. As a result, instead of receiving IDR4 million as promised, each East Timorese household in Belu district received just IDR503,000 (A\$50). As one activist recalled:

The amount was pitiful considering what we had done, including spending time in prison, but it was a worthy cause. We have shown that East Timorese are here and that our struggle continues.

Following the large rallies in Atambua, East Timorese held smaller protests on a regular basis throughout West Timor until 2012, when then president Yudhoyono issued a directive to provide housing for East Timorese in West Timor. To make this program more inclusive and consistent with mainstream Indonesian policy, the East Timorese were classified as people with low incomes (*Masyarakat Berpenghasilan Rendah*) and therefore eligible for public housing. The Indonesian Minister for Public Housing was assigned leadership of the project and Atambua was chosen as the place where the project would be launched.

However, like many previous housing projects, in this one, the quality of construction was poor and various East Timorese groups rejected their housing allocations and launched a strike to remain in their camps. One East Timorese elder who helped organise the strike in Atambua told me:

The government said these houses were broken because we left them empty. We did not want to argue with them, so we invited them to come to the location and see for themselves. We ushered them into one of the houses that had just been completed. Once they were all inside and observing the rooms, we went outside and pushed the wall. The thin concrete walls immediately cracked and shook. Noticing that the house seemed to be on the verge of collapsing, the officers rushed outside.

Imitating the officers' expression of fear and outrage, the elder explained that they had not intended to treat the officers badly or to humiliate them. They were simply trying to demonstrate the problem and show them why they had chosen to remain in their camps. He said: 'Now that they had experienced it themselves, they knew firsthand how bad the house was, and hopefully they would change the way they delivered their services.'

East Timorese groups in the neighbouring district of North Central Timor (TTU) also responded negatively to the housing project and organised rallies around the office of the *bupati*. They demanded the local government pursue an inclusive social policy and treat them with respect. In Kupang district, different forms of protest were organised by East Timorese groups in the village of Naibonat. They refused to participate in the registration census or be included in the program.

This renewed struggle finally reached the office of the Indonesian National Commission on Human Rights (Komisi Nasional Hak Asasi Manusia, or Komnas HAM) in Jakarta and a team was sent to West Timor to investigate. After visiting some of the housing project sites and talking to East Timorese in Belu and TTU districts, the team confirmed, in October 2013, that the housing was substandard (Kompas Online 2013). After a lengthy standoff, in early 2014, the Indonesian Public Prosecutor was called on to investigate allegations of corruption against the project contractors. Officials from the Ministry of Housing and the local government, together with the managing contractors, were charged with corruption in the special Indonesian court and a number were found guilty and sentenced to prison. The investigation was then expanded to cover all districts in NTT and, at the time of writing, other alleged offenders were still waiting to appear in court.

Many East Timorese expressed satisfaction that their struggles had eventually paid off. They were pleased that their efforts resonated across district boundaries and influenced other people in NTT. They have also demonstrated that corrupt officials who seek to gain from the displacement and suffering of East Timorese will be brought to justice. The cases have illustrated that the East Timorese in West Timor are not simply 'active citizens' who participate in civic life by casting their votes, paying taxes, and so on. Rather, they are 'activist citizens' who are prepared to challenge the state's authority and demand that it be more responsive and accountable for its actions. In this sense, the East Timorese have transformed themselves from agents of the state into champions of

their own communities and in this role they are prepared to act in the interests of their fellow citizens. The transformation demonstrates that East Timorese political mobilisation in West Timor is not simply about serving their own agendas and securing compensation from the state. Their demands for state accountability confirm they are also playing a new role in demonstrating a willingness to embrace and support the Indonesian democratic reform agenda.



Plate 7.4 An East Timorese rally in front of the NTT governor's office, September 2017

Source: Kompas.com/Sigiranus Marutho Bere.

## Alliances with established associations

East Timorese struggles and political mobilisation have so far been influential because they have managed to form alliances with established associations in West Timor. 'As we have lived here [in West Timor]', some declare, 'we should not just build our own house, but also be part of local people's houses'. Here, the ideology of house dispersion or 'marrying out' is alluded to in their involvement with West Timorese associations, particularly local ethnic organisations. The United Timorese (Persehatian Orang Timor, or POT) is one such prominent organisation, and the largest association formed to accommodate and represent local

Meto-speaking West Timorese in NTT. East Timorese who have been members of this association since its early formation denounce the claim that POT is exclusively Meto. They argue that POT is an organisation for all Timorese regardless of their ethnolinguistic background and, with East Timorese support, some leaders of this association have been elected to office at the district and provincial levels.

Some East Timorese are also involved in Indonesian philanthropic organisations. The Wadah Foundation, a philanthropic group set up by Indonesian billionaire Hashim Djojohadikusomo, supports the active involvement of East Timorese. Recently, the foundation provided solar panels and a water pipeline for East Timorese groups in TTS district.<sup>11</sup> East Timorese are also active members of the Indonesian Farmers' Union and Indonesian Veterans' Association. But perhaps the most important alliance they have formed so far is with the Indonesian Retired Armed Forces Association (Pepabri). By virtue of their enduring sense of comradeship and shared military experience, the association keeps alive relations between East Timorese and former Indonesian army generals (and some active generals) who served in East Timor during the occupation. This relationship is a crucial political alliance considering most of these retired generals remain key players in contemporary Indonesian politics.

Religious-based organisations make up a second set of alignments. Many East Timorese are active members of the Indonesian Interreligious Communication Forum. They are often appointed to represent members of the Catholic Church in their respective districts and this is crucial because the forum is a nationwide organisation with offices at provincial and district levels. With such a well-established institutional structure and broad membership, leading members of this forum have a direct channel to political leaders such as the governor or *bupati*,<sup>12</sup> and therefore direct access to key decision-makers. Muslim East Timorese are also active in established Islamic groups in West Timor. Some mosques near East Timorese resettlement areas, such as those in Boneana and Reknamo villages in Kupang district, were built as a result of these associations.

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11 Wadah is significant because of its link with one of Indonesia's largest political parties, Gerindra, and its chief patron, Prabowo Subianto.

12 East Timorese in Naibonat village in Kupang district, for instance, used the forum to approach the local *bupati* in their attempt to secure land for their church.

A third alliance that is beneficial to East Timorese involves human rights groups and grassroots activists in West Timor. Although few East Timorese are active members, these organisations have promoted East Timorese displacement as a human rights issue in West Timor and therefore represent an active voice promoting their interests. A final association relates to East Timorese involvement with a local disaster management group. West Timor has long been known for its severe droughts and frequent floods and a multi-stakeholder group has been formed to respond to these events. Some East Timorese have become focal points for their respective districts in support of this group, which is linked to national and global climate change and disaster risk reduction programs. Members have their mobile phone numbers registered as part of an early warning system, and when destructive events are predicted East Timorese are able to immediately report their situation to the emergency response agencies.

This diverse and multilayered participation demonstrates that associations play an important role in East Timorese social life and the practice of citizenship in Indonesian Timor. They have formed their own associations to express their views and interests, but they make these views and interests more relevant and powerful by building coalitions with established organisations. Putnam (2000: 338), in his study of community associations in the United States, argues that when citizens form associations, 'their individual and ... quiet voices multiply and are amplified'. Taking this view in relation to the East Timorese in West Timor, I suggest the voices of newly resettled communities are multiplied and amplified not simply when they form associations, but also when they pursue causes that matter to the wider society. Rather than seeking financial compensation for their displacement and suffering, East Timorese political activism has sought to broaden their impact as citizens by engaging in diverse issues such as human rights, climate change, anticorruption and religious plurality and tolerance.<sup>13</sup>

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13 The political mobilisation of East Timorese refugees in Sydney gained momentum and influence when they broadened their links with global interests (Wise 2006: 72).

## Conclusion: Changing perspectives on citizen activism

In the debate over citizen participation, researchers have attempted to identify associations formed and transformed by institutional or individual agency. Institutions in the host country provide opportunities for citizens to channel their political interests. This view, however, has placed participants in a reactionary position against government policies. Personal agency offers another approach to explain citizens as active political actors who engage in activities to overcome poor service delivery and associated policy practices.

In this chapter, I have endeavoured to apply both ideas to the context of East Timorese in West Timor. In so doing, I have considered the changing Indonesian political system in relation to East Timorese associational life. The result, however, suggests a need to look from a different perspective rather than to reengage with earlier debates. Indonesia's reformed political system offers more spaces for East Timorese to form associations and pursue their diverse political interests, but their idea of struggling citizens provides insights into the way associations are established, consolidated and mobilised.

In nearly two decades, East Timorese in West Timor have shown that associations play a pivotal role in fostering political involvement and civic virtue.<sup>14</sup> Scholars have argued that, for refugee or conflict-affected communities, the structure of conflict in their country of origin frequently serves as the determining factor in their choices. Some associations are oriented towards politics in their homeland while others focus on adaptation to and integration into their host society. This structure of conflict leads others to explain various political mobilisations among newcomers as revolving mostly around ideas of maintaining ethnic relationships with the homeland and adaptation to their new place (Rex 1987: 10; Bloemraad 2006: 162).<sup>15</sup>

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14 Hamidi (2003: 318–19), in her study of North African immigrant associations in France, asks: 'Are associations places of democratic socialisations and of politicisation? Are they places where people learn to take care of other people's interest, where people develop broad solidarities and where they learn how to discuss issues in a spirit of communication and tolerance? Are they places that develop civic virtues?'

15 The Greek Cypriot population in London, for instance, formed their associations specifically to maintain their ethnic group and preserve distinctive Greek Cypriot culture (Josephides 1987: 42).

Korac (2009: 33) neatly summarises the role of such organisations, writing:

Refugee and immigrant organisations are considered not only important for keeping the sense of continuity with past lives and identities through maintaining ties with the society of origin, but also for establishing links with mainstream society and for overcoming social isolation and marginalisation’.

Similarly, Wise (2006: 76–7) has amply demonstrated in relation to East Timorese associations in Sydney, Australia, that these were forged from solidarity groups that were focused mostly on political activism for East Timor’s independence while assisting newly arrived East Timorese refugees to settle in. Their efforts included networking among their ethnic group, facilitating access to government welfare services, learning English, finding accommodation, children’s education and employment (Wise 2006: 76–7).

East Timorese associations in West Timor are not simply about generating social capital and effective adaptation. They are also driven by the continued political mobilisation to claim their due rights as Indonesian citizens. This is exemplified in their successful efforts to send their own representatives to the local parliament in three consecutive elections in West Timor. An East Timorese is also running in the election for district head (*pilkada*) in 2018. This is a milestone in their political mobilisation; however, many East Timorese elders have expressed their frustration with ongoing division. One elder told me that ‘if you look at our growing population, we could actually win more seats if only we were united’. In a similar vein, another elder said:

If we look at the ballot paper, we’ll always find East Timorese candidates in all the parties. We tried to advise them to unite our voice, but nobody listened. How could we elect more [East Timorese] representatives if we always campaign against each other?

Indeed, in the 2009 general election, most major political parties had East Timorese candidates in their teams. This dispersion has proven successful, with three East Timorese politicians elected to the Belu district parliament, one representative elected to the Kupang district parliament and one to the NTT parliament.<sup>16</sup> This division continued into the 2014

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<sup>16</sup> Armindo Mariano was reelected to the provincial parliament. At the district level, the late Mauricio Freitas was elected to the Kupang district parliament. In Belu district, Arnaldo Tavares (Demokrat), Ali Atamimi (PPP) and Antonio dos Santos (Indonesia Sovereign Party: Partai Kedaulatan Bangsa Indonesia, or PKBI) were elected.

general election, with similar results. There were three East Timorese representatives elected to the Belu district parliament and one to the Kupang district parliament, as well as two to the NTT parliament.<sup>17</sup> Since 2009, many East Timorese from these electorates have run for the national parliament, but have encountered the same problem—no single candidate wins enough votes to represent East Timorese in Jakarta.<sup>18</sup> The successful participation of East Timorese in three consecutive elections in Indonesian West Timor has shown they have the capacity to adapt, reproduce and expand in new sociopolitical settings. However, their endless infighting and tendency for fission lead them to stagnation and frustrate their political mobilisation.

In spite of this ongoing division in their political ambition, the idea of ‘struggling’ citizens deserving of government support has taken East Timorese citizenship practice in a new direction. Having operated as state agents during the violent conflict in East Timor, they are now becoming agents of their own communities by seeking accountability from the Indonesian Government. From their initial mobilisation for compensation, East Timorese associations in Indonesia have progressively expanded and diversified their activism into larger issues on the national and international stages. This demonstrates that East Timorese in West Timor have been more politically active than when they were still in East Timor. The concept of struggling citizens also signifies that East Timorese are not passive recipients of government policies or interventions. More importantly, it illustrates how the majority of East Timorese in West Timor have reconciled with their confrontational past and are moving on with dignity in Indonesia.

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17 In Belu district, three East Timorese were elected: Agostinho Pinto, Fernando Pareira (Gerindra) and Manuel da Conseqüência (PPP). In Kupang district, Tomé da Silva (Gerindra) was elected. In August 2016, Edjido Manek (Gerindra), a former leader of the Laksaur militia group, was appointed to Malaka district parliament, replacing a West Timorese representative who had run for the *bupati*. At the provincial level, Armindo Mariano, who has controlled the East Timorese electorate in Belu and TTU districts for a decade, was defeated by Angelo da Costa, Guterres’s assistant from PAN. Another East Timorese elected to the provincial parliament was Antonio Soares, a son of former governor Abílio Soares, who stood for Gerindra. In January 2017, Antonio resigned from his political activities after being caught by Indonesian police for using drugs. A West Timorese eventually took his seat in the parliament.

18 In 2014, Eurico Guterres (PAN) was challenged by Mario Vieira and Octavio Soares (from Gerindra), with the result that none of them was elected. After more than a decade and two terms as its chief in NTT, Guterres resigned from PAN in October 2017.

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