

2. A Brief History of Timor

Knowledge of the ancient indigenous history of the island of Timor is limited. Prior to colonisation, Timor was divided into dozens of small kingdoms ruled by traditional kings called *liuri*. They were reliant on slash-and-burn agriculture. The Dawan or Atoni, who might have been the earliest settlers of the islands from mainland Asia, came to occupy the 16 local kingdoms (*reinos*) in the west of Portuguese Timor at the time of colonisation. The Belu or Tetun migrated to Timor in the fourteenth century, creating 46 tiny kingdoms in the east of the island by pushing the Dawan to the west (Fox 2004; Therik 2004:xvi).

Perhaps as early as the seventh century, Chinese and Javanese traders were visiting Timor with an interest in the plentiful sandalwood on the island. This was the same resource that attracted the Portuguese a millennium later, as well as trade in Timorese slaves (Kammen 2003:73). Coffee was introduced as a significant export after 1815. The Chinese, Javanese and later the Portuguese continued as the dominant international influences in Timorese history. James Dunn (2003:9) reports that ethnic Chinese dominance of commerce was formidable in East Timor prior to the Indonesian invasion: 'In the early 1960s, of the 400 or so wholesale and retail enterprises in the Portuguese colony all but three or four were in Chinese hands. The latter were controlled not by Timorese but by Portuguese.' The Chinese, on Nicol's (2002:44) estimate, controlled 95 per cent of all business in East Timor in April 1974. Coffee production, however, was dominated by a Portuguese corporation, SAPT (Hill 2002:8–9). Much of the Chinese elite was slaughtered or fled in the Indonesian invasion¹ or the UDT–Fretilin fighting that preceded it (Dunn 2003:178), their commercial dominance supplanted by a Javanese elite of cronies of President Suharto, many of whom were also Chinese.

The Portuguese were the first European arrivals on Timor, in 1511 establishing a foothold in what is the contemporary enclave of Oecussi when Dominican friars started creating converts to Catholicism. The Portuguese capital shifted to Dili in 1769. Dutch colonisation started in 1568, with the Dutch East India Company building a fort and trading centre during the seventeenth century in Kupang—today the largest city in Indonesian West Timor. While the Dutch and Portuguese arm wrestled across several centuries for notional sovereignty, neither had significant sway over the kingdoms outside their trading ports. Portuguese interest was limited; the colony was administered from Goa until

¹ Dunn (2003:245) reports that in the invasion hundreds of Chinese were killed—often just the men, after being separated from their families. In one large slaughter, 'a group of Chinese community leaders who, it seems, had come out into the street to offer some kind of welcome to the vanguard of the "New Order" were gunned down'.

1896, with Chinese traders always more influential forces on the ground than the Portuguese. The 1859 Treaty of Lisbon ended the intermittent conflict between the proxies of the Portuguese and Dutch on Timor. It gave the eastern half of the island plus the enclave of Oecussi to Portugal, the rest to the Dutch.

Portuguese colonialism to some seemed benign in Timor compared with its other colonies only because it was on such a loose rein. As Wise (2006:20) points out, it included a substantial slave trade and common use of forced labour for cash crops, road construction and other purposes right up until 1974. In the early twentieth century, the Portuguese took slightly more interest in consolidating their limited control, especially over taxation. This provoked a rebellion led by Manufahi *liurai*, Dom Boaventura, in which forced labour was an important grievance. His rebellion won significant support across the territory. It was put down after a loss of possibly 25 000 lives in 1912.

Japan drove Australian troops from Kupang in 1942. Surviving Australian forces fled across the border into the neutral Portuguese territory of East Timor. This drew Portuguese Timor into the conflagration, with an invasion of 20 000 Japanese troops who were harassed by the hit-and-run tactics of Australian forces and East Timorese allies. Until this happened Japan had had no intention of invading East Timor (Scott 2005:7), partly because Germany was concerned that Portugal not be drawn into the war on the Allied side. By the end of the war, perhaps 40 000 to 60 000 East Timorese had lost their lives (Dunn 2003:22) and many women had experienced sexual slavery. At the end of a guerilla campaign, most of the Australians escaped back to Australia with the loss of only 40 men (Pilger 1994:237).

Scott describes this terrible suffering after Australia's intentional strategy of dragging East Timor into World War II as the first of four Australian betrayals of the people of East Timor in recent history. The second was Prime Minister Gough Whitlam's declared support for the integration of East Timor into Indonesia long before a reluctant President Suharto had been persuaded of this course. The third betrayal was when the United Nations, with prominent involvement from Australia, guaranteed the people of East Timor that they could vote for independence or for autonomy within Indonesia without fear. When widespread killing broke out after the result was announced, predominantly Australian UN personnel were ordered back to the greater security of Dili and then were evacuated from the country. As in World War II, many individual young Australians showed extraordinary acts of bravery in defending Timorese, as in unarmed Australian police officers standing between a militia member with a weapon and the Timorese citizen he was about to shoot. The dishonesty and duplicity of Australia as a nation were what betrayed Timor through its leaders, not the magnificent young people who went to do the impossible job on the ground in East Timor. David Scott nominates as the fourth betrayal

that Australia knew from its intelligence intercepts that the Indonesian Army planned the 1999 slaughter and scorched-earth policy that it implemented; yet Prime Minister John Howard failed to press the Indonesian leadership forcefully enough on this and convinced himself that Australian intelligence might prove incorrect.² A fifth betrayal in our view that occurred since Scott's book was published was the coercive negotiation of oil and gas rights with Timor-Leste over the disputed aspects of the post-independence border with Australia, as discussed in Chapter 11. A related sixth betrayal that Scott did not highlight was the refusal at various stages to grant asylum to desperate Timorese who fled to Australia:

With all this high level political maneuvering aimed at positioning to take advantage of these rich oil reserves, Australia began to refuse asylum to East Timorese refugees so as not to cause offense to Indonesia. There was a sense in Canberra that it was time to 'put the East Timor issue to bed'. When 1,200 refugees arrived in September 1994, Australian immigration authorities took the cynical position that, because the East Timorese held Portuguese citizenship and were not facing persecution in Portugal, they were therefore not entitled to claim the protection of Australia. This was a bizarre and contradictory position, given that Australia had argued forcefully in the International Court of Justice against any claim by Portugal to speak for the East Timorese when the Portuguese challenged the legality of the Timor Gap Treaty...In 1996, one East Timorese asylum seeker appealed the Refugee Review Tribunal's adverse finding on his claim for asylum. As a consequence of the Federal Court judgment in his favor, in three other East Timorese cases the tribunal deemed that Portuguese nationality was inapplicable and ruled in favor of the East Timorese concerned. However, the Australian government appealed these decisions in July 1997. After deliberately dragging out the appeal process until the end of 1999, the government decided to drop its appeal in the Federal Court against the asylum seekers, opting to return to the normal refugee determination process. By this time, however, the referendum in East Timor had taken place, and this group no longer had any claim to asylum. (Wise 2006:46)

The Carnation Revolution

The Portuguese dictatorship of Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, succeeded by Marcelo Caetano, was overthrown by the peaceful 'carnation' revolution of 1974—named after the flowers placed in the military's guns by demonstrators.

² This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

Because decolonisation was part of the spirit of the revolution, a space was created in East Timor for liberation movements and political associations. The two main parties to emerge were the Associação Social-Democrata Timorense (ASDT: Timorese Social Democratic Association), later renamed Frente Revolucionária do Timor Leste Independente (Fretilin: the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor), and União Democrática Timorense (UDT: the Timorese Democratic Union). The founders of Fretilin were mostly very young, and included Nicolau Lobato, Mari Alkatiri and José Ramos-Horta. Francisco Xavier do Amaral was invited by the founders to join them because he was older (Hill 2002:62–61). UDT initially favoured ‘progressive autonomy’ under Portugal with a right to self-determination, though it then moved to support for independence when it became clear that this was a more popular policy with the people of East Timor.



Figure 2.1: Democracy demonstrators lead the carnation revolution in Portugal by placing flowers in the barrels of soldiers' guns

Photo: Reuters/Picture Media

In the context of the Cold War and its own recent purges of communists, Indonesia worried that communist elements in Fretilin might establish a communist satellite or a base for insurgency in its midst. Another specific fear of the Indonesian intelligence establishment was a Soviet naval base in the midst of Indonesian waters. Indonesian intelligence operatives in Dili were active both in a failed attempt to establish an influential party supportive of integration

with Indonesia (Apodeti: Associação Popular Democrática Timorese/Timorese Popular Democratic Association) and in persuading UDT that they should shun democratic alliance with Fretilin. The Indonesian intelligence agenda was to divide pro-independence forces and create internal chaos. This succeeded in ultimately enabling them to justify to Western allies that an Indonesian takeover was necessary to prevent Marxist rule.

On 11 August 1975, UDT broke a four-month coalition government with Fretilin, mounting an armed movement to control the territory and exclude Portuguese and Fretilin influence in order to assure Indonesia that East Timor would not be a breeding ground for communism. This followed a meeting of UDT with General Ali Murtopo in which he conveyed a message from his leadership that a communist government would not be tolerated, but that there might be support for independence under a staunchly anti-communist government (Bertrand 2004:137). In addition, Indonesian intelligence fed UDT the line that Fretilin was planning a coup that would exclude them from power, so they had better get in first.

Within 10 days of UDT's attempted coup, Fretilin reversed UDT's attempt to seize armed control. Most Timorese within the colonial military were successfully recruited by Fretilin to reverse the UDT insurrection. Leaders of all the significant non-Fretilin parties, including UDT and Apodeti, fled across the border into West Timor. Some forged common cause with Indonesian invasion plans, though most did not, realising by this stage they were being used by Indonesian intelligence. UDT and Apodeti fighters made almost no military contributions to the invasion. For weeks before the full-scale invasion, Indonesian Special Forces pretended to the United States to be UDT and Apodeti troops engaging in armed incursions across the border into East Timor. One reason for this was to create the impression that the UDT-Fretilin civil war that had ended was ongoing. The intent was to manufacture a pretext for an Indonesian occupation to end the chaos. The full-scale invasion arrived on 7 December 1975. When it did, Fretilin members killed large numbers of UDT prisoners.

Richard Woolcott (2003:158–9), while not conceding that Australia made any mistakes in its own realist diplomacy of 1975, quotes with relish the generous way Ramos-Horta has acknowledged mistakes on his side:

[W]e the East Timorese, in 1974 and 1975, were inexperienced, immature and irresponsible in not grasping the opportunity of independence with wisdom. Instead we engaged in civil war...thus we played into the hands of the hardliners in Indonesia...so blaming Australia and the United States is a bit one-sided. I always hope that the East Timorese side can be humble enough to say that we were inexperienced, immature and stupid.

Woolcott goes on to quote Ramos-Horta as saying that Fretilin's unilateral declaration of independence in November 1975 was 'a tactical political error', though on Woolcott's own account an error made long after invasion was inevitable and indeed clandestinely under way.

During the mid-1970s, there were atrocities by Fretilin against UDT, and vice versa. As we have found in all cases of Peacebuilding Compared to date, the conflict created opportunities to settle scores that had nothing to do with the war. In his testimony to the Comissão de Acolhimento, Verdade e Reconciliação (CAVR: Truth and Reconciliation Commission), President of Fretilin in 1975, Francisco Xavier do Amaral, said that some used the conflict to seek vengeance against those responsible for firing them from their jobs (CAVR 2006:Part III, p. 47). Current Prime Minister, Xanana Gusmão, put the diverse drivers of score settling in the UDT–Fretilin conflict this way:

Sometimes this wasn't because they had a problem with them about this [political] situation, but from an old problem. I know that sometimes it was because someone had taken someone else's girlfriend and so now he used it as a chance to beat him. I know this. People took advantage of this war to beat others and to take justice into their own hands. But some did beat others because they were angry at them due to the war... [I] want to say that in this process of war so many died...it is true that Fretilin killed many UDT prisoners...UDT also killed Fretilin prisoners. (CAVR 2006:Part III, p. 43)

In June 1974, East Timor's Foreign Affairs spokesman, Ramos-Horta, had pulled off the first of a long list of diplomatic triumphs. He obtained a letter signed by Indonesian Foreign Minister, Adam Malik, welcoming the prospect of an independent East Timor (Dunn 2003:54). The letter assured that 'the government as well as the people of Indonesia have no intention to increase or expand their territory'. It was not long before Malik was forced to retreat from this view by the more powerful intelligence lobby in the Indonesian polity. While military defeat was the short-term upshot of Ramos-Horta's consummate networking between friends in different Timorese factions and potential enemies in Jakarta, his gifts at grafting power by networking others to do his running for him, rather than by thrusting himself forward as a supreme leader, were evident from the beginning. On some accounts, Ramos-Horta was the most influential force in shaping ASDT and Fretilin (and their coalition with UDT) because he had the ability to listen, be responsive and harness both the radical and the more conservative elements in Fretilin (Nicol 2002:135–53). He also worked with Timorese student leaders returning from Portugal (Hill 2002) to arrange new organisational bases of influence, helping to inspire the formation of the National

Union of Timorese Workers, the National Union of Primary School Teachers, the National Women's Organisation and the National Youth Organisation (Nicol 2002:153).

While the networking strengths that in the long run saw Fretilin prevail to create an independent Timor-Leste were palpable in 1975, so was its intolerance of difference and of differentiated power. This was manifest in the murder of UDT prisoners. Fretilin declared from the outset that it was 'the only legitimate representative of the people' (Dunn 2003:25). It disagreed with the Portuguese Governor's pleas for the army to remain impartial guarantors so 'that the people of Timor will be able to freely choose their future' (Nicol 2002:170). At every stage, the Fretilin view was that the military (Falintil) must become a pillar of unity with Fretilin in pursuit of national liberation. Dalliance with communism was always less of a political danger in Fretilin than interest in the ideology of a one-party state. Western diplomats persistently misdiagnosed these dangers in reverse importance, even after Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in Moscow in 1985, and the Cold War began to thaw.

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