

Challenging Tradition, Changing Society : the Role of Women in East Timor' s Transition to Independence*

As East Timor prepares itself for independence sometime next year, one of the most pressing issues is the role which women will have in the new state. Calls from women's groups for 30 percent of parliamentarians and 30 percent of civil servants to be women, and pressure from donor countries such as Japan, Portugal and Australia to secure a deal in which local councils will have at least 50 percent women, have yet to find acceptance amongst the almost exclusively male East Timorese leadership which rejected these proposals in the April 2001 CNRT (*Conselho Nacional da Resistência Timorese*) conference. Meanwhile, despite the formal acceptance of principles of equality by the UN-led East Timor Transitional Administration (ETTA), there have been few real changes on the ground where women continue to suffer violence and abuse in what one East Timorese woman activist has described as « a deeply traditional Catholic society frozen by years of war »¹. During the past year (2000) alone, there have been 169 documented cases of domestic violence by men against women, including some involving highly placed members of the Timorese elite². Such crimes are now the single most important category of crime, constituting some 40 percent of all criminal offences against persons and property. « It may be that women are speaking about it for the first time – but it is probably the single most important issue facing Timorese women today » according to Milena Pires. During the first all-women's conference held in East Timor in the summer of 2000, domestic violence was clearly the

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1. M. PIRES quoted in O'KANE 2001.
2. *Ibid.* ; on the case involving Dr Sérgio Lobo, the former chairman of the Department of Health for ETTA, see GUTEREZ 2001.

most pressing issue on the minds of delegates, the topic coming up again and again in the discussions³.

During the Indonesian occupation (1975-99), women often bore the brunt of the violence. Separated from their husbands and elder sons, women were harassed and often suffered rape and sustained sexual abuse at the hands of their Indonesian captors. In the refugee camps and holding centres, such as the prison island of Ataúro, populated mainly by women, living conditions were terrible with food shortages, poor sanitation and rampant disease. But besides the image of women as victims and martyrs so frequently highlighted in the speeches of East Timorese leaders like Xanana Gusmão, there is another story to tell. While their men-folk went up to the mountains to fight, some women joined the clandestine movement and furthered their education both in the Indonesian school system and in exile. Others held the fort at home, struggling to keep their families together often in the most distressing circumstances. In the words of Milena Pires, « women were involved at every level: they helped run the camps, sent supplies and smuggled information [to the Falintil (*Forças Armadas de Libertação Nacional de Timor Leste*) guerrillas]. And now, as the men come out of hiding and return from the mountains, they don't want to go back to their traditional roles »⁴. The present article, which is based on extensive interviews with members of the younger generation of East Timorese exiles in Lisbon immediately before and after the 30 August 1999 popular consultation⁵, looks at the sort of society young East Timorese hope to create. In particular, it considers the role which educated women envisage as they return to make new lives for themselves in the soon to be independent East Timor/Timor Loro Sae, as well as considering some of the obstacles they are likely to encounter as they attempt to fashion a new and more egalitarian community free from both patriarchy and violence. It looks first at the nature of the East Timorese exile community in Lisbon and some of the key contextual issues which need to be borne in mind when assessing the interviews.

East Timorese Exile Community in Lisbon and the « Survivors » Interview Project

3. PIRES, *op. cit.*

4. *Ibid.*

5. For a discussion of the origins of this project and the biographies of those interviewed, see Carey 2001 : 185-209. I would like to express my thanks here to the Leverhulme Foundation (London), the British Academy's Committee for South-East Asian Studies, the Oppenheimer Research Grant Fund of Queen Elizabeth House (Oxford) and the Modern History Faculty of the University of Oxford for their generous support for my initial research in Portugal and East Timor. It is my intention to publish the results of my research in Portuguese with Editorial Caminho in Lisbon *Survivors : East Timorese Experiences of the Indonesian Occupation, 1975-99*. The book will contain a number of photographs of the East Timorese exile community by the leading British photographer of East Timor, Steve Cox.

Those East Timorese currently studying and living in exile in Lisbon and other Portuguese cities are very much a self-selected group. The fact that so many of those interviewed had access to higher education (nearly all had graduated from senior high school during the Indonesian-occupation period and most had either been to, or were currently studying at, university and technical college) sets them apart from over 99 percent of their fellow countrymen and women who enjoy no such opportunities.

Apart from the late *liurai* (ruler) of Atsabe and second Indonesian-appointed Governor of East Timor (in office, 1978-82), Guilherme Gonçalves (1919-99), whose presence in Lisbon was fortuitous (he had come to Europe to participate in the fourth All-Inclusive East Timorese Dialogue at Burg Schlaining in Austria in November 1998 and been forced to seek medical help in Lisbon after being taken gravely ill), all those we interviewed had arrived in Portugal between 1990 and 1998. Most had come through the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the majority after entering foreign embassies in Jakarta. Only two had made their way to Portugal by private means. Apart from Gonçalves (b. 1919), all were born between 1950 and 1978, with by far the greatest number (16 out of 22) having birthdays in the decade 1968-78. This meant that they were at most seven years old or in Class 2 of primary school at the time of the 7 December 1975 Indonesian invasion.

A sizeable number (6 out of 22) were Fataluku from the extreme eastern or Ponta Leste (Eastern Point) region of the territory. Constituting some three percent of Timor's 700,000 ethnic Timorese inhabitants, this notoriously independent-minded ethnic group had provided the backbone of the armed resistance to the Indonesians after the fall of the Mt. Matebian redoubt in November-December 1978. Another important cohort (8 out of 22) had been born and brought up in the territorial capital Dili with parents who hailed from Timor's more westerly ethnic communities (i.e. Makassae, Mambai, Galolé, Belu, Bunaq and Kemak). Only two were of Chinese-Timorese descent. None hailed from the capital's tiny Arab community at Kampong Alor and only a few had any significant pre-1975 contact or blood relationship with the Portuguese. Apart from instruction at the hands of Catholic priests and lay brothers – whose quality was universally praised – most had had a rather negative experience of their Portuguese colonial masters, one even going so far as to describe them as «arrogant» and «unwilling to mix with the local Timorese population»⁶.

Although the study did not specifically set out to look at the experiences of East Timorese women, all the interviews were conducted with a colleague, Dr. Viet Nguyen-Gillham, who had special expertise on women's issues having recently completed her doctoral thesis on the testimonies of refugee and displaced Bosnian Muslim women. Every interview thus had a

6. António Campos, ex-Falintil commander, born Baucau 1959, interview, Lisbon, 15 April 2000.

specific gender dimension. Even when we interviewed men, we usually asked them to reflect on the specific problems faced by East Timorese women in the light of the violence inflicted on them during the Indonesian occupation period. Unfortunately, because of the skewed gender balance of the Timorese exile community in Portugal, where there are many more young men than women, less than a quarter (5 out of 22) of our interviewees were themselves women. Of these only four were prepared to talk at any length on the specific problems of violence and sexual abuse.

Two of the women hailed from the pre-1965 generation, the others having been born in the mid-1970s. There was also a divide in terms of political loyalties and commitment to the armed or clandestine resistance. Two had directly participated, one (a supporter of the centre right *União Democrática Timorense* or UDT party of rich landowners and pro-Portuguese *mestiços*) having made a very belated contribution, and the last having been largely apolitical. Even in this case, however, it was clear from the interview that the occupation years had left more than their fair share of bitterness and difficulty.

In assessing the relevance of the interview material for an understanding of women's issues in contemporary East Timor, certain preliminary considerations were borne in mind. These included taking a closer look at the nature of the Indonesian occupation of East Timor and the parallels which might be drawn – in terms of sustained sexual abuse (rape camps, etc.) – with the situation in Bosnia during the 1992-95 civil war⁷ or the behaviour of the Pakistani military in Bangladesh in 1971 when upwards of 400,000 Bengali women were reported to have been raped. As George Aditjondro, himself inspired by Franz Fanon, has pointed out, the constant sexual harassment of East Timorese women by Indonesian troops has flowed in part from a deep psychological need experienced by an insecure occupation force to prove their « potency » in the face of widespread local resistance and the fighting capacity of the male population⁸. Some of the Indonesian acts of sexual violence have indeed taken on an almost ritualistic aspect and seemed to have been designed to eradicate the sexual potency of entire elite families. How else to explain the brutal way in which the family of the second Fretilin President, Nicolau Lobato (in office, November 1977 – 31 December 78), were hounded to their deaths with Lobato's wife, Isobel, having a stake driven through her vagina, after being executed on the wharf at Dili during the 8-9 December 1975 Areia Branca massacre and his first

7. See CASTLE 2001, on the prison sentences imposed by the War Crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague on three Bosnian Serb army and paramilitary police commanders and sub-commanders who were convicted of using mass rape and sexual enslavement as a weapon of terror under the terms of the genocide (war crimes) convention covering « violence and torture », and « other acts of violence ». The trial, known as the Foca case, made history as the first successful conviction for war crimes of a sexual nature in the modern era. The sentences ranged from 28 to 12 years.

8. G. ADITJONDRO, 1994 : note 34, quoting F. FANON, 1967.

cousin being publicly castrated and executed in Viqueque in 1980⁹? According to Robert Cribb, an expert on the history of mass killings in modern Indonesia, « amongst the strongest pieces of circumstantial evidence suggesting a high death toll [in East Timor between 1975 and 1980] are the scattered reports of ritualised brutality by Indonesian soldiers, for such brutality not only implies dehumanisation of the enemy which is a necessary element in mass killing but also a boredom with intense violence [and] a search for ways to make death more terrible which is characteristic of those who have killed much and wish to kill more » (Cribb 2001). The specific issue of crimes against women in East Timor during the occupation – especially the bloody last act of the pro-integrationist militias in September 1999 – has already emerged in the reports compiled by Fokupers (Forum Komunikasi Perempuan/Women's Communications Forum), a leading women's non-governmental organisation active in East Timor¹⁰, and by the doyen of Australian experts on East Timor, James Dunn¹¹. There were also graphic accounts of rape camps established by the Indonesian army in certain areas of East Timor, especially the heavily contested eastern zones¹².

Despite earlier hopes, however, these are most unlikely to emerge in any trials of Indonesian military and civilian personnel implicated in the 1999 militia excesses in East Timor since, with the Wahid government in Indonesia now under intense pressure and the possibility of impeachment in the August 2001 People's Consultative Assembly (*Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat*/MPR) looming, there is little possibility of such trials ever taking place. Even if there were, and, as with the The Hague Tribunal for War Crimes in the former Yugoslavia, convictions were secured against key officers, the human consequences of the rapes and long years of sexual violence against women would still not be resolved.

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9. I am grateful to José Ramos Horta for information on the manner of Isobel Lobato's death, p.c. May 1988 (see also COX & CAREY 1995 : 22). The public castration of one of Nicolau Lobato's first cousins in Viqueque in 1980 was mentioned by Domingos Sarmiento Alves, interview, Lisbon, 13 November 1999, see CAREY 2001.
 10. FOKUPERS 2000 listed 182 cases of gender-based human rights violations in the pre-[i.e. post-27 January 2000] and post-ballot violence in East Timor.
 11. J. DUNN 2001 : 26 and 51, where he refers to the charge against Colonel (now Brigadier-General) Tono Suratman, the last but one Korem Commander in Dili (in post, June 1998 to August 1999), of the brutal rape of the wife of a leading Timorese pro-independence activist in early 1999.
 12. See the interview with Domingos Sarmiento Alves, Lisbon, 13 November 1999, cited in CAREY 2001 : 194. « It was a very tense situation [in Viqueque] in 1979-81. There were constant killings [...] It was even worse for the members of the Fretilin Women's Organisation, the *Organização Popular de Mulher Timor* (OPMT). These women were gathered together in a chicken coop which I had helped build when I was a boy scout [i.e. before 1975]. They were kept there in the most distressing conditions. In the evenings and nights, they were summoned for "interrogations". But, in fact, these were not interrogations at all. Instead, they were gang raped and sexually abused. The OPMT women were forced into positions as prostitutes for the soldiers. It was a form of rape camp. If any refused to go with the soldiers, they would be automatically killed. But the situation for those who agreed to the conditions of sexual slavery were truly dreadful ».
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Reintegrating Abused Women Back into Independent East Timorese Society : Some Reflections

Faced with this litany of abuse and aware of the depredations of the Indonesian army sponsored pro-integrationist militias which were occurring even as we undertook the interviews in Lisbon, we asked each of our correspondents to reflect on the ways in which abused women might be reintegrated back into East Timorese society. This also provided an opportunity for several of the interviewees to voice their opinions about the correct relationship which should prevail between young married couples in the newly evolving urban professional community in East Timor. Such opinions will inevitably be seen as highly advanced in the context of contemporary East Timorese society, particularly in the countryside, but they do reflect the generally held views of the educated younger generation of East Timorese who have experienced life in exile in Portugal during the past decade. Even the usually cautious – not to say withdrawn – former UDT supporter, Felísmina Monteiro, had very decided views on these issues as can be seen from this exchange :

Int : I want to ask you a question about the women of East Timor. Over the twenty-four years of the Indonesian occupation so many have been raped, tortured and abused. Even in the last few months [i.e. January-September 1999] of pro-autonomy militia terror in East Timor many women were forced into relationships with militiamen and are now going to have problems being integrated back into society. What would be the best way to help these women become part of their communities again ?

– Women who have been subjected to a lot of specific violence will certainly need help. But the militias should also be tried for crimes against women. Maybe women will have problems being accepted back into their communities again. That is because of the violence they suffered, indeed the violence of the whole situation [of occupied East Timor].

Int : What kinds of help are you thinking about here : would it be counselling, women doing things for other women, or what ? Do you have any ideas of the kind of help they might need ?

– Women in East Timor suffer from a lack of education [less than 20 percent are currently literate]. Most of them did not study. Improving their educational chances would certainly be one way of helping them because at the moment all they do – in Dili at least – is to take care of the house, washing and cleaning and doing all those sorts of things. In other places like Baucau, women do traditional things like weaving *tais* (Timorese tie-dyed and hand-woven scarves). Only in Dili are women not involved in such [traditional] activities. All the women do is washing and sewing and I never wanted to do those things. My sisters had to be very patient with me. Taking care of the children, taking care of their husbands [was their entire role in life]. In the future in East Timor women should have the same rights as women in other countries like Portugal and Europe. Those women who were abused, they need a lot of care and understanding. They suffered in their bodies what I only experienced in my mind. They need to be cherished, they need to be talked to with a lot of understanding. They have to be shown a lot of patience to help them overcome their problems.

Int : What other important rights should women have in East Timor ?

– In East Timor, women do all the cooking. Now some men are starting to help their wives and some women (like myself) are starting to work in offices. But it's still a very small percentage.

Int : So women need to be given the right to a proper education, to work, and the right to expect their men-folk to help them [by carrying out household tasks] ?

– Yes, we have to help each other. At the present time, if a woman has a job in East Timor, when she gets home [in the evening] she still has to do everything around the house because men don't cook, wash clothes or do the dishes.

Int : If you go back to East Timor next year what do you want to do ?

– I want to have the opportunity to study and work hard.

Although almost half a generation younger, the twenty-four-year-old Delfina Maria de Jesus de Rego Soriano, who was studying for a diploma in informatics in Lisbon, echoed the same sentiments :

Int : What about going back to work and struggle for the improvement of the position of women in East Timorese society ?

– If you look at traditional East Timorese society there is a huge divide between the rights enjoyed by men and women. But we are now in a situation of rapid transition. A new society is being born and I consider that the rights enjoyed by men and women should be entirely equal in that society. That is something I would certainly fight for.

Int : What would it be like if you got married ? Would you take the view that your husband to be – whether he were East Timorese or a foreigner – would be the one who went out to work and act as the breadwinner, while you stayed at home to keep the family going ?

– No, not at all. That is not at all my view. I will be going back as a returned foreign-educated woman. I have my rights and my expectations of marriage : namely, that it will be a full partnership and my husband will also take on appropriate household duties. Obviously, I will not shirk from my doing my own household chores, but it will have to be a genuine partnership. As far as I am concerned nothing will stop me going out to work too. So it will be a modern household in which maybe we both go out to work and our children are cared for during the day by someone else. No way am I going to sacrifice what I have learnt and achieved abroad to become the slave of some man in East Timor.

Int : Did you think like that before you left East Timor or did those ideas evolve when you lived abroad ?

– I think it was something that was already evident when I was in East Timor. You have to remember that I grew up in a family which had no father

from 1982 and in our household there was always an equal division of work between men and women, between my brothers and sisters and myself and, of course, my mother. When my elder brother got married both he and his wife shared their household tasks. They both went out to work and they both fought to preserve their household and family in the very difficult times of the occupation. There were plenty of examples all around of equality and sharing between men and women and I believe that was already implanted in me. Obviously it became more noticeable since I have been abroad [in Macao and Portugal], but it was definitely not new to me when I left East Timor in April 1996.

Int : What will your special contribution be to East Timorese society ?

– I feel my particular forte is on the economics side. I think my special contribution will be in terms of the [management of the] Timorese economy. Maybe I will assume some position of authority in formulating economic policy or dealing with financial issues. These are the things I would like to make a special contribution in.

Int : What are your reflections on the violence which has taken place against women in the past twenty-four years ? I am thinking here especially of the rape of women or forced concubinage [sexual slavery] by the pro-autonomy militias and Indonesian military.

– I am very sad at what has happened and I believe the UN should conduct a thorough investigation. There should be an international tribunal to try Indonesians accused of war crimes. I believe the international community also ought to try the militia leaders. I know that they are our own flesh and blood but they need to be answerable in a court of law too. Whether it is held inside or outside East Timor I am not in a position to say. All I know is that they must be brought to justice. Meanwhile, the special rights of women must be enshrined in our basic constitutional laws and the laws of the land. Women, in my view, need to enjoy special protection. They have rights which must be recognised. I really don't know about the situation of women who have been raped or forced into positions of concubinage or sexual relations with Indonesian soldiers. Every situation is different – indeed every person is different. I can empathise very deeply with their situation but maybe different families will take different views. We are a very traditional society and it is really difficult to see how all this is going to work out.

João Dias, the young lab technician who, like Delfina, is now also studying informatics and computer sciences in Lisbon, voiced a similarly enlightened view of future marriage relationships amongst educated East Timorese and the re-integration of abused women back into East Timorese society :

Int : What do you think about the violence which has been perpetrated against women in East Timor over the past twenty-four years ? What is going to happen to them now [November 1999] especially with 200,000 refugees in West Timor and rapes still going on there ? East Timor is a deeply conservative society. People don't talk about rapes. Instead, they use the expression « women who dance ». That is the expression used for women who have been raped. Their families often refuse to accept them. The fathers especially don't want their daughters to come back to live with them. It is also difficult for women who have been raped and have children. Somebody gave me the example of a woman who had had a child, but she was forced to live by herself because her family refused to see either her or the baby. The child is

a few years old now and the family is only just beginning to accept the baby. Then over the past twenty-four years of occupation, there are what you call comfort women who were forced to share their lives with Indonesian soldiers, or forced to live in concubinage with Indonesian soldiers or members of the militias. Now that you are about to have a fully independent East Timor what do you think is going to happen to the integration of these women into society and the sorts of life they can expect to lead?

— This is a very serious problem. We really need to get much closer to the issue since it goes to the very heart of issues of tradition and cultural values in our society. It is very difficult. We live in a very conservative society. The majority of the women who have been raped are not prepared to talk about it for fear of not getting a husband in the future. The most important aspect is the role which women can play and how they can be integrated into normal society. It is often thought that such a situation undermines the good name of the parents and family and there are inevitable consequences. Sometimes there are shotgun marriages in which the lover runs off. One can't really say this is a forced relationship. But nevertheless the implications of this are very serious for all concerned.

It will be one of my tasks when I go back to try to change that culture and to act as a role model. I personally don't think that virginity should be the mark of a woman who is able to be married. It should not depend on that. We must try and break down these traditional attitudes. Obviously I have travelled extensively and others [amongst the exile community] have also travelled. We are thus going back and bringing different attitudes to bear. Love not virginity is the key as far as I am concerned in any successful marriage. Sometimes there are pregnancies with no husbands. That is difficult because we live in a traditional society. But the most important thing is that women are respected. They must have a situation in society in which they can be valued. It is simply not right for a woman who has a job to then come home and have to go straight into the kitchen. Men have arrogated far too much power to themselves in East Timor. From now onwards I would like to show what a true marriage is really like in which the husband also goes into the kitchen and does his full share of the housework and washing. I think that there must be a constant give and take in any marriage. We also need to look closely at the teachings of the Catholic Church, particularly of the injunctions of Vatican II. The injunction which I have in mind here is the one which urges us to constantly look for ways to be closer to people, to meet people and help them. There is a generational change afoot now and I think that will inevitably bring different attitudes. Obviously we ourselves need to play a special role in ensuring that these new attitudes have an impact on wider society in East Timor.

The often jarring opposition of liberal values and conservative tradition in East Timorese society is frequently cited as a cause for potential conflict. In this face-off, conservative tradition is usually seen as the obscurantist force standing in the way of development. Get rid of tradition and the path to modernity and progress will be clear seems to be the message. But interestingly two of the youngest interviewees, Ejdio Tomas Dias Quintas and Honório de Araújo from Mihara (Lospalos) had perhaps the most thoughtful take on all this.

Int : When I was in East Timor, women told me that a woman is valued less than a buffalo. Now that you have a free East Timor which will soon be fully independent, do you have any thoughts about how to raise the status and position of women in your society? I am thinking especially here of those who have become marginalised in some way from society during the past

twenty-five years, women who have been raped or forced into sexual relationships with Indonesian soldiers or militiamen. Do you have any thoughts on this ?

– **Honório** : As regards the status of women, it is true that they are subject to a great deal of customary regulations and traditions, which differ between the various [30+] ethnic groups in East Timor. As for the new period of democracy in East Timor, I think that men and women should be treated equally as far as the laws of the land are concerned. But there is another aspect, that of traditional culture and this has to be defended. After all we were fighting to preserve East Timor's separate identity and part of that identity has to do with tradition and culture.

– **Ejídio** : As regards the status of women, yes, I would endorse the fact that there is a cultural dimension to all this. First, there has been a lot of cultural oppression on the part of the Indonesians. Second, women in our society are, of course, bound by tradition and culture. But I don't think it would be right for any future independent East Timorese government to involve itself directly with such issues...

Int : What might such a government's attitude be if the social situation evolved in East Timor ? Take my own country, England, for example, it was traditionally an agricultural society where most family legacies and bequests were left to the eldest son under the law of primogeniture. Later, as society developed, laws were put in place which allowed the younger sons and daughters of households to inherit. In 1882, the Married Women's Property Act was passed which allowed a married woman to retain all the property which she had brought into a marriage as well as her future acquisitions. Do you think something like that might happen in East Timor ?

– **Ejídio** : I think it's going to be very difficult to legislate across the board. What happens if say I was married and I was cuckolded in my own house and I divorced my wife because she had taken a lover ? I don't think in that case one could just have one sort of divorce settlement which laid down hard and fast rules on the division of property : namely, one half goes to the man and the other half to the woman. Frankly, every divorce is going to be different and it must be judged accordingly, especially by the process which is informed by custom (*adat*). That said I think that the laws of the land should treat men and women equally.

– **Honório** : If you look around the modern world you can see that women have all sorts of skills which show them to be the equal of men. If you look at neighbouring countries, even Indonesia where they have just [21 October 1999] elected a woman Vice-President [Megawati Sukarnoputri], there seems to be no bar on women becoming political leaders. This also ought to be the case in my own country, East Timor. [For this to happen] women should enjoy equal access to education. Then they will be able to make an equal contribution to society. Even if women want to take up a military career and become army generals, I believe they should be allowed to do so. That is their business. Frankly, they have all sorts of things to contribute.

– **Ejídio** : But [remember] when you move into the sphere of custom, you move into a different world, one which changes very slowly. We simply cannot overthrow customary society all at once. It has to be changed very sensitively and very gradually. I would like to give you an example here from

my own village of Mihara. A young man I knew from Mihara got married to a local woman and he paid seventy-seven buffaloes as bride price. The marriage cost the young man dear and it was officially blessed by the local priest. As it turned out his wife was barren but he was not allowed to divorce her because all the correct marriage procedures had been observed. The only way in which a divorce could have happened in this case was if both husband and wife had agreed on an amicable divorce settlement which would have allowed the young man to marry again and have children. Custom dictated that he could not just repudiate his wife since he had gone through all the correct customary procedures in winning her hand. He could not just cast her aside. Here, I think, is a good example of custom (*adat*) not oppressing the woman but actually upholding her rights in marriage. So *adat* is by no means a one-sided matter.

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The clash between conservative and liberal values in terms of future relations between young men and women in East Timor, especially in the urban environment of Dili, will certainly be significant here. The whole question of the way in which sexually abused women are reintegrated back into Timorese society will assume a new importance as educated East Timorese young men and women return from the exile diaspora. Just how successful they are may be a good indication of the degree of tolerance which will be found in any future independent East Timor. If the attitudes of the diaspora East Timorese are anything to go by, such tolerance will require some fundamental adjustments in traditional East Timorese society, not least within the deeply patriarchal family structure.

Then there is the position of the Catholic Church in East Timor. The juxtaposition of theological conservatism, moral toughness and a peasant-born practicality stood Bishop Belo in good stead when he was standing up for East Timorese rights in the face of the Indonesian occupation. So too did his unequivocal rejection of the Indonesian «family planning» (in fact, female fertility control) programme at a time when Jakarta was waging a policy of ethnocide against the local Timorese population (Carey 2000). But inspiring the affections of a population united by the brutalities of a foreign occupation is one thing, addressing the moral ambivalences of an era of development quite another. In the present transition to independence will Belo's categorical rejection of all unnatural contraceptive methods as «[canonically] illicit and illegal» command such widespread popular support? In the past when educated East Timorese youth looked to the Church as a protector against the Indonesians, Belo's theologically conservative style of leadership did him no harm. But the post-occupation era is different. How can Belo's Church speak to the needs of those whose lives have been blighted by Indonesian army and militia violence? Even in the blackest days of Indonesian rule, Belo could be startlingly blunt with Timorese youth, accusing them of naivety, stupidity or worse. Now his blunt talking may provoke a negative response, leading some amongst the younger generation to question the relevance of conservative teachings at a time when issues of women's rights, sexual freedom and reproduction (the

right of abortion for those women who have suffered rape at the hands of pro-Indonesian militias, or who demand access to future state-aided contraception or family planning programmes) will be ever more pressing. It is interesting to note here that Belo's brother bishop in Baucau, Dom Basílio do Nascimento, has shown himself decidedly more flexible on this issue than Bishop Belo, encouraging married men who do not wish to have more children to undergo vasectomies, and stressing the need for more attention to be given to the issue of women's reproductive health¹³. The two Bishops' joint pastoral letter issued in March 2001 dealt specifically with the issue of violence against women¹⁴, thus indicating that the Church is cognisant of the issue. But the jury is still out on whether it will really rise to the challenge and play a positive role in reintegrating sexually abused women back into East Timorese society, or indeed whether such reintegration will be possible given the current clash of values between the conservatism of traditional Timorese (rural) society and the younger generation's liberal and cosmopolitan ideals. In East Timor's struggle for the establishment of a truly independent and tolerant society, as former CNRT president, Xanana Gusmão, has repeatedly warned, the hardest part has yet to be accomplished¹⁵.

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Peter CAREY

Trinity College, Oxford

Peter Carey's recent publications are *East Timor. The Cost of Independence* and (with Steve Cox), *Survivors. East Timorese Experiences of the Indonesian Occupation, 1975-99* which are both about to be published (in Portuguese) by Editorial Caminho in Lisbon.

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