Kisho Tsuchiya

What was "Independence" for the East Timorese? A historian's autobiographical reflections over perceptions of the past

When Timor-Leste officially became "independent" on 20th May 2002, I was only a junior high school student living in Tokyo. The legendary transnational activism for an independent East Timor was already over. I spent part of my childhood in Bali in the early 1990s but, at the time, had never heard of the Santa Cruz Massacre, or Fernando de Araujo (better known as Lasama), the Timorese student activist who was arrested in Bali. For that matter, I was barely aware of the province of "Timor Timur" that was resisting Indonesian rule. When I began to explore the world as a university student, Timor-Leste's "restoration of independence" was a given historical fact. Only attentive Japanese school kids might have found the "independence of East Timor in 2002" in the historical chronology on the last page of social studies or world history textbooks.

Image 1
Author in Bali in 1991. Photograph provided by Yuki and Hidetaka Tsuchiya.

Timor-Leste came closer to me when I became a student of Professor Sukehiro Hasegawa at Hosei University in April 2007. He had been the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for East Timor until September 2006, when he resigned from that high-ranking UN position, taking responsibility for the 2006 East Timorese Crisis. Hosei University's Faculty of Law then recruited him to teach Peacebuilding and Diplomacy. I was admitted into his seminar and had plenty of time to talk with him regarding Timor-Leste's conflicts and the United Nations' Peacebuilding over the next four years.

Hasegawa trained us to be future international officers rather than researchers, an experience that was amazing (and sometimes overwhelming) for his undergraduate students. He often instructed us to plan and manage events that involve international V.I.P.s

ABSTRACT

O que significou a «Independência» para os timorenses? Reflexões autobiográficas de um historiador sobre a perceção do passado

Segundo Akihisa Matsuno, durante a ocupação militar indonésia, Timor-Leste constituiu uma espécie de «coleção de textos» para os académicos ativistas internacionais da década de 1990, cujas obras se baseavam principalmente em fontes contrabandeadas e testemunhos de refugiados. Convencionalmente, a «Independência de 2002» foi concebida como a solução inegável de séculos de domínio estrangeiro. No entanto, a experiência local de investigadores externos em Timor-Leste após 1999 foi a de um confronto com variadas perceções timorenses de «independência», *ukun rasik an*, e com um passado que desafiava o entendimento histórico convencional estabelecido na década de 1990. Este ensaio autobiográfico reflete sobre a experiência de campo do autor, bem como a da sua geração, e sobre o modo como esta prática veio alterar a pesquisa académica sobre Timor-Leste. Em particular, este artigo aprofunda três encontros concretos e a sua correspondente investigação: (1) o trabalho elaborado na ONU pela Equipa de Apoio Eleitoral das Nações Unidas e a perceção desta equipa, por parte da oposição militante timorense, enquanto «potência colonial»; (2) a vida quotidiana num agregado familiar timorense e a experiência das mulheres e da «geração indonésia», e (3) conversas nas ruas e as funções históricas da fronteira territorial, da migração e da violência. Estes três conjuntos de encontros e tópicos de pesquisa fornecem visões alternativas sobre o que significa a «independência» para o povo timorense (oriental) e para aqueles que fizeram parte da história recente do país.

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Image 2
Sukehiro Hasegawa visiting a school in Timor-Leste, 2007. Photograph provided by Sukehiro Hasegawa.

such as Muhammad Yunis, Martti Ahtisaari, and, of course, José Ramos-Horta, one of the two East Timorese Nobel Peace Prize Winners. My early education about Timor-Leste was thus informed by UN officers and leading Timorese public figures. Hasegawa's constantly positive, determined, and effective UN-based training strongly shaped the ways in which his students encountered post-conflict countries and regions.

However, what I became more curious about was his apparent trauma in Timor-Leste, particularly his experience of the 2006 Crisis that fatally damaged his career as one of the three highest-ranking Japanese officers within the United Nations System (the other two being Sadako Ogata and Yasushi Akashi). He told me that he could easily have stopped the violence if the United Nations had retained its military force (as the Crisis began after the Peace Keeping Operation had been withdrawn in 2005). Occasionally, he muttered, "Mr. Tsuchiya, I was with President Xanana Gusmão at the time and, by now, I read all the reports. But, I still don't get it. Why did it happen?"

By that time, the United Nations' report on the 2006 Crisis was available, and we had a relatively clear sense of *whodunnit* and what happened. Crudely put, it was as follows. Over 400 Timorese soldiers left their military barracks, complaining that there was a discrimination regarding promotion within the military based on where they were from – East or West within the country. Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri from the FRETILIN government directed the military to fire these petitioners. Then, anti-government demonstrations spread, and other groups of Timorese joined them. Violence erupted, about thirty people died, and many became "internally displaced people." In June, PM Alkatiri resigned, and

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Image 3
In an IDP camp in Dili, 2007. Photograph provided by Kyoko Hirano.

Image 4
Author's first visit to Timor-Leste in 2007. Photograph by Kyoko Hirano.

other former resistance leaders, such as Xanana Gusmão and José Ramos-Horta, took over the country's leadership.

I joined the Hasegawa seminar's study trip in Timor-Leste for the first and second times in 2007 and 2008, respectively. These were my first visits to the country, and there was still a camp for "Internally Displaced People." Numerous "UN cars" were driving around the streets of Dili. A sense of stability and social tensions were both apparent. Soon, I came to like the Timorese people whom I met there, especially the youth close to my own age.

I often asked the people, locals and foreigners: "Why did the 2006 Crisis happen?" This was because the reports that were available at the time were not all clear regarding *whydunnits*. I realized that no international officers could answer this question adequately. One Spanish officer told me, "Some say Kaladi, and others say Firaku. Easterners and Westerners in Timor discriminate against one another. But this discrimination has no history." (Later, when I became Douglas Kammen's student in National University of Singapore, I found out that this discrimination did have a long history. See Kammen, 2010.)

Some Timorese people told me different stories. A Timorese youth shared this account: "Mari Alkatiri is a foreigner. He never experienced war in Timor. People like him just came back after the voting [in 1999] and took over the government. We only knew FRETILIN. But we didn't know that FRETILIN's leader was a foreigner."

What I sensed (not "understood") was that there was a broad sense of disappointment regarding the processes and the consequence of what was called "independence."

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I began to read academic books on Timor, including the works by Jill Jolliffe, Helen Hill, James Dunn, and Akihisa Matsuno, the regular points of reference to the history of Timor-Leste's independence in English and Japanese. The authors of these works were involved in transnational activism for an independent Timor-Leste from the 70s to the 90s, and utilized activist archives. Matsuno's book made the strongest impression on me, as a Japanese student, of all. The book begins as follows:

> The independence of this small country [Timor-Leste] was achieved by overcoming numerous hardships. Portuguese colonization since the 16th century, Japanese occupation during World War II, and the 24-year Indonesian occupation since 1975....The East Timorese people have dreamed of a day to be free for the long five centuries of foreign domination. (Matsuno, 2002, 1)

Such a narrative resembles anti-colonialist history (familiar to Asian students) modelled after the Biblical story of paradise, the fall, the dark-age, and salvation. In the case of Timor-Leste, it was "450 [some say "500"] years of Portuguese domination, 24 years of Indonesian illegal occupation, three years of the UN interim administration, then the restoration of independence in 2002." It is natural to end the story in 2002, the "restoration of independence" as a solution to the Indonesian invasion/occupation, because these books were published between 2002 and 2003. Of course, it was unreasonable on my part to expect historical contexts or answers to post-independence political issues in these books. But, as an undergraduate student in the latter half of the 2000s, I was surprised that I did not find any clue to the post-2006 disappointment and political divisions amongst the East Timorese people in the books that were available at my university.

As the Subprime Mortgage Crisis hit the global economy, job-hunters at Hosei University were suffering around 2008-9. Therefore, I came up with an idea to delay my job-hunting. I asked Professor Hasegawa, "Would there be anywhere I can earn some unique experience for a year? I've just realized that I am unprepared to decide on my future career." He suggested, "Why don't you work for the United Nations' Mission in Timor-Leste? You've been to the country twice. You speak sufficient English and a bit of Indonesian. Besides, you are a Christian. Perhaps you may fit in there." Immediately, I replied, "yes," and then processed my leave-of-absence from the university. Hasegawa arranged an agreement with Andres del Castillo, the Chief Technical Advisor of the United Nations Electoral Support Team in Timor-Leste (UNEST), to accept me at first as an intern, and then, a few months later, as a locally hired staff member with a special salary of $500. He persuaded me not to come back for a year, because he was ashamed that a French student whom he had sent the year before gave up his internship in Dili in mere two weeks. In this way, I – a 21-year-old Japanese undergraduate at the time – seized a chance to have an extraordinary one-year working experience at the UNEST office.

Looking back, it is clear to me that such an unusual way of career development would have been impossible without the UN's political infrastructure, Timor-Leste's post-2002 "neo-colonial" situation, Japan's strong economic power, and my personal connection to Sukehiro Hasegawa (the most powerful Japanese national regarding the UN presence in Timor-Leste). But mine is also a variation on stories of thousands of foreigners who flocked to post-1999 Timor-Leste to gain unique experience, to conduct research, or to develop careers in NGOs, International Organizations, or government. In fact, it was the period of the largest presence of foreigners in the entire history of Timor-Leste, with a presence of 18,000 UN officers compared to the pre-WWII Portuguese "colonial domination" administered by mere few hundred European officers. Importantly, such expats' "field experience" made my generation of Timor-Leste researchers distinct from the preceding generation that depended on refugees' accounts and smuggled texts to understand Timor-Leste. As Professor Akihisa Matsuno recently told me, for the transnational activist scholars of the 1990s, "Timor-Leste was like a collection of texts."

As I arrived in the UNEST office, the first instruction from Senhor Andres del Castilho – my boss and

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Image 5
The 22nd Birthday with UNEST Office mates in July 2009. Photograph by Bernardo Cardoso.

Image 6
UNEST-IRI Electoral Training in Suai, 2009. Photograph by Kisho Tsuchiya.

historian of Timor-Leste who showed me a possibility of a longer history of Timor – was to master two local languages: Tetun and written Portuguese. So I did, spending all available hours to master these two within a few months. In the process of learning, I engaged in a lot of conversations in Tetun with Timorese "kolegas" in the language school and in the street, at the office and at home.

At the time, I stayed on the second floor of an ex-guerrilla soldier's house to save money, given my low budget, and paid $120 per month. This was an unusual experience for "international officers" most of whom stayed in hotel rooms or their own houses. The UN's salary discrimination that provides international officers about ten times more salary than "national officers" was an important cause of resentment among Timorese UN staff members. During the late Portuguese colonial period, the salary gap between the *metropolitanos* and the *nativos* was roughly 2 to 1. My special salary of "$500" spurred Timorese colleagues' curiosity, because they had never heard of an "international officer" who received such a low salary that was equal to that of Timorese officers. But, this financial situation provided me plenty of time to chat with Timorese colleagues over lunch time in Warung Baratu (literary "cheap canteen").

This environment facilitated my Tetun and Portuguese learning. In the office, my colleagues called me by my first name, but at home and on the street, Timorese friends gave me nicknames such as *malae kiak* (poor foreigner), *senhor klosan* (young lord), or simply *cina* (ethnic Chinese). Experiences in UNEST and beyond were utterly eye-opening and shaped my later research as a historian. So, I would like to disclose my three concrete

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Image 7
Election Day in Suai in 2010. Picture by Kisho Tsuchiya.

experiences in Timor that resonate with the work of researchers who belong to my generation.

> Experience at UNEST: extra-parliamentary opposition to the "Restoration of Independence in 2002"

UNEST's business covered practically all things that were related to electoral design and management: legal framework, voter registration, training for electoral bodies and committees, voter education, management, and observation of actual elections. Following Senhor Andres here and there, I became familiar with how elections are planned and managed. Senhor Andres was considered a genius by his subordinates. He had experience in this business since the triumphal (and also tragic) Popular Consultation in 1999, spoke about ten languages, knew Timorese history better than any officers, and he was capable in planning, organizing, and managing. The management of the 2009-10 local elections seemed largely unproblematic with young but sufficiently experienced Timorese electoral bodies and Andres' supervision.

One day, however, Senhor Andres said in a meeting, "Let's give up elections in these two villages." It was unusual for me see him like this. The revelation was the existence of the militant extra-parliamentary oppositions to the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste and its "Restoration of Independence in 2002," such as the *Conselho Popular pela Defesa da República Democrática de Timor-Leste* (CPD-RDTL), Sagrada Família, Colimau2000, and later *Conselho Revolucionário Maubere* (KRM). According to the UN's intranet information at the time, thousands of people were supporting or sympathizing with the militant groups. When I served as an electoral observer for the 2009-10 local elections, several villages associated with one of the

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militant organizations in Baucau boycotted UNEST and the government's electoral bureaucracy decided to compromise with them, giving up elections in these villages. (Later I learned that UNEST had habitually compromised with the militant groups.)

Through news articles and the UN's internal information, I came to know that the boycotters were insisting that the "independence given by the United Nations" was not genuine independence, and, therefore, those villages decided not to cooperate with UN-sponsored elections. To borrow their Tetun-Portuguese terminology, what they struggled for was *ukun rasik an* (conventionally translated as "independence" or "self-determination"), but the current independence was ukun an (i.e. self-determination that is not *rasik*. I will examine the word *rasik* in the following paragraphs). Since genuine independence (i.e. *ukun rasik* an) had not yet been achieved, their struggle continued (*a luta continua*). These phrases originated from early FRETILIN campaigns in the 70s, but, in the post-2002 period they gained new meanings.

At the time, I did not understand what this *rasik* – a word often translated as "self" or "own" – meant in this context. As I familiarized myself with Tetun and the militant groups' messages, however, I began to understand that things that are *rasik* come out from within, as in, *oan rasik* refers to "biological child." In the same manner, *ukun rasik* an (a *rasik* self-determination) must be generated through Timorese people's culture, society, and history [Tsuchiya, 2021]. When the militant oppositions refer to *ukun rasik an*, it was predominantly about the 1975 FRETILIN ideals, Timorese perceptions, social values, and wartime experience.

This distinction of *ukun rasik an* (self-determination that is to be achieved from within) and *ukun an* (self-determination that is realized externally) had contemporary relevance. First of all, the concept of *ukun rasik an* can be a weapon to criticize not only the classical colonialism of Portugal and Indonesia, but also the United Nations' administration and remaining foreign influence even after 2002. The independence given by the United Nations (i.e. *ukun an*) did not reflect the original FRETILIN ideals, and socially engineered an "independent Timor-Leste" that was acceptable for the international society. The UN and "international society," therefore, are also colonial powers to them. Militant groups extended this critique to some Timorese politicians such as Mari Alkatiri and José Ramos-Horta, because these politicians did not have wartime experience in Timor. Therefore, in the view of the militant opposition, the first government of Prime Minister Alkatiri was not ukun rasik an, but *ukun an*. This was the meaning of the saying, "Mari Alkatiri is a foreigner" that I heard on my first visit to Dili in 2007.

By 2010, their message had begun to resonate with my own experience in the UN Mission and the social world of Timor-Leste. Many UN officers were accommodated and integrated into Timorese society. But there were some who never mixed with the locals. One officer told me, "I never believe in so-called local solutions. I only believe in the international best practices." He often shouted at Timorese co-workers, and I didn't understand why he acted that way. One day I learned that he had experienced being bombed by the Taliban in Afghanistan, and this made him uncooperative with those whom he considered "natives." Like former European and Japanese colonial officers, such as UN officers from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Zimbabwe, he brought his trauma in from elsewhere to deal with Timorese problems. Thus, Timorese problems were often interpreted and dealt with according to the contemporary international sentiment of "war on terror" rather than Timorese contexts.

There were (and are) many other "colonial" problems. I am aware of a UN international officer – my former basketball team-mate – who ran over a Timorese pedestrian (who died soon after) and vanished after the incident. He was never tried. Also, Timorese mothers gave birth to many "UN babies" whose UN parents disappeared after their terms in the country. One such father was my office mate who had three children in three different countries. He once lectured me that, to manage 10 women at the same time, one must be able to tell a lie. I began to consider us, i.e. the international officers, as descendants of colonialism.

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Such revelations and experience enabled me to see the divisions between Timorese survivors of the Indonesian Occupation in Timor and returnee leaders who had been refugees, as well as the perceptions of international society and the Timorese people. It led me to study post-colonial critiques more deeply and to re-examine FRETILIN documents in Tetun and Portuguese from the 1970s from the perspective of war-survivors. In addition, I should be honest here that I was probably enabled to see this by my connections to Japan and the Philippines, two countries under the shadow of the United States, but with strong traditions of resistance.

> Experience at home: ex-guerrilla as husband and the "indonesian generation" as wife

My Timorese host family in Dili consisted of an ex-FALINTIL guerrilla (Geração 75), his Indonesian-educated wife (Geração Indonesia), their children (Geração Independência), and a female domestic helper. While this family was a unit and all of them communicated mainly in Tetun, it was like a microcosm of Timor-Leste's generation gaps, containing three generations with different structures of thought, experience, and emotion.

The husband/father was a state-acknowledged national hero. He joined FRETILIN in 1974 when he was 18 years old. As the Indonesian military invaded Portuguese Timor, he went to the jungle, and fought from the mountains for 24 years. When his resistance against the Indonesian army was over, he began receiving a pension as a veteran, and started his own family. He was always proud of his heroic role in the history of Timor-Leste's independence. As he learned that I was interested in history, he encouraged me to improve my Portuguese, encouragement that shaped my career. In addition, within the family, he is the only one who appears in history books.

His wife was almost 20 years younger. She spoke Indonesian in addition to Tetun. During the daytime, she listened to Indonesian music. She had an intimate feeling about Indonesian language, culture, and thought about more than her own society. The wife/mother usually spent her time chatting, listening to music, and watching TV, while the helper did most of the domestic labor including cooking, childcare, and cleaning. The wife/mother was close to the "lord of house" – as early modern Asian societies had – and her main responsibility was to give birth to children. Their children studied Portuguese in school and learned Indonesian through their daily lives with their mother.

In the evening, the wife and children would watch Indonesian television with much laughter while the helper slept in a separate hut. The veteran and his Japanese tenant would sit down in a corner of the room together. One day before going up to sleep on the second floor, I asked the veteran, "By the way, do you understand Indonesian?" He replied, "No. But, my family does. That's why I sit in the corner with you." Then there was a lot of laughter from the family, as they had been eavesdropping on our conversation. I felt pity for the veteran – after 24 years in the jungle, he was still sitting in the corner of the room. However, I realized that the narrative of independence and its guerrilla heroes lost its centrality in their home. The stories of women and the Indonesian-educated generation had not yet been told at that time but were dominant at home.

Because of this experience, I was excited when I read the works of Angie Bexley, Kamisuna Takahiro, and Hannah Loney. Their works explored underrepresented East Timorese actors such as the Indonesian-educated generation and women. Along with them, we should question, "What exactly was independence for the youth and women?" Bexley and Kamisuna's works, for example, point to a distinguishable experience of the Indonesian-educated generation (Gerasaun Foun), who shared the experience of resistance against Indonesia, but internalized Indonesian ideas of resistance and revolution, culture and training (Bexley 2007; Kamisuna, 2020). Their activism for an independent Timor-Leste was also cooperation with the Indonesian activists for democratization.

Under the United Nations' interim administration and the "independence given by the UN," political expression of the Geração Indonesia was marginalized along with all other things that the top leaders considered

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Image 8
Ex-FALINTIL, Paulo Alves Maria dos Santos (Dadulas) and the author in his house, 2015. Photograph by Marjorie Lucagbo Tsuchiya.

"Indonesian." They were given a minor status in state discourse and put into marginal spaces of local NGOs and at home. This was another context to the 2006 Crisis.

Timorese women's history is yet to be written. Hannah Loney's *In Women's Words* centralized women's voices to reconstruct a critical history of the militarized society under the Indonesian army (Loney, 2019). Yet, her book does not seem to radically revise the narrative of the conventional history of independence. When women's words go against the established narrative, Loney seems to defend the latter. I hope to see a Timorese women's history which does not hesitate to radically question the established historical narratives and periodization to examine the transformation of the Timorese family and women's roles. Collaboration with anthropologists will enrich the future historical writings on Timorese women. Here are some questions for future history to be written: What exactly was the early-modern Timorese family and what was women's place in it? Were Timorese women "relatively independent," as is often observed in other Southeast Asian societies? How did European colonialism transform Timorese families and women's roles within them? What were the impacts of three big wars (the Portuguese Pacification, World War II, and the Indonesian Invasion) on women? What was women's experience of Timor-Leste's "independence" and how does it revise the established narrative? From this perspective, oral history and women's history have great potential.

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> Experience in the street: conversations regarding the other side of the border

Concepts of border and national space are central in the Westphalian conception of the nation-state, and by extension, "sovereignty" and "independence." My first interest in Timorese perceptions of space and border was aroused in an unexpected way, through a chat about Christian theology in the street in Dili. As I was discussing the concept of God with several Timorese youth, a friend from Oecussi asked me, "Do you know where God is?" I answered, "God is everywhere." [This is what I was taught in my church in Tokyo] He smiled and said, "That's what foreigners say. In fact, God is in Timor, in Indonesian territory."

These conversations reminded me of the separation of the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Though the two kingdoms were in a state of war, Israelites continued to visit and worship God in Jerusalem in Judah, until Jeroboam I of Israel established alternative sites of worship in Bethel and Dan [I Kings, 12:25-32]. Does the same apply to the Timorese?

Such curiosity led me to read anthropologists' works, namely Tom Therik's book on Wehali, the center of the Timorese ritual regime and the residence of Maromak Oan (the Bright One, or God's Child) in Indonesian West Timor (Therik, 2004). The basic idea of my "Converting Tetun," was formed during M.A. training in Southeast Asian Studies (Tsuchiya, 2019). In the paper, I explore 19th-20th century missionary encounters with Timorese culture and Timorese perceptions of Christianity. The paper demonstrated that Catholic texts in Tetun did not simply dismiss Timorese religious beliefs but introduced Christianity as a continuation of Timorese mythologies. The missionaries borrowed indigenous words for the highest deity to express the Christian God, and, in the Timorese translation of the Bible, Jesus claims the status of Maromak Oan and *liurai* (king, or "lord of the land"). As a result, Wehali remains central in the Timorese sacred landscape even as Christianity has spread through Timorese societies over the past few centuries.

In my PhD thesis and forthcoming book, I go more in depth regarding the history of border, cross-border migration, and war in Timor from a longue durée and trans-border perspective (Tsuchiya, 2018). As a repetitive pattern of regime change in modern Timorese history emerged before my eyes, the insufficiency of the national history became legible. As a result, my understanding of Timor-Leste's "Restoration of Independence" had to be revised again.

The pattern of regime change that I am discussing here is characterized by a roughly 30-year (or one generation) cycle of war and migration, regime change, pacification, and deepening of social tension, which then repeats in another round of war and migration, regime change, pacification, and deepening of social tension, and so forth. There are several factors that characterize this cycle such as persistent attempts at state consolidation, war and refugees. The nature of the territorial border on Timor Island frames these dynamics, as well: the existence of two separate jurisdictions and loose border-control destabilizes the order, because they provide motivation for political dissidents and criminals to migrate (and return in times of change).

This pattern starts with the Portuguese colonial war from the mid-19th to early 20th century which culminated in the Manufahi War. Although the Indonesian Invasion is far more famous, according to René Pélissier, these colonial wars (particularly the Manufahi War) were possibly more devastating, with an estimated population loss of 32.5%-44.8% between 1910-13 based on Portuguese official records (Pélissier, 2007, 420). This accounts for not only the Timorese war casualties, but also those who died of sickness and hunger, as well as those who emigrated. The so-called "colonial peace" from the 1910s-41 was built upon such huge damage to Timorese societies. As this "peace" was consolidated, social tensions within the societies deepened.

When the Allied Forces and the Japanese military invaded Portuguese Timor in 1941-45, these two foreign forces found Timorese collaborators easily. Why? Because there were existing tensions in Timor. Portuguese secret documents reveal that the Salazar

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Image 9
Memorial of WWII, "Contra o Invasor". The inscription below reads, "Ao Régulo Evaristo de Sá, morto em 1943." Photograph provided by Kyoko Hirano.

dictatorship was unpopular, and this resulted in the population's disregard for the government's war-time directions and support for the Allied Forces. The Japanese found allies in the East Timorese diasporic communities in Dutch West Timor because there were plenty of Eastern Timorese refugees from the colonial wars who held grudges against the Portuguese. From this perspective, World War II in Timor was a historical "return of the suppressed." Indigenized warfare among the Timorese groups during WWII resulted in another round of massive population loss and refugees (Tsuchiya, 2018, chapter 5).

From 1974 to 75, a similar pattern emerged as the result of the Carnation Revolution in Lisbon and the proposal for Portuguese Timor's decolonization. While the UDT initially aimed to maintain the status quo, other East Timorese political parties quickly demanded what had been suppressed by the post-WWII Portuguese rule. FRETILIN itself was a product of Portuguese assimilation, but it accommodated various demands for change such as abolition of colonial governance, class and economic exploitation, racism, and discrimination in state posts. The Monarchists (or KOTA) demanded the restoration of Timorese monarchism. Last but not least, former Japanese collaborators, participants of the 1959 Viqueque Rebellion, and Timorese refugees from WWII came back as pro-Indonesian integrationists and their supporters from Indonesian West Timor. The Timorese party conflict in August 1975 and eventual Indonesian invasion produced yet another massive population loss and refugees. As Portuguese Timor became the Indonesian province of Timor Timur, new types of elites emerged as Indonesian-sponsored leaders.

Now, let us reconsider the year 1999 and the "Restoration of Independence" in 2002 as a part of such a

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Image 10
The Indonesian Border Post in Atambua in 2015. Photograph by Kisho Tsuchiya.

historical cycle. The Indonesian takeover from the 70s to the 90s caused massive destruction (CAVR, 2013). It generated Timorese diasporic communities in Australia, Portugal, Macao, Africa, and so forth. And those refugee communities included Timorese people who were better educated. After the Popular Consultation in 1999, these diasporic Timorese – including national figures such as Mari Alkatiri and José Ramos-Horta – returned to Timor-Leste and took over the new country's leadership. The post-electoral violence in 1999 also produced massive numbers of refugees, the majority of whom settled in Indonesian West Timor.

In this view, Timor-Leste's "Restoration of Independence" is a repetition of the same cycle of the modern trans-border history of Timor Island, although it is different and new in many ways. New diasporic communities were generated, and old tensions renewed. If the Timorese people and the International Community aim to maintain peace and stability in Timor, we should not underestimate such local/trans-border history, Timorese people's (both the majority and minorities) experience, or their emotions.

> Independence of whom? Independence from what?

After I ventured away from the United Nations, my fieldwork shifted to archives and interviews. Historical documents have often forced me to reconsider East Timorese perceptions of "independence." The various waves of colonial knowledge production and changes in Timorese self-images make narration of Timorese history and "independence" rather complicated. In writing papers on the island's history, I have encountered various inadequacies regarding our terminology.

The three field experiences above and their perspectives on "independence" (the gap between ukun rasik an and ukun an, men and women, and trans-border movement of people) put me in a position to consider the questions of "Independence from whom?" and "Independence from what?" When we talk about Timor-Leste's independence, what kind of "East Timorese" and "independence" are we talking about? There are several terms to refer to the East Timorese including Maubere/Buibere, Timorese, and East Timorese. All these words make some sense to

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the Timorese people and academics, but they all have limitations (Tsuchiya, 2018). Let me describe the problem briefly.

As often cited, Maubere is a Timorese common name just like John or Maria. During the late Portuguese period, it was used as a pejorative for the native population with a connotation of "backward," "ignorant," and "uncivilized." Buibere is the equivalent for women. This pejorative was not only used by the European Portuguese, but also by ethnic Chinese, Arabs, and Indians, and certain Timorese people could really get angry if they were called Maubere in the 70s. FRETILIN, on the other hand, utilized Maubere/Buibere to mean genuine and pure Timorese who are not contaminated by colonialism, and it became an important part of the campaign for an independent Timor-Leste. Due to this racial connotation, those who consider themselves "civilized," "Westernized," and "educated" often do not consider themselves Maubere/Buibere. This is the context behind the CNRM (Conselho Nacional de Resistência Maubere) being renamed the CNRT (Conselho Nacional de Resistência Timorense) in the 90s.

The positive aspect of the Maubere conception of Timorese nationhood is its pro-commoner and majoritarian stance. The people who are considered Maubere/Buibere are generally the poor, the most war-affected, and rural groups. Policy, advocacy, and nationalism based on Maubere nationhood prioritize this group. It has a potential for social revolution.

But it has a negative aspect, as well. Maubere's independence would be an independence from racism (either European, Chinese, or Indonesian) and its political economy. On the other hand, Mauberism makes a basis for racism in reverse. In addition to Christian religious discourse, the Maubere conception of Timorese nationhood provides a hint to interpret racist discourses on post-2002 Timorese politics, namely exclusion and political discrimination against ethnic Arabs, Chinese, Indian groups, and Muslims. In Tetun discussions in various Social Networking Services, it is easy to find dismissive comments on non-Maubere politicians based on their race and religion, not directly related to their political records or platforms. Thus, the Maubere conception of Timorese nationhood has so far been unable to imagine those ethnic/racial "foreigners" as part of the nation.

"Timorese or East Timorese?" is another interesting question. "East Timorese" is used in English but sounds rather awkward in Tetun (*ema Timor-Leste?*). The citizens of Timor-Leste, or East Timorese nationals are properly "East Timorese." This potentially excludes the liminal populations of so-called "Indonesian citizens from Timor-Leste" or the refugees produced during the violence of 1999, because East Timorese independence is supposedly independence from Indonesian military rule. The East Timorese conception of nationhood excludes the East Timorese who do not fit into the discourse of the current regime.

The often-used term "Timorese" (or *timor oan* in Tetun) is not unproblematic, either. It enables a historian like me to see the "East Timor Problem" as an island-wide problem. Historically, there were political groups that demanded independence of "United Timor." Such cannot be discussed with terms such as Maubere/Buibere or "East Timorese." But is it the right term to narrate the country history of "East Timor"? I do not think so.

> Conclusion

This autobiographical reflection on Timor-Leste's independence has focused on how I encountered both mainstream and suppressed accounts. Such encounters of mine were part of the collective experience of my generation of "foreign observers" who entered "independent" Timor-Leste in the 2000s and 2010s. Such encounters were largely different from the preceding generation's knowledge production about Timor-Leste. In addition, I cannot tell at the moment whether such temporary sentiment would be remembered or forgotten by the Timorese and observers of the next generation.

The story of Timor-Leste's independence as narrated by school textbooks, Helen Hill, James Dunn, and Akihisa Matsuno will remain as the basis of the country's story as long as the country's ruling class remains

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the same. Indeed, I encourage Timorese and other historians to pursue and enrich such "official" narratives of Timor-Leste's history, because it is important to remember the stories of the Indonesian invasion, Timorese resistance, and transnational activism for an independent Timor-Leste.

However, academics of our generation are also aware that there are various suppressed Timorese accounts of the militant groups, women, and those who are currently treated as losers, traitors, the Indonesian-educated generation, and so forth. I hope that future researchers will also explore such diversity to produce a more inclusive and cross-culturalizing history. Diverse, and potentially conflicting memories of different Timorese groups and individuals should be embraced as truthful historical experiences.

To do this, we must ask more radical questions, including "What exactly is Timor-Leste's independence?" rather than uncritically accepting the "historical fact" that the country became independent in 2002. That date can be questioned, as well. Did Timor-Leste become "independent" on 28 November 1975 when FRETILIN unilaterally declared it? Wasn't that only a declaration made by one of several political parties? Was the "independence of 1975" really "restored" in 2002? How about 2012? Did Timor-Leste really become independent after the United Nations finally withdrew its Peace Keeping Force? Today, isn't it still in a condition of "neo-colonialism" as FRETILIN originally defined in 1974-75? In many ways, the struggle for ukun rasik an (independence) is still continuing, as many Timorese people say, "A Luta Continua! (The struggle continues!)"

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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