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# *Asia Pacific Perspectives*

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**Center for the Pacific Rim**

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### **Editor's Introduction**

We are pleased to introduce the summer 2013 issue of *Asia Pacific Perspectives*. This issue brings together the voices of scholars from Canada, Australia, Britain, and Japan as it considers the interaction between the international and the local in East Asia today.

The first two articles examine the issue of human rights from different perspectives. **David Webster** looks at the struggle for independence in Timor-Leste in terms of local agency. He argues that a regional actor successfully appealed to the international community for support by using human rights norms as a leverage issue. **Silvia Croydon** analyzes the development of a concerted regional approach to the question of human rights in East and Southeast Asia. She finds that there are many challenges to the creation of a regional approach, but that progress is being made.

Looking at the recent tension surrounding maritime disputes in East Asia, **Mike Chia-Yu Huang** asks what drives China's increasingly "assertive" foreign policy. He argues that the number of actors in decision-making has led to inconsistent policy, and that this causes tension between domestic factions, neighboring states, and global powers. **Felicity Greenland** also addresses the conflict between local experiences and international norms, using research on traditional folk songs. She describes a rich and established cultural history of whaling in Japan, a legacy put under pressure by current global environmental concerns.

Finally, with this issue, *Asia Pacific Perspectives* introduces a new type of article, one we are calling "Think Piece." This new series will allow contributors to respond to current events and big ideas in the Asia-Pacific region in a shorter, more informal style that integrates personal opinion informed by scholarship and the author's expertise. We hope you will find value in our first "Think Piece" by **Pablo Figueroa** on the Fukushima nuclear-reactor situation in Japan.

Dayna Barnes, Managing Editor

John Nelson, Editor

## Languages of Human Rights in Timor-Leste

David Webster, *Bishop's University*<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the historical process by which Timorese embraced the language of human rights, and their transnational support networks as diffusion belts for "rights talk." It argues for a two-way understanding of rights diffusion, suggesting that Timorese framing of rights have contributed to a global shift towards a wider understanding of human rights as more than simply civil liberties in the Western tradition. Human rights, in other words, is a language that has served the Timorese independence cause, and in turn informed that cause.

**KEYWORDS:** *Timor-Leste, East Timor, human rights, Fretilin, National Council of Maubere Resistance, transnational social movements.*

Twenty years after the South Korean military regime gunned down pro-democracy protesters in the city of Kwangju, Timorese Catholic Bishop Carlos Ximenes Belo addressed a gathering in turn-of-the millennium, post-dictatorship Kwangju. Drawing parallels between the struggles of the Korean and Timorese peoples, he stressed the role of open information, of breaking silences. "It is a simple fact," he argued, "that when people have full access to information, they are in a position to not only make intelligent decisions, but also to act on behalf of their distant brothers and sisters around the world who are in need of help." What lever could move powerful governments? Belo's answer was that "civic organizations and individuals of good will around the world, acting in solidarity with the people of East Timor and Korea and other places, can have a huge impact on the way events transpire" (Belo, 2000).<sup>2</sup>

Belo's point underlines a major point in the Timorese experience: the centrality of human rights and the relevance of non-state transnational activist networks, to use Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink's (1998) term. Timor-Leste (East Timor) was invaded and occupied by Indonesia from 1975 to 1999. It then achieved its independence as the result of a transnational campaign waged in alliance with solidarity groups overseas. The Timorese independence movement fought a battle on the terrain of human rights, against an Indonesian military regime that denied the universality of rights. In fighting that battle, Timorese activists embraced the language of rights and made it central to their emerging national identity. They also affected the way their overseas supporters talked about rights, with more space made for "solidarity rights" (about which, more below), in addition to the emphasis traditionally placed by these groups on civil liberties and freedom from torture and other forms of oppression (the distinction between human rights and civil liberties follows Clément, 2008).

<sup>1</sup> This paper draws on material in David Webster, 2003. Further research was possible with assistance from a Kiriyama post-doctoral research fellowship at the University of San Francisco in 2008-09 and with the assistance of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

<sup>2</sup> While retaining the term East Timor in places, this essay follows current Timorese practice in preferring the Portuguese-language name, Timor-Leste.

Is the rhetoric of universal human rights a new imperialist discourse, rooted in the powerful West, as scholars such as Michael Aung-Thwin (2001-02) argue? Or does it offer liberating possibilities to movements rooted in the global South? The Timorese case points to the way a powerless movement used the language of human rights as a “weapon of the weak” and ultimately prevailed through this language (Scott, 1985). Timorese activists then incorporated human rights into their emergent identity. Timor-Leste emerged in the course of the struggle against Indonesian rule as a “notion-state” – not yet a nation on the ground, but one that was forming in the minds of its people. The language of human rights was part of this process; it also shaped the process. Early solidarity rights, such as the right to self-determination and development, were advanced from the global South and have transformed global understanding of the scope of rights. More recent solidarity rights can be said to include the right to water, to a clean environment, and to peace. Among these is a claimed right to indigenous cultural survival, driven by what some call the “Fourth World” of indigenous peoples. Timorese campaigning drew on earlier human rights and solidarity rights claims, and also played a role in advancing newer, Fourth World-inspired solidarity rights.

Timor-Leste is half an island located off the northern coast of Australia, amidst the Indonesian archipelago. It was for many years a Portuguese colony where neglect combined with periodic harsh efforts to exploit, and where co-operation and resistance to Portuguese rule were both present (for a history of Timor-Leste, see Gunn, 1999a; Dunn, 2003; Jolliffe, 1978; Taylor, 1999). The rise of independence movements in Portugal’s African colonies put the last major colonial power on the defensive until its dictatorship fell in 1974, the result partly of strains from three colonial wars in Africa. This opening saw the creation of Timorese political parties, of which two were able to win substantial support: the Timorese Democratic Union (UDT) and the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (Fretilin). After UDT, a party led by Timorese elites, opted for a policy of continued links to Portugal, Fretilin formed to demand immediate independence, with a declaration signed by Francisco Xavier do Amaral but actually penned by young activists Mari Alkatiri and José Ramos Horta, both key political figures ever since (Ramos Horta, 1987; Nygaard-Christensen, 2012, pp. 493-8).

In 1975 UDT staged a coup attempt; Fretilin fought back and won. The short civil war of August 1975 saw Portuguese administrators depart, never to return. Fretilin eventually declared an independent Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste on November 28. Indonesian forces launched a full-scale invasion on December 7, re-colonizing the territory. The ensuing military occupation was a human rights catastrophe, with effects ranging from massacres and torture, to state-engineered famine, to displacement of indigenous peoples from their land. The Indonesian army ran the territory declared to be Indonesia’s 27<sup>th</sup> province until 1999.

Timorese nationalists continued to fight. They opted at first to model themselves after “Third World” liberation movements. Over time, their movement reinvented itself using the language of human rights to propose a new national identity as a rights-respecting culture. The process saw Timorese forge alliances with other peoples seen as indigenous, using a new language of rights and indigeneity that was both instrumental and foundational to shifts in identity. A struggle took place on the ground in Timor-Leste and for international opinion, with this

latter possible because Ramos Horta and Alkatiri, among others, were outside Timor-Leste and able to carry on the fight through diplomatic means. Pressure mounted upon the Indonesian government. In 1999, the United Nations was able to organize a referendum, in which near-universal turnout saw a massive vote for independence. Despite a wave of violence unleashed by the Indonesian army, international pressure forced Indonesia to accept a UN peacekeeping presence and interim administration, which oversaw the restoration of an independent Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste in 2002. It was the first new state of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Independent Timor-Leste has made human rights central to its identity claims.

There was not simply a one-way diffusion of “rights talk” from North to South (Ignatieff 2000; Foot 2000). Solidarity groups in Northern countries, church-based networks and other channels also began to embrace the “rights talk” generated by Timorese activists in the course of their own struggles. In this sense there has also been, through transnational movements, a diffusion of newer ideas of solidarity rights from South to North. Timorese independence movements embraced the language of human rights, but they were not simply passive recipients of ideas of rights generated elsewhere. They were also active participants in reshaping global understandings of the meaning of human rights.

This paper examines the historical process by which Timorese independence movements embraced the language of human rights, and their transnational support networks as diffusion belts for “rights talk.” It argues for a two-way understanding of rights diffusion, suggesting that Timorese framing of rights have contributed to a global shift towards a wider understanding of human rights as more than simply civil liberties in the Western tradition. Human rights, in other words, is a language that has served the Timorese independence cause, and in turn informed that cause.

### ***Timor-Leste: Liberation Movement Prototypes***

Timorese nationalists were not sailing into uncharted waters in 1974: they had a vast range of previous independence movement examples to draw upon. They opted for a prototype that seemed to fit well in the “global 1970s”: the Third World national liberation movement. This model was launched for instance in the Vietnamese and Indonesian revolutions in 1945. The latest wave by the 1970s was African movements against Portuguese or white-minority rule in Africa. Two factors made the national liberation movement model especially compelling to Timorese nationalists, both of them international. First, it offered access to United Nations system, which had opened the door to liberation movements including the Palestine Liberation Organization, African National Congress, South West Africa People’s Organization, and others. Second, the language of liberation movements was Portuguese as much as any other. To Timorese whose mental maps centred on the “lusophone world” of the Portuguese empire, there was great appeal in the example of Mozambique and Angola, the writings of Guinea-Bissau nationalist leader Amilcar Cabral on revolution and Brazilian writer Paulo Freire on popular education and empowerment.

Third World national liberation movements used military force, but they had no illusions, in most cases, that they could defeat European colonial powers on the battlefield alone and unaided. Self-reliance was for the future; winning inde-

pendence would need international solidarity. Therefore, independence struggles would have to be waged on both the domestic and international levels. After Indonesian nationalists declared their country's independence in 1945, for instance, they took an explicit decision to combine *perjuangan* (struggle) with *diplomasi* (to use the Indonesian spelling). So too did the Vietnamese independence movement and later the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam. This became standard practice for the national liberation movements that followed.

From Timor-Leste, Fretilin would walk that path as well. As its name suggests, Fretilin was formed in the image of the Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo). Frelimo developed the synthesis of struggle and diplomacy to new heights. In founding president Eduardo Mondlane's words: "Our struggle, apart from being a just struggle located in Mozambique, is at the same time an international struggle" (Frelimo communiqué, 1974, cited in Venter, 1975, p. 387). Crucially, Frelimo asserted a status as the "sole representative of the Mozambican people," the one over-arching liberation movement for Mozambique. It won that recognition first from the independence movements in the other Portuguese African colonies, then at the Organization for African Unity, and finally at the UN. The diplomatic struggle imposed a need for internal unity in order to sustain the "sole representative" claim, vital to maintain international support. The character of its supporters, from the USSR to China to Tanzania, helped shape the character of Frelimo as a Marxist-inspired party and remove any calls for a multi-party independence movement. In other words, international imperatives shaped the character of Mozambique's independence movement – and thus of emergent Mozambican identity.

Portugal was a Cold War ally of the United States and Western Europe, a reliable member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and a valued strategic partner. Thus NATO governments were reluctant to push its dictatorship too hard on decolonization issues. Frelimo therefore looked for support to Western civil society: churches, trade unions, and a dedicated solidarity movement of committees formed to oppose Portuguese colonialism. Frelimo's ideology was very much "Third Worldist." That is, it stood on the left, but looked not to Soviet examples but to a wider "Third World project" of liberation, a project that was inherently global in nature (on the "Third World project," see Prashad, 2007).

Fretilin embraced this inherited model, which seemed to signal the path to international success in the 1970s context. Under lobbying by Mari Alkatiri, Frelimo endorsed Fretilin as the "sole representative" of the Timorese people, ignoring other parties such as the UDT. Fretilin in turn reinvented itself from a social democratic party in the Swedish mold, to one that looked to Third World examples and inspiration. Thus its philosophy by 1975 was Third-Worldist nationalism and a commitment to agrarian development and the principles of self-reliance, a good fit with global fashions of the day.

This won some international support, but lost other potential backing, including the goodwill of neighboring Indonesia. From 1945 to 1965, Indonesia under president Sukarno was a Third World pioneer, host of the seminal African-Asian conference held in Bandung in 1955, and a leader in the Non-Aligned Movement. After Sukarno's fall in 1965, a pro-Western modernizing government under General Suharto took power. His government's attitude towards Third

Worldism was ambiguous at best. Indonesia's foreign minister was initially willing to declare that "independence is the right of every nation, with no exception for the people of Timor." But Indonesian attitudes shifted as Fretilin became more and more like the Frelimo model. Indonesian leaders framed the issue not in Third Worldist terms, but in the language of the Cold War. They pointed to communist Vietnam as the major security threat to Indonesia, muttering to Western defence attaches that they feared "another Cuba" on their borders (Adam Malik, 1975, pers. comm. to J. Ramos Horta, June 17; Canadian Embassy Jakarta, 1978). In 1975, Indonesian president Suharto approved an invasion. His job was then to gain the support of major governments to take over what was still Portuguese territory and convince them to back Indonesian efforts to abort a decolonization process. He told U.S. president Gerald Ford: "Indonesia doesn't want to insert herself into Timor self-determination, but the problem is how to manage the self-determination process [so that] a majority want unity with Indonesia" (Simpson, 1975). Ten days after Fretilin leaders declared independence in 1975, Indonesian forces invaded in force.

Fretilin diplomacy, initially attempted in the name of the short-lived Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, attempted to follow the Frelimo model of a classical Third World liberation movement, claiming to speak as "the sole representative of the East Timorese people" and dismissing other parties as "colonial puppets." The United Nations General Assembly called on Indonesian troops to leave East Timor each year from 1975 to 1982, but each year the margin dwindled. Most Western governments initially abstained, then, one by one, they began to vote with Indonesia. The logic of supporting a pro-Western government in resource-rich Indonesia underpinned a feeling that there was no point in supporting a hopeless cause. Thus, president Jimmy Carter's "human rights administration" in the United States concentrated on the treatment of political prisoners arrested when Suharto seized power. State Department reports on human rights in Indonesia concentrated on the prisoners issue. U.S. arms supplies to Indonesia, meanwhile, increased and were used to turn the military tide against Timorese guerrillas through aerial bombing (U.S. House, 1977; Glasius, 1999; Simpson, 2005).

Fretilin had embraced the Third World liberation movement model in response to international factors. It was a "derivative discourse" inspired by foreign models (Chatterjee, 1986). The model however did not work well in the Timorese case. While Fretilin claimed to be the sole representative of the Timorese people and made a claim to the right to self-determination, this was ignored. Among Western governments, only Australia proved willing to endorse Indonesian rule in de jure terms. But all other Western, Asian and Soviet-bloc governments offered de facto acceptance of Indonesian rule. Only some African governments and, for a time, China accepted the liberation-movement claim to a right to self-determination that could actually be realized.

### ***Reinvention: The Language of Human Rights in Timor-Leste***

In the effective and creative use of non-state diplomatic tools, Timor-Leste offered a model of how to use "weapons of the weak" to win a struggle on the terrain of diplomacy that it could never win on the battlefield. This model saw Timorese

nationalists use such advantages as they had to build upon inherited anti-colonial liberation movement models. They forged a sense of Timorese identity and unity based upon shared suffering and shared resistance to Indonesian rule. They drew upon Catholic-inspired themes of redemption through suffering and upon a developing language of universal human rights to build up a transnational solidarity movement. Finally, they used these tools to disrupt the Indonesian government's international support network enough that, when a "window of opportunity" came in 1999, Indonesia's strongest supporters sided against it.

Fretilin's cause overseas had been harmed by two factors: the appearance of disunity, and a blackout on news from Timor-Leste. As a result, Fretilin had to adapt the liberation movement model in ways that changed the identity of the resistance movement inside Timor-Leste. Internally, a Revolutionary Council of National Resistance (renamed the National Council of Maubere Resistance in 1987) was formed under Xanana Gusmão, one of the few Fretilin leaders left alive inside East Timor. In Xanana's words, leftist ideology was to be replaced by "a common feeling – that of national identity" (Niner, 2001, p. 20). The new theme was no longer Fretilin as the "sole representative," but an effort to build coalitions. This was a major step back, taken for tactical reasons. Yet it led to a new theme in Timorese nationalist rhetoric: the unity of the whole nation against Indonesian occupation.

Fretilin also moved to a new "three fronts" strategy aimed at ending the silence imposed by the territory's status as a closed military zone. The first front was the guerrilla resistance, by this point mostly symbolic. The second was diplomatic. Joining them was a "clandestine front" of non-violent young activists in Indonesian-controlled areas. These "estafeta" (messengers) were able to maintain communications between guerrillas and the outside, and to report on the human rights situation. This marked a real breakthrough, linking the military and diplomatic fronts and revitalizing both. In Xanana's oft-repeated slogan, to resist was to win, by demonstrating to the world that struggle went on.

This was a performance on three stages. The guerrillas performed resistance, with the charismatic figure of Xanana, who was replaceable if necessary, in the leading role. The clandestine front made sure their actions were known and supported for a domestic audience. The diplomatic front took the performance to an international audience, shaping it to appeal to each audience. And in turn, the process boomeranged back into Timor-Leste. The diplomatic front could mobilize messages of support from overseas, pass them to clandestine activists, and see them carried back to the guerrillas.

All this required breaking silences. Timor-Leste was closed, with human rights monitors, tourists and even the Red Cross refused entry. Into this came the new flow of information carried by the clandestine front. This inspired the creation of overseas support groups motivated by the reports of human rights violations. Each group then circulated information itself through civil society networks, local and national media, the internet and newsletters like the *Estafeta* (published by the East Timor Action Network/U.S. and named for the clandestine front's messengers). A network of Parliamentarians for East Timor formed in Portugal, Britain, Canada, Japan and other countries. Dedicated East Timor solidarity groups sprung up in several countries, linked in a loose International

Federation for East Timor with offices in Kyoto and New York. Fretilin was isolated among states, but it was gaining new support within international civil society. Each Timor solidarity group made human rights central to their lobbying efforts.

Ever-greater Timorese emphasis on “suffering” mobilized outside support in two ways: through transnational Catholic church movements, and through identification with the rising stress on human rights around the world. Unity and human rights were central. Xanana resigned from Fretilin and announced that the guerrillas were no longer Fretilin’s army, but the forces of the whole people. “Now,” he declared, “my political philosophy is only the liberation of my country” (Domm, 1990, p. 8). With this statement, the language of anti-colonial nationalism fashionable in the 1970s gave way to nationalist language more attuned to the global currents of the 1980s, without dropping the stress on Third Worldist imagery. In Catholic terms – and those were important terms what was by then a majority-Catholic country – Fretilin repented in the 1980s; it purged the elements of disunity that held the nation back from achieving its independence.

Similar flexibility was on display in a series of peace plans advanced in the late 1980s and early 1990s designed to appeal to international political opinion and to show what Ramos Horta, named as Xanana’s chief overseas representative, called “the sense of responsibility, maturity, and moderation of the East Timorese resistance leaders” (Ramos Horta, 1996). Each of these words was coded to appeal to Ramos Horta’s target audience: decision makers in Western capitals. For it was there that power lay. Third Worldism by the 1980s was losing ground. Third Worldist imagery and language were no longer assets, so Ramos Horta and other Timorese diplomats dropped them. None of this surrendered the Timorese claim to independent nationhood. Bishop Belo wrote to the UN Secretary General on February 6, 1989 calling for a referendum. “We are dying as a people and as a nation,” he wrote, taking Timor-Leste’s “nation” status as a given. The letter added a decisive new factor, showing the Timorese church to be on the side of self-determination and instantly making a referendum the top demand of Timorese activists (letter appears in Gunn, 1999b, p. 138; see also Kohen, 1999).

Timor-Leste underwent a profound religious transformation under Indonesian rule. When Indonesia invaded, Catholicism was the religion of Portuguese-speaking elites. This changed under Indonesian military rule, however. In 1975, some Portuguese priests fled, but others – and the Timorese priests – remained with the people and shared their experience. This led to an identification of church and people: some 80% of the Timorese people became Catholics. Xanana insisted in a secret letter to one Timorese priest that the church’s “prophetic mission ... is to support the people in their struggle for liberation” (Gusmão, 1987a). By the 1980s, church leaders who witnessed massive human rights violations had come to agree. Seeing suffering, a highly conservative church was drawn into political involvement. The church became the only national institution free of Indonesian military control, offering a space for dissent, a shield against reprisals and an affirmation of Timorese identity. As Bishop Belo said: “The Catholic faith of the people is a kind of symbol to unite them, it is a way of expressing the fact that they are Timorese” (Canada Asia Working Group, 1993). There were parallels here to the role of the church in other countries, such as the Polish Catholic

church's leadership in resistance to communist rule (Manuel, Reardon & Wilcox, 2006).

Even with a Polish Pope, however, Vatican policymakers felt compelled to balance the needs of the Timorese and Indonesian churches. The Papal nuncio in Jakarta dismissed Bishop Belo's UN letter as personal and unrepresentative of the church; the chair of the Indonesian Conference of Catholic Bishops urged "the wisdom of silence" (Federer, n.d., p. 31; Smythe, 2004, pp. 60-1). Asian bishops sympathized on human rights grounds but preferred silence. The first words of "solidarity" from the Indonesian bishops conference came in 1983, but the bishops cited "Indonesian-style prophetic action" as requiring avoidance of any sort of confrontation or criticism of the government. On the other hand, church support from overseas continued to grow. An international Christian Consultation on Timor-Leste began in 1985. The same year, the (U.S.) National Conference of Catholic Bishops declared: "We need to break down the walls of silence." This picked up on the message carefully and quietly conveyed to them by Timorese church counterparts. As Bishop Belo said in his Kwangju speech: "the vast majority of what took place in silence, and the people suffered the consequences: more than 200,000 East Timorese or one third of our small population, died as a consequence of the Indonesian occupation" (Belo, 2000).

Similar statements came from bishops' conferences in other countries. This was linked to a global awareness-raising campaign on Timor-Leste coordinated by Amnesty International, which also struck notes of bearing witness and breaking silence. Churches, of course, do not dictate policy to their governments, but they seem to have played a significant quiet lobbying role. The example of a Timorese church standing with the people, quietly but firmly, had strong global resonance. Its example diffused to the West and ultimately back even into Indonesian churches.

In international discourse on Timor-Leste, the church-inspired message of human rights and deliverance from suffering began to displace the voice of the guerrilla-inspired language of liberation from colonialism. The message of suffering was also carried increasingly by the clandestine front, which tried to appeal to international opinion through a series of highly visible, non-violent protests, beginning with a visit by Pope John Paul II and culminating in a protest march in 1991 on which Indonesian troops opened fire. This "Santa Cruz massacre" was not unusual, but Indonesian soldiers made a serious mistake: they killed a New Zealand citizen, and beat an American reporter. Most importantly, a British reporter filmed it all. It was no accident that the massacre was filmed: clandestine activists made sure the cameraman was there and then helped him smuggle out the film that was then broadcast around the world. Images of suffering and resistance mingled in the media coverage, as Timor-Leste became for the first time a world news story.

### ***Timor-Leste in Pacific NGO Rights Networks***

The 1990s saw Timor-Leste emerge as a world issue, and as a real issue within Asia for the first time. The Timorese case was tied up with global debates over the meaning and extent of human rights. Timorese nationalists grabbed media spotlights and reinvented the models they had inherited in ways that appealed to

public opinion in the countries that were Indonesia's key backers. Asian backing was vital to Indonesia's ability to control the agenda, since it both provided vital diplomatic solidarity and made it tougher for governments outside the region to oppose. The issue intertwined with the larger question of the universality of human rights, as Indonesia joined Malaysia, China and others in preaching "Asian values" through the 1990s. Timorese voices were prominent among the Asian non-governmental chorus that refused to sing from their governments' "Asian values" song books.

Crucially, Japanese Catholic bishops made their first statement as a group. The Japanese bishops had up to this point tended to avoid strong stances, feeling like Christians in much of Asia that as a vulnerable minority they should not rock the boat. (In other words, "Indonesian style prophetic action" was a pan-Asian phenomenon.) Japanese bishops would acknowledge this later, invoking themes of repentance:

We know enough about the East Timor issue to recognize that we, the people who are part of the "international community," bear much of the blame for the present situation. Today the armed militias believe they can perpetrate violence against the defenseless population with impunity because they have seen how slow the international community has been to condemn the violence perpetrated by the Indonesian military over the past twenty-three years. Our country, Japan, is particularly culpable. Not only did our troops occupy your land during World War Two, but after the invasion by Indonesia, our country continued as the biggest donor of economic assistance to Indonesia, thus enabling, albeit indirectly, Indonesia to carry out its cruel occupation of your land (Catholic Bishops of Japan, 1999).

Rights claims asserted from within Timor-Leste and preached by the Timorese diplomatic front and Timorese priests were being transmitted through the "conveyor belt" of the church-based solidarity movement and causing change in other countries. Bishop Aloysius Soma played an especially important role, speaking at the first Asia Pacific Conference on East Timor in 1994 (a country-specific manifestation of the Asian rights network) of the "long, terrible road of suffering" walked by the Timorese. A settlement, he said, could not be left to governments since they "have as their primary concern selfish goals that they refer to as their 'national interest,' goals which have little to do with justice, peace or love for one's fellow human beings." This assertion of a duty to independent foreign policymaking signaled the increasing influence on the Timor-Leste issue exerted by non-governmental organizations, including transnational church-based networks. At the same meeting, Cardinal Jaime Sin drew parallels with the role of the Philippine church during the years of the Marcos dictatorship. "Our faith tells us that it is Christ who suffers everytime human rights are trampled upon," he wrote in a letter to Bishop Belo (Sin, 1986; Soma & Sin, 1994).

Xanana had pledged allegiance to "complete respect for universal Human Rights" starting in 1987, but up to that time rights had been just one of several melodies in the Timorese liberation song (Gusmão, 1987b). The Santa Cruz massacre solidified human rights as the dominant melody. Timorese diplomats increasingly embraced human rights as part of the identity they promised for their future independent state. Ramos Horta declared that "human rights transcend boundaries and prevail over state sovereignty" (Ramos Horta, 1996, p. 22). Not by chance, this was the precise opposite of the Indonesian government's position on the rights debates of the 1990s. Ramos Horta forged links with Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy in Burma, and with the Tibetan

government-in-exile. He even drafted the independence movement's peace plan while staying in the Dalai Lama's capital at Dharamsala, India.

Timor-Leste also joined the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, an alternative UN for nations without states of their own, making common cause not only with exiled governments of Estonia, Eritrea and so on that now have their own states, but also on the basis of equality with other movements trying to separate from Indonesia and with indigenous peoples from around the world.

Again, this 1990s movement was both responsive to global currents, and a contributing part of a wider shift. Ideas of indigenous cultural survival and indigenous sovereignty were increasingly prominent internationally in the 1990s. Timorese nationalists joined this shift by embracing new languages of indigeneity, but these were not invented from whole cloth. Timorese indigenous cultures had been a major marker of difference from Indonesia for some years. Timorese foregrounding of this aspect was part of a global shift in which more and more was heard of a "Fourth World" that, unlike the Third World, had not yet been decolonized. Timorese diplomats deployed the language of Fourth World indigeneity, without surrendering their great asset of being recognized as a former colony not yet decolonized. This decision also altered the way Timorese identity was expressed at home. No longer was there any talk of the need to nation-build through uniformity – in the words of Frelimo's Eduardo Mondlane, "to die a tribe and be born a nation" (Mondlane, 1983). The new conception of Timorese identity embraced talk of diversity and the struggles of "tribal peoples." This went so far that Canadian photographer Elaine Briere's images of Timorese "hill tribe" women could adorn the cover of *Cultural Survival Quarterly* to illustrate a special issue on the indigenous peoples of Burma. Global indigeneity was being read across borders.

All this built support in the West and Asia, with Timor-Leste holding an honored space in Pacific civil society gatherings. José Ramos Horta especially had a central place in these networks. He was often a speaker at gatherings; Timorese resistance to a leading authoritarian state in the constellation of Asian dictatorships served as an inspiration to activists elsewhere; and many Asian activists took part in Ramos Horta's Diplomacy Training School for marginalized peoples based in Sydney. As the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) annual summits became a focal point for economic integration and growth-centred denials of rights both civil and economic, Timorese activists made the summits a focal point for dissent as well, by occupying the American embassy in Jakarta for the duration of the 1994 APEC summit. Timorese activism was close to pan-regional activism at APEC summits thereafter, and Ramos Horta was the selected keynote speaker for the APEC "people's summit" in Vancouver in 1997.

There are often suggestions that the end of the Cold War in 1991 was the decisive factor in shifting government policies, as Indonesia's importance in strategic terms vanished. That is not backed up by the evidence, which shows soaring aid, trade and investment in Indonesia. The end of the Cold War may have reduced ITS strategic importance, but Indonesia remained a high-growth economy open to foreign investment. The fashionable thinking of the day was that "soft authoritarian" governments were delivering an "economic miracle" in eastern Asia, and that growth would eventually bring about democratization (for example, see Morley, 1993). So, little change was evident in the attitudes towards

Indonesia displayed by major governments. Timorese diplomats still had to use “diplomacy from below,” that is, through solidarity groups pressuring their own governments. Again, this reinforced the centrality of human rights languages in the independence movement, a development that in turn reinforced the centrality of rights in emergent Timorese identity.

A major unintended consequence of the “Asian values” push led by the governments of China, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia was the rise of a network of Asian human rights groups. Civil society organizations were not new to the region, but the “Asian values” assault prompted them to place human rights at the centre of their own languages, and to merge the language of rights with the language of development, environment and international solidarity. The preparatory meetings for the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights included one in each region. With Asia the only continent with no regional rights mechanisms, the Bangkok preparatory conference was expected to be a rallying call for the “Asian values” school, a continent-wide rejection of the universality of human rights, and a defence of cultural relativism. So it was, if government declaration issued in Bangkok is the only document read. Yet an unexpected (though carefully planned) gathering of Asian human rights organizations produced a remarkable counter-declaration that asserted the universality of rights and the importance of broadening understandings of rights to take in solidarity rights. The Bangkok NGO declaration rejected any claim that “Asian values” could over-ride any aspect of the universality of human rights. It also rejected the notion that human rights were Western in origin and should only be understood in a Western sense. Asia, it argued, had much to teach on human rights, not only things to learn. This declaration did much to influence the language and concepts deployed by Western NGO partners across the Pacific. It created a third position in the polarized debate over “Asian values,” rejecting Asian government claims that national sovereignty came first, but also insisting a holistic approach that stressed “solidarity rights.” This rejected the emphasis of civil liberties emphasis used by NATO governments in the period of post-Cold War triumphalism, and it also served as a useful corrective to NGOs in the North. One call, for instance, was on Northern NGOs “to use the democratic space available in their societies to increase public awareness of how Northern control and domination of the international system curbs and curtails the basic rights of people in Asia” (Bangkok NGO Declaration, 1993).

The last phase in the Timorese independence campaign opened in 1996 with the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Belo and Ramos Horta. The Nobel was no surprise – solidarity groups had been pushing for it since 1993, when legislators in Japan and the United States nominated Belo. The Nobel committee’s decision to name Ramos Horta as co-laureate aimed to amplify an outspoken voice in the diplomatic front, in order to complement Belo’s quieter advocacy from inside. The pair had very different styles and operated in very different contexts without much direct contact, but their work was still complementary. Timorese activists saw the Nobel as a validation of the resistance and of its diplomatic strategy.

With the peace prize as a wedge to open doors once closed to him, Ramos Horta was able to turn to diplomacy from above in Western capitals. New diplomatic lines were on display at the UN Commission on Human Rights in 1997. This time, a resolution on Timor-Leste was sponsored by the European Union, Canada, Norway and Iceland as well as the faithful supporters like Mozambique.

Most Asian members stood in opposition, as did former Timor-Leste supporters China, Cuba and Zimbabwe (a group Human Rights Watch dubbed “the abusers club”). This was the logical result of the shift towards the language of human rights, though Western sponsors were careful to point out that they were not advocating self-determination. Making common cause with Tibetans and so on had lost the support of China, but Timorese diplomats were willing to take that risk in order to win the support of Europe and ultimately the United States. Diplomats accustomed to working in partnership with Indonesia lamented the unwelcome influence of public opinion. Canada’s ambassador to Indonesia, for instance, complained bitterly that his government seemed “prepared to have our NGO community dictate our actions” on Timor-Leste (Canadian Embassy Jakarta, 1995). Public opinion made continued support for Indonesia more difficult.

Inroads were even evident inside Indonesia, where Timorese university students began to stage successful bids to win support from within Indonesian civil society by making common cause with the growing pro-democracy movement. The democracy movement in Indonesia did not give universal support to the Timorese cause, but Timor-Leste served as an inspirational example of resistance to the Suharto regime for many Indonesian activists. Indonesian soldiers captured Xanana and put him in an Indonesian jail, but that just gave him access to Indonesian dissidents. Xanana became a bit of a folk hero, his image disseminated on posters like that of Che Guevara. With some success, he was painted as “Timor-Leste’s Nelson Mandela,” a political prisoner with higher moral stature than his captors.

The fall of Suharto in 1998 saw his successor offer a referendum on independence to the Timorese. When they opted overwhelmingly for independence, pro-Indonesia militias unleashed a wave of planned violence. Amidst the violence, the Security Council sent a special delegation to Jakarta, led by Namibia’s UN ambassador Martin Andjaba, a former non-state diplomat for the SWAPO liberation movement who had little time for the dissimulations of the Indonesian military leadership (Martin, 2001, p. 105; Taylor, 1999, pp. xxx-xxxi). September 1999, the month of greatest post-ballot violence, was also the scheduled date for the annual APEC summit. The Asian members of APEC had long resisted any discussion of political issues within the forum, leaving the official APEC agenda entirely focused on economic issues. In the run-up to the 1999 summit in New Zealand, Canadian foreign minister Lloyd Axworthy managed to convince almost all APEC members to attend a sideline meeting on Timor-Leste that discussed possible sanctions on Indonesia. “We have basically taken over the agenda of APEC which is an economic organization to deal with this political security issue,” Axworthy said, adding that “we are not taking no for an answer” from Jakarta (Axworthy, 1999). This marked the defection of Indonesia’s reliable Asian support bloc, and left it isolated internationally.

The 1999 telling of the Timor-Leste story in terms of courageous underdog against regional bully did not spring unformed from nowhere. It was possible because of 24 years of Timorese public diplomacy, which provided the basic ingredients for the tone of 1999 press reports. A decade later, massive Sri Lankan military operations and bombarding of civilians as part of a campaign to wipe out the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam would be plotted very differently, in a far more contested fashion. The new pressures on Indonesia were possible due to the foundation built by Timorese activists and their transnational support

network. Timor-Leste took over the front pages for two weeks in September 1999, all around the world. Ian Martin, who headed the UN mission in Timor-Leste, identifies as important pressures: a “highly effective” non-governmental support movement going “into overdrive” in 1999; the voice of the Catholic church; and “extraordinarily intense” media coverage (Martin, 2001, p. 106).

### ***Human Rights as Identity***

Languages of human rights have spread more generally, of course. It has become common to cast arguments in “rights talk” (Ignatieff, 2000; 2003). Rights mechanisms within the international system are constantly being rejigged. The international human rights regime asserts, in essence, that rights should limit state sovereignty, an argument asserted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in ways that, according to John Humphrey, have made the UDHR part of “customary international law” (Humphrey, 1984, p. 65). Rights were endorsed, or more properly re-endorsed, as “universal and indivisible” at the 1993 Vienna World Conference on Human Rights, and membership on the revamped UN Human Rights Council is theoretically conditional on a government’s human rights record, with all members subject to a Universal Periodic Review of their records by other governments. The change is normative, with the periodic review process pro forma rather than substantive. But words matter. Even purely rhetorical commitments by governments create space that can be used by non-governmental rights groups to press for actual change. An example is provided by the 1970s Helsinki accords in Europe, in which the Soviet bloc made pro-forma promises to respect human rights which were then cited by domestic human rights activists to make rights claims within the USSR and Eastern Europe (Thomas, 1999; Chilton, 1995). Some scholars argue that enmeshing rights-violating states in a web of international norms and commitments can help diffuse the values of human rights. This case has been made most strongly with respect to the People’s Republic of China – no exemplar of either civil-political or economic rights, but, it is argued, one that has improved its performance as a result of integration into global networks (though it may be China that has changed the international regime more than the regime has changed China) (Foot, 2000; Kent, 1999; Ming, 2001). The unspoken assumption is that human rights are to be diffused from North to South, from the more developed European, North American or Australian governments to recipients in Asia, the Middle East, or Latin America.

Diffusion needs to be seen as a two-way process, and it needs to be seen as a partly non-governmental process. Western NGOs, it seems clear, listened to Asian counterparts in the 1990s debates on the meaning of human rights. The embrace of solidarity rights by NGOs in the developed world is an example of South to North diffusion. Southern examples seem to have inspired Northern activists, for example, to take up campaigns for the right to water (for instance, see Barlow & Clarke, 2002). Diffusion of human rights is not a lobster pot that allows movement in one direction only. It is a two-way process, and the Timor-Leste case illustrates this two-way diffusion. Solidarity groups in Northern countries, church-based networks and other channels began to embrace the “rights talk” generated by Timorese activists in the course of their own struggles. In this sense there has also been, through transnational movements, a diffusion of newer ideas of solidarity rights from South to North.

Similarly, rights diffusion travels disproportionately through non-governmental channels. NGO actors in the process of democratization in Taiwan made human rights central to a new Taiwanese national identity. Such organizations as World United Formosans for Independence argued for a declaration of independence from China. They also argued for a democratization of the Republic of China government that ruled the island of Taiwan and claimed to be the rightful ruler of all China. The causes of independence, democratization, human rights, indigenous rights and environmentalism intermingled in the Taiwanese democracy movement. Once the government accepted the need to democratize, human rights became central to the Taiwanese identity, both because of the shape of the democracy struggle and because human rights could stand as a marker of difference from mainland China. Taiwan has seen the value in non-state diplomacy ever since then (Shih, 1999, pp. 144-64; Yang & Tedards, n.d.)

Respect for human rights has also become central to Timorese identity. This process began during the independence struggle, as activists sought to counter Indonesian claims about “territorial integrity” and “Asian values” with claims to the collective right to self-determination as a people, and a rejection of cultural relativism. Timorese diplomats, shortly after independence, were already boasting of their new country’s ratification of all existing UN human rights instruments. This is a claim that cannot be made by most states that don the mantle of human rights promotion and “democracy assistance.” Timor-Leste made headlines in 2011 when it entered the lists against Iran for a seat on the governing board of UN Women. Western media reports framed this as an American and Australian government win over Iran. But this ignored Timorese agency. As Timorese voices confirm, Timor-Leste sought a seat in order to take part in global debates on the rights of women, including by sharing its own experiences.

In other words, Timorese figures saw themselves as able to offer, not just take, lessons on human rights. The Timorese independence struggle demonstrates how the language of human rights took centre stage for a Southern movement. After independence, too, Timorese are using the language of human rights. A universalizing discourse it may well be, but it is also one that can be deployed by social movements rooted in the global South as a prime asset. Human rights languages need not be a club used by strong developed states; they are just as much a weapon of the weak.

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