

The Portuguese Colonization and the Problem of East Timorese Nationalism

When we speak about East Timor, what precisely are we talking about? Half an island located on the easternmost tip of the Archipelago of the Lesser Sunda Islands, near Australia and New Guinea, 19 000 km² in area, a fifth of the size of Portugal, with approximately 800,000 inhabitants. The territory's process of decolonization was brutally interrupted in 1975 by a prolonged and violent colonial occupation by Indonesia, which was definitively rejected and dissolved by the referendum of August 1999. It was then followed by brutal violence, terminating with the intervention of the United Nations, which came to administer the transition process to independence, still undeclared but increasingly a reality with the recent elections for the Constituent Assembly, clearly won by Fretilin. Unquestionably, East Timor has become an important issue in political discourse, particularly in Portugal. All expressions of solidarity, with their groups and influences, each with their own motivations and causes, have revealed a growing interest in the East Timorese problem. Consequently, the territory became the object of concern for international politics and solidarities. However, research in social sciences has been lacking. Scientific studies in the fields of history, sociology, anthropology or economics are extremely rare, something which can be largely explained by the difficulty in obtaining free access to the territory of East Timor during the period of the Indonesian occupation, a situation which has yet to be overcome because of the enormous difficulties in organising the reconstruction of a devastated and disorganised territory, confronted with international aid which transports economies, inflation and even social behaviours practically unknown to the local populations. In many cases, the immediateness of political discourse or the rhetoric of solidarity has filled in for what has not been studied, and interpreted what is not even known. From History to Economics, via the issues of development or nationalism, causalities were put forward that insisted on

the diversity of the Timorese, their specific culture and history. Documents, sources, field work and research work were not included in these discourses; but they founded, and sometimes justified and manipulated, some of the memories which presently characterise knowledge on East Timor. To start with, the issues of colonization and nationalism.

The territory was first identified by the Portuguese in 1512-13, but effective European occupation of a small part of the territory only began after 1769, when the « city of Dili », the capital of so-called « Portuguese Timor », was founded¹. Until then, the Timorese territory was visited mainly by Portuguese traders and missionaries. The former sought the lucrative trade of sandalwood, while the missionaries, predominantly Dominicans, were engaged in the mission of evangelisation. Catholic preaching played an extremely active role during the 18th Century, when many missionaries considered undesirable in Goa were received in Timor. Evangelisation soon reached the Flores, Solor, Wetar and many of the other small adjacent islands, where churches were built and parishes were established². Until the beginning of the 20th century, in spite of the coffee campaigns, almost always carried out by small local proprietors, Timor was governed not only with « African » ideas, but also with many Indian and Mozambican elements, the latter constituting a significant quota of the colonial army³.

The territory slowly became colonized from the 1860's onwards but was confronted with frequent resistance and local revolts. It was only around 1913-1914, during the Manufhai wars when the colonial power managed to mobilise several allied Timorese kingdoms against the local resistance movements, that colonial domination definitively spread throughout Eastern Timor⁴. However, the colony was far away, serving rather to exile political opponents and rebels from the Portuguese African colonies than as a territory of economic colonization. Strangely, it was in fact during the brutal Japanese occupation that the invaders edified roads and airports that today still structure a significant part of the communications network. Only during the late 1950's was it possible to identify « serious » economic, administrative, social and cultural investments and, in the twenty years following the liberation of Goa in 1961, these widened to include investments in education and the first attempts at « industrialisation »,

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1. See, in this issue of *Lusotopie*, R.R. LOUREIRO, « Discutindo a formação da presença colonial portuguesa em Timor » and A. de CASTRO, *As Possessões portuguesas na Oceania*, Lisbon, Imprensa nacional, 1867; L. de OLIVEIRA, *Timor na História de Portugal*, 3 vols, Lisbon, Agência Geral do Ultramar, 1953; R. M. LOUREIRO, (ed.), *Onde Nasce o Sândalo. Os Portugueses em Timor nos séculos XVI e XVII*, Lisbon, Grupo de Trabalho do Ministério da Educação para as Comemorações dos Descobrimientos Portugueses, 1995; I. Carneiro de SOUSA, *Timor Leste desde muito antes dos Portugueses até 1769*, *Encontros de divulgação e debate em estudos sociais*, 3, 1998 : 5-23.
 2. A. Pinto da FRANÇA, *Portuguese Influence in Indonesia*, Lisbon, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1975.
 3. W.G. CLARENCE-SMITH, « Fazendeiros e pequenos proprietários no território português de Timor no século XIX e XX », *Encontros de divulgação e debate em estudos sociais*, 3, 1998 : 41-50; I. Carneiro de SOUSA, *Timor Leste ...* : 19-21.
 4. R. PÉLISSIER, *Timor en guerre : le crocodile et les Portugais (1847-1913)*, Orgeval, Ed. Péliissier, 1996.
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parallel to administrative reinforcement and the continuous influx of populations to the urban centres.

A History Yet to Be Written

The history of East Timor is yet to be written. During the colonial period, some general historiographic studies were edited, and the fourteen Portuguese titles available were mainly produced by military and administrative officials, while the pre-colonial history of the territory was never the object of any scientific contribution. Such was the case that much of the current anthropological and historical knowledge on East Timor was in fact only gathered between 1953 and 1975. António de Almeida was official responsible for this work. Born in 1900, a graduate of Medicine and post-graduate of the Escola de Medicina Tropical (School of Tropical Medicine) and of the Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical (Institute of Tropical Scientific Research), António de Almeida became one of the most powerful figures in Portuguese colonial research⁵. A man of the Regime. During the 30's and 40's, he worked in Angola, and started what he would come to designate *Anthropo-biology*, in a renowned research work (although in many cases polemic) on the Bushmen. In 1953, he started his studies on Timor, visiting and staying in Timor on several occasions. He discovered prehistoric archaeological layers and developed the analysis of ethno-linguistic divisions; he was involved in the production of films; he published dozens of articles and even became a member of the National Assembly representing Timor for two terms of office. In spite of his prolific work and knowledge of the territory, the ideas with which he interpreted Timorese history and culture were neither his own nor were they original. They were based on the work of a renowned Brazilian author, Gilberto Freyre, especially on one of his best-known books in Portugal *O mundo que o português criou* ("The world the Portuguese created"), a best-seller during the 40's and 50's⁶. The book was ready to be published in 1937, but was successively delayed. The book came to include a preface dated 31st January 1940, by António Sérgio, a prominent figure of the democratic opposition and eminent essayist and historiographer. His preface gave a consensual dimension to Freyre's book and contributed to its success, precisely in the year when the «Grande Exposição do Mundo Português» («Great Exhibition of the Portuguese World») was opened. However, the book's great attraction for its readers was its first paragraph: «*Aspectos da influência da mestiçagem sobre as relações sociais e de cultura entre portugueses e luso-descendentes*» («Aspects of the influence of race-mixing on the social and cultural relationships between the Portuguese and Portuguese descendants»). In this paragraph, the author defends the idea that Portugal, Brazil and the Portuguese colonies constituted a unity of sentiment and culture, because Portuguese colonization was special and different from any other: the Portuguese, explained Freyre, «dominated the native populations, mixing with them and dearly loved the coloured

5. A. ALMEIDA, *O Oriente de expressão portuguesa*, Lisbon, Fundação Oriente, 1994.

6. G. FREYRE, *O mundo que o português criou*, Lisbon, Livros do Brasil, 1940.

women » (p. 40). He further added, « in all places where this manner of colonization dominated, the prejudice of race is practically insignificant and the mixing of races, a psychological, social and, one can even say, an active and creative ethnic force... » (p. 43). The Brazilian sociologist concludes by stating that the specificity of the Portuguese colonization promoted « the democratisation of human societies through the mixing of races, interbreeding and miscegenation » (p. 46). Gilberto Freyre designated these ideas by the term « Luso-tropicalismo » (Luso = of Portuguese origin: *Portuguese tropicality*)⁷. In spite of the fact that these ideas were used as ideological and political banners by the colonial propaganda of the « Estado Novo » (the Portuguese dictatorship from 1932-1974), this concept of « *Luso-tropicalismo* » is today still one of the few interpretative theories of Portuguese colonization and of the Portuguese-speaking spaces throughout the world⁸.

However, the « *Luso-tropicalismo* » theory did not cause widespread enthusiasm in academic and scientific circles⁹. Historians simply ignored it. The importance of the works of Charles Boxer, Jaime Cortesão and those published by Vitorino Magalhães Godinho from the early 1950's onwards, developed the interpretation of Portuguese expansion and colonization in their economic and social dimensions, defining spaces, geographies and cultures. At the end of the 1940's, Portuguese anthropology and sociology were still incipient domains, and they were pursued in order to prompt the appearance of relevant scientific works. It was for this reason that researchers from other scientific fields became interested in that of « *Luso-tropicalismo* » theory. Almerindo Lessa, for example, applied it to the Portuguese colonial presence in India, but it was the leader-geographer Orlando Ribeiro who, in his most important work, *Originalidade da Expansão Portuguesa* (« Originality of the Portuguese Expansion ») most used and dignified the theory of « *Luso-tropicalismo* »¹⁰. Nevertheless, the application of this theory was rare, with the exception, naturally, of Brazil. In Angola, Mozambique, Guinea and in the Atlantic islands colonized by the Portuguese, there are virtually no social science studies based on the « *Luso-tropicalismo* » theory. Curiously, one exception is precisely Timor.

The idea of a benign, benevolent colonization, grounded on an almost egalitarian and sentimental relationship with the local populations became the official thesis of the Portuguese colonization of Timor. The attraction of

7. G. FREYRE: *Aventura e Rotina*, Lisbon, Livros do Brasil, 1953; *Um brasileiro em Terras Portuguesas. Introdução a uma possível luso-tropicologia*, Lisbon, Livros do Brasil, 1953; *O Luso e o Trópico*, Lisbon, Comissão Executiva das Comemorações do Quinto Centenário da Morte do Infante D. Henrique, 1961.

8. C. CASTELO, « *O Modo português de estar no Mundo* ». *O luso-tropicalismo e a ideologia colonial portuguesa (1933-1961)*, Porto, Afrontamento, 1998; Y. LÉONARD, « *Salazarisme et lusotropicalisme, histoire d'une appropriation* », in *Lusotopie. Enjeux contemporains dans les espaces lusophones*, 1997 : 211-226; A. MOREIRA & J.C. VENÂNCIO (eds), *Luso-Tropicalismo. Uma Teoria Social em questão*, Lisbon, Vega, 2000.

9. I. Carneiro de SOUSA, « *O luso-tropicalismo e a historiografia Portuguesa : itinerários críticos e temas de debate* », in A. MOREIRA, & J.C. VENÂNCIO (eds), *op. cit.*, Lisbon, Vega, 2000 : 66-81.

10. O. da Cunha RIBEIRO, *Originalidade da expansão portuguesa*, Lisbon, Sociedade de geografia, 1956. [republished Lisbon, Edições João Sá da Costa, 1994]

a Portuguese tropicalist theory of colonization of Timor became permanent in the works of António de Almeida who, based on an assumed position of ethnocentrism, understood the Portuguese presence in Timor as an enraptured act of civilisation. To prove his ideas, he referred to the importance of the mixing of races and, from the 1960's, the access of the Timorese to secondary school education and to administrative posts, as well as the opening of opportunities for the Timorese to study in Portuguese universities. Although Almeida's research was responsible for the exaggerated identification of 31 ethno-linguistic groups in East Timor, his interpretations did not contemplate cultural diversity and got lost in exalting « *Luso-tropicalismo* » and « Portuguese civilisation »¹¹.

Lineage and Space, Kinship and Territoriality

History has not in any way focused the singularity of East Timor¹². The singularity of the social, cultural, anthropological and symbolic aspects were not contemplated in an understanding of Timorese reality. It is necessary to speak of the cultures, societies and even the peoples of Timor. Between the 9th and the 13th centuries, these peoples established a « stable » model of society based on lineage¹³. According to unilineal rules, parental organisation was strongly patrilineal, represented by exogamous marriage, in general forbidding marriage between direct relatives with consanguinity and between brothers and uncles and nephews. The brides were chosen outside the *suco* (a group of villages), thus creating relationships between two villages, the husband's (*Fetosá*) village and the wife's (*Umane*). The men of the *fetosá* village could continue to marry women from the *umane* village, but the opposite was forbidden. At the same time, norms of social and familial circulation were established : the son of a *liurai* (a local king) could only marry the daughter of another *liurai* or of a *dato* (local nobility). Polygamy was common among these elitist sectors and was even encouraged by the first wife who became the prime female figure within the domestic unit.

The system of inheritance was marked by the existence of corporate descendants, exaggerating the stability of land use and property associated with the relatively high population densities. It was a model of undivided inheritance, in which the possessions were inherited by the next generation, to be administered by the eldest man of the family, who was often an uncle-brother of the father and supported the whole family. When there was a partitioning of inheritance, only the men of the family had rights, according to claims of birthright and age. However, position status could only be inherited by men of the noble lineages. This specialisation in terms of social

11. A. ALMEIDA, *O Oriente de expressão portuguesa*, Lisbon, Fundação Oriente, 1994 ; cf. M.E. de Castro e ALMAEIDA, *Estudo serológico dos grupos etnolinguísticos de Timor-Díli*, Lisbon, Instituto de investigação científica tropical, 1982.

12. I. Carneiro de SOUSA, « Mercantilismo, Reformas e Sociedade em Timor no Século XVIII », *Revista da Faculdade de Letras - série História* (Porto), 1997.

13. I. Carneiro de SOUSA, *Timor Leste... op. cit.* : 11-15.

stratification may explain the establishment of the social, cultural and symbolical predominance of a parenthood system based on patrilineal lineage. Therefore, in Timorese society, this rigid social stratification forced the groom's family to pay a dowry to the bride's family in order to « release » her to live in a virilocal model. Husbands from poor families who could not afford to pay the dowry would live in an uxorilocal model, often in a position of social inferiority and marginal social status, thus specialising the social distinction between « noblemen » and « non-noblemen ». This social and symbolical transaction was usually designated in Tetum as *barlaki* and constitutes an important example of Mauss' idea of *don* or « gift », i.e., an idea of social communication, alliance and domination through marriage and dowry, as well as establishing forms of social contribution.

In any case, the normative ideal of virilocal residence was not always accomplished, either because the dowry agreed upon during *barlaki* negotiation, was not paid, or because the woman and her lineage possessed significant property, which they wished to preserve within the same lineage. Consequently, in the decisions made about post-matrimonial residence and the children's filiation to one or the other kinsmen, a strong tendency to ambivalence resulted in relation to common social practices, leading to situations in which the same, related ethnic groups could present both patrilineal and matrilineal tendencies whenever the demographic pressure rose. There were, certainly, some important social models, but their transgression was possible and tended to deepen social mobility. Portuguese colonization naturally accelerated these processes of mobility, through the introduction of new social groups, such as the *topázios* (or « black Portuguese »), and also a diversity of social, cultural, religious and other values. In any case, the institution of *barlaki*, with its imposition of social alliances and negotiation, was clearly fundamental in the structuring of lineages and territories. The *barlaki* was, in many cases, drawn-out, specialised and symbolically complex. The dowry negotiations not only covered lands and animals, specially buffalo, but also led to the display of pieces and instruments of prestige, from traditional clothes (*tais*) to swords (*surik*) of great quality and refined workmanship. Feasts and private reunions, accompanied by specific cultural practices, from communal songs to feasting, marked the meetings between the members of the same lineage and, afterwards, the other meeting-negotiation with the other lineage. In many cases, the lineages of Timor individualised patrimonial domination, presenting alliances between territorial communities and independent villages, or lineage alliances based on significant territorial units, water courses, mountains, coastal areas, lands with an abundance of agricultural resources, or communication axes. Lineage and appropriation of space, or in other words, kinship and territoriality are fundamental factors in the traditional social organisation of the peoples of Timor.

Colonial Recognition of Traditional Powers

Among the various principles of social organisation that the traditional Timorese societies came to specialise, the main one is based on the primacy of the descendants of the group which founded an agrarian establishment and first occupied, cleared and worked the land, thus preserving an elevated status. The chiefs are frequently those who can clearly trace the descendants of an ancestor of a lineage or tribe, although the social hierarchy is, in some cases, open to individual skill and manipulation through opulence, as is shown by the close relationship between feasts and power. The social hierarchy may, of course, be inherited or acquired. The dominant, founding lineages appropriate the secular and religious positions; they have a word in community affairs, detain the right to present food, intervene in the distribution of work and control the decisions relative to land use in the territorial group. Their social power is expressed through objects of prestige: ceramics, antique necklaces, megalithic monuments, fine arms, and drums. Their prestige is also expressed through success in agriculture and particularly through the accumulation of livestock, chiefly pigs, and products that can be used in the common feasts. Powerful lineages tend to reinforce their position through marriage with other neighbouring lineages, which generally allows the « nobles » to be distinguished from other social groups and to expand alliances of dominion. In this field, it is once again the dowry which functions within the social organisation as a factor of social hierarchisation and distinction, reinforcing the tendency to elitist endogamy and preventing powerful lineages from increasing their power, whenever it obliges men incapable of proceeding with its payment to reside uxorilocally.

One could think that in this manner a lineage would be able to reinforce and structure its power indefinitely. Genealogical filiations are complex, subject to the manipulation of oral genealogies, dependent on opulence and prestige, and whenever a lineage chief shows a tendency to increase power in an « unpopular » manner, revolts and conflicts break out with great frequency. A State could not develop based on a traditional micro-scale, unless the emergent leaders came to monopolise power and converted the network of economic, social and military alliances into a centripetal structure around a charismatic power. This did not happen in the Austronesian world before the period of Indianisation between the 5th-10th centuries and, in the case of Timor, we rarely find permanent indications of territorial, supra-local states before the 18th-19th centuries, when the construction of the State starts to constitute an investment continuously dominated by Portuguese colonization, both through its captaincies, race-mixing or missionary work, and also with alliances and vassalage of the traditional territorial powers¹⁴.

It is preferable, therefore, to emphasise, in the pre-colonial and traditional history of Timor, the importance of patrimonial domination. The social groups depend upon the permanent proprietors and the more general

14. A. de CASTRO, *As possessões portuguesas na Oceania*, Lisbon, Imprensa Nacional, 1987.

social separation between nobles and commoners becomes more evident and is resumed in the distinction of lineage. In this way, the *liurai* – ruler or territorial chief – represents the reigning lineage, but also tends to appropriate important patrimonial domains. A significant part of the agrarian patrimony also resides in the *dato*, the nobility that ranks above the *atan*, constituted by workers and servants... The structuring of political power is thus dispersed among the territorial chiefs (*lurahan*) and village chiefs (*leo*) who are recruited in the superior lineages, frequently descendants of the founders, and who supervise work and festivals. This power is further reinforced and maintained thanks to the endogamy of the higher lineage, which tends to specialise societies of « noblemen », workers and slaves, either captive or in debt. It is possible that this hierarchisation and its tributary, almost feudal, support, was intensified by Portuguese colonization, which sought to systematically convert the noble groups and, in this way, guarantee colonial domination.

The traditional social world has been poorly studied. With one exception: a Portuguese forestry engineer, poet and design teacher, enraptured with Timor and its peoples, sought to understand the traditional Timorese societies. In two fundamental works, *Motivos Artísticos Timorenses e a sua integração*¹⁵ (« Timorese Artistic Motifs and their Integration ») and, especially, in *Arquitetura Timorense*¹⁶ (« Timorese Architecture »), Ruy Cinatti identified the diversity and complexity of Timorese culture, investing it with proper dignity. Although not a professional anthropologist, Cinatti greatly contributed towards the development of cultural studies on Timor and introduced important indicators for future studies, which were not, unfortunately, pursued owing to the political situation of the last two decades. Significantly, despite working in Timor in the same periods, António de Almeida and Ruy Cinatti did not cross paths. They were often polemical, though. Almeida developed an anthropology which had the interests of colonization in mind, while Cinatti focused on a cultural diversity which had not been configured by any notions of Portuguese tropicality¹⁷.

The long history of Portuguese colonialism in Timor is based on the recognition of traditional powers and on seeking unification, through cross and sword, of the territory's social culture of elitism. The Portuguese (indirectly) « ruled » with the support and the configuration of traditional lineage powers within the societies of Timor's peoples. To govern Timor in the name of the Portuguese crown, through the « governance » of the traditional Timorese powers themselves, thus admitting the coexistence of a social, religious and juridical Portuguese system with a consuetudinary culture of the traditional Timorese social world. However, those who converted to Catholicism were forced to accept another juridical system. In 1769, when the colonial administration was established in Dili, this system

15. R. CINATTI, *Motivos artísticos timorenses e a sua integração*, Lisbon, Instituto de investigação científica tropical, 1987.

16. R. CINATTI, *Arquitetura timorense*, Lisbon, Instituto de investigação científica tropical, 1987.

17. P. STILWELL, *A Condição Humana em Ruy Cinatti*, Lisbon, Presença, 1995.

worked. It would work for a very long time. At the same time, almost paradoxically, it would consolidate colonization and preserve a certain memory and reality of the traditional world of the peoples of Timor. Because of this, at the beginning of the 20th century, through the Decree of 17th July 1909, the Portuguese central government continued to recognise, as it had almost always done since the 1500's, the juridical system of local kingdoms, in this case seventy-seven, distributed throughout eleven boroughs. Even the designation of *Lurahan* (kingdom) was accepted as corresponding to a borough district, governed by a *liurai* with the patent of colonel ; it was established that a *suku* (« suco ») was formed by a group of villages (*lissa*), governed by a *dato* with the patent of major ; and finally, a *leo* was defined as a village that could be equivalent to a parish, governed by a *dato*, with the rank of captain. The intention of these official regimental efforts was to take advantage and configure traditional Timorese society, something which was further achieved with the development of a group of *mestizos* with increasing social and cultural weight. In all rigour, it was not a process of miscegenation. It is well-known that the production of a Euro-Asiatic social group was officially encouraged from the beginning of the 16th century and, despite criticism from the Church, invaded both the so-called State of India, and also that shadow-empire that merchants, adventurers and soldiers developed far from the official control of the Portuguese. It also became a power strategy for the local oligarchies and patriciates who found force in mixing support and discrimination in relation to the subaltern social groups. So it was in Timor.

Odd Colonial Army, Odd Catholic Church

The scientific literature available on the different European colonialisms (predominantly dealing with African themes...) usually identify the European armies and Churches as exclusive factors of colonization and colonial oppression. This is not the case in Timor. « Paradoxically », the « Portuguese » army and the Catholic Church also became factors of both local cultural identity and the development of « national » claims. This situation has been well-documented since the beginning of the 1960's. Doing military service in Timor meant getting away from the colonial war in Africa. However, military service implied two years, too long for the sons of peasants from the rural villages or for the sons of the city workers. Family-sons from the middle and upper-middle bourgeoisie of the urban centres, frequently from powerful families, some opposing the regime and on the verge of possible desertion, came to « Portuguese Timor » to do their military service and enjoy the delights of a calm, peaceful tropical paradise, apparently given up to the paternal Portuguese presence. Many brought their wives and, sometimes, the whole family nucleus. They mobilised an important labour market, mainly domestic, which socially animated the urban centres, especially Dili. The armed forces bulletin, *Revista do Comando Autónomo Provincial* actually became one of the first spaces to embrace pre-

nationalist ideas. Some of its issues gave voice to the Timorese who, based on ethnography or on curiosities, on localism or on criticism, started to write the first texts with nationalist sentiment. Benefiting from equipment, structures and resources, and often promoting the Timorese' first employment, the army mobilised the territory both socially and culturally. Even artistic caravans were created, animating many settlements and communities throughout Timor, mainly with musical shows. Thus, the army contributed to the development of sociability between groups and territories, from the recreational to the political, as well as encouraging sports activities. Many « mestizos » enlisted and served in the Portuguese army, before founding the national and independentist parties in 1974-1975 founded and some of them are still the main leaders of the Timorese political parties, from Fretilin to ASDT.

Apart from the army, there is also the Catholic Church¹⁸. At the end of the Portuguese colonial period, Catholics represented less than a third of the population, but today, a large majority (90 %) of Timorese are Catholic. The Church represented, together with the armed resistance, the main institution of political and social resistance and was a counterpoint to the attempts at cultural assimilation by Indonesia. It is often forgotten that when Indonesia invaded the territory of Portuguese Timor in December 1975, the Church was practically the only organised institution. The colonial administration, army and government had all but disappeared, while the Church was maintained with its equipment, personnel, areas and buildings, saints and cults... It had cultivated continued relations with Portugal and Macao, relations which persisted after the invasion. It also had a proper discourse and language, marked by a sense of mission and pastoralism, which set it apart from the Indonesian colonizing projects. A language that, apart from Portuguese, continuously promoted Tetum as lingua franca and liturgical instrument.

From Nationalism to Nation ?

Timorese nationalism is a process. It combines different contributions, from the parties to the freedom fighters, from the Church to the local communities, from the Diaspora to the discourses of the different solidarities, which many times came to configure pluralist history and culture into simple identifying ideas such as these reductive oppositions between Timorese Catholicism and Indonesian « Islam » or the radical cultural identity of East-Timor confronted with the cultures and populations of Eastern Indonesia marked by the same anthropological structures and cultural productions. In these considerations, the idea of nationalism prevails as an essence and not a process. What happens in East-Timor is a long process of production of identifying structures. A process that also includes the contribution of Portuguese colonization, which

18. J.F. BOAVIDA, *The fusion of Religion and Nationalism in East Timor : a Culture in the Making*, Oxford, J.F.B., 1993 (M. Phil. Thesis presented to the University of Oxford).

introduced the currency or the fortress, the language and new religions that aided the configuration of the local elite and thought. It is also a contribution of the things which Portuguese colonization persecuted and repressed: political and partisan parties, movements and organisations. The production of national identifying structures also involves the resistance, the Diaspora, the regional and international insertion of East-Timor, and is at the same time a political, social, cultural and symbolic process. Symbols like the term East-Timor or, for example, the personification of the political situation in the figure of Xanana Gusmão, concur to create important, general, identifying ideals. At the same time, the recent elections for the Constituent Assembly help us to understand the time and mode in which long-term anthropological and sociological structures are associated with the more « recent » nationalist resistance: more than programmes, progressive economic or social ideas, it was the memory of the resistance and its figures and combatants which guaranteed the expressive majority of votes obtained by the Fretilin and the other two parties linked with the resistance, the ASDT (Associação Social Democrata de Timor) and PD (Partido Democrático).

Relating again the present with the independentist movement of 1975, poorly studied and less well understood¹⁹, we discover general and diffuse nationalism, popular in nature and which mobilises the poor in the fields and the cities, assuming an almost sacred dimension of liberation. Perhaps, for this reason, even the leaders of the left-wing independentist parties continue to assiduously attend local churches and their associations and confraternities, in the same way as many, even those recently returned from long exile, are in many cases obliged to marry again, complying with the *barlakis* and alliances that the local communities and traditional families, normally extensive and communitarian, demand be celebrated. Dysfunctions between modernity and tradition, field and city or between a dominant rural economy and the invasion of a strange « globalisation » brought by the thousands of United Nations and NGO officials, are already contradictory social and cultural phenomena absolutely present in Timorese society. For now, an idea of liberation, independence and national construction attracts immense expectations and unites almost all political parties, religious and civilian institutions. This unity is not, however, eternal and will be fragmented when confronted with the enormous challenges of the reconstruction of a devastated, extremely poor country, in which the abundance of resources, from the oil of the Timor Sea to the agricultural generosity of the soils, do not conveniently feed the populations, eradicate disease and organise a society. Sanctified, almost blessed, Timorese society is increasingly more plural, in all senses, from the sociological to the political, in spite of this temporary unity dictated by a common resistance and a dominant desire for independence.

19. L.F. Ferreira TOMAS, *O problema político de Timor*, Braga, Editora Pax, 1975.

It is more difficult to discuss the problem of Timorese nationalism without considering this process of resistance²⁰, in which different factors intersect, stretching from the representation of Portuguese colonialism to the armed resistance, the incorporation of new political ideas and the generalised attachment felt by rural populations in relation to the old forms of social ancestral structures and of patriarchal power. In the strictest sense, it should be noted that the difficulty is fundamentally ours, used as we are to associating the idea of nationalism to a very European construction of nation-states, a consequence of evident national ideals. This is not the moment to discuss the fragmentation of these linear ideas in the very heart of Europe, but it is worth noting and accepting that national constructions are essentially processes which mobilise the most diverse weapons available, from the symbolic to the political, including processes of resistance. The latter's prolonged reproduction generates modalities of active and aggregative nationalisms around crucial elements for the construction of a nation: proper cultural identity (religious, traditional, communitarian...) and national political mobilisation around a representation of the idea of an Independent State, like the churches or guerrilla movements, the highly disseminated confraternities of the « Sacred Family » or the generalised belief in the charismatic paternal power of the great figures of the resistance, alive or dead, which can liberate, shelter and feed a population seeking to edify an independent national political community. It was precisely because of this that Indonesian political dominion, quite apart from its illegal character invoked in the international forums, was not able to integrate this community into another complex national space, with different symbolic and political values.

It was also not able to multiply the security, shelter and economic satisfaction with which the representation of a nation is transformed into a national State. But a fundamental challenge persists: to know how to elevate a national identity that preserves and promotes cultural diversity, assuming clearly that diversity, is a factor of identity and national dignity.

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[Les sous-titres sont de la rédaction].

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