

## East Timor a dependent State. What can we do for the Timorese?

J. A. Berlie<sup>1</sup>

East Timor became independent in 2002. Considering the role of the UN, Australia and Portugal in 2009, what can we do to develop this new country and help it to be less dependent? This article looks at the dependency of the country and society, politics, education and development to try to find solutions for the new country.

### Society

East Timorese society is complex. There are around fourteen ethno-linguistic groups (see my article on *The Asian Journal of Social Science* 36/3-4, 2008). The traditional customs (*lisan* in Tetum language) continue to play a role. However, the youth are modern and constitute a challenging question for East Timor society. Thirty percent of the population falls between the age 15 and 29. In the coming decade, it is hoped that the youth will be fully integrated into the political life and the development of the country. Youth dissatisfaction may lead to violence.

The ‘Petitioners’ is also a serious question not yet fully solved but it cannot be explained by a so called ‘historical’ division of the country into Loromonu and Lorosae. This malaise inside the FDTL, Defence Force of East Timor, which precipitated the 2006 crisis recalls the turmoil of the year 1959. Following an attempt of uprising in Viqueque, Baucau and Dili, 70 Timorese were deported to Angola. These events are still very present in the minds of the people of Bagia, Matebian mountain, and Viqueque. In 2009, Abel Belo, Frederico Almeida da Costa, Juman Basirun, Lourenço Rodrigues Pereira, and Salem Sagan are the last survivors of these past yet symbolic events. All were interviewed by the author. The current main point, law and order, which is a recurrent problem since 1959 is not yet fully solved.

Since independence in 2002 the country has not yet found a long-term incentive scheme to restore a harmonious consensus. However in 2008, the payment of pensions to former Falintil veterans—a political act not yet implemented in Guinea Bissau—is a favorable action by the East Timorese government. A new type of governance and planning may reduce the impoverishment of the people and youth unemployment. Among other possible options, the development of vocational education and the implementation of new laws on education is a suggestion to develop the country and reduce youth disillusion. A great effort is being made by UNMIT (United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste) to improve governance. This mission continues in 2009-2010, but its practical implication on the government and the ministries is difficult to evaluate. However, on 9 July 2009, the President of the National Parliament, Fernando de Araujo Lasama, was invited to give an East Timorese viewpoint on governance to an important audience including the UN highest representative Dr Atul Khare, at the Hotel Novo Horizonte. During that meeting, a discussion on corruption (KKN), the commission anti-corruption (*Komisaun Anti Korrupsaun*), and ‘Constitutionalism’ has not yet drastically solved the economic problems, the lack of unity and secured the political stability of the dependent country.

### Politics

In 2009 CNRT, the Party of the PM Xanana Gusmão, and Fretilin dominate the political life of the country. Sergio de Mello wanted many parties for East Timor nascent democracy. East Timor’s political complexity is partly a consequence of the recognition of too many parties by UNTAET in 2001. In 2007, the importance of multiparty alliances launched by ASDT (the party of Xavier do Amaral) and PSD (the

---

<sup>1</sup> The author is grateful to James Fox who invited him at the ANU to prepare this paper in December 2008.

Social Democratic Party) has contributed to the election of the President Ramos-Horta and the Prime Minister Xanana. Political harmony will contribute to ease the ‘dependence’ of the East Timorese State.

The manipulation of the ordinary East Timorese continues. ‘A significant element of the elite manipulation (...) contributes to the current division between the elites and the *Maubere* people, the ordinary East Timorese. This, in turn, reflected elements of traditional tribal culture and the historic roles of the *liurai*, (...) the authoritarian structures of the Indonesian occupation, and the pronounced economic inequalities of the UN/international period’ (Kingsbury 2009, 217).

In 2008 there are three main political formations which were established after the legislative elections in 2007. The formation in power which includes 39 deputies under PM Xanana (in a 65 member parliament) is called AMP (Aliança Maioria Parlamentar). This political alliance includes five parties: CNRT, PD (Partido Democrático), PSD, UNDERTIM (Veterans’ Party) and the deputies of ASDT. In 2009, the founder ‘Teacher’ (*Facts* 1976), the traditional faction and the president of the ASDT party, Xavier do Amaral, are independent.

The GGA (Grupo Grande Aliança) includes 23 deputies—which are still better known under the name Fretilin. The General Secretary is still Mari Alkatiri, but GGA also includes two presidents of parties: the Kota deputy, Manuel Tilman, and the PPT deputy, Jacob Xavier.

A new opposition alliance, LDP (Liga Democrática Progressista) is structured by ex-deputies João Carrascalão (UDT), António Ximenes (UDC) and Armando Dourado da Silva (PL). LDP is new and relatively weak. Avelino Coelho (PSD) in principle says he joined the LDP, but he is also a secretary of state of the majority, for the energy resources policy.

PUN (National Unity Party) is an independent party of the opposition which took 3 seats with the support of the Catholic Church under the leadership of a former UNTAET minister, Fernanda Mesquita Borges.

The great political event in 2008 was supposed to be the Peace March planned by the Fretilin Party and the LPD, it never happened. The year 2009 was initially rather quiet. Suddenly, beginning in July, new events transformed the political landscape, KKN, corruption, and a constitutional crisis between the Prime Minister and the President, were at the centre. It is too early to forecast a quick resolution of the current political instability which started in 2007 and continued in 2008. The elections in 2012 are nevertheless not far away. It seems that a reform the FDTL and the East Timorese Police (PNT) two key points to recover the ‘full sovereignty’ of the East Timorese. The training of young future leaders to replace the UN staff and of new recruits to join the Defence Force and the PNT Police may also help the country to be less dependent.

### **Development, employment and vocational schools**

The budget and in particular the possibility to develop East Timor is related to the Petroleum Fund another dependency. The New Greater Sunrise Treaty was signed on 11 January 2006 by M. Alkatiri and Ramos-Horta. Under the Timor Sea Treaty, East Timor is entitled to 90 percent of the revenue within the JPDA maritime limits while Australia takes 10 percent. Federer (2005, 120) mentions the question of corruption doubting the capacity of East Timor to ensure an effective use of its hydrocarbon revenues. The Consultative Council of Petroleum Fund of Timor-Leste (PF 2009, 1) mentions two important destabilizing factors, corruption and inflation. Between August and November 2009, the recent oil spill of Montara platform in Timor Sea shows the dependence of East Timor who has no other way than a diplomatic and eventually international legal complain toward Thailand and Australia to solve the problem. The dependency of East Timor is particularly marked for oil and gas.

The Vice-PM Mario Carrascalão, who has ten years of experience in administering the whole East Timor, told *The Age* (22 Nov. 2008), says that the way the Government is awarding contracts — without open tendering from various bidders — is open to corruption. For Mario Carrascalão, three points have to be solved in East Timor in the coming years: State-planning, corruption and good governance (interviews 26 August 2008 and July 2009). The former PM Alkatiri is more direct. ‘There is corruption,’ he says. ‘We have facts and will soon reveal them’.

Recently, in August 2009 Alkatiri has stated that he wants to help the Prime Minister. If this direct or indirect proposition of collaboration is truly accepted and well managed, it may stabilise East Timorese politics but is not strong enough to structure a request to ask the United Nations to leave the country in 2010.

The International Exhibition at the Municipal Market of Dili between 27 and 31 August 2008 with 75 enterprises registered is an attempt to develop the country, but yet did not attract solid foreign investment. The booth of the Ministry of Energy was attended by many young female and male Timorese eager to know more about the future of their country's economy and also probably seeking employment. Unfortunately this sort of international meeting does not prove yet the existence of a planned Timorese economic system able to put the economy of the country on track by replacing the United Nations staff consumption by a purely East Timorese local consumption. Another important point is starting to plan a better integration of the youth.

### **Unemployment of the youth and education**

The World Bank mission in East Timor in July 2008 (*Report 2008*) estimates that 7 percent of the population has formal employment. Only 400 formal jobs are annually created for some 15,000 young people entering the labour market each year. In constant 2000 prices, the non-oil GDP per capita has declined from US\$318 in 2002 to US\$305 in 2007 (*ibid.*). 'The country's increased income has not sparked economic growth or poverty reduction'.

Concerning employment in East Timor the International Labour Organisation has pointed out the following points. Entering the labour force at an early age is subject to 'recurrent unemployment' (*Yes 2007: 22-3*). In fact, 22 percent of the youth interviewed judge that agriculture is not 'a good way to make money'. However 73 percent think positively that agriculture is good for the country. 29 percent of the interviewees judge that it is necessary to have personal connection to someone in government to find a job. Most of the youth want to be rich so, 60 percent think that earning a good salary is more important than steady employment in the long-run.

Formal education in particular in rural and remote areas (Berlie 2007, 412) and in vocational education are essential to fight poverty and develop the country. There are only two good professional schools of agriculture, the country needs at least four of them. But what are the necessary tools to develop the East Timorese economy? It is important to develop education. I am not so confident after having visiting a vocational school in Comoro. This primary school and vocational institution in computer science opened in 2003. Some 355 students are currently registered in the school, in particular in the vocational section, for the year 2008-2009. How many will really attend the courses? In this school there are around forty computers working out of fifty and around one hundred Australian typing machines for two classes. Out of three teachers, only one seems appropriately qualified to teach a computer course, but it seems that he has no previous teaching experience.

For education the country is dependent of Portugal and for health Cuba is central. Concerning health, 18 East Timorese trained in Manzanillo, Cuba, will hopefully be graduated in 2010 after a local training in East Timor. Without mentioning these successful students, around 700 Timorese are studying medicine in Cuba and one hundred in East Timor. When all these students will be hopefully graduated, East Timor health system could try to be independent and more local and this will increase the sovereignty of East Timor.

Planning is also useful to improve the weak and minimal coordination between industry and training institutions. Industrialization is not yet planned. The high number of clients of Timor Telecom, one hundred and twenty thousand, is not really a mark of development.

There are currently three ice factories in Kupang. A unique East Timorese ice factory was jointly established by Fretilin in Hera to a fish cooperative; it was too distant from Dili and finally failed in 2006. Since no other main project is on the agenda, the principal project is a gas plant in Timor-Leste (US\$15 billion). For technical reasons, perhaps the Darwin option, which would require a 530km pipeline, should be preferred. State secretary Alfredo Pires said that pending the Malaysian Petronas final report, it seems that the higher cost of the Timorese option makes the technically easier Australian alternative more attractive (*The Australian 31.7-1.8.08*). East Timor is closer to the Greater Sunrise fields and it seems that negotiations are continuing. The dependence of East Timor for the extraction and prospection of gas and oil will unfortunately last longer than expected; this challenge could be also partially solved by continuing to upgrade education in East Timor.

For Nair (2005) Indian farming is 'a gamble in the monsoon'. Agriculture is even a greater challenge in East Timor where planning is not a priority. Development is a function of both human and natural environment. There is little use having powerful tractors and not being able to maintain and repair

them, as under UNTAET in 2000 and 2001. Tractors are planned and bought in 2008 and 2009, but it is not enough to develop the agriculture and motivate the Timorese peasants. Vocational schools are necessary to train mechanists; the districts are under developed and cannot plan any technical training. Seven years have passed since the independence in 2002, and the lack of planning is still visible. The 'high input technology' that exists in India in Punjab, Haryana and Andhra Pradesh is unfortunately not present in Timor- Leste. Mohammed Yunus, the 2006 Nobel Prize winner, went once to Dili but his visit did not succeed to improve micro-credit in East Timor. In Dili, as in India, there is a lack of rural credits and as yet no real breakthrough in farm technology. Indian agriculture has grown less than 2 percent per annum between 1994 and 2004. Four percent is considered a sustainable minimum for India (Nair 2005, 185). East Timor growth in agriculture is low. There is also a lack of management on water and power, despite the aid of Japan in 2004. Matsuno (2009, 7) proposes to actively invite foreign capitals to East Timor to develop the agricultural sector. 'Educated urban youths would also demand more active and liberal economic policies' (*ibid.*). There is no sovereignty for East Timor and food security without a drastic development of agriculture.

Despite all these rather alarming conditions for development, it is yet possible to motivate the Timorese. Recently, a Timorese Ph D student gave reasons for that: According to him during the Indonesian occupation of the country, all efforts were made but no motivation was present. In the period 1976-1999, the point is that the great majority of the East Timorese wanted to be independent, not to be mobilised for the Indonesians (a legacy of Boa Ventura—an anti-colonial leader—and of the years 1959 and 1974).

A new constructive mass mobilisation of the youth and the farmers, for a national reconstruction, may restore the courage and creativity of the Timorese for the country to become 'really independent' as everybody was expecting in 2002. Generally speaking, the training of young future leaders to replace the UN staff and of new recruits to join the Defence Force and the PNT Police may also help the country to recover its total independence.

## Conclusion

In 2000 already, Fox and Babo rightly forecast difficulties still existing in 2009 such as Intrinsic differences in cultural values and national ideology, which despite a rich ethno-linguistic diversity are coupled with the social and political challenge created by a dual legal system, the traditional *lisan* sometimes called *adat*, and the 'Western' system, either Portuguese, UN or 'constitutional'. These differences continue to create a certain lack of national unity (Fox and Babo 2003, 262-263). This lack of unity in 2009 imposes the presence of an Australian led force to secure law and order and dents the sovereignty of the new country.

The economic development should be based on the reconciliation of the main political factions and egalitarian principles to avoid widening the gap between the poor and the rich, young people and elderly, rural population and the elite in Dili. This reconciliation will help to diminish the role of the UN, Australia and Portugal and give more confidence to the East Timor (Chopra 2002, 999).

The East Timorese are very able in politics. The point is to find a way to merge their political aspirations and their motivation to develop themselves the country by developing agriculture and asking to the government drastic change instead of finding ways to get more money by various ways. In 1999, the Indonesians tried to bribe the Timorese, they finally voted against for independence. So it is necessary to prove to the people of this country that work will produce more wealth for them and their family in the long-term prospect. Agriculture has to be planned for a long-term development and not short-term investment on big tractors without spare parts.

Reforms have to be genuinely Timorese to generate social and political stability. The courage, clemency and determination of the President Ramos-Horta are auspicious for the country. New vocational institutions for the youth are essential. New state planning will motivate two essential categories of the East Timorese society—the youth and the majority who cultivate the land. It may also restore the confidence, courage, and creativity of the whole nation to find solutions to be less dependent.

## Bibliography

- BERLIE, J. A. 'Notes on East Timor: Languages and Education' in *The Asian Journal of Social Sciences* 36/3-4, 2008, 10 p.
- *Politics and Elections in East Timor* (in Chinese). Guangzhou: Southeast Asian Studies, Jinan University, 2007-1.
- 'Schooling in Timor Leste' in G. A. Postiglione and Jason Tan (eds.), *Going to School in East Asia*. London: Greenwood Press, 2007-2, 404-13.
- BERTHE, L. 'Le Mariage par Achat et la Captation des Gendres: Les Buna' de Timor Central,' *L'Homme* 1/3, Paris, 1961, 5-31.
- CHOPRA, Jarat. 'Building State Failure in East Timor' in *Development and Change* 33(5), 2002, 979-1000.
- CLEARY, P. *Skatedown: Australia's Grab for Timor Oil*. Crows Nest NSW: Allen and Unwin, 2007.
- CRISTALIS, Irena. *East Timor. A Nation's Bitter Dawn*. London: Zed Books, 2009.
- Facts about Fretilin*. Sydney: ACT, c. 1976.
- FEDERER, Juan. *The UN in East Timor: Building Timor Leste, a Fragile State*. Darwin: Charles Darwin University Press, 2005.
- FOX, J. J. and D. Babo Soares (ed.). *Out of the Ashes. Destruction and Reconstruction of East Timor*. Canberra: ANU Press, 2003 (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 2000).
- KINGSBURY, D. *The Price of Liberty*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- MATSUNO Akihisa. 'Theorising East Timorese Politics...' (not final paper) in *Conference Understanding Timor-Leste*, Dili, 2-3 July 2009.
- Petroleum Fund (PF). *Coloquio Nacional*, Consultative Council of PF, 2009.
- NAIR, KP Prabhakaran. 'Indian Agriculture: Revival Challenges' in N Janardhana Rao (ed.), *Indian Agriculture—Issues and Perspectives*, Hyderabad: ICFAI Books, 2005.
- RENARD-CLAMAGIRAND, B. *Marobo: Une Société Ema de Timor*, Paris: Selaf, 1982.
- SMITH, M. with M. Dee. *Peace Keeping in East Timor. The Path to Independence*. London: Boulder, 2003.
- World Bank *Report 2008 on National Workfare Program*.
- ILO/East Timor Ministry of Labour, 2007, *Yes Youth Employment Study*.