



THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

E P R E S S

Out of the Ashes: Destruction and Reconstruction of East Timor

Abstract for chapter 1

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‘Tracing the path, recounting the past: historical perspectives on Timor’ places Timor within its regional and historical setting. It is concerned with the entire island, as it is difficult to discuss historically one part of the island without reference to the other part, and indeed the region.

These historical perspectives on Timor take into account its physical setting, ethnic diversity and colonial division. The discussion of the physical aspects of Timor encompasses the climate, the patterns of settlement and the various kinds of agriculture. Ethnic diversity covers traditional politics, languages and social identity, including the emergence of Tetun as a *lingua franca* in East Timor. The discussion of colonial division looks at the 400 years of engagement between the Portuguese and the Dutch.

The resilience of the Timorese, evident throughout their history, is likely to continue to play an important part in the development of East Timor.

Keywords

Agriculture, Atoni, Black Portuguese, Chinese, Dutch, Dutch East India Company, East Timor, Indonesia, Mambai, Portuguese, Sandalwood, Tetun, Timor, Timorese political ideas, Topasses, West Timor

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Tracing the path, recounting the past: historical perspectives on Timor

James J. Fox

The island of Timor, in one of its mythic representations, is described as a half-submerged crocodile, wary and waiting. In another mythic representation, Timor is mother earth itself, accepting, long-suffering, supportive of all who rely upon her. Geologically, Timor has been described as a ‘tectonic chaos’. Linguistically, the island is a babel of languages and dialects. Historically, for centuries, it has been a divided island and a source of continuing dispute. Its local populations have long resisted outside interference and have been fiercely defensive of their different local cultural traditions. From these perspectives, Timor is not one place, but many.

Because of the complexity of its traditions, there have been various attempts to simplify Timor’s diversity. Dividing the island’s population into East and West is one of the most potent of these simplifications. This division makes little sense in understanding the history of the island, the ethnic composition of its population or the interrelationship of its cultural traditions. Moreover, it leaves the enclave of Oecussi, the historical founding site of Timor’s Portuguese traditions, on its own in the West – detached and with little relevance to the rest of East Timor.

To understand East Timor requires a perspective on Timor as a whole. It also requires that careful attention be given to Timor’s distinctive cultural traditions. Thus Suai’s traditions differ from those of Maliana, Maliana from those of Maubara, Maubara from Manatuto and Manatuto from Los Palos. These traditions form the basis of local resilience and are the source of multiple identities.

This brief introduction will focus on East Timor but will adopt an island-wide perspective, considering, in turn, the physical setting of the island, its linguistic and ethnic diversity and its extraordinary history. This account of Timor's history will consider the foundations of the colonial division of the island and the intermittent negotiations that went for decades to arrive at an agreement on the borders between the Portuguese and Dutch. It will also consider some of the effects of this colonial presence on the Timorese population.

On Timor, a narrative that recounts the past is described as 'the tracing of a path'. This, then, is one path toward an understanding of the present.¹

Timor in geological perspective

The island of Timor is itself an extraordinary geological formation which has been formed – and is still being formed – by the forward thrust of the Australian tectonic plate in the direction of the Asian plate. The movement of these massive plates has created and trapped a set of multi-island ridges of which Timor is the most prominent. In the distant geological future, the mountains of Timor, given the enormous pressure that is being brought to bear beneath them, are expected to rise to the heights of the Himalayas.

The dominant soil type on the island is a soft, scaly clay which has been given the Timorese name *Bobonaro*, taken from a region in the centre of the island. This *Bobonaro* clay substratum is overlaid with a jumble of limestone and associated marl derived from the greater Australian land mass and a melange of volcanic materials and scattered outcrops of metamorphic rock piled upon by marine deposits and overlaid yet again by a stratum of raised reefs and corals.

Timor's climate is dominated by brief but intense monsoonal rain – from December through February or March – followed by a prolonged dry season. The south coast of East Timor enjoys a second period of rain which begins, after a short respite from the west monsoon, and extends to July when the dry season begins.

¹ This chapter is, in part, based on a paper, 'The Paradox of Powerlessness: Timor in Historical Perspective' which was originally presented at the Nobel Peace Prize Symposium, *Focus on Timor*, at the University of Oslo (9 December 1996).

Rainwater, trapped in limestone deposits by irregular sheets of clay, often surfaces in a scatter of freshwater springs. Perhaps a third or more of all settlement names on Timor include the word for water – such as *Oe*, *Wai*, *We* or *Be* – indicating a source of fresh water.

Timor's clay soils do not support heavy vegetation. They soak up rain and swell in the wet season; dry, crack and fissure in the dry season. Historically, the Timorese population has carried on shifting agriculture on alluvial and limestone terraces or on the mixed, marine-based soils of ridges, slopes and valleys throughout the mountains of the island, or they have developed more intensive agriculture on various alluvial plains, formed by Timor's main rivers, along the coast.

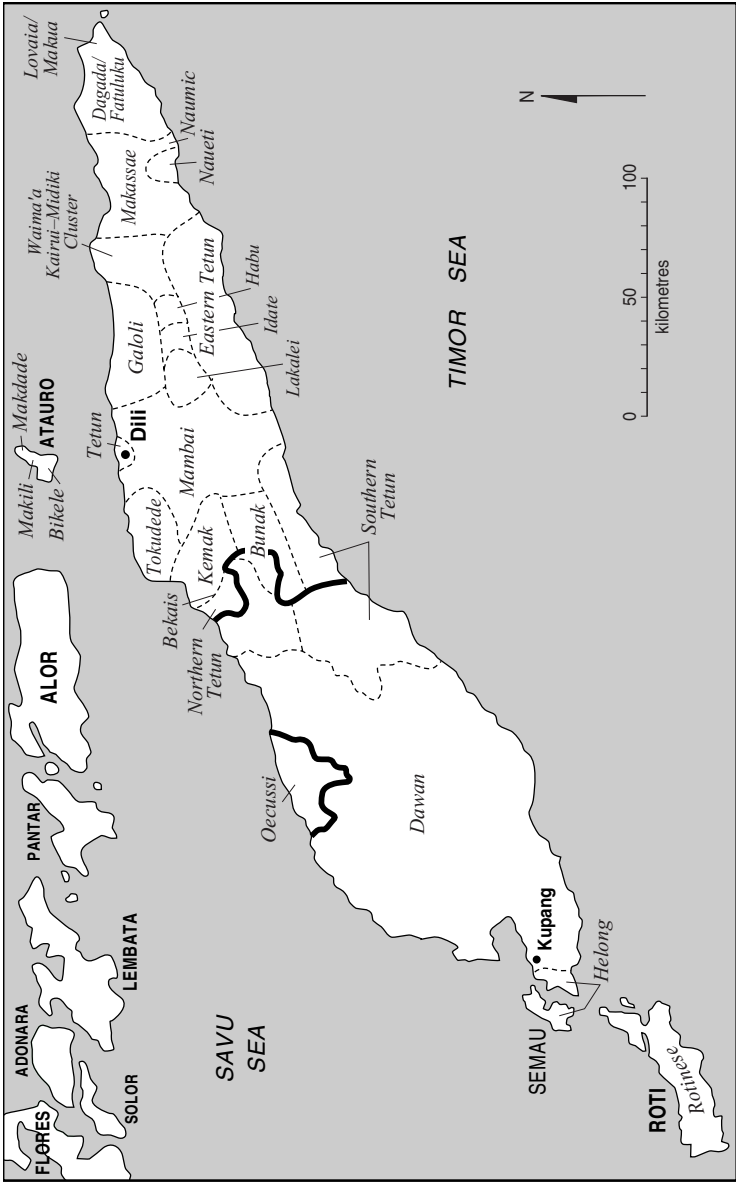
The peopling of Timor: the linguistic evidence

The mix of peoples on Timor is as complex as any other aspect of the island. Prehistorians consider Timor as one of the gateways for the movement of populations to Australia. Given the time-depth of these migrations, the search is on for the equivalent of 'Solo man' in Timor. As yet, however, no human traces of this antiquity have been found in the alluvial riverbeds or caves of Timor.

The first evidence of early agriculture dates back to 3000 BC (Glover 1971). This evidence is generally interpreted as an indication of the initial arrival of early seafaring Austronesian populations into the region. It is from these, and probably from subsequent migrations of Austronesian-language speakers, that the majority of Timor's present languages derive. Glover's research also points to an earlier hunter-gatherer population whose flaked stone tradition he dates to approximately 11 500 BC. Whether this earlier population was assimilated or whether it gave rise to other non-Austronesian-speakers of Timor is still uncertain.

All the languages of Timor belong to one of two major language groupings: the Austronesian language family or the Trans-New Guinea phylum of languages (see Map 1).

The main Austronesian languages of Timor are Uab Meto (the language of the Atoni Pa Meto who are also referred to as Dawan or Vaikenu), Tetun, Mambai, Galoli, Tokudede and Kemak. Other Austronesian languages, about which relatively little is known, are Waima'a (Uaima), Kairui-Midiki, Habu, Idate, Lakalei and Naueti. Some of these languages form contiguous dialect clusters. The Austronesian



Map 1: The languages of East Timor

languages of Timor are closely enough related to one another to form a recognisable subgrouping, which, in turn, shows relationships to the languages on the neighbouring islands of Flores, Solor and Maluku.

The main Trans-New Guinea languages are Bunak, which is spoken on both sides of the border between East and West Timor; Makassae which is spoken in the Baucau district, and Dagada (Fatuluku) which is spoken at the eastern end of the island. There is also another Trans-New Guinea language, Adabe, spoken on the island of Atauro. Even less is known about the subdivisions and dialects of these Trans-New Guinea languages than of East Timor's Austronesian languages. The Trans-New Guinea languages of Timor are related to various languages spoken on the islands of Alor, Pantar and on the tiny island of Kisar. In turn, these languages are related to languages in the Birdhead region (*Vogelkop*) in West Papua. Present linguistic evidence suggests that speakers of these Trans-New Guinea languages arrived on Timor after the initial migration of Austronesian speakers.²

What is clear is that these languages, of two very different origins, have borrowed from and influenced one another over a considerable period of time. Thus Bunak shows considerable borrowings from Tetun, whereas the Austronesian languages, such as Kairui/Midiki and Naueti, have been influenced by neighbouring Trans-New Guinea languages.

One striking feature of the socio-linguistics of Timor is the remarkable contrast between the east and the west halves of the island. Almeida (1982) lists over 30 different languages and dialects in the East compared with only three languages in the West. The Wurm-Hattori *Language Atlas of the Pacific Area* (Wurm and Hattori 1981) which groups dialects, still identifies at least 17 distinct languages in East Timor compared to three main languages – Dawan, Tetun and Helong – in the West. This sociological difference between East and West is, to a large extent, the result of initial Portuguese historical involvement in the western half of

² Professor Stephen Wurm, who was one of the first linguists to recognise the Trans-New Guinea phylum as a major grouping of languages, is a strong supporter of the view that Trans-New Guinea phylum speakers arrived in Timor after Austronesian speakers. In his view, there is evidence in the languages of Timor (and Alor) of linguistic features that developed in the course of the migration of speakers of these languages from the east of New Guinea westward. Other linguists consider that there has been insufficient research on the Trans-New Guinea phylum as a whole and on the Timor-Alor languages in particular to confirm Wurm's bold hypotheses.

Timor, which gave rise to the expansion of the Atoni population. As with much else on Timor, to understand this difference between East and West requires an historical perspective. It is essential therefore to consider the history of Timor over the past 450 years.

Early accounts of Timor

The history of Timor is inextricably tied up with one species of tree, white sandalwood (*Santalum album* L.). This tree once grew, almost as a weed, by root propagation throughout the limestone hills and mountains of Timor. Trade in its precious, fragrant wood may date back centuries before the earliest references. By the fourteenth century, both Chinese and Javanese documents refer to Timor. One such Chinese document reports:

The island has no other rare product but sandalwood which is abundant and which is bartered for with silver, iron, cups [of porcelain], *hsi-yang ssu pu* [a kind of cloth], and coloured taffetas (Rockhill 1915:257–258).

The first European reference to what had become an extensive trade in Timorese sandalwood can be found in *The Book of Duarte Barbosa* written in 1518:

In this island there is abundance of white sanders-wood which ‘the Moors in India and Persia value greatly, where much of it is used. In Malabar, Narsyngua and Cambaya it is esteemed’. The ships ‘of Malaca and Jawa [Java]’ which come hither for it bring in exchange axes, hatchets, knives, swords, Cambaya and Paleacate cloths, porcelain, coloured beads, tin, quick-silver, lead and other wares, and take in cargoes of the aforesaid sanders-wood, honey, wax, slaves and also a certain amount of silver (Dames 1921, 2:195–196).

One of the first European vessels to reach Timor was the *Victoria*, a ship of Magellan’s fleet. The *Victoria* put in on the north coast of Timor on 26 January 1522. In his account of this visit, Antonio Pigafetta explains:

All the sandalwood and wax which is traded by the people of Java and Malacca comes from this place, where we found a junk of Lozzon which had come to trade for sandalwood (1969:141).

The Portuguese were the first Europeans attracted to Timor by this sandalwood trade. It took over 50 years after the Portuguese conquest of Malacca in 1511 to establish a presence in the area. Moreover, the

Portuguese chose to establish themselves to the north of Timor, initially, on the island of Solor. It was there, on Solor, that the Dominican preachers gained their first converts.

In 1561-62, the Dominicans built a palisade of lontar palms to protect local Christians but this was burnt down the year after by Muslim raiders, prompting the Dominicans, in 1566, to erect a more permanent stone fortress on Solor. For its first 20 years, the captain of this fort at Solor was nominated by the Dominican Prior in Malacca. Around this fort there developed a mixed, part-Portuguese population of local Christians, many of whom were themselves involved in the sandalwood trade with Timor.³

The Dominican fort on Solor had a chequered history. Plundered in a local uprising in 1598, the fort fell, after a long siege, to the Dutch in 1613. According to Dutch sources, their forces were able to take the fort because over 500 of its occupants were, at the time, on a sandalwood-trading expedition to Timor.

Instead of sailing for Malacca, the thousand strong population of the fort, later joined by those from Timor, transferred to Larantuka, a harbour on the eastern end of Flores and from there, established themselves at Lifao on the north-west coast of Timor. With their strongholds on both Flores and Timor, this mixed, part-Portuguese population of local islanders resisted all attempts to dislodge them. This population became known as the *Larantuqueiros* or as the *Tupassi* ('Topasses', purportedly from the word for hat, *topi*, because the Topasses regarded themselves '*Gente de Chapeo*': 'People of the Hat') – or, as was common in all Dutch documents, the 'Black Portuguese' (*Swarte Portugeezen*).⁴ In the language of the Atoni Pa Meto population, who had the longest established contact with them on Timor, these Topasses were known as the *Sobe Kase*: 'The Foreign Hats'. (Yet another variant of this designation, among the Rotinese, on the small island at the western tip of Timor, was *Sapeo Nggeor*: 'The Black Hats'.)

These Topasses became the dominant, independent, seafaring, sandalwood-trading power of the region for the next 200 years. They were a multilingual group. Portuguese was their status language which was also used for worship; Malay was their language of trade, and

³ For an interesting account of the history of this fort, see Barnes (1987).

⁴ C.R. Boxer has written a great deal about the activities of these Topasses. His brief study, *The Topasses of Timor* (1947), which relies on both Dutch and Portuguese sources, is a classic study of its kind.

most Topasses spoke, as their mother-tongue, a local language of Flores or Timor.

The British buccaneer, William Dampier, visited Lifao in 1699 and has provided a perceptive description of this mixed, multilingual Topass community:

These [the Topasses] have no Forts, but depend on their Alliance with the Natives: And indeed they are already so mixt, that it is hard to distinguish whether they are *Portugueze* or *Indians*. Their Language is Portugueze; and the religion they have, is Romish. They seem in Words to acknowledge the King of Portugal for their Sovereign; yet they will not accept any Officers sent by him. They speak indifferently the Malayan and their own native Languages, as well as Portugueze (1703, reprinted 1939:171–172).

Neither the Dutch nor the Portuguese who were loyal to the Viceroy of Goa were able to exert any substantial control over them. On Timor, there were times when the interests of the Portuguese Viceroy and those of the leaders of the Black Portuguese coincided. Just as often, however, the Black Portuguese opposed both the Portuguese Viceroy and the Dutch East India Company with whom they also carried on trade. However often the Viceroy's delegates were rejected, Portuguese friars were always welcomed on Timor and moved freely throughout the island.

The establishment of the Portuguese and Dutch on Timor

While Larantuka remained firmly in Portuguese control, the disputed fort on Solor, known as Fort Henricus to the Dutch, changed hands several times during the first half of the seventeenth century. At one stage, in 1629, the Dutch commander of the fort, Jan de Hornay, deserted to Larantuka where he married a local girl, converted to Catholicism and became known thereafter as João de Hornay. (De Hornay's desertion allowed the Dominicans to retake the fort at Solor in 1630 and hold it until 1636.)

João de Hornay, through his sons, Antonio and Francisco, gave rise to one of the dynasties that provided the leadership to the Black Portuguese community on Timor. The other dynastic founder was Mateus da Costa, a rival companion in arms of Antonio de Hornay. Mateus had married a princess of Timor (by one account, the daughter of the ruler of Amanuban; by another account, the daughter of the

ruler of Ambenu). His son, Domingos, continued the da Costa dynasty on Timor.

These two families fought and feuded, intermarried and succeeded one another, establishing in the process Timorese clans that continue to this day.⁵ In the seventeenth century, a wise Viceroy in Goa sent his envoy to Larantuka with identical letters of appointment, one for Antonio de Hornay and the other for Mateus da Costa, instructing him to appoint as his representative whoever he found was in power. (As it happened, this turned out to be Antonio de Hornay but Mateus did not accept this judgment, claiming that his earlier appointment was still valid.)

In 1641, the native ruler of the domain of Ambenu on the north-west coast of Timor (at what is now referred to as Oecussi) was converted to Catholicism by the Dominican friar Antonio de São Jacinto. Prior to this time, the Topasses had traded for sandalwood at several harbours along the coast. Thereafter they made the harbour of Lifao in Oecussi their main trading base, establishing a small settlement there.

In 1642, a Topass captain named Francisco Fernandez, who had been born on Solor, led a band of 90 musketeers across the island of Timor from north to south to strike a blow at the power of the indigenous rulers of the island – the kingdom of Sonba'i in the interior and the kingdom of Wehali on the south coast. Striking at and burning these centres was a demonstration of Topass power and allowed the Topasses to redirect the sandalwood trade through their hands.⁶

From this point, the Topasses steadily extended their influence and control into the main mountainous sandalwood-growing areas of Timor. Their most important stronghold was in the Mutis mountains but their influence extended to the south coast as well.

The Dutch, in turn, repositioned themselves in 1653, by shifting their main garrison from Solor to Timor. On Timor, they took control of and enlarged the fortifications begun by Friar Jacinto in the Bay of Kupang. There they erected a stone fort to which they gave the name *Concordia*. This location gave them the advantage of an all-weather harbour with a fortified settlement which could be supplied from Batavia but it put them at a distance from the main sources of sandalwood on Timor which the Topasses and their local allies controlled.

⁵ The da Costa family established itself in the Noimuti region; the de Hornay family in Anas.

⁶ For a further discussion of this event and its consequences, see Fox (1982).

To rectify this disadvantage, the Dutch East India Company called upon its most illustrious general, Arnoldus de Vlaming van Oudshoorn, to deal with the Black Portuguese. In 1656, with troops fresh from triumphs on Ambon, de Vlaming marched into the interior of Timor and was completely routed by the Topasses and their allies led by Antonio de Hornay and Mateus da Costa. For a time, after this serious defeat, the Dutch contemplated withdrawing entirely from Timor. For the next 150 years, the Dutch remained confined to Kupang and their influence was limited to a radius of several miles around Concordia.⁷

The Portuguese, who attempted to assert formal rule from Goa, fared no better than the Dutch. The late seventeenth century onward is a catalogue of uprisings against Portuguese authority. Thus, in 1695, Mateus da Costa fomented an uprising in Larantuka to overthrow the first Viceroy-appointed 'Governor and Captain-General of the islands of Solor and Timor', Antonio de Mesquita Pimentel.

In 1701, Antonio Coelho Guerreiro was sent to be governor. He made Lifao the official Portuguese settlement in 1702 and managed to maintain his position for more than two years until he was also expelled and forced to call on the Dutch for his passage back to Goa in 1705. In 1722, Antonio de Albuquerque Coelho was appointed but was besieged in Lifao for three years by the Topasses and their allies led by Francisco de Hornay. His successor also faced fierce opposition and was besieged for long periods of time while the Topasses continued to control the trade in sandalwood from the interior of Timor.

During this period, the Topasses made three unsuccessful attempts – in 1735, 1745 and 1749 – to drive the Dutch from Kupang. Often the Dutch and Portuguese co-operated in their efforts to control the Black Portuguese. Thus, in 1761, the *Opperhoofd* in Kupang, Hans Albert von Pluskow, was murdered by Francisco de Hornay and Antonio da Costa in Lifao where he had gone to attempt to negotiate the reinstatement of the Portuguese governor.

Finally, under siege by the Topasses and with his provisions exhausted, Portuguese Governor Antonio José Telles de Menezes, on the night of 11 August 1769, abandoned Lifao and sailed eastward to establish a new Portuguese settlement at Dili, far from any threat of the Topasses. (It was at this point that Francisco de Hornay offered the Dutch East India

⁷ For a discussion of the early history of the Kupang area, see Fox (1977); for a more popular account of the history of Kupang itself, see Fox (1981).

Company the possession of Lifao, an offer that was officially considered and declined.)

It is appropriate at this juncture to quote an eighteenth century commentator on Timor, the Scots sea captain, Alexander Hamilton, writing in 1727:

[The Timoreans] permitted the Portuguese colony of Macao in China, to build a Fort on it, which they called Leiffew, and the Dutch a factory called Coupang, but would never suffer either to interfere with the Government of their country ... they found that the Timoreans would not lose their liberty for fear of the loss of blood ... (1930, II:74).

Only in the nineteenth century – in fact only late in the nineteenth century – through a process of relentless intrusions by military force, were the two colonial powers able to exert their influence on the interior of Timor. Despite continuing contact with Europeans, dating to the early sixteenth century, Timor was never colonised as were other parts of the Indies. For most of the colonial period, control was a matter of pretence and veneer. The Portuguese claimed to have pacified their territory by 1912, the Dutch theirs by 1915.

The division of Timor and the veneer of colonial control

In 1777, the Portuguese in Dili regarded Timor as divided into two provinces: a western province called Servião, inhabited by the Vaiquenos (Dawan or Atoni) and consisting of 16 local kingdoms (*reinos*) and an eastern province called Bellum (or Bellos), inhabited and dominated by the Belu (or Tetun) and comprising no less than 46 small kingdoms. Servião covered much of the area controlled by Topasses. According to the Portuguese, this district had as its supreme ruler or emperor, the Lord Sonba'i. At this time, although then situated in Dili, in the east of the island, the Portuguese had less knowledge of conditions there than in the west. Although the ruler of the Bellos, whom they referred to as the emperor, exerted wide influence, it is doubtful that this ruler exercised hegemony, as the Portuguese implied, over all 46 kingdoms of the eastern half of the island.

The Dutch drew a different picture of this same political situation. In 1756, the Dutch East India Company sent a distinguished envoy by the name of Paravicini to order its relations on Timor. This renowned *Commissaris* returned to Batavia with a contract treaty purporting to have

been signed by all of the rulers of Timor in addition to those of the islands of Roti, Savu, Sumba and Solor: 48 signatories on a lengthy document with 30 clauses. Whether, in fact, he obtained the signed agreement of all of these rulers, the contract of Paravicini represented the political geography of native rule more accurately than did Portuguese documents for the same period.

The supreme ruler of Belu and sovereign king of Wywiko Behale [Waiwiku Wehali], whose name is given as Hiacijntoe Corea, is reported to have signed the Contract of Paravicini on behalf of 27 dependent domains, all but four of which can be identified and located on a map to this day. Besides domains on the western side of Timor, this contract included at least 16 dependencies in what is now East Timor.⁸

That these Dutch claims to allegiance involved only a nominal relationship is evidenced by the fact that it was only in 1904 that the Dutch were able to obtain an official audience with the person whom they had designated as the *Keser* or *Keyzer*, having had to make their way to Laran in Wehali with an armed force to meet him. This was the first recorded Dutch meeting with the Tetun ruler of Wehali (Francillon 1980).

Despite doubts over its validity as a formal political document, the Contract of Paravicini asserted Dutch claims to large areas of the island claimed by the Portuguese. By an equally dubious token, through claims to all the territories controlled by the Topasses, the Portuguese were able to claim large areas of western Timor. These overlapping, hardly credible claims to territory on both sides resulted in one of the longest, most drawn-out negotiations in colonial history.

The partitioning of Timor

During the Napoleonic wars, the British occupied the Dutch fort at Kupang and laid claim, for a brief period, to Dutch colonial possessions on Timor. When, in 1816, the British returned colonial authority to the Dutch, the Dutch set out to determine their areas of supposed control in relation to the Portuguese. Almost immediately thereafter there occurred the first of a series of disputes over the borders between the two colonial powers.

The Portuguese claimed a large area of West Timor including the mountainous region of Mutis (thus a territory far larger than the present

⁸ The text of this contract can be found in Stapel (1955:87-107).

enclave of Oecussi-Ambenu). The Dutch, in turn, claimed a considerable sweep of territory on both the north and south coasts of what is now East Timor. (The coastal territory of Maubara, for example, was one area of East Timor over which the Dutch both claimed and exercised authority well into the nineteenth century. The Dutch also maintained control over a small but significant enclave, called Maucatar, located near the present town of Suai.) Even more unclear, and thus subject to considerable dispute, was the interior border between the Portuguese and Dutch on Timor.

For a full 100 years, between 1816 and 1916, the Portuguese and Dutch engaged in recurrent territorial disputes that were played out at the local level as diplomatic negotiations continued in Lisbon and The Hague. A settlement of unresolved borders was eventually achieved only through a determination of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in 1914 and officially acknowledged on Timor in 1916.

Just as Dutch Timor was part of the greater Netherlands Indies, so too was Portuguese Timor part of the then Portuguese Indies. In this empire, the Portuguese included Timor as well as territory on the islands of Flores, Solor, Pantar and Alor under the direction of Macau. What little authority the Portuguese could maintain on these islands north of Timor was exerted through local rulers who would hoist the Portuguese flag and visit Dili at appropriate intervals. The lack of almost any Portuguese control on these islands eventually upset the ill-defined political balance that existed between the two colonial powers and forced them to begin negotiations on their mutual boundaries.

In 1838, when the Dutch resident on Timor led an expedition that attacked and burnt the town of Larantuka on Flores as punishment for suspected piracy, this action was represented in Lisbon as a fearsome Dutch attack on Portugal. The Dutch countered with the assertion that if the Portuguese could not control piracy in the territory they claimed, their claim could hardly be considered valid. Yet when a Portuguese ship fired on a perahu from Makassar, also suspected of piracy, this was seen as an attack on Dutch colonial authority.

The Dutch initiated discussions with the Portuguese in 1846 with a view to acquiring Portuguese territories. These discussions were given further impetus in 1848, when the native ruler of Oecussi, who was under Portuguese authority, took part in an armed conflict among various rulers on Alor, over whom the Dutch claimed authority. This prompted the Dutch government to establish an official commission

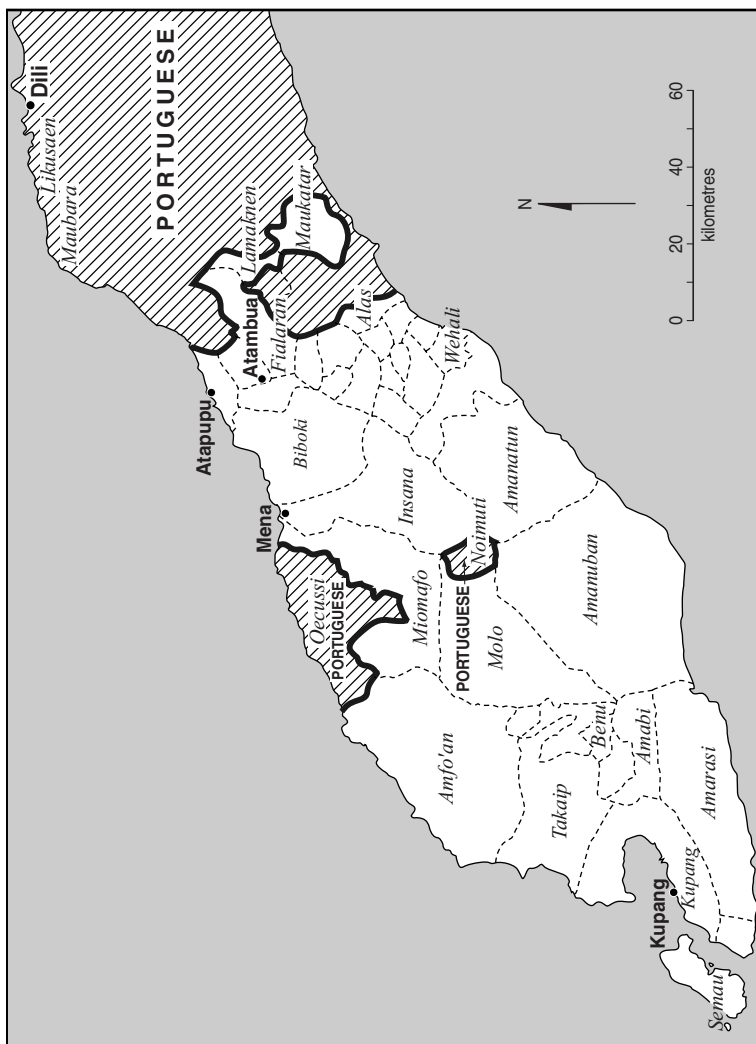
to carry forward negotiations on territory in the Timor region. Although Portugal was initially willing to consider the sale of its territories, a decision was taken in 1851 to decline the Dutch offer of purchase. It was agreed, however, to establish clear boundaries between Dutch and Portuguese areas.

At this time, in 1850, Timor and Solor were made a separate province of the Portuguese Indies, with financial independence from Macau. In the following year, the new governor in Dili, Lima de Lopes, reached an agreement with the Dutch on a major delimitation of colonial boundaries on Timor but faced with an impoverished administration, also agreed to cede – without authorisation from Lisbon – all Portuguese claims to eastern Flores and the nearby islands in return for an immediate payment of 80 000 florin (to be followed by a later payment of another 120 000 florin). The Dutch who had already been prepared to acquire Portuguese territory immediately accepted this offer and made the necessary payment to secure the agreement.

When officials in Lisbon became aware of what had happened, Governor Lima de Lopes was recalled in disgrace, but his agreement could not be rescinded. In the end, a treaty of demarcation and exchange of territory was negotiated in 1854 but only ratified in 1859. Portugal ceded all its historical claims on Flores, Solor, Pantar and Alor to the Dutch. On Timor, the two colonial powers arrived at a demarcation by listing the various traditional states under each other's authority. The Dutch ceded Maubara to the Portuguese. They also recognised Portuguese claims to Oecussi and to the area of Noimuti to the south of Oecussi. The Portuguese, in turn, recognised Dutch authority over the enclave of Maucatar on the south central coast of eastern Timor near Suai (Map 2).

Although this treaty eliminated some indeterminacy of boundaries, it was flawed in two respects. It left two landlocked enclaves – Noimuti and Maucatar – in each other's territory. How was authority to be exercised if access was limited? More uncertain still was the fact that demarcation was based on a division of native states whose mutual boundaries were not determined. The size of the different enclaves and exact boundary between East and West Timor came to rest on a variety of local traditional claims to territory.

Further conventions were needed and were eventually agreed upon in 1893, 1904 and 1913. The 1893 convention was an agreement to achieve a demarcation; the 1904 convention ceded Noimuti to the Dutch and



Map 2: Dutch interpretation of Timor's boundaries (1911)

Maucatar to the Portuguese and set forth the boundary between East and West in terms of specific landmarks; the 1913 convention was an agreement to submit the dispute over outstanding boundary lines, mainly for Oecussi, to the Permanent Court of Arbitration. This court issued its judgment on 25 June 1914, but the final ratification of boundaries was only concluded in The Hague on 17 August 1916.⁹

There is a particular irony that as negotiations proceeded between The Hague and Lisbon – all phrased in appropriate diplomatic French – neither colonial power controlled the territories over which they were deliberating. At repeated intervals during each dry season, on an almost annual basis, the Dutch led armed expeditions to wage war in the interior, particularly against the expansive and powerful domain of Amanuban.

Similarly, the Portuguese mounted no less than 60 armed expeditions between 1847 and 1913 to subdue the Timorese. In 1860, even as he was negotiating with the Dutch over ‘Portuguese territory on Timor’, the Governor of Dili, Affonso de Castro, described the situation with remarkable candour: ‘Our empire on this island is nothing but a fiction’ (1862:472).

Traditional politics, languages and social identity

From the earliest Chinese sources to the final reports of the colonial powers, all commentators agree that Timor was comprised of kingdoms and rulers. Traditional kingdoms dating back to at least the fourteenth century imply well-established, indeed fundamental, ideas about order and political relations. Curiously, however, in the long history of European contact with Timor, virtually no commentator has credited the Timorese with a political philosophy or has sought to explore and to treat seriously indigenous ideas of authority.

What is even more remarkable is that the kingdoms of Timor identified by Antonio Pigafetta on the Magellan voyage in 1522 persisted through the entire colonial period despite more than 400 years of turmoil, disruption and upheaval. This, too, would suggest an extraordinary capacity for local continuity: a capacity to persist, to endure, and to maintain links with the land.

⁹ These long, drawn-out negotiations leading to the final border treaty are discussed in detail in Heyman (1895) and Ezerman (1917). The texts of the various Portuguese-Dutch treaties and conventions plus that of the Permanent Court of Arbitration can be found in Krieger (1997:1-17).

The Pigafetta reference is particularly revealing in that two of the four kingdoms mentioned in that account of 1522 are Suai and Camanasa, both important sites on the south central coast of East Timor. Suai has become a town, whereas Camanasa, a large village outside of Suai, retains its traditional setting and traditional ruler. Both had large polling stations for the UN ballot.¹⁰

One of the difficulties, which continually confronted both the Dutch and the Portuguese, was how to conceptualise these native ‘polities’ to be able to deal with them through their rulers. The Dutch used a variety of titles: king, great prince, kaiser, and regent (*keoning, grootvorst, keyzer, regent*) before settling on the use of the general term, *radja*, in the nineteenth century. The Portuguese used the royal designation (*rei*) but also a graded system of military ranks from colonel to lieutenant before they settled on the general term, *linrai* (see de Castro 1862:471).

What was bewildering to European officials were the relations among these various polities. The Contract of Paravicini in 1756, for example, recognised 13 independent rulers, mainly in West Timor, together with the great ruler of Waiwiku-Wehali, who had under his authority two local ‘regents’ and another 21 named territories, most of which were in East Timor. In addition, the treaty mentions rulers of seven other domains, including Suai, that appear to have been allied to Wehali. Interestingly, the first partitioning treaty between the Dutch and the Portuguese in 1859 was a realignment of many of the same territories nominated in the Contract of Paravicini.

Relations among the local polities of Timor were continually changing. Alliances among these polities shifted, especially as internal relations changed; there was regular, seasonal raiding into each other’s territories – some in the form of ritual headhunting; and migration of clan groups in search of land and water was common. The Portuguese and Dutch both contributed to this situation.

In return for diverting the sandalwood trade to Lifao and other ports on the north coast of the island, the Topasses formed close alliances with the local Atoni Pa Meto polities and in several instances became the rulers of these polities. They were the first to introduce

¹⁰ I was an international observer in the Suai area at the time of the ballot and chose to begin my official observations at the Camanasa polling station. That evening, I was introduced to the traditional ruler of Camanasa, who was later reported to have been killed in the mayhem that followed the announcement of the results of the ballot.

muskets to the Timorese and they increased the supply of simple iron tools. The Dutch (rather than the Portuguese) introduced maize to the island and promoted its planting, initially in the area around Kupang (Fox 1977:76). This combination of muskets, iron tools and maize, provided principally to Atoni groups, changed the face of West Timor. With a new highly productive crop, the tools to plant it and the firearms to expand aggressively and open new land in others' territory, the Atoni population, previously subordinate to Tetun rulers who controlled the sandalwood trade, rapidly spread through much of West Timor, assimilating other groups to Atoni modes of livelihood and culture.¹¹

The language map of Timor today attests to this Atoni expansion over the last 400 years. Only the remnant Helong speakers, now confined to the western tip of Timor and the island of Semau, give some indication of what West Timor may have been like before the Atoni expansion.

Squeezed between the Topasses and the Dutch, the authority of the once great Atoni ruler, Sonba'i, declined as other Atoni polities rose to prominence. By the nineteenth century, Amanuban had expanded its power over a large area of central west Timor and had developed an effective armed cavalry which was a match for the Dutch forces of the period (see McWilliam 1989).

The role of the Chinese on Timor

It was never just the Topasses, Dutch and Portuguese who influenced developments on Timor. The Chinese, who initiated the earliest trade with Timor for sandalwood, were a major influence as well. Dampier who visited the Topass settlement at Lifao in 1699 noted the presence of 'China-Men, Merchants of Maccao' living among the Topasses. This Chinese connection has long been crucial on Timor and at times has been paramount. As Topass control of trade in the interior of Timor declined, Chinese control increased.

One of the most detailed nineteenth century descriptions of Timor is that of Dr Salomon Müller whose account covers a period from 1828

¹¹ For a more detailed, ecologically oriented examination of the history of Timor and consequences of European involvement, including the introduction of maize and of firearms, on patterns of Timorese livelihood, see Fox (1988). To gain some idea of the local adaptive capacity of Atoni culture, see Fox (1999).

to 1836. Müller, for example, noted the Timorese (especially Atoni) obsession with muskets:

The trade in flintlock rifles is the most advantageous trade that can be conducted on Timor ... The rifle belongs, above all, to the most important piece of inheritance, to the costliest value that can pass from father to son: indeed a Timorese would often more easily and more happily do without house and livestock, even a wife and child, rather than without such a weapon (1857, 2:234).

Although initially this trade was carried out through the Topasses, by the nineteenth century this important trade was in the hands of the Chinese. Müller described this situation:

Since the natives do not themselves bring their two foremost products [sandalwood and beeswax] to market, each year, during the dry season, a number of Chinese from Kupang, Atapupu, Batu Gede and other coastal sites travel into the interior on horses laden with specific trade goods to conduct this trade. As these traders go from one district to another, in each domain they first approach the ruler and the *fettors* offering them gifts and requesting permission to trade and be allowed safety and protection in all circumstances (1857, 2:244–245).

Müller marvelled at the fact that despite the considerable value of the goods that these Chinese carried with them into the mountains and of the amount of sandalwood they brought back on horseback, there were no reported incidents of any violation of Chinese safety. This was at a time when both Portuguese and Dutch colonial officials could make only limited journeys into the interior and only under armed protection.

Later in the nineteenth century, as the supply of sandalwood dwindled, coffee was introduced and planted widely in the upland areas of both Dutch and Portuguese Timor. Much of the planting of coffee was done at the initiative of local Chinese who were able to control its trade and export. Although the Portuguese tried repeatedly to channel the export of coffee through Dili, the Chinese preferred to export this crop through the port they controlled at Atapupu.

The emergence of Tetun as a lingua franca in East Timor

Prior to the Atoni expansion, there was an earlier expansion of the Tetun people, probably from what the Tetun regard as their traditional centre

of origin on the central south coast. This expansion was both northward and along the south coast. As a consequence of this expansion, there are several distinct forms of Tetun. These are generally described as different dialects, though there are considerable differences among them.

The first of these Tetun dialects is associated with the traditional polities of Waiwiku-Wehali on the southern coastal plain of West Timor where the towns of Besikama and Betun are now located. This dialect, often referred to as 'straight' or 'true Tetun' (*Tetun Terik* or *Tetun Los*), is regarded as the highest and most sophisticated form of Tetun speech. It retains a 'noble register' (*lia na'in*), a special vocabulary, used on formal occasions, for humbling oneself and respecting others. The linguist, Catharina van Klinken, who has studied this dialect intensively refers to it as the 'coastal' (*fehan*) dialect of Tetun (1999). Included in this dialect is the Tetun spoken on the coastal plain of East Timor which is associated with the former polities of Suai and Camanasa. Van Klinken regards the Suai form of Tetun as a subdialect of *Fehan Tetun*. She contrasts both of these subdialects with what she calls the 'mountain' (*fobo*) dialect of Tetun, which is spoken to the north, both in the mountains and on the plain, on both sides of the border in West and East Timor. This dialect, for example, is spoken in both Atambua and Batugade.

Yet another dialect of Tetun is spoken in the lowlands further to the east of Suai (see Hicks 1976). This dialect of eastern Tetun (or *Soibada Tetun*) became separated from *Tetun Terik* by the migration of the Mambai-speaking peoples from the mountains onto the coastal plain. In the nineteenth century, the Portuguese in Dili adopted a simplified form of market Tetun as the *lingua franca* for the territory which they controlled. Tetun was adopted only after Portuguese possessions were reduced to just the island of Timor. Prior to this, Malay was the preferred *lingua franca* among the various peoples on Flores, Alor and Timor who acknowledged allegiance to the Portuguese. Thus, for example, until the early 1850s, Malay-speaking volunteers from Sika on Flores, known as the Company of Militia from Sika (*Companhia de Moradores de Sika*) were recruited, on a near annual basis, to do battle for the Portuguese in their local warfare in East Timor.

Writing about the formation of Tetun Dili which is also known as 'market Tetun' (*Tetun Prasa* or *Tetun Praça*), the historian and

language scholar, Luis Thomaz, admits that ‘the origin of the use of Tetun as a *lingua franca* in East Timor is very obscure’ (1981:55). Dili is in an area where one might have expected the Mambai language to have been chosen as a vehicle for communication since the town itself is located within an area originally inhabited by Mambai-speakers.

Promotion of Tetun by the Catholic church toward the end of the nineteenth century was an important factor in the eventual establishment of Tetun as a *lingua franca*. For a period, however, the church seems to have promoted Galoli as much as Tetun (Fox 1997:14). Crucial to the development of Tetun was the establishment of Soibada College in 1898 in an area of the East Tetun dialect. This college was responsible for training all the schoolmasters (*mestre escolas*) who taught throughout Portuguese Timor and provided official staff. The term, *Soibada Tetun*, was coined to refer to this standard of Tetun, which is closely related, but by no means identical with, the vernacular speech of the East Tetun dialect area.

The everyday Tetun of Dili has a simplified syntax and shows strong Portuguese (and, more recently, Indonesian) influences. It could almost be considered a creole derived from vernacular Tetun. Since the Indonesian occupation, the Catholic church has established a form of Tetun, which is sometimes referred to as ‘liturgical Tetun’, *Tetun Ibadat*. This standard of Tetun, although simplified, resembles *Soibada Tetun*. This liturgical Tetun is widely understood because of its use in churches throughout East Timor but it is not what people speak in ordinary communication. Rather there are a great variety of spoken forms of Tetun ranging from the street language of Dili to the vernaculars of Suai or Viqueque to varieties of learned Tetun by non-Tetun speakers.

Although great attention is given to Tetun, the fact is that the single largest language group in East Timor is that of the Mambai who occupy the mountains of central East Timor, an area that includes the districts of Ermera, Ainaro and Aileu as well as parts of Liquiça, Dili and Manufahi. Although Mambai has various dialects, there is considerable intelligibility among these dialects and a growing sense of identity among the Mambai as a group. On the streets of Dili, among local East Timorese, there is a popular distinction made between talkative Easterners (*firaku*) and more taciturn Westerners (*kaladi*). Based on this distinction, the Mambai are the archetypical *kaladi* (Traube 1980:292,

1986). Formerly, they were also the archetype for the term, *maubere*, which was used politically to designate the Timorese peasant.

Contemporary agriculture and rural identity

Throughout Timor's history, there has always been a contrast between the population of the coasts and the population of the mountains. The more populous north coast, although prone to drought, has the greatest number of rivers that can be harnessed for agricultural production. The mountainous interior of the island has historically been the heartland of the Timorese but its rough, irregular, chaotic terrain has militated against the build-up of populations in large continuous settlements. As a consequence, Timor's mountain population has traditionally lived scattered in small settlements or has concentrated, often seasonally, in specific sites to exploit available resources. Local settlements have shifted periodically to take advantage of ever changing conditions. By contrast, the rainy south coast (with the exception of the alluvial area around Suai) has been the least exploited and least populated area of the island.

Recognising these historical imbalances, the Portuguese government, already in the 1960s, initiated agricultural extension programs to induce a shift of population to the south coast. The Viqueque area to Uato Lari was a major focus of these efforts where the Portuguese, in the late 1960s, were able to introduce high-yielding varieties of rice (Metzner 1977:167).

The Indonesian government renewed these efforts from 1977 onwards, by promoting the use of high-yielding varieties of rice, extending irrigation for rice on both the north and the south coasts, and introducing transmigrants, particularly from Bali, to some of these areas to encourage the transfer of new rice-growing technologies. The promotion of rice over maize (and other dryland crops) but even more, the military obsession with security that forced a significant shift of the population from the mountains, had a profound effect on both agriculture and population distribution. The north coast became even more populous than before the Indonesian occupation while the mountain population decreased. Only in the Viqueque area was there an increase in population and a notable increase in agricultural production. In fact the Viqueque district came to rival the Maliana and Covalima (Suai) districts, particularly in its rice harvests.

Previously a variety of local identities were constructed around particular modes of livelihood. The Atoni, Mambai, Bunak and most of the other mountain populations were seen primarily as subsistence maize cultivators; the Kemak, however, were noted more for their rice planting as were the Tetun, who also distinguished themselves as cultivators of mung beans. Metzner identifies the Makassae of Quelicai as 'skilled and highly esteemed' rice cultivators who pioneered the beginnings of rice cultivation in Uato Lari (1977:283; see also Forman 1980).

Over the past 25 years, many of these particular identities have been eroded by population movement and the greater emphasis placed on rice and other crops. Coffee is now East Timor's most important export crop and most of this coffee is cultivated in Mambai areas. The Mambai have also turned to vegetable growing and have become market-gardeners to the towns of the north coast. The number of water buffalo, once the pride of the Timorese as the mark of wealth and status, have declined throughout the territory. Bali cattle have been introduced to East Timor but until the recent destruction of livestock in September, these cattle were concentrated mainly in Los Palos in the East and Covalima in the West. The districts of Baucau and Viqueque suffered far less destruction than other parts of East Timor and fewer of their population were forced to West Timor. By contrast, the districts of Los Palos, Maliana and Covalima suffered extensive destruction and widespread deportation. The local populations of these districts will take longer to re-establish themselves and rebuild their way of life.

Conclusion

It is legitimate to ask what patterns of the past are likely to continue in the future. Certainly the resilience of the Timorese, evident throughout their history, is likely to continue in the face of a new wave of outside influences. This resilience has always been tied to different localities and undoubtedly, different localities, linked as they are to various social and linguistic identities – as well as varying modes of livelihood – will continue to play an important role in the development of East Timor.

Dampier's 1699 account of the Topass community portrays a multi-lingual community: Portuguese, Malay and at least one local Timorese language. Translated into the present, this would suggest a combination of Tetun, Indonesian and Portuguese. This simple translation, however,

misrepresents the present situation: Tetun and Indonesian are languages understood by a large proportion of East Timorese whereas the use of Portuguese is still limited. Moreover, for most East Timorese, Tetun is their 'second' Timorese language. Indonesian, whether or not it continues to be taught in schools, will – as in the past – remain the language of inter-island communication. The teaching of Portuguese will inevitably conflict with the need of the East Timorese to learn English to communicate internationally. Whatever solution is worked out over time, the people of East Timor are likely to remain a multilingual population.

In their various philosophies of life, Timorese distinguish between spiritual authority and political power. As a result of its defence of the people against oppression, spiritual authority is now clearly vested in the Catholic church. This authority provides the basis for the development of a common purpose and a cohesive civil society. Political power, on the other hand, may fragment, as has repeatedly happened in the past. The history of Timor is replete with all manner of political manoeuvring and this, too, is likely to continue. One need not regard political diversity as necessarily divisive. Diversity can also be a source of strength. In co-operation with UNTAET, over the next year or two, the East Timorese must now fashion formal structures to channel their political activities. This task will be crucial to the creation of the new nation of East Timor.

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