

Mari Alkatiri: Islamic Identity and legitimacy in Timorese (inter-)National Politics

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Mari Alkatiri's membership of Timor Leste's small but long-established Hadhrami Arab minority was either a non-issue or moderately helpful most of his life. It was in post-Independent Timor Leste that Alkatiri's Muslim identity played a more significant role in his political career. He had returned to a profoundly more Catholic Timor Leste in 1999. Since the invasion in 1974, Indonesian government policy insisted on its populations identifying themselves with a major religion. Most Timorese chose Catholicism; Carey reports the number of Catholics in Timor Leste officially rose from 29 per cent in 1974 to nearly 90 per cent in 1999 (Carey 1999, 86). The Catholic Church had provided succour and a solidarity network for the independence movement during the horror of occupation. In 2005, after an argument over the Alkatiri government's attempt to remove compulsory religious education in schools, the Catholic Church in East Timor organised a two-week long demonstration at which people called for Alkatiri's resignation as Prime Minister.

The article examines the interaction of Islamic religious identity and Timorese (inter)national politics through the examination of three phenomena: aspects of Alkatiri's biography, Alkatiri's identity as represented in Australian media in 2005-6 and in the 2005 Church demonstrations. The article supports Hughes' argument that in the lead up to his resignation as Prime Minister, 'the dispute with the Church dealt a blow to Alkatiri personally, from which he never recovered' (2009, 192). Alkatiri's religious identity meant he could not garner support from younger Timorese for whom the Church had, 'become a crucial reference point for the new student-led independence movement from 1985 onwards', (Carey 1999, 86). Further, the article argues Alkatiri could not claim legitimacy with these group during the Church's test of its power within the State because of new aspects of Timorese nationalism influenced by New Order Indonesian policies (Hughes 2009, 194). The clandestine movements' political imaginary had changed from the foundational socialism of the early Timorese nation becoming more conservative and religious. Both factors worked to preclude Muslim and socialist Alkatiri's inclusion in, and leadership of, some sections of the new Timorese solidarity community. It also hindered his legitimacy with the public crucially in the power struggle with Xanana Gusmao that followed in 2006, after which Alkatiri left office.

In examining the tumultuous period of the Church demonstrations, we cannot only consider internal developments. The Australian media were especially influential in creating a particular image of Alkatiri that reflected back into the Timorese political scene. In looking for simple and convenient representations of complex Timorese politics, Australian media drew negative images into the Australian and Timorese public spheres during the 2005 Church demonstrations. I posit that this had an effect in providing an identity label on which Australian publics could "hang their hat on". Their contrasting of Alkatiri's Muslim identity with a Timorese Catholic identity influenced debates about Alkatiri and intervention in Australia. I argue negative identity labelling of Alkatiri was reflected into the Timorese public sphere.

Kelly da Silva (2008), David Hicks (2011) and Alynna Lyon (2011) have discussed some aspects of Alkatiri's dispute with the Church in 2005 as crucial in changing the relationship between Church and State in Timor Leste. I pursue a different angle in this article and use Alkatiri's identity as a *Leitmotiv*, which allows me to shed light on two instances when people opposed to Alkatiri used religious identity to add weight to their arguments. In our interview, he suggested that the role of the Catholic Church in the Timorese State was atypical of Catholic Church state relations generally and more characteristic of Islamic states, a statement supported by Lyon's research into the role of the Catholic Church in the State (2011, 7).

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FRETILIN supporter Zelia Fernandes said, ‘Alkatiri being Muslim is not a good argument’,² and that religious identity was used to discredit him because his opponents had no real other arguments. Real argument or not, opposition groups often cited Alkatiri's religious identity in 2005-6, both during the Church demonstrations and in Australian media reporting. For this reason, I examine Alkatiri's Islamic identity as part of the complex political relations of the period, in order to complement the extensive literature covering Church-State relations and the 2006 crisis.

In 2011, Alkatiri and his supporters in FRETILIN said their relations with the Church were much better. It remains to be seen whether Alkatiri's appeal for legitimacy will overcome residual denotative and negative views of his Islamic identity in the eyes of national and international publics in the 2012 parliamentary elections.

Hadhrami Trade and Settlement in Southeast Asia

Since medieval times, traders and religious teachers from the Hadhramaut, a region in the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula, travelled with the monsoons throughout the Indian Ocean. They then formed diasporic communities and alliances Eastern Africa, India and the Southeast Asian archipelago. According to Ulrike Freitag, the break-down of security and social order in the Hadhramaut in the 19th century as well as advancements in transportation, such as steam shipping, led to greater migration flows to the Indian Ocean littoral, where Hadhrami had settled and traded in the preceding centuries (Clarence-Smith & Freitag 1997). They had also set up schools that taught Islamic and secular subjects (Mobini-Kesheh 1999, 327). Hadhrami were important to trade, religion and the courts of Southeast Asia and were influential in the Islamization of the region.

It has been difficult to establish from the available literature when the first Hadhrami Muslims arrived on Timor Leste. According to some sources, people on the island of Timor recognised the sovereignty of the Islamic Ternate Sultanate in the Moluccas, in the 16th century, suggesting regular relations. The island of Banda to the north of Timor and the only source of nutmeg and mace for many centuries probably had Muslim settlements before the Portuguese arrived. Tomes Pires wrote in 1512 that the people of Banda ‘began to be Moors’ only since the 1480s’, supporting the idea of Muslim communities on Timor predating colonialism. (Lape 2000, 145).

Alkatiri confirmed there was a Muslim trading presence on Timor in the 19th century. They have only ever numbered a few hundred, and there are approximately 2,400 Muslims living in East Timor now, 600 of which are Hadhrami. Haegerdal tells us, ‘there was a degree of movement between Alor, Atauro and Timor’ (2010). Inter-island movement possibly brought with it Muslims from the island of Alor. The toponym Kampung Alor seems to support the thesis of inter-island settlement by Muslim communities. Kampung Alor is the suburb in central west Dili where Hadhrami and other Muslims live. It fronts the sea to the north, the Comoro River to the west, and the Farol quarter borders it to the east. According to Lisbon Technical University's ‘The History of Timor’, widely quoted in Wikipedia, but with no named author, the Hadhrami established a community in Kampung Alor from the nineteenth century onwards. Until the 1970s, the Hadhrami community of Kampung Alor grew rice and fished. Some Hadhrami men gained positions of high regard within the Portuguese administration, becoming *Chefe de Post*—head of the subdistrict. During the Second World War, some members of the Arab community in Kampong Alor took over local political posts from the Liurai (kings) and cooperated with the Japanese occupation forces.

After the military revolution overthrowing Salazar's successor Caetano in Portugal in 1974 and the moves towards decolonisation of Timor, some people within the Arab community in Dili supported the political party Apodeti and integration with Indonesia. Others supported the nascent independence movement. One of these people was Mari Alkatiri.

² Fernandes, Z. 2011, Interview with author, Dili, Timor Leste, July 8

Alkatiri's Bibliography

Alkatiri opened the interview by stating that both his paternal grandfathers came to Timor directly from the Hadhramaut in Yemen, 'almost 200 years ago'. Like many Hadhrami families, his grandmothers were locals. His paternal grandmother, 'is from Maubara and my father's [grandmother] is from Venilale'.³ Hadhrami men are allowed to marry outside the community but women generally do not (Alatas 2010). Alkatiri himself is married to a Catholic woman⁴. Although his grandfathers had come as traders, they later became agriculturalists. Alkatiri said they were pushed out of trade in Timor because of growing Chinese control of that sphere. Mari bim Amude Alkatiri was born on the 26th of November 1949 and grew up in Kampung Alor near Dili. Alkatiri acknowledged his family's religion set them apart. As a third generation Timorese they are, 'gradually being integrated into society. Although the religious identity is really different [...] I am still a Muslim. And that's the reason why my education was a Muslim education. Before going to the official school, I was educated in a Madrasa'. The Madrasa is in Fatuhada, Kampung Alor, and attached to the mosque, Masjid An-Nur, which was built on land endowed by Azan bin Umar Al-Katiri shortly before World War II. The teachers in the Madrasa were mostly Hadhrami. At school in the late fifties, Alkatiri started learning Portuguese in addition to his mother tongue, Bahasa Kupang, which is a variation of Bahasa Indonesia, and the *lingua franca* of Timor, Tetun. He spoke about the advantages and disadvantages of belonging to a religious minority:

[A]t that time, being a Muslim, we couldn't really apply for the official school. Only in the year '59-'60, then we were admitted to the official school. The Portuguese official school. Since the beginning... a bit discriminated within the society.

Alkatiri left Timor to study surveying at university at the Angolan School of Geography. After returning to Timor, he joined an 'anti-colonial discussion group' (CAVR 2006, 23), and worked for the Colonial Public Works Department as a chartered surveyor (Shoesmith 2003, 236). He contributed to the Jesuit-run newspaper *Seara*, (Carey 1999), which escaped the Caetano regime's censorship until 1973. In January 1970, he founded the Movement for the Liberation of East Timor (Al Madani 2002).⁵ He was also a founding member of ASDT, which later became FRETILIN,⁶ together with important personalities such as Xavier do Amaral and José Ramos Horta. I asked him if his family's religious background had an influence on his political attitudes. He replied with a confirmation and a dig at his opponents:

The way [my father] approached things were different sometimes. Of course [it had an effect]...religious identity is still very strong in my way of doing things. I try to be straightforward but very honest. And sometimes I hear that people don't like it. They prefer the Javanese style.

After the early influence of his father, Alkatiri's political or ideological identity as a member of FRETILIN became decidedly more important. The African nationalist movements and other anti-colonial struggles inspired FRETILIN's ideology in the seventies. FRETILIN's avowed aim was to be a 'front that united nationalist and anti-colonial groups under one vision—the liberation of Timorese from colonialism' (CAVR 2006). In the early 1970s, FRETILIN also drafted programmes threatening the Church, including a 'critique of the Church's involvement in colonialism and its large land-holdings' (Smyth 2004). Prior to the Indonesian invasion, says Carey, 'FRETILIN was proposing a complete division of Church and State' (1999, 81). Alkatiri stated that for a modern political party, there was no other choice to insist on the division of Church and State. Further, during his term as Prime Minister, people pushed him to set up a Ministry of Religious Affairs, which he argued, 'is not a tradition from a Catholic majority country. This is

³ Alkatiri, M. 2011, Interview with author, Dili, Timor Leste, August 12

⁴ Marina Alkatiri is the Timorese ambassador to Mozambique

⁵ Also; Alkatiri, M. 2011, Interview with author, Dili, Timor Leste, August 12

⁶ FRETILIN is the Frente Revolucionária do Timor Leste Independente (Revolutionary Front of Independent East Timor)

a tradition for an Islamic majority country. You are trying to copy Indonesia. I am Muslim, but I don't agree with this'. Alkatiri practices his religion, as the majority of Timorese people to, but he admits, 'I am a Muslim, but I am not a radical Muslim. Even for some Muslims, I am a very bad Muslim. But of course I am a progressivist man'.

After the unilateral declaration of independence following the FRETILIN/UDT civil war in 1975, Alkatiri was named Minister of State of Political Affairs in the short-lived FRETILIN government (Al Madani 2002). Alkatiri recalled this period immediately after the Indonesian invasion:

We couldn't really get assistance from Portugal, to establish our headquarters in Portugal. I flew to Mozambique, because I know Samora Machen, the-then President of Mozambique [. ...] I went there and then he signed immediately, ok, you can come here [and establish your embassy].

His personal connections with African leaders of anti-colonial movements were more important than his religious identity during his exile. Frelimo in Mozambique supported FRETILIN's exiled External Delegation⁷ at both the diplomatic and individual level. The Frelimo government gave scholarships to any Timorese who could qualify for university, (Hill 2006) demonstrating that solidarity within the anti-colonial movement and his political connections played a role in Alkatiri's success. Alkatiri had a successful professional career in Mozambique; he studied law at the Eduardo Mondlane University in Maputo before becoming a legal consultant in 1992 and later lecturing at the University of Mozambique.

In 1977, Alkatiri replaced Ramos-Horta as the Minister for Foreign Affairs for the External Delegation when Ramos-Horta became Timor Leste's representative to the United Nations. In the 1980s, Xanana left FRETILIN and declared that Falantil, the revolutionary army in Timor Leste, would be party neutral in the fight for independence. Ramos-Horta also left FRETILIN, and Alkatiri became very influential in the leadership of the External Delegation. By the time the exiles returned to Timor Leste, Hughes says, 'the efforts made by FRETILIN in the early 1970s to popularise the socialist nationalism of Portuguese Africa had long since paled into insignificance' and beside the brutal impact of the Indonesian occupation a very different sort of nationalism had grown up—conservative and anti-communist, with a strong emphasis on religion — things that so many citizens had imbibed from the Indonesian system (Hughes 2009, 191).

The Australian Media

After September '11 and during the so-called War on Terror, the Australian media gave negative press to Islam and Muslims. The majority of news media presented what they saw as the incommensurability of Islam with western democratic values, and treated identity and culture as a 'core or deep value'. Some commentators called Samuel Huntington's thesis declaiming an inevitable 'clash of civilisations' (Huntington 1993), between Islam and the West prophetic. Conservative international politics re-fashioned scripts of the Other using bald orientalisms, a strategy that Verstraete & Longman have argued makes religion or "culture into the main identity factor of a population, or its motivational force in intercultural conflicts" (2004, 5). I would suggest this is particularly true in cases of Arab/Muslim diasporic communities as Heiss & Slama have argued (2011, 232). To illustrate the discursive context in which discussions of Alkatiri's identity took place, I digress briefly to the Australian media reportage of the 2002 so-called Bali Bombings. The weekly news magazine *The Bulletin* wrote, "there are monsters on the loose [...] [Eric Ellis talks to police about] 'the secret world of 'Indonesia's Arabs'", because, he elaborates, 'Militant Hadhramis are believed to have been instrumental in radicalising and financing otherwise moderate Indonesian Muslims' (Ellis 2002). As Edward Said argued long before 9/11, 'labels like 'Arab' or 'Muslim' as subdivisions of 'The Orient'', are so over-determined and political that, 'no one today can use them without some attention to the formidable polemical mediations that screen the objects, if they exist at all, that the labels designate' (Said 1984, 214). In Alkatiri's case, the Australian media happily used labels

⁷ The group of FRETILIN members living in exile and trying to win Timorese independence through international diplomacy

like Muslim and Arab to discuss him as a politician, making “culture” into the main motivational force in what was a political struggle of elites over legitimacy. In this way, the media simplified complex politics and history for Australian readers, a great number of which subsequently saw Australian interference in Timorese affairs, especially over the gas in the Timor Gap, as natural and perhaps necessary.

Instability at the national level of Timorese politics was concurrent with these discussions. The Australian media cast roles for actors in post-Independence Timor Leste in terms of primordial identities and these international portrayals refracted back into Timor itself. To draw on Eller and Coughlan’s, ‘The poverty of Primordialism’ (Eller and Coughlan 1993, 46-7), media reports attributed the strife to the a priori nature of Alkatiri’s Muslim- and the Timorese people’s Catholic- identities. They also presented the inevitable conflict between religious identities as the beginning and end point of their analysis. Regardless of the complexities of the situation Dili, media wrote to themes of ineffable and incompatible identities in Timor Leste. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s *Four Corners* ran a report 2006 called ‘Stoking the Fires’ (Jackson 2006). This piece of television journalism won Australia’s highest award for journalism but has since been heavily criticised for its ‘irregularities’ recently in the documentary film ‘Breaking the News’ by Nicholas Hansen (2011). At the beginning of the programme, the reporter Liz Jackson, quoted men at the 2005 Church demonstrations, ‘Alkatiri is a terrorist, a communist, a Muslim’ say the men at this rally’ (Jackson 2006). Jackson conflated terms and used primordial notions of the incommensurability of Islam and Christianity to frame her subsequent allegations. The Australian newspaper ran articles calling Alkatiri a ‘fundamentalist’, (Aarons 2006) and seven days after the broadcast of ‘Stoking the Fires’ and amidst riots, Alkatiri resigned. Alkatiri told me, ‘I was trying to sue Four Corners, for Four Corners’ complete fabrication of a lot of things, but I didn’t really get good lawyers in Australia’. During the Church demonstrations in 2005, Mark Dodd of *The Australian* wrote that the appeal for Alkatiri to step down, ‘struck a popular chord, with many in the staunchly conservative Catholic nation already uneasy about being ruled by an un-elected Muslim’ (Dodd 2005). There are a number of problems with this statement, it is debateable how ‘staunchly’ Catholic or conservative Timor is; further, that the demonstrations were representative of a widespread opinion or of certain opposition groups is unknown. Dodd’s analysis presented the demonstrations as an inevitable conflict between religious identities.

Alkatiri gave reasons why the Australian media campaigned so strongly against him, and in his opinion, it comes down to resources. At the time, Alkatiri was negotiating with the-then Australian Prime Minister John Howard regarding the Timor Gap, and the natural gas reserves it contains. Alkatiri asserted, ‘If I had really, in the negotiation, given bigger, better opportunities for the Australians, they would have defended me, I am sure. This is very opportunistic... a very pragmatic way of doing things’. Although the Australian media did not have control over Timorese public opinion, media portrayals of Alkatiri did reflect back into the domestic scene. In this way, religious identity became more prominent, and provided another way to justify opposition to his government.

The Australian media wrote analyses of situations in East Timor using primordialist notions of religion and in doing so, replicated the turn to ethnicity given legitimacy by people like Huntington. Questions of religious identity subsequently assumed more importance in political debate in Australia and in East Timor. Having pointed to the flaws of such an essentializing approach, I nevertheless argue that Alkatiri’s ethnic and religious background did have some influence on his biography even before he became Prime Minister. In the following, I posit Alkatiri’s cultural identity as a Hadhrami enabled his education, which in turn allowed him to become a politician and to be part of FRETILINs External Delegation.

The Church Demonstrations

After Timor Leste became independent, the nationalist sentiment that had been important for community solidarity was changed. During Alkatiri’s exile, the Catholic Church had grown influential. Their solidarity with the Timorese people in offering places of refuge and the limited contact that the Timorese had with the External Delegation meant that the Timorese Church became a key channel of communication and resistance (Carey 1999, 86).

In the UNTAET interim government, Alkatiri was both the Chief Minister and the Minister for Economy and Development. At this juncture too, Alkatiri's Muslim identity played little role in his selection. It was his standing in the international community as leader of FRETILIN's External Delegation that contributed to his success. FRETILIN subsequently won 57 per cent in the first elections in August 2001 and Alkatiri became Timor Leste's first Prime Minister.

On the 3rd of November 2002, police arrested a high school student at a demonstration. The next day a demonstration against the arrest was held in front of National Parliament. It is alleged that outsiders incited the demonstrators. During the latter demonstration a student was shot, quite probably by the police. A group of the demonstrators then burnt Hello Mister supermarket, houses near the mosque, Alkatiri's house, and the house of his younger brother. David Hicks stated recently that the burning was carried out by pro-Indonesian and anti-government demonstrators (Hicks 2011, 121). The violence, at least partially directed at Alkatiri, illustrated his decreasing popularity with some groups.

The Church demonstrations began in April 2005, after the Cabinet had decided in February to make moves to stop compulsory Catholic education from state schools (Hicks 2011, 118). Alkatiri said he voted against the majority of the cabinet for religious teaching to remain compulsory. In January, Bishop Dom Alberto Ricardo da Silva and Bishop Dom Basilio do Nascimento had made an official complaint to a body convened by the United Nations that not enough was being done to convict those guilty of war crimes during the Indonesian period (Hicks 2011, 123) amongst other complaints, listed in full by da Silva (2008, 11).⁸

The Age reported, 'influential sections of the Church called people into the capital, Dili, to protest against the curriculum' (Murdoch 2005). People at the protest held placards asking people to 'fight against the Alkatiri regime' and the same article quoted Father Benancio Araujo as saying, 'We are fighting the dictatorship regime of Alkatiri' (Garcia 2005). Father Domingos Soares, a member of the CRNT organising committee, said, 'the people and the Catholic Church have joined peacefully for an end to this extremist government' (Lamb 2005). Another banner proclaimed, 'Win war with God, government with God, develop with God' (Hicks 2011). I suggest this last banner shows the pairing of nationalism and religion that characterised the a new aspect of nationalism in Timor Leste, and which, by its nature, disallowed Alkatiri's inclusion. Alkatiri was reported in a Mozambique newspaper as saying, 'I admit the fact that I am a Muslim, in an overwhelmingly Catholic country, may be difficult for some Catholics to accept' and remarked, 'the Catholic Church played the role of an opposition, organising demonstrations for two or three weeks' (AIM 2006). In our interview, he agreed that his religious identity played a role in the demonstrations:

...not for the normal people, but some of the Catholic hierarchy [...] particularly those in a political party - small parties - they had no other argument, [other] than to tell the people this is a majority Catholic country, [and therefore] can't be really governed by a Muslim.

Zelia Fernandes, a FRETILIN party member, also said that 'Alkatiri being Muslim is not a strong argument'.⁹ Alkatiri flatly denied that he was against religious teaching in schools and that he had voted for its inclusion in the February 2005 cabinet vote. He said it is his belief that although the Church could not form part of the government, 'the Catholic Church is part of [Timorese] identity. As a politician, I am

⁸ I reproduce Kelly da Silva's note (2008, 11 n14): 'On April 26, 2005 the Timor Post printed part of the Church's accusations against the government, which were characterized as anti-democratic and unjust. To ground its claims, the Church presented the following evidence [that the government was at fault], the, 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'

⁹ Fernandes, Z. 2011, Interview with author, Dili, Timor Leste, July 8

always looking for a strong identity of the people. As a small country between two giants you need really a strong identity, to identify yourself as different'. He also claimed that these days his relationship with the Catholic Church is greatly improved:

I think we cannot really proliferate religions here[. ...] when I was Prime Minister, I was really protecting the Catholic Church here against the new groups of Christians coming in, nee? [...] And now suddenly the Prime Minister is Catholic, everybody is Catholic, and they open doors, windows, and everything for those people to come. That's the reason why the Catholic Church now realise it was better with [me].

For FRETILIN, a national revolutionary identity was more important than religious identity, making Alkatiri's religious affiliation largely irrelevant within the party. Alkatiri claims an authentic revolutionary identity: 'I am a founder of this country; I am the founder of everything, FRETILIN, Falintil, the Democratic Party of Timor Leste. There is no other... leader with the same condition (sic.). That's why I have been telling the people: religiously, I belong to a minority, politically; I am the leader of the majority. But this is a contradiction'. These words lend support to Hughes' argument that Alkatiri and FRETILIN saw themselves as 'early pioneers who helped forge a national consciousness, they were the vanguard of the nationalist revolution' (2009, 193). Hughes' summary gives a deeper reading to the opinion Alkatiri offered me of his stature as founding father, namely, 'the FRETILIN government argued that Portuguese language and culture were a part of Timorese history and that restoration of Portuguese had 'always' been FRETILIN policy'. In doing so they claimed to be 'recapturing the authentic Timorese experience' (Hughes 2009, 193), regardless of the 24 years of intervening post-colonial history. Alkatiri's time away from East Timor also played against him, as for many people, "whatever suffering homesick exiles might have endured abroad could not come close to their own' (Traube 2011, 134).

During the 2005 Church demonstrations, Alkatiri's Islamic identity became a political burden. Even though he could claim revolutionary credentials, the kind of nationalism that had evolved in Timor was greatly different and had used the 'Church as a source of social cohesion and political mobilisation' (Hughes 2009, 194). By virtue of his Hadhrami identity and left wing credentials, he was not able to use the Church as a support network and this limited his political success. The 2005, Church demonstrations marked a turning point in Alkatiri's term as Prime Minister and illustrated his diminishing popularity with internal and external stakeholders that would lead to his controversial resignation in 2006.

In this sense, the argument over religious teaching in schools was also a debate over national identity. Alkatiri and FRETILIN supported, and were representative of, a secular and more Portuguese socialist identity, but the Church, Xanana Gusmao and José Ramos-Horta has the support of the younger members of the clandestine movement and a more conservative and religious identity. Ramos-Horta ran as an independent in the presidential elections and said in the Tetun-language part of his inauguration speech, that he had 'three superiors, the Vatican and its two representatives in Timor', Bishops Ricardo da Silva and Basilio de Nascimento. He added, 'As President, I will work together with the Church in order to make the relationship between the Church and the State even stronger (Ramos-Horta 2007). Ramos-Horta was able to appeal to the more conservative and religious nationalist sentiment. At the vital juncture of the Church demonstrations in 2005, Alkatiri could not make the same appeal.

Conclusion

Edward Said once lamented, in a response to Huntington, 'how finally inadequate are the labels, generalisations and cultural assertions' (Said 2001). The inadequacy of the Australian media's presentation of Alkatiri's identity has become clear in the course of this article, but so too have the constraints identity can place on a political leader. It was not an incommensurability of Muslim and Catholic identities, as the Australian media would have it, but rather that Alkatiri appealed to a different kind of socialist and secular nationalism for legitimacy. Even though he could claim revolutionary credentials, the kind of nationalism that had evolved in East Timor was greatly different and the young and the clandestine movement had used the, 'Church as a source of social cohesion and political mobilisation' (Hughes 2009, 194). By virtue of his

Hadhrami-Muslim identity and left wing credentials, Alkatiri was neither able to use the Church as a support network, nor could he claim legitimacy from it; this was obviously limiting his political success.

I have argued that in the colonial period, being a member of the Hadhrami community in East Timor meant he had a more advantaged economic background than many other East Timorese and was able to go to the Islamic madrasah before attending the government school at the age of ten. Education allowed him to imagine a free and independent Timor and this passion made him a founding member of the left-wing independence party, FRETILIN. In FRETILIN's External Delegation, identity took second place to ideology. His party claim that his religious identity is not important for a modern leader, but in 2005, his cultural identity was constraining because it meant he was positioned outside the Church's communication and solidarity network. This in turn meant that his public personality could not have resonance with the nationalist feeling that had developed along more conservative and religious lines in East Timor since 1975. Alkatiri could not claim legitimacy because the new kind of nationalist discourse excluded him in an instance of problematized identity from which he has found his political career difficult to resurrect thus far.

In the upcoming parliamentary elections in June 2012, it is most likely that Alkatiri will once again run for Prime Minister. Five years ago, in the 2007 elections, 'the public standing and reputation of the former Prime Minister [...] was not seen as an advantage' (Bexley & McWilliam 2008, 78) although FRETILIN won a greater number of primary votes (29 per cent) than other parties did. Nonetheless, talking to people in Dili in 2011 about Alkatiri drew mixed reactions, party supporters stand behind him but others are suspicious. It is also of interest whether infrastructure spending by the incumbent coalition government will placate voters, especially in some of the districts outside Dili, who seem frustrated with lack of services and economic development and who might otherwise vote for FRETILIN. In any case, the campaign period over the next few months will show whether Alkatiri's religious identity continues to play a role in the East Timorese public's imagination as well as in the Australian media's reporting on East Timor.

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