

**THE BIBLE AS CONSTITUTION OR THE CONSTITUTION AS BIBLE?
NATION-STATE BUILDING PROJECTS IN EAST TIMOR**

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RESUMO

Este texto analisa os conflitos ocorridos em Timor-Leste, em 2005, entre a Igreja católica e o poder executivo, a respeito do caráter a ser atribuído à disciplina de ensino religioso no currículo de ensino primário. Indica-se que os embates que se constituíram ao redor desse tema são expressivos de diferentes projetos para construção do Estado-Nação no país, bem como das disputas entre distintos grupos com relação ao papel desempenhado no processo de conquista da independência. Propõe-se que os eventos sejam compreendidos como produto da trajetória experimentada por certos setores da população no período da ocupação indonésia. Indica-se, assim, a singularidade da posição dos retornados, ex-componentes da frente diplomática da resistência, aos quais se opõe a Igreja católica, que se autodenomina como representante dos de dentro. As manifestações evocaram ainda um incipiente debate sobre a construção de uma memória nacional, pelo que a Igreja católica demandava um correto reconhecimento do Estado diante do papel por ela desempenhado na resistência à ocupação indonésia.

Palavras-chave: Estado-Nação, Igreja católica, Timor Leste, reconhecimento.

ABSTRACT

The article focuses on the conflicts in East Timor in 2005 between the Catholic Church and the Executive over the role of religious teaching in the elementary school curriculum. The analysis indicates that debates around this issue manifest different nation-state building projects for that country, as well as disputes among different groups regarding their roles in the independence process. We propose that these events be understood as a product of the itinerary of certain sectors of Timorese society during the Indonesian occupation of the territory. The singular position of the counter-diasporas is singled out, namely, those former members of the diplomatic front whom the Catholic Church (self-proclaimed representative of the “insiders”) now opposes. The protests also pointed to an incipient debate on the building of a national memory, the Catholic Church claiming for a rightful acknowledgement by the State of its own role against Indonesian occupation.

Keywords: Catholic Church, East Timor, recognition, State-Nation.

Between April and May 2005, the first government of the Democratic Republic of East Timor (DRET) faced what was then the most serious political crisis in the country since the restoration of independence. During 19 days, up to five thousand people, from various regions and organized by the Catholic Church, went to the capital Dili to protest changes in the elementary school curriculum suggested by the Ministerial Council. The government proposed that religious education courses become optional and entrusted to the confessional institutions operating in the country, which would also be responsible for training and paying teachers. Moreover, the course should be offered outside of regular class times, and student performance should not be evaluated. This paper addresses the social drama unfolding in East Timor around this controversy. Such conflicts manifest the different nation-state building projects in that country, as well as the disputes between various elite groups over the role each would play in the process of regaining independence. These struggles flash out yet another, incipient debate on the construction of national memory in which the Catholic Church demands due acknowledgement from the State for the role it played in the resistance to Indonesian occupation.

The paper is organized in three sections. First, it introduces the reader to the historical and ethnographic context being discussed, and presents the trajectory of the political crisis in question as well as its main personages. It then proceeds to an analysis of discourses uttered by different actors involved in the drama, with particular focus in stances upheld by the Catholic Church. The demands, representations and projects structuring them are examined. I draw on previous analyses elaborated in order to understand ongoing conflicts between the different groups making up the civil service structure being formed in the country (Silva, 2004). Finally, the epilogue explores how this drama shed light on the nation-state building process in East Timor.

State-building in East Timor

East Timor is the youngest nation in the world. Situated between Southeast Asia and Oceania, its territory had been nominally colonized by Portugal for approximately 450 years. After unilaterally declaring independence in the last week of November 1975, East Timor was invaded by Indonesian troops on December 7th that same year. Until 1999, it remained as Timor Timur, Indonesia's 27th province. The country was run by the United Nations Transition Administration in East Timor (Untaet) from November 1999 to May 2002, when independence was finally restored.

Even though the Portuguese first docked in the territory as early as the 16th century, it was not until the late 19th century that a colonial state was properly funded in the province. This state was in charge of effectively occupying the island and erecting an administrative system supportive of the organized commercial exploitation of natural and human resources on behalf of the metropolis. As in other processes of colonial expansion, the Catholic Church figured throughout the centuries as a privileged partner of the Portuguese state in the consolidation of its ultramarine empire.

Although the colonial state's presence has comparatively enlarged the territory during the 20th century, it remained feeble until 1975, and would be even more absent if it wasn't for the Catholic Church's support. It was the Church that first set out to create educational institutions in the colony,¹ and to normatize *tétum-praça*, the territory's lingua franca. In 1885, endorsed by the Macau bishop, the first catholic catechism in Tetum was published.

¹ According to Soares (2003), until 1890 all 13 educational institutions in the colony were administered by the Catholic Church.

Between 1960 and 1961, for instance, of the 229 teachers in the then-Portuguese Timor, 134 worked for religious missions, 61 for private institutions (such as the Chinese commercial association), and only 34 for the state. Nonetheless, less than a third of the local population was considered by the Church to be converted to Catholicism in 1975 (Smythe, 1998).

The territory's transition from colony to independent country, and then to being an Indonesian province in 1975, was marked by a civil war between supporters of the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente, Fretilin) and the Timorese Democratic Union (União Democrática Timorense, UDT).

The Indonesian occupation between 1975 and 1999 witnessed a significant growth of the state apparatus. The number of Catholics also grew, reaching 90 percent of the population. As a result of the *pancasila*,² the Indonesian state required all citizens to convert to one of the five religions recognized by the state: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, or Buddhism.³ Given the historical precedent of Portuguese and catholic presence in the country, the majority of the population eventually turned to Catholicism. Refusing to be hierarchically submitted to the Catholic Church in Indonesia, Timor's Catholic Church remained directly linked to the Vatican during occupation. It thus enjoyed enough freedom to go on performing its cults in Portuguese and Tetum.

Authors such as Anderson (1998) and Smythe (1998) suggest that the people's adhesion to Catholicism, besides responding to demands by the Indonesian state, has also operated as a source of political and identity resistance against the invader agent. Timorese thus gradually distinguished themselves from Indonesians moved to the then Timor Timur for professing Catholicism rather than Islam, the main religion in the remaining islands of the archipelago, with the exception of Bali.

Indonesian occupation was intermittently contested during the twenty-four years it lasted by different fronts making up Timorese resistance. During the last years of occupation, resistance was organized in three fronts, under the aegis of the National Council of Timorese Resistance (Conselho Nacional da Resistência Timorense, CNRT): the armed front, represented by the Armed Forces for the Liberation of East Timor (Forças Armadas de Libertação de Timor-Leste, Falintil); the clandestine front, compounded by members of Timorese civil society within the territory; and the diplomatic front, made up of members from the Timorese diaspora to Australia, Portugal, Mozambique and Angola.⁴ Each of these fronts maintained organic relations with the others. Falintil, for instance, has operated for twenty-four years with weapons and other materials from the Indonesian army itself, or provided by the clandestine front. The language used in communication between the movement's elites was Portuguese. It is worth noting the significant presence of catholic religious personnel, especially those born in Portuguese Timor, who took an active part in the resistance movements against Indonesian occupation. Of these, bishop Dom Ximenes Belo,

² *Pancasila* is the name given by the Republic of Indonesia to the set of values and requirements defining the belonging of individuals and collectivities to the political-administrative unity represented by the Indonesian nation-state. Belonging to the Indonesian Republic should be compounded by the affirmation of the following state principles: 1) belief in a supreme God; 2) civilizing justice amongst peoples; 3) unity of Indonesia; 4) democracy through deliberation and consensus among representatives; and 5) social justice for all. As far as the first principle is concerned, the state required that all profess a monotheistic religious faith, which was supposed to be registered in the citizens' identity cards. Such requirement quickly drew most Timorese to Catholicism, even if only formally in many cases.

³ For an analysis of policies enacted by the Indonesian state in East Timor, see: Republic of Indonesia (1984) and Aditjondro (2000).

⁴ For a more thoroughly description of the stages Timorese resistance movements have been through between 1975 and 1999, see Magalhães (1999).

1992 Nobel Peace Prize laureate along with José Ramos Horta, is the best-known internationally.

It is estimated that one third of East Timor's population had been killed during the almost twenty-five years of Indonesian occupation. This has led Noam Chomsky to characterize the Indonesian state as the perpetrator of the largest genocide in modern history after the Holocaust (Chomsky apud Aditjondro, 2000, p. 161). Besides the implantation of a terror state, linguistic homogenization was a fundamental policy in the process of incorporating East Timor to Indonesia. Learning Indonesian became mandatory, while the use of Portuguese was relentlessly prohibited. Because the Indonesian state officials could not understand Portuguese, its use represented a threat against the control and governability of the territory (Lutz, 1995, p. 5).

In 1999, following the economic and political crisis that swept Indonesia in 1998, conditions emerged for a referendum in which the people of Timor were called to manifest themselves on the independence of the territory vis-à-vis the Republic of Indonesia. The victory of the independence option led to the concerted action of pro-Indonesia militias which, in a few days, destroyed close to seventy percent of the country's public infrastructure, besides killing around a thousand people. This period of intense conflict was eventually thwarted by a United Nations peace force – the International Force in East Timor (Interfet). It was then replaced by a peace-keeping and civil administration mission, the United Nations Transition Administration in East Timor (Untaet), which operated until May 2002, when independence was finally restored.

Since 1999, various local and international agents have acted jointly to pave the way for the functioning of a local public administration. This involves, among many other items, the implementation of a universal education system, approving legislation regulating the acts of society and the state, instituting state powers, forming a professional bureaucracy, demobilizing guerillas, restoring and maintaining infrastructure works, devising and implementing a postal mail system, negotiating Timorese land and maritime borders which define, among others, rights of access to and exploration of oil and gas in the Timor sea, and so forth. The events discussed in this paper are framed by this picture of state re-building. Stances taken by the different local actors regarding such enterprise are strongly related to three fundamental factors: a) stances taken vis-à-vis the various resistance fronts against Indonesian occupation; b) the way in which they were or were not incorporated into the Portuguese colonial state and the Indonesian state; and in the case of returnees, c) the host country during exile.⁵ It is thus about new modalities of social differentiation which emerged as a consequence of Indonesian occupation.

The curriculum question

In order to homogenize didactic-pedagogic practices in the country's system of public education, the Timorese government approved in November 2004 an experimental curriculum proposal for elementary school which, among other provisions, made religious education an optional course.⁶ Such pilot proposal was to be limited to thirty-two schools in the country's

⁵ Returnees, in this study, are those who have been away from the country during the entirety or part of the period of Indonesian occupation.

⁶ At least since April 2003, this was the subject of debate in the hallways of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (Ministério da Educação Juventude e Desporto, MEJD). At that time, locals were supported by a group of experts sent to East Timor by the Brazilian government in order to, among other tasks, draft a first curriculum proposal for the various levels of education in the country. By then, the question whether religious education would be optional or not had already bred polemic. Most high echelon personnel in the Ministry defended that religious education remain mandatory.

thirteen districts. This experience would form a baseline from which to build a definitive curriculum. Even so, the Church stood adamantly opposed to it.

In February 2005, the Catholic Church in East Timor officially reacted against the government's proposal by publishing a pastoral note addressed to all those who had been christened. In this document, it laid out the reasons for its criticism of the government's project. This note triggered a series of reactions from the government, to which the Church replied by eventually organizing a large public demonstration which took to the streets adjacent to the government palace in Dili for nineteen days. The manifestations organized by the Church gradually broadened the scope of their demands from the state, to the point of calling for the resignation of the Prime Minister, thus radicalizing even further the ongoing crisis. After at least two frustrated official attempts at negotiating, the conflict was stifled by the elaboration of a joint declaration by the state and the Church hierarchy in which, among others, the government gave up its project and publicly acknowledged the importance and value of the Catholic Church and of Catholicism in the building of Timorese national identity.

The struggle between the Catholic Church and the Executive is in itself indicative of the former's political muscle in the country to the point of being acknowledged by the latter as a fundamental bedrock of national identity. The discourses uttered by the various actors involved in the conflict – and the stances taken by them during the crisis – reveal the main sources of tension and resentment, as well as the contending projects of different social groups during the early years of the Democratic Republic of East Timor. In this context, it is worth remarking that the conflict took place in a battleground shaped by the Catholic Church, which could be further indication of its ongoing ability to figure as an instrument of political resistance in the country.

The following analyses were based on press coverage by the local print media between April 13 and May 13, 2005. My main sources are the newspapers *Suara Timor Lorosa'e* (STL) and *Timor Post* (TP).

The Catholic Church and the formation of the national spirit

In a document titled *Pastoral Note from the Catholic Bishops of East Timor on Religious Education in Public Schools*, the Church stood firmly against the government's proposal. The narrative presented established unbending links between public education, morality, citizen rights, national identity, and Catholicism. Let us see how such issues were woven together in some of its passages.

It is the duty of the state to promote civility, solidarity, mutual respect, human dignity, human rights, and collaborations between the various creeds. A keen effort is therefore necessary to devise a detailed juridical definition of an educational system which acknowledges the fundamental values of life in society, a matter to which Religion is undoubtedly of foremost importance. The state cannot evade its responsibilities for developing the identity, culture, cultural patrimony, the deepest feelings of citizens and Religion, which is a citizen's right. It is a duty of the state to create the means necessary for guaranteeing respect and the full exercise of citizens' rights and liberties. [...] We are pleased to recall that the Constitution of East Timor has acknowledged that "in its cultural and humanistic vein, the Catholic Church in East Timor has always known how to shoulder with dignity the suffering of the People, standing by its side in the struggle for its most elementary rights" (Preamble). It is in this context that the Church will always be ready to serve the People, whose "deep sentiment, aspirations and faith in God" the Constitutional Assembly's representatives have interpreted.

[...]

For the Timorese, Religion, and particularly the Catholic Religion, was and is an expression of the people's identity. Lately, the Catholic Religion has supported the people in their harsher trying times, during experiences of foreign invasion and military occupation, providing refuge, inspiration, and support in the struggle for national liberation. It is the moral foundation for living in the society that we are today, always struggling for justice and truth, open to forgiveness, solidarity, love, and hope. We should know how to learn from others' experiences, both the positive and, above all, the negative ones. Just because peoples from overseas consider religion a minor issue, it does not mean we have to follow suit. Shall we have the courage and audacity to be different and value that which speaks deeply to the soul of a People, and not blindly follow the dogmas of globalization and capital? Let us not waste away our treasure. It is preferable that we value it.

[...]

The other religions present in East Timor will assess its justice. We, the Catholic Bishops of East Timor, are of the opinion that teaching Religion should not only be optional, but mandatory in the Curriculum. Parents will decide whether their children will attend Religion class or not. They will have to declare this option when enrolling their children. We hope and expect that the Government will search for and find ways to achieve a general consensus before pursuing this pilot experience. [...] (Nota..., 2005).

The argument presented by the Church affirmed that religion – no matter which one – acts as a moral source for constructing the individuals' world view, identity and behavior. As a collective patrimony, it would be up to the state to preserve it and shore up the conditions for its reproduction. In this context, religious education would play the fundamental role of concurring for society's moral reproduction, while its optional status could endanger society itself. Access to this class was thus characterized as a citizen's right, to be secured by the state, inasmuch as it would grant the people access to moral sources shaping collective life.

The Church further highlighted that most Timorese were Catholics, and that this confession was and is the expression of the people's identity and of the kind of society existing in the country. It underlined the role played by the Catholic Church throughout Indonesian occupation, a period in which its rituals and physical facilities would have been taken as refuge and source of inspiration and support in the struggle for independence. Moreover, the Church urged a critical approach, watchful of the mere reproduction, in the country, of foreign models of sociability – an indirect reference to the way state-building was being carried out in East Timor.

The Constitution as bible: the split is pried open

After the Church's pastoral note was issued, the state came public to legitimize its own proposal. Then Prime Minister of RDTL, Mari Bin Amude Alkatiri, was the main spokesperson for the government in this debate. In order to justify the proposal, he resorted to the national Constitution which defined the state in RDTL as laic. He also asserted that the curriculum project was being put forward not only by the government, but also by Fretilin, the majority party in the National Parliament. It was thus that the Prime Minister declared that, as the highest authority in the Executive Branch, the *Constitution was his Bible*, and that the proposal was a way of enacting the country's supreme law. He argued that, as a laic state, the RDTL public administration should not finance religious teaching. Similar statements were made by the president of the National Parliament, Francisco Lu-Olo.

The government's irreducibility toward the ecclesial authorities' stances was responded to by the Church with a new declaration, this time directed not only to those who had been christened, but to all the people of Timor. In its April 9, 2005 release, the Church broadened the range of its criticisms of the government, delving deeper into the ongoing crisis within the Executive. Presenting itself as representative of the country's entire population, the Church announced that "the people of East Timor's concerns are not limited to religion classes for children. The issue is a real clash of ideologies, principles, values and expectations between the government and the people." (Komunikado..., 2005). Among others, the Church accused the Prime Minister of desecrating the Bible when comparing it to the country's Constitution. It also criticized the Executive for having created the Committee of Truth and Friendship together with Indonesia. Reverberating stances by other agents of civil society, the Church regarded the committee as a threat to the exemplary punishment of those guilty for the crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Indonesian State in East Timor during the post-referendum massacre and the entire occupation. Moreover, the Church called attention again to the Timorese Catholics' responsibility to actively fend for their identity, "which is essentially Catholic and Asian, not European or Mozambican." (Komunikado..., 2005).

On April 12, the government issued a note from the Prime Minister's Office. Besides reaffirming the state's stance, it indicated that April 9, 2005 would make history as the day when the Catholic Church hierarchy in East Timor became a political party. The government thus accused the Church of unduly interfering in issues that were the exclusive responsibility of the state, and of precipitating a political crisis at an inordinate moment – in the eve of the conference with donors and the visit of the Indonesian president to the country. This crisis took the form of a public demonstration against the government starting April 19, after the Prime Minister had declared to the press that he would like to know the people's position and not that of the Catholic Church. The Church responded to the challenge, mustering its faithful for a collective demonstration against the government in the country's capital. It lasted nineteen days.

The 'bad payer' dictatorship and demands for due acknowledgement

Local press coverage of the demonstrations was wide. This allows ferreting out the various issues involved in this conflict, which are related to the tensions pervading the country since May 2002, and to the re-building of national memory. Firstly, it should be recalled that the Catholic Church has, through its statements, taken the Prime Minister as encapsulating the whole government. And Mari Alkatiri is a Muslim and a returnee from Mozambique.

Among other things, the Church set out to cast the government's proposal as a reenactment of Fretilin's 1975 communist government project, conjuring up the memory of the civil war between supporters of the Timorese Democratic Union (União Democrática Timorense, UDT) and Fretilin which took place that same year. Also, the Church circuitously declared that the curriculum suggested by the state was defended by those who had been away from the country during the Indonesian occupation.

In this context, in the April 14 issue of the newspaper *Suara Timor Lorosa'e*, father Domingos Maubere, a priest spokesperson for the Timorese episcopate, accused the government of encouraging the Timorese to abandon their belief in God (Governu..., 2005). In that same occasion, he evoked the Church's role in resistance against Indonesian occupation as a direct response to criticisms by the government that the institution would be unduly taking up political roles in Timor. It was thus argued that, historically, the Church had always been involved in the country's secular questions. In the May 5 issue of the same newspaper, another priest, father Domingos Maubere, described the government as "the bad

payer's dictatorship", while demanding that Konis Santana, former member of the Falintil, be raised to the status of national hero (Sarani..., 2005).

Meanwhile, the Church expanded its list of demands vis-à-vis the state. In April 21, Dom Ricardo, Bishop of Dili, declared to the *Suara Timor Lorosa'e* that the protests also substantiated the issues of freedom of the press in the country, as well as corruption, health, education, and so forth. As part of this expansive movement, the crisis reached its critical peak when demonstrators began to demand out loud the resignation of Mari Alkatiri and the convening of a new government. The crisis deepened after a failed first attempt at talks between the Church and government for the elaboration of an agreement on April 25. Presenting itself as the people's eyes, ears and mouth (Bele..., 2005), the Church, through father Apolinário Guterrez, declared in the April 26, 2005 issue of *Timor Post* that it had taken along to the meeting with the government the people's aspirations:

The people protests because it no longer wants the government telling them to be quiet. The people is no longer willing to be force-fed with the will of the government and its indifference toward its needs and values. [...] The bottom-line is the model of society that is being imposed on the people. (Povo..., 2005, my translation).⁷

In a letter addressed to the Fretilin Central Committee and to the president of the National Parliament, representatives from the parishes of Baucau and Dili present at the demonstration wrote:

[...] the Prime Minister doesn't care about the people. He is closed to the people's aspirations, by introducing a model of society that is not in tune with the identity of the Timorese people. According to the Constitution's Second Article, Paragraph 62, sovereignty belongs to the people. That's why we ask of Fretilin's Central Committee and the National Parliament Dr. Mari Alkatiri's resignation from the position of Prime Minister of this nation. (Bele..., 2005, my translation).⁸

These facts cannot but be interpreted as strategies by the Catholic Church to keep the position of power it holds in Timorese society. Of the strategies used to this end, Timorese national identity is portrayed as being fundamentally inspired by Catholic morality. But the conflicts educe more than that. They reveal the existence of different civilizing projects for society, as well as demands for due recognition (Taylor, 1994) of various groups and institutions according to the role they played in the resistance against Indonesian occupation.⁹

⁷ In the original Tetum, father Apolinário Guterrez so declared to the *Timor Post*: "Povo protesta tan ba lakohi tan Governo atu taka sira nia ibun. Povo la dispostu ona atu simu nafatin impozisaun vontade Governo nia, no Governo nia indiderensa kona ba povo nia preciza nebe baziku no kona ba valores povu nian. [...] Problema inan maka modelo sosiedade nebe oras ne'e daudaun impoem ba povu ne'e."

⁸ In the original Tetum, according to the newspaper *Suara Timor Lorosa'e* of April 27, 2005, the letter would register that: "...Primeiru Ministru la foo importansia ba povo nia problema hirak bee. Taka aspirasum ba povu, nia hatama modelu sosiedade ida neebe la tuir povu nia identidade. Tuir Konstituisaum artigu 2 n°. 62 katak soberania iha povo sira nian limam. Tanba nee ami husu ba Comitê Central fretilin no Parlamento Nacional atu hatuun Dr. Mari Alkatiri nudar Primeiro-Ministro iha nasaum ida nee."

⁹ Taylor (1994) characterizes recognition as a kind of politics defined by the affirmation and extension of the perception of dignity and merit to minority collective identities within encompassing political communities. For this author, recognition is the basis for certain social segments to access rights differentiated by group. The latter would only be accepted if non-hegemonic identities are understood as legitimate by the encompassing societal culture. Taylor further suggests that the universalization of the assumption that all cultures are worthy of recognition is the logic extension of the assumption of dignity in a multicultural context, inasmuch as it legitimates the respect for difference.

By imposing this agenda, the protests opened a window for revisiting the past. Such implications are made clearer as seen through the trajectory of some personages.

Mari Alkatiri, then the Prime Minister of RDTL, was part of the country's first government between November and December of 1975. In the eve of occupation, he, along with José Ramos Horta (former Minister of Foreign Affairs), Rogério Lobato (former Minister of the Interior) and others, fled the country in search of institutional support to halt the threat of Indonesian occupation. However, there was no time for consuming this, as for twenty-four years he remained exiled in Mozambique, to return only after 1999. Alkatiri's life story therefore makes him a returnee.

As head of the Executive, it was up to him to form a government cabinet. To head Ministries of significant political weight, he appointed Timorese who had been living mostly abroad and were educated and trained in countries like Mozambique, Australia and Portugal and who have been part of the diplomatic resistance front during the occupation.¹⁰ Once returned to East Timor, most of them projected onto its state-building process operational expectations characteristic of those countries in which they grew up and amassed professional experience. The project of making religious education an optional course given the state's secular character, as defined by the Constitution, may be thus interpreted as an example of the laicizing society project prevailing amongst them. Such project is frontally opposes to that of the Catholic Church in East Timor, and certainly to the views of most Timorese who had to deal daily with the Javanese occupation. For them, religion enjoys a safe place in the definition of the country's national identity, as well as the morality of daily life, both public and private. Most of the members of this second group acted in the armed or clandestine resistance fronts against Indonesia. When, for instance, the first expert mission sent by Brazil to East Timor presented to the Ministry of Education in 2003 the proposal to make religious education optional, the chief director of the entity, who had been educated during the 'Portuguese times' and active in the diplomatic resistance front, himself a passionate catholic who had remained in the country during occupation, was one of the first to oppose it.

This picture helps understand the Catholic Church's criticism of the tendency in East Timor to copy foreign models – and that would include the idea of making religious education optional in the public system. The Church's assertion on April 9, 2005 that Timorese identity would be essentially Catholic and Asian, rather than European or Mozambican, was especially targeted at the returnees in the Timorese government who had come from Portugal, Mozambique, and Australia.

Returnees are currently a category of social identification in the country whose "Timorese-ness" is frequently challenged. Most of them distinguish themselves from the rest of the population for having higher income, being fluent in Portuguese or English, and holding higher echelon positions within the state or in Timor's incipient private sector. Moreover, many work in the field of the Assistance for International Development (AID), especially those returnees from Australia who are paid as internationals, that is, as foreigners, wages that are on average fifteen times higher than the locals'.

Entrenched in such power positions, the resources available to the returnees – symbolic, institutional and financial capital – in order to impose their projects for state and society are,

¹⁰ Mari Alkatiri, along with Ana Pessoa Pinto (Minister of State Administration), Madalena Boavida (former Planning and Finance Minister), Roque Rodrigues (former Defense Minister) and Gregório de Souza (former State Secretary of the Ministerial Council) are all returnees from the Timorese diaspora exiled in Mozambique. The highest authority of the Judiciary, Cláudio Ximenes, is a returnee from Portugal. On the other hand, the group of officials working between 2002 and 2003 with President Xanana Gusmão (with the exception of Paulo Pinto) was made up of returnees from Australia, hired by the United Nations. For instance, Emília Pires, government's former advisor on foreign assistance up until early 2004 – a vital character for understanding the dynamics of international aid to East Timor – is a returnee from Australia.

in principle, more effective than resources available to those who lived there during the occupation. During the government of Mari Alkatiri, they were the ones who led the process of building public administration. Even though they were a numerical minority in the Ministerial Council, most returnees were regarded as people close to the Prime Minister, who enjoyed the means of persuading local authorities who had remained in the country throughout Indonesian occupation. Such situation was not lived out without resentments.

There is a commonly-held view among returnees that the greatest challenge to state-building in East Timor is the disciplining of local human resources. From their perspective, the Timorese *insiders* (those who remained in the country during Javanese occupation) are, for the most part, incompetent and undisciplined. In this sense, training and enabling personnel for public administration is deemed to be one of state-building's sharpest hurdles. Civil servants' so-called 'bad habits' and 'training deficiencies' are interpreted as part of the legacy of Indonesian occupation. Faced with such 'reality', those coming from the different counter-diasporic flows attribute to themselves a civilizing mission. Having returned to East Timor as qualified public-administration officials who concentrate both power and knowledge, they justify their prevalence in such positions in terms of their technical and linguistic capital.

The returnees' discourses range from acknowledgement of their own ignorance about the social and cultural habits of those who had daily endured Indonesian occupation to demonstration of surprise and reprobation toward them. To a greater or lesser extent, the characteristics of the behaviors and values of those who made up the clandestine and armed resistance fronts are, in general, regarded negatively. In order to account for their own conduct, returnees resort to various causal chains and adjectives: *ignorant, disrespectful, irresponsible, lazy, futile, exploitative, and passive* are among the stereotypes attributed to them.¹¹ Such repeated discourses breed intense resentment among the *insiders*, exemplarily including those who took part in the events discussed above.

On the other hand, members of Timorese diasporas were not 'warmly' welcomed when they returned to the country. Many of the *insiders* see returnees as privileged people, who left East Timor due to particular interests such as studying or getting rich. They are regarded as a threat to the labor relocation of the nationals who had remained in the territory in order to *fight*.

In terms of the conflict which is the subject of this paper, the Catholic Church – in contrast to the government, headed by a returnee – may be identified as an *insider* institution, representing those daily facing the Indonesian occupation and resisting to it. The government, on the other hand, seems to be regarded by demonstrators as representing the interests of the counter-diaspora groups, accused of being foreigners disrespectful of the people's values and aspirations (Kammen, 2003). This context sheds light on the Church's demands for government resignation while preserving the authority of the majority party, Fretilin, whose affiliates had mostly remained in the country during Indonesian occupation.¹²

¹¹ In addition to the issues above, a survey by Wise (2001) with returnees from Australia in Dili reveals that some of them were bothered by hygiene standards they observed in the population at large. They contrasted what they saw as "lack of hygiene" with their own memory of the *Portuguese old days*, a clean city then inhabited by very clean people. Just as with the people I myself interviewed, those surveyed by Wise also blame Indonesia for the incorporation into the population of habits deemed inadequate (Wise, 2002: 226).

¹² At the height of the crisis, protesters would shout things like: "Long live the Catholic Church; Out with Mari Alkatiri; Long life to Fretilin." (see, for instance, issues of *Timor Post* and *Suara Timor Lorosa'e* from April 26 to May 07, 2005). Even though Mari Alkatiri is Fretilin's secretary-general, there is no consensus in his own party regarding his leadership's legitimacy. Among other reasons, this is due to his having lived outside the country during the years of Indonesian occupation and to disputes with other resistance leaderships.

I therefore propose that this political crisis be approached as the culmination of denunciations of disregard (Cardoso de Oliveira, 2002) raised by various social groups against the ‘bad payer’, namely, the government.¹³ If the curriculum polemics was indeed the conflict’s trigger, the latter extrapolates this question to encompass problems with the government leadership that are daily addressed by elite and non-elite *insiders*, albeit privately and diffusely. Thus, the demand arose for proper acknowledgement, by the government and the whole of society, of the role played by the Church and its faithful in the struggle against Indonesian occupation and in the configuration of national identity. The moral insult stemming from the lack of such recognition is tapped by the Church as a means of unifying the various stances by different Timorese social groups vis-à-vis the returnees entrenched in high government positions, of which Mari Alkatiri is taken as the greatest symbol. The fact that he is Muslim could be taken by the people as yet another diacritical sign setting him apart from their aspirations and values. During the year I spent in East Timor, between 2002 and 2003, I witnessed many people’s uneasiness with this fact, who thought it was not coherent to have a Muslim Prime Minister heading a country of such large Catholic majority.

In its pastoral note issued in February, the Church underscored the role it played during the occupation, when it would have provided spiritual and material comfort to those who were persecuted by the invaders. It is also important to recall that Dom Ricardo, the Bishop of Dili, along with priests Domingos Maubere and Apolinário Guterrez played an active part in the resistance to occupation by providing food, shelter, medicines, and others to many Timorese. The Church also claimed to have provided the moral sources forming the bedrock of Timorese identity, something for which it indirectly demands greater respect by the government in order not to lose its prominent space in the local political picture. It complained about never having been invited by the government to discuss the new format for elementary education before its approval by the Council of Ministers. Given all the services it had provided to the nation, the institution highlighted its ongoing political role in the country, although without having organized nor wishing to organize itself as a political party. It thus indirectly demanded greater recognition from the government. Presenting itself as the people’s spokesperson, it ran amok against what it saw as a government imposition against the people’s values and will. In this context, it evoked, among others, the lack of appropriate assistance to Falintil’s veterans.¹⁴ Below is another statement by a priest, father Domingos Maubere, reproduced in the *Suara Timor Lorosa’e* on May 5, 2005:

[...] The Catholic Church will always be on the side of the christened in all of Timor, rising up and crying out that the government does not become a bad payer. To the veterans, the poor and widows who lived the war and truly suffered from it, independence has come and there is no **consideration!** This is a grave burden, and the

¹³ Cardoso de Oliveira (2002: 110) thus defines the idea of disregard: “I take *disregard*, or acts of *disregard*, to mean the reverse of recognition, as defined by Taylor (1994), and I would rather say ‘disregard’ instead of ‘lack of recognition’, to emphasize the moral insult present when the interlocutor’s identity is unabashedly and, at time, incisively not recognized [...]. It est, recognizing an authentic identity is not just a matter of being cordial towards the interlocutor, but a moral obligation whose non-observance may be taken as an aggression, even if unintentional, by the person who denies the demand for recognition.”

¹⁴ On April 26, 2005 the *Timor Post* printed part of the Church’s accusations against the government, which was characterized as anti-democratic and unjust. To ground its claims, the Church presented the following evidence: 1) creation of the Committee of Truth and Friendship along with the Indonesian state; 2) lack of transparency in the negotiations with companies drilling for oil in the Timor Sea; 3) lack of appropriate punishment against the former Secretary of State, Virgílio Smith, for a crime for which he was condemned; 4) lack of appropriate public policies for food security, education, and health; 5) lack of government assistance to Falintil’s veterans; 6) negative economic growth since the restoration of independence; 7) nepotism; 8) anti-democratic use of force in popular demonstrations; and 9) disrespect for freedom of the press.

Church fulfills its moral responsibility to be on the side of those baptized by posing checks on the bad payer.¹⁵ (Sarani..., 2005, my translation and emphasis).

During the crisis, declarations even emerged that challenged the Prime Minister's citizenship as, so it was claimed, Alkatiri would have been born in Kupang, in the Indonesian part of the island (Troka..., 2005). When the Prime Minister suggested that those involved in the demonstrations were pro-autonomist, he got as a reply that those were pure flesh and blood *Maubere*, warriors who had remained together with the people during Indonesian occupation (Manifestante..., 2005).¹⁶ It was thus indirectly recalled that the Prime Minister and other returnees had been away from the country during the invasion.

Finally, I would like to bring up a statement by a high official in the Timorese state who remained in the country during the occupation. It encapsulates the ongoing resentment by many of the *insiders* against the actions of returnees.

Now that the heroes are returning, they're talking big, so big about everything; they know everything. For instance, take the gentleman who returned from Brazil. I may say that all this time he was in Brazil, in São Paulo. Now he comes back and talks big about this and that, about such and such in the National Mobilization Party. [...] But where were you during these twenty-four years? We never saw you. All of a sudden you're a bragger, boasting around? This is what we see and it's not very good, is it? This breeds conflict. I won't say only those who remained here have the right to talk, but you have to know what you're talking about. You may talk or not; where's your influence during these twenty-four years? Were you kicked out or were you just in search of a better life, a better life for yourself? You see, you begin to brag around here, that's not right. I use this example because here there's conflict, these people, they can't; they don't know about our people's twenty-four-year struggle. They need not [should not] speak because they have never been involved in this life, in this struggle. It is wise to keep your mouth shut rather than speaking, that's it. (my translation).¹⁷

¹⁵ In the original Tetum: "Igreja Katolika sei hamutuk ho sarani sira iha Timor laran tomak sei hamrik hodi haklakak ba governo atu la bele sai mau pagador. Veteranus, oan kiak no faluk sira nebe iha funu laran terus tebetes to'o tiha independência la iha konsiderasaum! Ne'e hanesan todan boot tebetes nebe Igreja Katolika iha responsabilidade moral atu hamutuk ho sarani sira para hapara ema sira nebe mau pagador sira ne'e."

¹⁶ The term 'Maubere' is currently used as synonymous with Timorese. Originally used by the Fretilin between 1974 and 1975, it denoted the non-mestizo Timorese, often farmers, who had no place in the Portuguese colonial state. The adjective 'pro-autonomist', on its turn, makes reference to those who defended that East Timor remained as part of the Indonesian Republic, with special administrative autonomy vis-à-vis the central government. In the 1999 context, they opposed the independence of East Timor.

¹⁷ In the Tetum original: "Ne'e sira maka heróis fali iha ne'e, sira começa koaliaibun boot, boot, ibun boot, boot buat hotu-hotu sira maka hatene hotu.. [...] Por exemplo, hanesan senhor ida que hau bele hatete por exemplo nia uluk hela kleur iha Brasil iha S. Paulo neba. Nia mai iha ne'e nia mos koaliaibun boot, boot hotu, manda bocas koalia oin-oin, oin-oin nia maka partido be mobilização nacional. Ne'e be 24 anos ne ó iha nebe hela maka ami nunca hetan ó? Derrepente ó mai koaliaibun boot, boot iha ne'e, ne'e kan ita hare hanesan ladiak, kah lae? Ne'e be cria conflito, ema nebe não quer dizer que ami dehan ami sira hela iha ne'e ami maka iha direito koalia mas ó mos tem que hatene ó nia an, ó bele koalia kah labele koalia, tanba be ó nia influencia durante 24 anos iha nebe, sera que ó foi mandatado para for a ou porque ó moris buka diak deit, ó moris diak. Ó começa haré ona, ó mos mai koaliaibun boot-boot iha ne'e, ne'e ladun diak ne'e. Hau fo exemplo maka ne'e iha conflito, tanba ema sira hanesan ne não quer dizer que ami la halo sira para labele, mas sira mos tem que compreende sira nia an dehan katak bele koalia kah labele koalia se imi ladun, la hatene história be iha ne'e ninia, história povo ninia luta 24 anos lalika koalia tanba nunca envolvido na vida nessa luta convém manter-se calado emudecido do que falar ida ne'e, ne maka ne'e."

Epilogue

The crisis between the Catholic Church and the Executive was settled through the signature of a joint declaration on May 7, 2005, mediated by the President of the Republic. In it, both institutions acknowledged, among others, the contribution of the Catholic religion to the edification of national identity and the socio-economic, cultural and political formation of the territory, as well as to the individuals' moral cultivation. Consequently, the continuation of religious education as a regular course in the elementary school curriculum was secured, while attendance was to be authorized by the parents when enrolling their children. Moreover, in the same declaration, the government asserted that in the Penal Code being drawn up in the country, abortion and prostitution would continue to be defined as crimes. The document further prescribed the creation of a working group to be made up of representatives of the government, the Catholic Church and the other religious institutions, entrusted with overseeing abidance to the principles put forward in the declaration.

At a press conference on May 9, 2005, the Prime Minister beseeched parents to enroll their children in religious education, given its importance for the moral cultivation of individuals as well as for the nation's future (Marí..., 2005). Ironically, he was reproducing the argument raised by the Church in its February Pastoral Note.

There is no doubt that the Catholic Church came out as the winner in its dispute with the government. It not only secured religious education as a regular course, but the maintenance of the criminalization of abortion and prostitution – two fundamental items in the ecclesial agenda in its effort to hold sway as the moral source in various of the planet's latitudes. It showed the government its power by mobilizing hundreds of people from various social groups, going as far as challenging the stability of the state itself when calling demonstrators to demand the Prime Minister's resignation.

These events suggest that the formation and dynamics of the state in East Timor cannot be understood without contemplating its interactions with other fields of social action. In previous works (Silva, 2004), I have discussed how the AID field has conditioned the edification of public administration. Here, my purpose was to bring to surface the ways the Church has been influencing the design of public policies in the country. These, on their turn, have fundamental implications for the ways narratives of national identity will be carried forward in the future.

From a *longue durée* perspective, the events analyzed here are not surprising. The Catholic Church has been a major partner of the Portuguese state in its colonial enterprise in East Timor and elsewhere. It has been argued that, were it not for the presence of Dominicans and other religious orders in the then Portuguese Timor during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, Portugal would have long ago lost its rights for exploring the land. On the other hand, in many parts of the empire throughout the twentieth century, the 'promotion' of any native to the condition of 'assimilated' was conditioned, among others, by baptism and the practice of Catholicism. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that it was in the galleries of the catholic seminaries in East Timor – in Soibada, Dare, Manatuto – that various local elite groups were educated to be fluent in Portuguese. It was also Church personnel who elaborated the first dictionaries and grammars of Tetum, the country's official language along with Portuguese. All this is further compounded by the fact that, during the occupation, the Catholic Church stood as a locus of cultural and political resistance against the Indonesian state. These data suggest that it has never left this space, from which it is now standing in opposition to other actors, the Timorese returnees. This opposition stems from the fact that the Church wishes to keep the Bible as the people's Constitution, the moral source of Timorese identity and sociability. The curriculum proposal presented by the Executive was seen by the Church as disregard for this narrative of national identity. Due to the life story of

the people advancing the proposal, the curricular changes were appropriated by the ecclesial hierarchy as a moral insult against the role played by it and all other Timorese who lived under Indonesian occupation.

These conflicts are far from exhausted in East Timor. In June 2006, in the wake of a serious political crisis between the military forces and the police, and already frayed by the 2005 struggle with the Church, Mari Alkatiri's government did not resist. Ramos Horta, a close relation of Xanana Gusmão (current President of the Republic and former commander of Falintil), was appointed as Prime Minister. In his inauguration speech, he declared:

[...] I underscore our debt to the Catholic Church, in special to Bishops D. Ricardo and D. Basílio, who worked hard in reconciliation and are deserving of my grateful acknowledgement. [...] It is in this sense that the government has privileged a fine and fruitful relationship with the Church, recognizing its unique historical experience, attentive to the people's deep spirituality, *without secular and laicizing modernisms*. The Timorese Catholic Church is one of the few institutions to hold together the social fabric: the government has invited it to play an even larger role in the education and formation of our people, in human development and struggle against poverty. [...] (my emphasis).

Even though Ramos Horta is himself a returnee, one could reckon that the mutual-trust relations between him and Xanana Gusmão makes Horta more permeable to the aspirations of the *insiders*, whose paramount symbol is the President of the Republic himself – he has only been away from the country during the occupation when captured by the Indonesian army in 1992. Finally, it is worth remarking that a significant part of the lifetime of Mozambique returnees, Mari Alkatiri included, took place under the one-party regime of the Mozambique Liberation Front (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique, Frelimo). Frelim's actions abroad were in fact financed by Frelimo. It thus remains to be clarified how such experiences have acted as mediators in East Timor state-building projects.

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