

A Spirituality of Suffering and Resistance: Confronting Violent Occupation in East Timor

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THIS CHAPTER REFLECTS on the development of a “spirituality of resistance” in East Timor, influenced by Christian faith, during the Indonesian occupation from 1975 to 1999. The experience of suffering amongst East Timorese during that time was accompanied by a widespread sense of resistance, which was deeply challenged by the years of occupation. The chapter argues that an existential, religious, and communal framework was developed in these years, reliant in many ways on the Catholic faith and church, for addressing the Timorese experience of suffering, and assisted in the resistance to violent occupation.¹ In order to show this, I analyze the events of 1999 when the occupation came to its climax and the Timorese resistance made a courageous decision not to retaliate the regime-sponsored violence. I argue that this decision exemplified in important ways the Timorese spirituality of resistance that was built on a shared approach to suffering, modelled on Christ, which undergirded the solidarity of the Timorese and their nonviolent reaction to violence.

¹ Cf. Joel Hodge, *Resisting Violence and Victimisation: Christian Faith and Solidarity in East Timor*.

Timor-Leste and the Catholic Faith: An Overview

A small, mountainous, and sparsely populated territory, the island of Timor was colonized by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, along with many of the Indonesian islands. Most of the Portuguese-controlled Indonesian islands were later taken by the Dutch, with only the eastern half the island of Timor and a small enclave in the western part remaining as part of the Portuguese empire. Portugal retained a somewhat tenuous control until East Timor was invaded by the Unitary Republic of Indonesia in 1975. Indonesia occupied the territory until 1999. The United Nations (UN)-sponsored Commission on Truth and Reconciliation (CAVR) reported that at least 102,800 people and likely even more than 183,000 people, died from unnatural and conflict-related causes during the Indonesian occupation.²

After a long period of resistance and advocacy, the people of East Timor were provided with an act of self-determination by the Indonesian president through a UN-administered referendum on August 30, 1999. The Indonesian president's intention in allowing a referendum was to resolve the ongoing problem of East Timor, especially as political and media pressure had increased during the 1990s, causing damage to Indonesia's international reputation and relationships. Despite large-scale intimidation, 78.5 percent of the Timorese electorate voted in favor of independence. Following widespread violence after the referendum vote sponsored by the Indonesian military, police, and different layers of the Indonesian government, a multinational peacekeeping force (with a UN mandate and Indonesian authorization) was deployed. This peacekeeping force, led by Australia, stabilized the situation in late September. By the time the force had arrived, however, an estimated 1,500 people had been killed, over 250,000 people had been forcibly moved across into Indonesian-controlled West Timor, and over 70 percent of the country's infrastructure was destroyed in the space of a few weeks.

² Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation Timor-Leste (CAVR), *Chega! The Report of the Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation Timor-Leste (CAVR)*. <http://www.cavr-timorleste.org/en/chegaReport.htm>, 44 and 73.

During the Indonesian occupation, there was a large shift to the Catholic Church. Approximately 25–30 percent of the population were baptized Catholics in 1975; by the end of the 1990s, this was well over 90 percent.³ Some have attributed Timor’s shift to Catholicism to the Pancasila, one of the foundations for the Indonesian state.⁴ As part of this doctrine, it is held that the Indonesian state “is based on the belief in the One and Only God,” as part of which the New Order government recognized five religions that were deemed acceptable in their belief in “one God.”⁵

However, Bishop Belo, the leader of the Catholic Church for most of the occupation, pointed to something more intrinsic to the Catholic faith to make it attractive to the Timorese, by stating that the witness of the clergy and religious to the “self-sacrificing love for Jesus and for his brothers and sisters who were suffering and helpless” was crucial.⁶ For example, the Constitution that was written for the independent Timor-Leste in 2002 recognized the importance of the Catholic Church in “taking on” the people’s suffering and promoting human dignity.⁷ Furthermore, José Ramos-Horta, in his speech at his swearing-in as prime minister of Timor Leste in 2006, remarked on the important cultural role of the Church: “The Timorese Catholic Church is the only continuous solid institution, that has absorbed the fabric of Timorese.”⁸ Similarly, a number of interviewees in my study commented that the Church kept the people of Timor-Leste together, even as their conventional world and culture disintegrated.⁹

³ Robert Archer, ‘The Catholic Church in East Timor,’ in *East Timor at the Crossroads: The Forging of a Nation*, ed. P. Carey and G.C. Bentley, 127–28; James Dunn, *East Timor: A Rough Passage to Independence*, 39–42.

⁴ Archer, “The Catholic Church in East Timor,” 127.

⁵ These religions were Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, and Buddhism (and later, Confucianism). Cf. Benjamin Fleming Intan, “Public Religion” and the Pancasila-Based State of Indonesia: An Ethical and Sociological Analysis, 172; Popular Consultative Assembly of the Republic of Indonesia, *Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia*, <http://www.embassyofindonesia.org/about/pdf/IndonesianConstitution.pdf>.

⁶ Bilveer Singh, *East Timor, Indonesia and the World: Myths and Realities*, rev. edn., 235.

⁷ República Democrática de Timor-Leste, *Constitution of the Democratic Republic of East Timor*, 2002, <http://www.constitution.org/cons/east_timor/constitution-eng.htm> and <<http://www.geocities.com/alextilman/download/constfnen.pdf>>. See the Preamble.

⁸ José Ramos-Horta, “Address by Dr José Ramos-Horta at his Swearing-in Ceremony as Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste,” <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB.NSF/db900SID/KHII-6RK7M9?Open Document>.

⁹ Hodge, *Resisting Violence and Victimisation*, 57–66.

“A Spirituality of Resistance”

The Catholic Church provided large-scale practical, pastoral, and spiritual support to the Timorese people during the Indonesian occupation. This helped the people cope with and confront the experience of oppression and develop forms of resistance to Indonesian occupation, particularly in nonviolent forms.¹⁰ These practical forms of assistance included advocating for victims of the regime, providing a space for political speech and discussion, as well as harnessing development assistance.

A major contribution of the Catholic Church during the occupation was the establishment of Tetun, one of the local languages, as the primary liturgical language in the church, rather than Portuguese or Indonesian.¹¹ Alongside the support it provided to the local culture, the establishment of Tetun (as well as the use of other local languages by the church) gave the Timorese a greater ability to appropriate and internalize the Christian story and liturgy. It contributed to the development of what Patrick Smythe called “a spirituality of resistance.”¹²

The increase in number and fervor of Catholics in East Timor during the occupation indicates its importance. Catholic beliefs and practices became increasingly important in the life of the Timorese, particularly in bringing the community together (e.g., nationwide Marian processions) and also in coping with violence and remembering the dead. The nature of the Timorese experience

¹⁰ When speaking of the Catholic Church, I am referring to the whole church—bishops, clergy, religious and laity, not just the church hierarchy. When speaking of the church hierarchy, I am referring to the ordained ministers, that is, bishops, priests, and deacons. The Catholic Church is divided into dioceses led by bishops. In each diocese, the Church is fully present with the bishop as the vicar of Christ, who is head of the Church. East Timor was originally one diocese, the diocese of Dili. In 1996, another diocese was erected—the diocese of Baucau covering the east of the country—and some years after independence another was erected in the west.

¹¹ Benedict Anderson, “Imagining East Timor,” *Arena Magazine* 4 (April–May 1993); “Imagining East Timor,” *Lusotopie* (2001): 233–39; Michael Leach, “Valorising the Resistance: National Identity and Collective Memory in East Timor’s Constitution,” *Social Alternatives* 21, no. 3 (2002): 43–47.

¹² Patrick A. Smythe, “*The Heaviest Blow*”: *The Catholic Church and the East Timor Issue*, 47.

under Indonesian occupation seems to have been given some meaning and sense within a Christian context, which provided cultural resources for hope and resistance. Patrick Smythe analyzed the Church's role and Timor's shift to Catholicism in terms of the experience of oppression and the faith's contribution to Timorese resistance, identity, and survival.¹³ According to Smythe, the Church remained the only independent institution that was loyal to Timorese culture, which assisted the people in their suffering and spoke for them. He identified how the Church gave "fresh hope to those in despair" and generated a "spirituality of resistance" through Gospel preaching that emphasized God's justice and freedom in the midst of oppression.¹⁴

Yet, despite its growth, the Church was deeply challenged in the Indonesian period. As most Timorese were left helpless and hopeless by intense forms of oppression, both the general populace and the hierarchy of the Church confronted the most difficult challenges, which paradoxically opened up avenues of transformation:

Suffering, for the people of East Timor, is not distinct from their vision of God. It is, in fact, integral to their identity as Timorese. Challenged as deeply by the same experience of suffering, the Timorese clergy have remade their Church, once steeped in the experience of colonialism, into a church of service. The clergy achieved this momentous shift (one that amounted to adopting Vatican II) in almost complete isolation. As the people of East Timor discovered from somewhere within themselves a quite unusual strength — the foundation of their capacity to resist—the isolated diocese of East Timor uncovered a sense of mission almost entirely

¹³ Smythe, "The Heaviest Blow," 47–48.

¹⁴ Ibid., 47. Cf. Chris Lundry, "From Passivity to Political Resource: The Catholic Church and Nationalism in East Timor" (abridged version), *ETAN/US*, 2000, <http://www.etan.org/etreligious/2001a/polresrce.htm>; H. Deakin, "East Timor and the Catholic Church," in *Free East Timor: Australia's Culpability in East Timor's Genocide*, ed. J. Aubrey; Dunn, *East Timor*, 39–44 and 134–35; A.J. Lyon, "The East Timorese Church: From Oppression to Liberation," in *The Catholic Church and the Nation-State: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. P.C. Manuel, et al., 143–44.

by reflecting inwardly on its own experience, which has enabled it to retain—in spite of many weaknesses and contradictions—the profound loyalty of its people.¹⁵

Regarding loyalty, Carey spoke of the deep bonds that were forged between the Church and the local resistance movement during the Indonesian period that the movement's leader Xanana Gusmão, described “as the very ‘backbone of the resistance.’”¹⁶ Yet, as Carey notes, the foundational contribution of the Catholic Church to Timorese solidarity and resistance eventually resulted in the Church being targeted by the Indonesian authorities, with both political interference and physical violence.¹⁷

State-sanctioned “Sacred Violence”

Importantly, the Church provided a framework to address and transform the experience of suffering on a personal and social level. This framework was based around God's own solidarity with suffering and oppression, and his ability to overcome, resist, and transform this suffering. In this way, the Church countered the regime's efforts to re-create East Timorese society by dominating the physical and social lives of the people. During the occupation, violence was arbitrarily perpetrated by the main organs of the Indonesian state: the military, police, and local government. The Indonesian regime in East Timor, led particularly by the military, gathered and enforced support by targeting specific people or groups as “enemies,” such as the local resistance and the Catholic Church. The violent tools of the state included torture, rape, arbitrary imprisonment, disappearances, killings, massacres, mutilation, and mass displacement and relocation of peoples. The discourse of the state was based on the singling out of people as enemies (such as communists,

¹⁵ Archer, “The Catholic Church in East Timor,” 120.

¹⁶ Peter Carey, “The Catholic Church, Religious Revival, and the Nationalist Movement in East Timor, 1975–98,” *Indonesia and the Malay World* 27, no. 78 (1999): 82.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 87–89.

dissidents, or seditionists). The use of violence by the military and their auxiliary militias, particularly manifest as massacres, torture, rape, and arbitrary imprisonment, was an effective means to create and destroy enemies and, so, enforce the discipline and power of the “omnipotent” state on the victims and the general populace.

By using arbitrary violence, the Indonesian state sought to inculcate a particular belief about its power and omnipotence in the East Timorese citizenry. The production of enemies who pollute and defile the social body is, according to René Girard, a common way to create and manufacture cultural unity founded in scapegoating (what he calls “the scapegoat mechanism.”¹⁸ Drawing on Tilly’s work concerning the monopolization of violence by the nation-state, Cavanaugh argues that the “assent of the governed *followed*, and is to a large extent *produced by*, state monopoly on the means of violence within its borders,” particularly the legitimization of forms of victimization by the nation-state to bolster its power and ensure unity around it.¹⁹ Like the “violent sacred” that Girard identifies in human cultures as being based on scapegoating, the Indonesian regime held out the threat that anyone could be punished or saved through state-sanctioned violence. In particular, anyone could become an enemy if they did not follow the state’s dictates, which were established under moblike conditions.²⁰ Targeting people was an effective way for the regime, first, to maintain unity amongst the state actors and, second, to extend that unity to the conquered populace. It did this by capturing them within a cycle of violence, perpetuating fear, envy, acquiescence, and fascination, in which the people were terrorized into disassociating themselves from each other, especially from those targeted by the regime and their families.

¹⁸ Cf. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory; René Girard with Jean-Michel Oughourlian and Guy Lefort, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Meetter.

¹⁹ William T. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism*, 76.

²⁰ This threat of violence also acted as a way to draw people into the state’s own practices of violence, which attracted disaffected young people and manipulated tribal leaders and groups. The government and military used tribal and family rivalries and allegiances, and rewards of money, food, alcohol, drugs, and status to garner support from local leaders, form militias, and control local populations and villages.

One of the important insights into the nature of violence that Girard imparts is how violence has a transcendent and sacred character. By monopolizing and spearheading violence, the Indonesian state sought to *project itself as sacred and omnipotent*—as the transcendent power that determined life and death. The state had the sole power to make accusations and execute moblike violence in order to save and unite. In doing this, it cloaked itself with the transcendent aura of violence, which could not be opposed. The regime created and targeted enemies as sacrifices to this system, in which the state appropriated the power of victimization and the voice of the victim to legitimize its acts. The state transferred the power of victimization onto itself by having the victim legitimize the state's actions (e.g., forced confessions), its monopolization of violence and the rivalry it had created, and by spreading propaganda about the victim. This sacred violence cultivated a kind of unity that was unstable, and required regular ritual violence to bolster it.

A Spirituality of Resistance at the Climax of Occupation

The violence of the occupation came to a climax in 1999 when the Indonesian regime's hold on the territory was disintegrating. Following years of brave resistance and international lobbying and campaigning, the East Timorese were finally provided with a referendum by the Indonesian government to decide their political future. The referendum was administered by the United Nations (UN), though, controversially, security for the vote was provided by the Indonesian military and police. During the period of political campaigning in the lead-up to the August 1999 referendum, major elements of the Indonesian government, military, and police, supported by local progovernment militias, led a campaign of intimidation against the local populace and pro-independence movement. This campaign, as Clinton Fernandes has shown, was part of a strategy formulated by powerful elements of the Indonesian government and military to create the impression of a civil war in East Timor. It used local militias to harass the population, aiming to provoke the pro-

independence movement and resistance army into conflict. The killings, the destruction of infrastructure, and the movement of people to West Timor were all part of the effort to create an impression of civil war. The strategy was aimed at overturning the referendum result to ensure the Indonesian government's continued presence in East Timor, by trying to prove that only the Indonesian government could provide order amongst internally warring parties (which the regime had really created).²¹

The widespread destruction, however, had the opposite effect: It prompted Australia, the United States (U.S.), and other key allies to put political pressure on Indonesia, with Prime Minister John Howard of Australia and the U.S. President Bill Clinton playing important roles. Contrary to an impression of civil war, the way in which the Indonesian military and other government organs were inflicting terrible violence on East Timor was not lost on the Australian, U.S., and other government intelligence. Yet, this did not become public knowledge until the media, local resistance and the international solidarity movement exposed the regime's efforts.²²

Likely the most important action that exposed the regime's strategy was the nonretaliation policy of the local independence movement and resistance army, Falintil. This policy was ordered by Falintil's imprisoned leader Xanana Gusmao, who had by this time become the most important independence leader. Gusmao had adopted a more nonviolent, conciliatory approach, facilitating and leading a forum of all Timorese political groups known under the Portuguese acronym, CNRT. His order was based on advice and evaluations, particularly by the Falintil's commander on the ground, Taur Matan Ruak.²³ Falintil had been fighting a losing guerrilla

²¹ Clinton Fernandes, *Reluctant Saviour: Australia, Indonesia and the Independence of East Timor*, 47–85.

²² East Timor had a significant international solidarity movement that was present in many countries. Its members consisted of East Timorese refugees, NGOs (nongovernment organizations), church groups, and other activists.

²³ Edward Rees, "Under Pressure: Three Decades of Defence Force Development in Timor-Leste: 1975–2004," Working Paper no. 139; Caroline Hughes, *Dependent Communities: Aid and Politics in Cambodia and East Timor*, 105.

battle in the mountains of Timor against the Indonesian military over the course of the occupation. In 1999, these fighters were allowed to come out of hiding into four cantonments. Though there were strong reasons to prevent the widespread destruction and killing, Falintil (along with the network of clandestine resistance operatives and the wider independence movement) maintained its discipline and did not retaliate the regime-sponsored violence. The impression of a defensive position by the Indonesian regime against locally warring parties, while really pursuing an aggressive agenda of conquest, was exposed by this position of nonretaliation, amongst wider efforts by the solidarity movement to bring the regime's strategy and persecution to light. The regime's violence in 1999 came to be publicly recognized by the international community, resulting in intense pressure on Indonesia to allow a peacekeeping force.

While the regime's violence in 1999 exposed the totalitarian and sacred nature of its rule, the nonretaliation of the Timorese people, resistance movement and local resistance army exemplified the "spirituality of resistance." It showed how the resistance movement had matured into sustaining a nonviolent stance in the face of overwhelming violence after a terrorizing history. It showed the ability of the Timorese resistance and people to suffer violence, rather than to perpetrate it, which was the key to their ultimate success. This ability to suffer was predicated on the belief in the justice of the Timorese cause and the ultimate vindication they hoped for, which was becoming more likely with increasing international support. The belief and hope in this vindication was realized in the political resolution of 1999, but it required deep foundations to maintain in the midst of violent and seemingly hopeless circumstances. For much of the Indonesian occupation, the Timorese suffered greatly and seemed to be on their own, with the world deaf to their pleas. This conviction, moreover, changed the spiritual life and national identity of the Timorese themselves. Many of the Timorese saw life and suffering in a new eschatological frame, in which vindication was ultimately guaranteed by God, who had suffered like them but had overcome

suffering.²⁴ The discourse and remembrance of the martyrs became particularly important for the Timorese during the occupation and it expressed this framework. The martyrs had given their lives selflessly and innocently, participating in Christ's victory over death. This victory was manifest in the Timorese spirit of resistance, but for the people still suffering, it awaited full realization based on faith in the loving God who was in solidarity with them and struggling with them to overcome violence, injustice, and evil.²⁵

In this framework, the innocence of the victimized was the privileged moral and spiritual position. It required confronting the worst kinds of evil and could only ultimately be sustained by forgiveness, faith, and humility, rather than violent vindication. As Xanana Gusmão himself stated, "Those who follow the militia, we think they are stupid, but as Catholics, you must forgive them."²⁶

The ability to expose the regime in 1999 formed part of a long-running campaign of resistance and advocacy for the Timorese, which had compelled the international community to recognize the persecution and the political rights of the Timorese. The action of the international community, led by Australia, to intervene politically, and then, militarily in September 1999, occurred particularly because popular feeling (especially in the media) had turned in a major way against the Indonesian government across the Western world and beyond. In Australia, for example, there were large protests and other political actions in 1999, such as letter and phone campaigns focused on politicians. The Australian foreign minister at the time, Alexander Downer, reported that he had not experienced such intense and widespread popular feeling in his political career as when the Australian public had called for the government to intervene in September 1999, following the brutal violence of the regime to suppress the August referendum result.²⁷

²⁴ Hodge, *Resisting Violence and Victimisation*, 143–62.

²⁵ William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ*, 62–63; Hodge, *Resisting Violence and Victimisation*, 165–86.

²⁶ Xanana Gusmão in John Martinkus, *A Dirty Little War: An Eyewitness Account of East Timor's Descent into Hell, 1997–2000*, 367.

²⁷ Greenlees and Garran, *Deliverance*, 245.

Despite the initial protestations of the Indonesian government and military that the disorder could be handled internally, political negotiations ensued over a number of weeks in September. These negotiations eventually led to the acceptance from the Indonesian President, B.J. Habibie, of a UN-authorized military intervention in order to stop the escalating violence. Underlying the threats posed by the political “sticks” and the “carrots” offered by the U.S. and its allies to Indonesia in order to allow the intervention, it was clear (even to the Indonesian president) that Indonesia had lost political legitimacy to govern East Timor, particularly after the widespread violence following the referendum result. Intervention on an international scale was necessary to ensure that the referendum result was respected and that the Indonesian military, police, and militias neutralized and separated from the Timorese. It was crucial that the political leadership of Indonesia accepted the intervention, especially as it could not or would not control its own forces.²⁸

Exposing and Resisting the Violent Apocalypse

The apocalyptic violence that occurred in 1999 was halted by international political efforts, supported by the readiness of major powers to militarily intervene and by a long-running solidarity movement that had cultivated a critical mass in favor of the Timorese people’s cause. These efforts were driven largely by concern for the innocent victims of Indonesian-led violence—a concern that had been a constant source of tension over the time of the occupation. I argue that there were two primary conditions that made a successful international intervention possible. One was the large-scale forms of nonviolent resistance on a local level that had a strategic impact internationally and built on and fostered local support for change; and two, a sustained international campaign that was able to effectively highlight the unjust persecution of the Timorese and show them to be innocent victims. The solidarity movement, linking the local and

²⁸ Cf. D. Greenlees and R. Garran, *Deliverance: The Inside Story of East Timor’s Fight for Freedom*, 196–254.

international campaigns, was strategic in furthering its aims, particularly by highlighting the persecution of the Timorese (e.g., the filming of the Dili Massacre in 1991 by sympathetic journalists) and showcasing the peaceful and mature leadership of the Timorese (such as when José Ramos Horta and Catholic Bishop Carlos Ximenes Belo won the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize).

The downfall of the regime was directly connected to the spirited resistance that was able to undermine the Indonesian state's efforts. By avoiding reciprocal violence through nonviolent resistance, the state's unjust violence and the innocence of its victims were particularly accentuated, especially to Western audiences. Girard argues that the reciprocity of violence and vengeance can result in endless cycles in which the rivals imitate each other. It was this reciprocity that the pro-Indonesian forces were seeking to provoke from the anti-Indonesian (or pro-independence) resistance, particularly Falintil. It was this same reciprocity that the East Timorese resistance army, Falintil, sought to avoid in 1999 by maintaining the ceasefire.²⁹

The wisdom of Falintil and the local resistance was not only in its avoidance of the reciprocal cycles of vengeance, but also in undermining the way in which the state gave justification to itself as the arbiter of violence. Girard argues that social order is traditionally built on a certain kind of mob violence—"legitimate" violence used to expel and contain "chaotic" violence. Girard calls this "Satan casting out Satan"—that which is regarded as violent and polluting must be violently expelled and repressed in order for the community to be ordered and healthy.³⁰ In this way, the Indonesian state sought to construct and identify the polluting elements of Timorese society—that which caused the purported "civil war"—in order to justifiably eradicate them on behalf of the populace, and so, justify its own existence.

Furthermore, it eliminated the major differentiating point that the Indonesian regime was attempting to construct: that the Indonesian state was peace-seeking, while the Timorese political parties were

²⁹ Cf. Rees, "Under Pressure"; Hughes, *Dependent Communities*, 105.

³⁰ René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Y. Freccero, 184–97; Girard, *I See Satan Fall like Lightning*, 32–46.

violent. Girard argues that violence is not caused by differences between human beings, but results from a lack of difference between desiring parties.³¹ In this way, the regime sought to erase any difference between the pro- and anti-independence parties by provoking the resistance into conflict with local pro-Indonesian militias so that they could become violent mirror images of each other. If the regime could do this, it would have looked as if both sides were as bad and as power-hungry as the other. This move backfired when the resistance did not retaliate, which emphasized the difference between itself and the regime and its proxies.

Furthermore, Girard shows that order emerges out of violence when differences can be defined. For this reason, it seems that the regime sought to create a difference between itself and the warring parties in order to legitimate its governing role. The fear of having nothing in one's self leads one to grasp for identity, as the Indonesian regime sought to do by making itself the arbiter of internal conflict between different Timorese groups. For this reason, the Indonesian regime was particularly motivated to foment violence, so that it could establish a legitimate and definitive difference between itself and the resistance. However, the regime could not establish a legitimate difference and claim over East Timor because their efforts to construct enemies and warring parties were eventually exposed. Although it claimed a particular right as the local authority in the archipelago, the regime was shown to be no different from the previous colonizers, nor any different to the warring militia groups, who wanted control over the land of East Timor. The regime was clearly shown to have descended to the level of a common warring party seeking dominance and control: a level it was supposed to be above of by being a just arbiter and mediator. In fact, the nonretaliation of the Timorese resistance exposed the regime because it presented a positive difference between itself and the regime: The Timorese resistance was shown to be nonviolent and seeking a peaceful resolution for its people, while the regime was shown to be violent, oppressive, and power-hungry.

³¹ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 49–64 and 127–29.

Thus, the problem with the Indonesian regime's effort was that it could not maintain the victor-conquered distinction with any political or cultural legitimacy. Furthermore, the efforts of the Church, local resistance, international solidarity movement, and general populace to reveal the innocent and unjust nature of the regime's violence meant that the regime could not effectively and unanimously put "the scapegoat mechanism" into effect. Because they could not establish violence unanimously, the regime enacted evermore extreme forms of victimization. The inability of scapegoating to reconcile the population to the state drove the regime in East Timor to arbitrarily target more victims to reestablish power and order against their rivals.

As I have stated, there were widespread and strong protests against the Indonesian regime in 1999, led by the international solidarity movement and supported by ordinary citizens, particularly in the West. This international concern expressed underlying discomfort about and disapproval of the Indonesian regime, which had grown steadily over the course of the occupation, particularly in Western democracies such as Australia. The decision of the Timorese resistance led by Gusmão to not engage in violence seemed to confirm this underlying discomfort, and increased the admiration for the Timorese people in their struggle. This action exemplified the Timorese struggle in a number of ways. Gusmão's order for his soldiers to not respond to the regime's provocation in 1999 meant, in the first place, a great deal of suffering.³² It was a brave and difficult decision by Gusmão to allow the Indonesian military and their militias to ravage the country—to, in effect, concede defeat and make his people vulnerable to the brutality of the Indonesian military and militias. Gusmão as well as the Timorese leadership and resistance took the radical step to trust in the Timorese people's ability to suffer, and to suffer in anguish alongside them. While he wanted to avoid this suffering, it was the innocent vulnerability—the position of suffering and persecution—that Gusmão hoped the international community would

³² Greenlees and Garran, *Deliverance*, 192; Fernandes, *Reluctant Saviour*, 79.

recognize, a position the East Timorese had inhabited for twenty-four years and was, in 1999, revealed to the world in its violent brutality. This decision required great discipline from the Falintil troops, particularly as many East Timorese sought their protection.

I have indicated that what enabled the Timorese ability to resist rivalry, accept suffering, and concede defeat was connected, in part, to the influence of Christianity, though, of course, there were other strategic motivations. Nevertheless, the ability of ordinary people to endure enormous suffering in 1999 and for the resistance to maintain “an amazing act of restraint and strategic vision”³³ derived from a deeper place than strategic concerns—to cultural and religious resources. Regarding this, the journalist Max Stahl remarked on the widespread willingness of ordinary people to sacrifice themselves for the good of others and for the cause of liberation.³⁴ This willingness was displayed in those venerated as martyrs in East Timor, which recognized the sacrifice of many ordinary people. This ability to (nonviolently) sacrifice and resist in solidarity with others undermined the efforts of the regime to isolate people from each other and has affinities with the growth of Christian faith and solidarity during this period. Christian faith, in particular, gave many Timorese an ability to inhabit the experience of loss and suffering with solidarity and hope that God was acting for them so that the system of sacred violence would be revealed. The resistance of the Timorese people was connected in some way to their identification with Christ in the experience of loss, oppression and victimization, and in the cultivation of a spirit of self-sacrifice like Christ that redirected the experience of suffering and enabled solidarity, particularly with the victims.

The sense of Gospel victory in victimhood was not a simple narrative of good-and-evil like the regime constructed against its enemies, but was one that dealt with the complexity of suffering, trauma, and loss with “com-*passion*,” that is, in “suffering with” the

³³ A UN military official in Hughes, *Dependent Communities*, 105.

³⁴ Philip Adams, “Ex-Pats with Deep Roots: *Late Night Live* in Timor-Leste,” <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/latenightlive/features/timor/episode10.htm>.

victimized, like Jesus himself: “He [Jesus] underwent God-forsakenness so that even the God-forsaken would have a companion in their despair. . . . The experience of God-forsakenness has been reclaimed by Christ. It is now a Christian experience.”³⁵ As they experienced extreme deprivation and violence, many Timorese seemed to discover a God who dwelt with them in the most unlikely place—in the isolation and pain enforced by violence—as victim; and who offered a way to deal with their sufferings positively.

In this context where suffering and violence were undermined and transformed, the state-sanctioned violence lost its effectiveness to force people into submissive support of the regime. The solidarity with a victimized God built solidarity amongst the people themselves around the victims, particularly in the spirit of self-sacrifice (which was exemplified by the so-called martyrs). This solidarity in sacrifice was modelled by the main liturgical practice of the Church, the Eucharist, where Jesus gives of his Body and Blood. Thus, at the heart of the Timorese “spirituality of resistance” seemed to be a God who shared the sufferings of the people as loving victim, enabling existential resistance to the sacred violence of the regime. This had a crucial political impact, most importantly by enabling the Timorese to nonviolently stand alongside and advocate for the persecuted—a position that provided the resources for a non-retaliatory approach in 1999.

Thus, the ability, desire, and commitment of many East Timorese to undergo suffering and oppression, rather than fight it violently, and for the leadership to trust the people, despite the sufferings they had to undergo, represented an ability to see beyond the present moment of rivalry to a larger picture of the common good. It is easy for humans to engage in violence in response to others and in the name of others, but the resistance movement and leadership showed an approach and discipline that transcended this. The ability to transcend the immediate feelings and consequences of violence

³⁵ Gil Bailie, “The Emmaus Road Initiative: Why did it Take the Crucifixion to Save Us?” Recorded lecture (2008), in Joel Hodge, “The Catholic Church in Timor-Leste and the Indonesian Occupation: A Spirituality of Suffering and Resistance,” 165.

and rivalry needs to be connected to a larger vision and solidarity imbued with a capacity for nonviolent reciprocity that sought the good of all. For instance, there was recognition amongst the East Timorese resistance and people that victory would not ultimately come through arms—a recognition evident in Gusmão's approach. This victory through defeat and death—a victory through the Cross—was identifiable with and drawn in a particular way from Christ. The overwhelming force of the Indonesian regime needed to be overcome with truth and solidarity, truth made possible by enabling a stance in suffering alongside the self-giving victim.

The hope that the Timorese held during the occupation that justice would prevail and the international community would respond to injustice was based on a belief that their cause would outlast the Indonesian regime, even if their cries for help were left unheeded for a short or even a long time. In the eyes of the East Timorese, death was not an obstacle for justice to be achieved. Yet, the most common mimetic response from humans is to return violence with violence, to take vengeance, even if nonviolence is more logical and advantageous in the long term. To avoid succumbing to revenge seemed to require the East Timorese to identify real victory and life with the victimized Other, rather than with the violent other. In this regard, while being strategic in nature, Gusmão's order manifested an existing spiritual discipline amongst the Timorese to resist violence and to believe that the violent other (institutionalized in the regime) could be exposed with truth, nonviolence, and forgiveness. This path of non-vengeance required special resources and effort on the part of the East Timorese that were grounded in faith and were realized in an alternative form of communion in forgiveness and self-giving. In this communion, the Timorese trusted each other to act for each other, suffering alongside each other, seeking their best interests.

Conclusion

The rare nature of the victory of the East Timorese to gain independence from an overwhelming military force has been commented on by various authors.³⁶ Ramos-Horta remarks that there is “almost no precedent for a guerrilla movement defeating an established government by military means alone.”³⁷ For East Timor, it involved overturning the dominance of the “persecutor’s perception” locally and internationally.³⁸ The means that Indonesia took to enforce its regime in East Timor were no longer palatable to an increasingly better informed international community that felt a political and moral imperative to protect those who were victimized. The awareness of persecution in East Timor amongst the international community grew to such an imperative, particularly in 1999, because of the clear exposition of the regime’s violence made possible by the contrast with the nonviolent solidarity amongst the East Timorese. Building an awareness of the innocent victims in East Timor became central to the success of the Timorese, made possible by an ability to accept suffering through self-giving solidarity, modeled on Christ.

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³⁶ For example, Fernandes, *Reluctant Saviour*, 1–3; David Scott, *Last Flight Out of Dili: Memoirs of an Accidental Activist in the Triumph of East Timor*, 5–11.

³⁷ José Ramos-Horta, *Funu: The Unfinished Saga of East Timor*, 206.

³⁸ Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 109.

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