## 1 Introduction

Of all the rebellions against the newly independent states in Southeast Asia since the end of World War II, only one has resulted in the formation of a new nation-state: Timor-Leste. Demographic, military, and geopolitical factors were stacked overwhelmingly against the people of Portuguese Timor, as were the deprivations under a brutal 24-year occupation; but one factor loomed inordinately in their favor – the legal niceties of international law on colonial rule and self-determination. For despite the Indonesian invasion in late 1975 and de facto recognition of its annexation accorded by many governments, Portuguese Timor remained on the United Nations list of non-decolonized territories, with Portugal still recognized as the legal authority.[1]

The success of the East Timorese people's painful struggle for independence was a function of a fortuitous conjuncture at the end of the Cold War. On the one hand, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 set off a chain reaction of democratic uprisings that resulted in the birth of six new states out of the former Yugoslavia and fifteen new states out of the former Soviet Union. Beyond Europe, the decade also saw the formation of newly independent states in Namibia, Eritrea, Palau, and Micronesia. This flurry of new sovereign states set a critical precedent that encouraged powerholders in Washington and elsewhere to imagine extending the principle of self-determination to the people of Timor-Leste. On the other hand, the Clinton-era turn to internationalism made possible an unprecedented expansion in UN engagement and missions around the world. But this was accompanied by military disaster in Somalia in 1992, failure to act to prevent genocide in Rwanda in 1994, and cover for US unilateralism in the Balkans thereafter. For this reason, the UN was desperate for a success story, and no territory provided more favorable conditions for the UN to play midwife to the creation of a new nation-state than occupied East Timor.

Release from Indonesian rule came at a high cost. In response to an agreement brokered by the UN for a referendum on the future of the territory, the Indonesian military and its civilian militias waged a horrific campaign of intimidation and violence. Despite this, on August 30, 1999, the people of Timor-Leste voted overwhelmingly for independence. A final spasm of violence caused mass devastation to the territory's infrastructure and the movement – both voluntary and forced – of hundreds of thousands of people across

[1] This volume will use Portuguese Timor when discussing the territory under Portuguese colonial rule (to 1975), East Timor when referring to the territory while under Indonesian occupation (1976–1999), and Timor-Leste for the period under UN-tutelage and since the achievement of independence in 2002. The people of the territory are referred to as East Timorese (so as to avoid any confusion with the people in the Indonesian province of West Timor).

the border to Indonesian West Timor. With the flight of Indonesian officials, there was a total collapse of state institutions.

The referendum and violence in 1999 gave rise to two closely related perspectives on Timor-Leste. The first, highlighting the nation, was a linear narrative from colonial exploitation and neocolonial violence to national unity and the corresponding goodwill of the "international community." It is the story of the power of ideals and the victory of consent. The second perspective, privileging statehood, portrayed Timor-Leste as a blank slate on which the UN would undertake the construction of entirely new state institutions and establish the conditions for a democratic future. These two perspectives have exerted considerable influence over interpretations of politics in Timor-Leste since independence. But both were simplistic, and at times self-serving. The black-and-white depiction of a movement from domination to consent erases the specificity of conditions: elite collaboration with Portuguese colonial rule and the late emergence of nationalism; the bitter internal political conflicts and transformations of the armed struggle against the Indonesian occupation; generational change and newly emergent political cleavages. And while the Indonesian state in the occupied territory did collapse, it did not follow that Timor-Leste was a blank slate. During the long Indonesian occupation, East Timorese had developed significant institutions and ideas about their own future. They wanted protection and assistance on the road to independence, but did not want to be invigilated by the United Nations.

What sort of politics would emerge in newly independent Timor-Leste? Where some observers were optimistic the country would readily adopt and adapt to democratic norms and find a niche in global markets, others feared the simultaneous challenges of state-building, democratization, and economic reconstruction would prove too much. More specifically, we might begin by asking:

- What sort of regime has emerged since the restoration of independence in 2002?
- What dynamics have shaped Timor-Leste's economy and what are its prospects?
- What are the bases of identity, mobilization, and political engagement?

Answers to these questions have varied greatly, but four major approaches can be identified. The first, and by far the most common, approach stems from the indisputable fact that the 1999 referendum marked a fundamental point of rupture and the subsequent UN mission the guarantee of independence. This spawned a large body of scholarship on state-building in which the UN and/or East Timorese actors are depicted as either the source of state strength or

weakness (Martin and Mayer-Reickh 2005, Goldstone 2004, Goldstone 2013) and a complementary but smaller literature on East Timorese nationalism, characterized by much the same binary in assessments (Babo-Soares 2003, Soares 2001). Alongside this, but with little cross-fertilization, a second body of literature emerged on questions of justice and reconciliation, based on the assumption that only by addressing the country's violent past would it be possible to develop a healthy civil society and a flourishing democracy. There are significant differences in concerns, of course, with some authors focusing on justice and truth-seeking (Kent 2012, Roosa 2007), others on the intersection and even hybridization of international and local models (Katzenstein 2003, Wallis 2012).

A third *problematique* posed in the literature on politics in Timor-Leste concerns the development and quality of democracy in general and elections in particular. Here, theoretical debates about institutional design (Shoesmith 2003, Feijó 2016) – the constitution, the semi-presidential system, regulatory frameworks, etc. – commingle with more empirical studies of political parties and elections (King 2003, Leach 2009, Leach 2013). The trajectory of assessments has oscillated across time and often along partisan lines between optimism, condemnation, and tempered praise. Against this, a smaller, fourth body of literature addresses Timor-Leste's political economy. Given that Timor-Leste has emerged as one of the most petroleum-dependent states in the world, it is little wonder that much of this analysis has been framed in terms of the resource curse (Drysdale 2007, Neves 2013). More recently, a distinct but complementary line of analysis has shifted the focus from the ways in which dependence on natural resource rents may distort state institutions and squander scarce resources to the clientelist logic of budget allocations and their abuses (Scambary 2015).

Timor-Leste has become neither the utopia some observers imaged nor the dystopia others predicted. Instead, it is a nation-state enchanted and bedeviled by politics – the promises of campaigns and the mundane aspects of administration, the opportunities and pitfalls of budgeting and contracts, and the search for identities old and new. In place of judgement and prognostication found in much writing on Timor-Leste's politics, what is required is an assessment of the balance of forces and dynamics that have made the country what it is today and a framework for further research.

To do so, this Element identifies the primary modes by which rulers have exercised power and shaped political relations in Timor-Leste across four distinct periods. While state *coercion* and popular *consent* neatly summarize the dominant relations of rule under the Indonesian occupation and the brief period of UN tutelage, respectively, they provide only partial and imperfect

guides to Timor-Leste's politics since 2002. Between these poles lie two other modes of rule that involve neither the fear of violence nor the internalization of a dominant ideology. On one side, but lying closer to coercion, are *constraints* derived from traditional conceptions of allegiance or economic pressures that may result in a silenced or pliable majority. On the other side is the neutralization of real or potential opposition through inducements – which may be purely economic or involve political office – rather than genuine persuasion, which I will call *purchase*.[2] This differs from patronage, which links specific patrons to specific clients or constituencies, in that the benefits (or side payments) may target the population at large. Furthermore, patronage may proliferate in circumstances where coercion or consent remain the primary means through which elites exercise power. It becomes *purchase* when neither coercion nor consent is a sufficient basis for the exercise of power and the distribution of benefits emerges as the ruling strategy. These ideal types, it will be argued, provide useful lenses for understanding politics in independent Timor-Leste.

This volume argues that the resolution of the 2006 crisis provided the essential parameters within which a new ruling strategy emerged based on an uneasy combination of *purchase* (rather than readily given consent) and *constraint* (rather than the continuous application of coercion). In this, there is less separating the major political parties than their expressed animosities might suggest. Finite resources and the absence of acute pressures to use those resources wisely make for a highly uncertain future.

## 2 A Violent Past

There is consensus among scholars that Timor-Leste's past continues to exert a powerful influence on contemporary politics, but little agreement about the precise nature of those historical legacies. Responses vary depending on the issue at hand and the length of one's historical gaze. For those concerned with elite behavior and the potential for generational turnover, the aborted attempt at decolonization in 1975 looms ever present. For those concerned with popular understandings of the state and its proper role, the abuses of the Portuguese colonial regime pale in comparison with those of the Indonesian regime, but the burden of the Portuguese head tax may loom large. And for those concerned with the provision of basic needs

[2] This schema is derived from Antonio Gramsci. As will become clear, however, constraint may also operate in the other direction, with the exercise of power limited by institutional arrangements and economic realities. Also note that I have substituted "purchase" for what Gramsci termed "corruption" so as to maintain a clear distinction between the neutralization of opposition through inducements, on the one hand, and the conventional notion of corruption as dishonest or fraudulent conduct such as bribery and nepotism, on the other.

in nutrition, health care, and education, a grim past may provide the starkest possible backdrop to the promise and possibilities of the present. Above all, however, Timorese and foreign observers alike agree that the country's history has been characterized by violence – violence perpetrated during 450 years of colonial rule; the extreme brutality under Japanese rule (1942–1945); and the horrors of the 24-year Indonesian occupation (1975–1999).

## 2.1 Portuguese Rule

Portuguese officials and imperial historians have long celebrated the fact that representatives of the Portuguese crown established colonial claims on the island of Timor in the early sixteenth century and maintained sovereignty over the eastern half of the island for more than four centuries. Typical of founding myths, such accounts contain a kernel of truth around which much fantasy has been woven. The reality is that for the first two centuries the Portuguese crown did not have a permanent settlement on Timor and conducted its trade in sandalwood, beeswax, turtle shells, and slaves from Larantuca, on the island of Flores. When Antonio Coelho Guerreiro was appointed to serve as the first Governor and Captain-General of the islands of Timor and Solor and other regions of the South in 1701, he faced such serious resistance from the racially mixed and Catholicized community of Topasses that he soon abandoned his post. The next seven decades saw almost continuous unrest and rebellion, resulting in a fateful decision in 1769 to move the Portuguese capital from Lifau to present-day Dili.

The Napoleonic wars and Portugal's loss of Brazil in 1822 marked a low point in the Portuguese empire, and it was not until mid-century that Portugal made the first efforts to build functioning colonial regimes in its African colonies and distant Timor. By then, however, sandalwood stocks on Timor were greatly diminished and the territory served primarily as a penal colony and distant marker of former imperial grandeur. In an effort to revive its fortunes, the government in Lisbon appointed a succession of governors tasked with turning the territory into a profitable colony. To do so, these officials sought to wed the longstanding practice of vassal relations with indigenous rulers with coffee cultivation, modelled on Dutch practices in Java. However, the annual tribute owed by the kingdoms to the Portuguese regime, forced coffee cultivation, and trade restrictions prompted a new wave of resistance. The small colonial army and Timorese warriors drawn from loyal kingdoms were sufficient to quell outright rebellion, but full Portuguese control over the territory remained elusive.

The turning point in colonial affairs came during the long tenure of Governor Celestino da Silva (1894–1908), who launched a series of brutal pacification

campaigns and gradually transformed Timorese rulers into functionaries in a new system of direct rule overseen by district military commanders. Silva's effort to transform colonial fortunes in Portuguese Timor culminated in the introduction of a head tax on all adult males in 1908 that, it was hoped, would force subsistence agriculturalists to engage with the market and set the colony, which had long relied on subsidies from Portuguese Macau, on solid financial footing. Visions of efficient and profitable colonial rule were soon thrown into disarray by the republican revolution that overthrew the Portuguese monarchy in October 1910. Timorese rulers felt threatened by the abolition of monarchy and its symbols, and the announcement of a sharp increase in the head tax the following year prompted outrage from members of the lesser nobility now responsible for tax collection. Together, these forces prompted the last great uprising against Portuguese rule in 1911–1912. The rebellion was crushed at an enormous cost in life and property, thereby ushering the territory into an age of full colonial control.

Colonial rule in Portuguese Timor was colored in critical respects by the peculiarities of Portugal itself. Portugal's territorial claims, which stemmed from the age of exploration, had survived into the twentieth century in large part as a result of the protective cover of the "ancient alliance" with Britain. At home, however, Portugal's economy continued to be dominated by subsistence agriculture, with barely any industrial development. Officials in Lisbon promoted the development of profitable colonies but lacked the capital to make that dream a reality. In Timor, education was limited to the children of settlers and the indigenous elite. Health care was absent beyond Dili and two other towns. Roads were poor and shipping dependent on foreign lines. As a result, the combination of economic development, education, and print media that incubated nationalism elsewhere in Southeast Asia was all but absent in Portuguese Timor.

After two decades of shaky republican governments, in 1931 Prime Minister Antonio Salazar established an authoritarian – and increasingly fascist – regime that stifled ideas at home and investment in the empire. Undeterred, colonial neglect was celebrated in the semi-official ideology termed Lusotropicalism. With the onset of World War II, Salazar's declaration of neutrality was quickly ignored by the Allies and Japanese alike, with critical implications for distant Timor. Under brutal Japanese occupation for three and a half years, an estimated ten percent of the territory's population died unnatural deaths. Yet when the war came to an end, Portugal rushed to reclaim its colonial possessions. Whereas France and the Netherlands quickly found themselves facing armed movements for independence, there was no such challenge in Portuguese Timor. In the face of new international condemnation,

the Salazar government promptly renamed these "overseas provinces" of a unitary Portugal. But cosmetic changes could not save the empire. India seized Portuguese Goa in 1961, and armed movements of national liberation soon followed in the Africa colonies. At the furthest reaches of the empire, under a mix of half-hearted developmental efforts and repressive security measures, Portuguese Timor survived as an anachronism in an age of rising Asian nationalism and Cold War pressures.

## 2.2 Decolonization Promised and Aborted

For the people of Portuguese Timor, change came in the form of imperial implosion in the metropole rather than a revolutionary upheaval of their own. In April 1974, frustrated by the unwinnable wars in the African colonies and decades of domestic stagnation, a left-leaning Armed Forces Movement overthrew the Portuguese dictatorship and called for immediate decolonization. In Guinea-Bissau, Angola, and Mozambique, revolutionary parties stood ready to claim the state, but quickly turned their guns on rival claimants, resulting in brutal civil wars. In Portuguese Timor, by contrast, there was neither a nationalist movement nor were there political parties. In this void, educated East Timorese rushed to form political associations ("parties" were still illegal) for the first time. The first to do so was a group of mainly mestizo civil servants who established the Timorese Democratic Union (*União Democrática Timorense*, UDT) on May 11. Nine days later a group of younger, more radically inclined Timorese formed the Social Democratic Association of Timor (*Associação Social Democratica Timor*, ASDT), which, modelling itself on the African nationalist movements and adopting a program of self-sufficiency (*ukun rasik an*)[3] and a common Maubere identity,[4] soon changed its name to the more militant Revolutionary Front of Independent East Timor (*Frente Revolucionária de Timor Leste Independente*, Fretilin). At the end of May, a third party – initially called the Association for the Integration of Timor into Indonesia, but subsequently changed to the Popular Democratic Association of Timorese (*Associação Popular Democrática Timorense*, Apodeti) – was established. There were ideological differences between the associations, but all agreed on the goal of independence from Portugal. In such a small setting, family ties between many of the founding members ensured a degree of civility and even the possibility of alliance.

[3] This was akin to Julius Nyerere's policy of socialist self-reliance and Kim Il Sung's *juche*.
[4] A common male name that Ramos-Horta used to refer to the poor, down-trodden Timorese peasant.

Less promising was the global context within which this hurried and poorly conceived process of decolonization unfolded. A decade earlier, the Johnson administration in Washington and its allies had applauded the military-led slaughter of leftists in Indonesia and rewarded Suharto's new regime in Jakarta for providing a bulwark against global communism. But in early 1973, with the signing of the Paris Peace Accords, the United States sought to salvage an "honourable" withdrawal from Vietnam. In this context, politicians in Washington and London could express approval for decolonization in the abstract but remain skeptical about the viability of tiny, under-developed and resource-poor Portuguese Timor as an independent nation-state. The possibility of an Australian trusteeship was mooted, but the Whitlam government was adamant that it "would not intervene again in land wars in South East Asia," adding that this applied "as much to the civil war in Portuguese Timor as to the earlier civil war in Vietnam" (quoted in Jolliffe 1978: 253). Outright incorporation into Indonesia emerged as a low-cost solution to the problem. To this end, Indonesian propaganda depicted Fretilin leaders as dangerous Marxists and suggested that an independent East Timor might become an outpost for communist expansion.

Indonesian intelligence operatives were also busy courting the newly formed Timorese parties, fanning their mutual suspicions while covertly providing light military training for several hundred pro-Indonesian Apodeti supporters. As a result, in early August 1975, UDT leaders staged a clumsy seizure of power in Dili and sought to detain their Fretilin counterparts. Most Fretilin leaders evaded capture and convened in the highlands of nearby Aileu, where they convinced the Timorese in the colonial army to back a counterattack. A month of fighting ensued in and around Dili. UDT leaders and their armed forces retreated west, eventually crossing the border into Indonesian West Timor, where they were welcomed as proof that the East Timorese people were incapable of governing themselves. UDT and Apodeti leaders also issued a series of proclamations opposing Fretilin and requesting that part or all of Portuguese Timor be incorporated into Indonesia (Kammen 2012). Meanwhile, with the outbreak of interparty fighting, the Portuguese governor and his staff fled Dili for the safety of Atauro island. Despite its insistence on an internationally recognized process of decolonization, by mid-September 1975, Fretilin found itself in the unwanted position of being the de facto government of the territory.

The Indonesian military responded to the political reversal in Timor by escalating its covert operations. Army special forces launched cross-border raids, and warships were deployed in coastal waters. By mid-October Fretilin's newly established Armed Forces for the National Liberation of East

Timor (*Forças Armadas de Libertação Nacional de Timor-Leste*, abbreviated Falintil) found itself engaged in frontline fighting. That a full-scale invasion was imminent was apparent to Fretilin leaders and western powers alike. On November 28, in a grim ceremony in Henry the Navigator Square, 37-year-old Fretilin President Francisco Xavier do Amaral, a former seminarian now dressed in military fatigues, read the one-sentence declaration of independence:

> Expressing the highest aspirations of the people of East Timor and to safe-guard the most legitimate interests of national sovereignty, the Central Committee of the Revolutionary Front of Independent East Timor – Fretilin – decrees by proclamation, unilaterally, the independence of East Timor, from 00.00 hours, declaring the state of the Democratic Republic of East Timor, anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist. (Jolliffe 1978: 212)

Diplomatic politesse typically precedes the violation of international law, and so the Indonesian response would have to wait another ten days. One day after the Fretilin declaration, UDT and Apodeti leaders issued a joint counter-declaration in English and Portuguese. The English version began: "In the name of the All Mighty [sic], and by the reasons previously referred, we do proclaim solemnly the Integnation [sic] of the whole territory of the ex-portuguese colony of Timor with the Indonesian Nation" (Soekanto 1976, 283–4). Of greater importance was that on December 6, 1975, US President Gerald Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger were due to arrive in Jakarta on a one-day state visit. During their meeting with Suharto, Ford and Kissinger acknowledged Indonesian intentions regarding Portuguese Timor and requested that, for the sake of appearances, US-supplied military equipment not be used.

## 2.3 Occupation and Resistance

The Indonesian government rationalized its invasion of Portuguese Timor in December 1975 on grounds that it was restoring order, responding to the legitimate request of the Timorese people, and forestalling a potential communist foothold in Southeast Asia. Beyond these false pieties, Indonesian officials anachronistically claimed that the island of Timor had once been part of great precolonial Javanese empires, but had been separated by the chains of European colonial rule. In this view, the long history of rebellion in the eastern half of Timor was motivated by a desire to "return to the lap of mother Indonesia" (Soekanto 1976: preface). Thus, in his 1976 independence day address, President Suharto directly addressed the East Timorese people: "We view you as siblings now returning to the big family of the Indonesian nation." Certain of the righteousness of their own claims, Indonesian officials believed the invasion

of Portuguese Timor would be easy, incorporation of the territory into the Republic of Indonesia uncontested, and the benefits of integration welcomed by the population.

But the Indonesian invasion on December 7, 1975 was poorly planned, clumsily executed, and faced far stiffer resistance than the generals in Jakarta had ever imagined possible. Fretilin leaders and much of the population retreated from the cities to the mountainous interior, where "base areas" were established. A civilian administration was called into existence to organize the population and, with a clear policy of civilian supremacy over Falintil, to direct the armed resistance. A war of position raged for three years. The toll on the population was enormous.[5] Under such strain, conflicts erupted between the civilian leadership and the military commanders as well as within the Fretilin elite. By late 1978, with the last major territorial base in the eastern sector under siege, Fretilin leaders allowed civilians to surrender. Tens of thousands of people were corralled into squalid "resettlement" camps, with little food or access to health care. With President Nicolau Lobato killed in combat, the Indonesian military declared that the resistance had been reduced to 100 men, whom they now called "a band of security disruptors."

Without international borders behind which refuge could be sought, and with no possibility of foreign assistance, the surviving leadership needed to assess the situation and reassess its strategy. A National Reorganization Conference was held in the mountains near Lacluta in 1981 at which Alexandre "Kay Rala Xanana" Gusmão was elected national political commissar and confirmed Falintil commander-in-chief, and the party name was changed formally to *Partido Marxista-Leninista Fretilin*. This had little to do with ideology and everything to do with ensuring a common set of analytical tools and the continued supremacy of the party. Only months later, the Indonesian military waged a massive "fence of legs" operation to sweep the island for resisters, disrupting food production and culminating in a massacre of fighters and civilians in the central highlands. Gusmão's (1982: 83) response was defiant: "We affirm that we are not many, but also that we are not just a few – *we are an entire people at war!*"

The resistance survived and new possibilities soon emerged. In 1982, Indonesia appointed the worldly Mário Viegas Carrascalão to serve as governor of the province. Soon after, in a daring operation, Xanana Gusmão managed to meet with East Timor's Apostolic Administrator Martinho da Costa Lopes right under the nose of his military escort. Even more remarkably, a series of low-level

[5] The (unnatural) death toll is estimated to have been between 102,000 and 183,000 (CAVR 2013).