

Placing East Timor on the Syllabus: Pedagogical Strategies for Teaching East Timor in University Level History Survey Courses

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Let's be frank. East Timor is a small place with a small population. Many otherwise well-educated and informed citizens in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas would have some trouble placing it on a map. Indeed, prior to my 2009 trip to Dili, a retired Classics professor asked me if the collapse of the Tamil Tigers would have an impact on the conference. After I politely informed him that the two islands were many thousands of miles apart he walked away with the question 'Where in the world is East Timor?' But that is not my question. Rather, my question is 'where in World History is East Timor?' My answer is that since 1400, East Timor is to be found in numerous historical processes, moments, and comparisons that are essential to the field of World History. This paper suggests ways with which East Timor can be placed into the larger narrative of World History and onto the syllabus of a university level survey course (Rodell 2009, 14-7). I offer these suggestions as models for courses both in Western schools but also for schools in East Timor as it rebuilds its educational system. There is much value in teaching East Timorese students how their young nation has fit into the world.

This paper does not advocate the misguided but well-intentioned effort to include every part of the planet in a World History course. All veteran World History teachers can tell you that such an effort will be disastrous, leading to a never quite complete laundry-list of the world, overwhelmed students, and exhausted instructors. Every World History course must go through a basic selection process. While attention must be paid to give various geographic regions, cultural traditions, and economic processes their appropriate weight, some things have to be cut. Unfortunately, it is all too common to see professors ignore relatively lightly populated places, people living on the periphery of larger civilization cores, or communities that seem too mixed, backwards, or isolated. Even if we get beyond the Eurocentrism that was so prevalent in the field of History, we can still find ourselves with narratives that privilege India, China, the Arab world, Western Europe, and North America. Even if we formulate an analysis where the world operates as an increasingly integrated system, we can still find ourselves with a framework of globalisation that silences people in the little places between the big core areas. As a corrective to this approach, Donald R. Wright recently published *The World and a Very Small Place in Africa* (Wright 2004). This historical intervention looks at the world system not from Baghdad, Mumbai, Amsterdam, or Canton, but from a seemingly isolated and marginal community in West Africa. His work shows both how the world came to Niimi and changed Niimi, but also how Niimi made its own decisions in its interactions with the world, giving agency to this 'very small place in Africa.' What I propose is using East Timor as a 'very small place in Southeast Asia' that can tell the story of globalisation from the periphery.

Aside from the many ways in which East Timor shows the interaction of the global world system with a specific area, there is also a moral reason for including East Timor in the World History narrative. The tremendous suffering that the nation has gone through is directly related to the lack of attention paid to it. When Indonesia invaded in 1975, most people did not know where East Timor was. This lack of knowledge was crucial to the Indonesian military's free-hand. If a place is unfamiliar or unknown it is difficult to get people to be concerned about it, even if their tax dollars are being used to send crucial military aid and material. It was only as East Timor slowly came on the radar screen after the 1991 Santa Cruz massacre that the North American grassroots campaign to stop military aid to Indonesia got going. If silence and ignorance were key components in what has been called 'Genocide in Paradise', we have a moral obligation to use East Timor (and other little known or forgotten cases) as an example in World History (Jardine 1999).

As a 'comprehensive' World History course is a pipe dream, there have been two main historiographic approaches to make the world accessible to the student: World Systems and Comparative History. World Systems, based upon the foundational work of Immanuel Wallenstein and Andre Gunder Frank, traces the way in which the world has become increasingly inter-connected (Wallerstein 1974;

Frank 1978). Focusing on economic processes, but noting their cultural and demographic impacts, the World Systems approach to World History generally starts with the first wave of European colonial expansion; but some revisionists now start with Zheng He's voyages in the Ming Dynasty or with the expansion of the Dar al-Islam as an economic and not just religious system (Chaudhuri 1985; Abu-Lughod 1989). Some World Systems narratives select a sub-section of the world and the connections to the outside (Curtin 1990). Comparative History takes specific examples and compares a certain number of historical variables. East Timor works very well for both of these methods, showing that seemingly isolated and remote places of the world are often part of a larger fabric.

While most might first use East Timor to discuss the Western colonial intrusion, to de-centre Europe I begin with the Chinese over-seas expansion of the early 15th Century Ming Dynasty (Dreyer 2007; Pomeranz and Topik 1999, 51-3 and 161-2). While it is unlikely that Zheng He's 400 foot treasure ships traveled this far to the east, Chinese merchants were frequent visitors after 1400 (Boxer 1960). While not a major spice producer like the famous islands to the north, East Timor did offer a highly prized export commodity in sandalwood (Dunn 13-4). Chinese demand for the fragrant wood created a market connection that linked one of the world's most important economic cores to this island. Merchants from elsewhere in the greater Indian Ocean world connected the island to India, Persia, and Arab market centres. By stressing the scale and scope of pan-Asian commercial exchanges, students learn that the Asian economy was sophisticated, dynamic, and vibrant long before Europeans entered the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. Such knowledge combats deeply engrained Eurocentric myths present in many student's minds and shows them that East Timor had a history before the Portuguese arrived.

This historical moment opens up the space for a larger discussion of the Chinese in East Timor. While the Chinese obviously had no interest in conquering the island, over the centuries many Chinese merchants settled there. Indeed, by the 1970s, the over-seas Chinese community dominated the local and long-distance commercial networks (Dunn 2003, 8-10 and 36-9; Taylor 1991, 16 and 34). Their history is very similar to the complex role of over-seas Chinese elsewhere in Southeast Asia: a number of very visible and successful merchant families and a much larger number of poor labourers. Discussing this seemingly paradoxical population allows students to consider Southeast Asian sino-phobia. I also encourage my students to contemplate why the over-seas Chinese were singled out for particularly brutal treatment by the Indonesians in December, 1975, with hundreds executed in the Dili harbour area and businesses appropriated (Taylor 1991, 8-9, 125, and 164; Dunn 2003, 244-7)

The European intrusion began after the 1511 Portuguese seizure of Malacca. Searching for a way to break into the lucrative spice trade, these Iberians brought a Crusader mentality with them. Without falling into the Eurocentric trap, it is undeniable that the arrival of Portuguese set in motion many dramatic changes to both the larger narrative of World History and to East Timor. The Portuguese are important because they illustrate the critical differences between European colonisation and Chinese over-seas trade. Coming from a relatively poor kingdom in a relatively poor continent, these Europeans were desperate to break into the cosmopolitan world of Asian commerce. Unfortunately, as Vasco Da Gama quickly learned in India, they did not have much to offer wealthy Asian merchants in exchange for the precious commodities that they sought. Thus, they very quickly turned to physical force (Ames 2005, 145-70). After years of armed-trade in the Mediterranean, this was nothing new for the Portuguese, but it was unprecedented in the relatively peaceful Indian Ocean world. The Portuguese were also coming out of the Reconquista, a series of wars between Christians and Muslims for control of the Iberian Peninsula. Bringing the crusading logic to Asia, Da Gama, Albuquerque and other Portuguese commanders saw the seizure of trade routes, strategic ports, and islands producing spices or sandalwood as economic warfare on the greater Muslim world. Furthermore, they fused their economic expansion with missionary activity. Thus, as East Timor, along with Recife, Goa, Malacca, Macau, and Mozambique became part of the seaborne Portuguese empire, they were also drawn into the pan-Catholic community and the global Lusosphere (Boxer 1969). East Timor then provides a window into several crucial processes in the initial phase of colonial expansion: late feudal distributions of power, early modern efforts to create global monopolies, and religious conversion.

The next four centuries of Portuguese colonial rule can be used in a World History course to show important aspects of colonial development or the lack thereof. One of the most obvious colonial developments was the drawing of maps. Disregarding indigenous cultural, political, and linguistic traditions, the Portuguese and Dutch competed for control of the island, finally settling on a dividing line in 1913. As in the case of so many African colonies, political boundaries in the tropics were determined

by calculations made by Europeans thousands of miles away. Imperial concerns charted the course of future nation-states around the world. This is an essential process in World History as so many contemporary conflicts, such as the prolonged crisis in East Timor from 1974 to 1999, have their origins in colonial boundary making.

East Timor serves as an example of colonial economic modernisation. After several centuries of neglect, the late nineteenth century Portuguese state began to engage in an increasingly intrusive and interventionist program (Taylor 1991, 10-1). This is most apparent in the push to develop cash crops for the export market, forced labor requirements for road building, and the imposition of a taxation system that required Timorese to pay in cash rather than in kind. As these interventions all have their parallels elsewhere in the colonial tropics, when paternalist Europeans tried to reshape local societies, this an excellent point for a comparative study. When the rather limited changes in East Timor are put up against the dramatic transformations in Southern Vietnam for example, the great diversity of possible colonial trajectories become apparent (Murray 1980).

One of the direct consequences of the social interventionist approach to colonial modernisation was to provoke rebellions. Again, this is a point where we can use East Timor in comparison with other colonies. Adas' study of five millenarian anti-colonial revolts serves as a model (Adas 1979). The late nineteenth and early twentieth century disturbances that culminated in Dom Boaventura's major rebellion that spread from Manufuhi to much of the colony between 1910 and 1912 demonstrate clear anger at the intensification of colonial rule. The nature of the anti-insurgency campaign is also of great illustrative value for the comparative study of colonialism. Using over 12,000 mostly non-white troops from its various colonial possessions, the Portuguese lost under 300 men with twice as many wounded. Timorese losses, on the other hand, were well over 3,000 killed, 12,000 wounded, and 4,000 captured (Taylor 1991, 11-2). The brutal arithmetic of colonial warfare, where non-white deaths regularly exceeded white deaths, was due to unequal access to military technology and strategies that blurred the line between civilian and combatant (Browsers 2009). The nature of this type of warfare is relevant to other colonial settings in the era of high imperialism as it is to the later Indonesian operations of the late 20th century.

World War Two is another historical moment where East Timor can be brought into the narrative. Indeed, East Timor's experiences show just how global the war was. Despite being the territory of neutral Portugal, the island suffered from Allied and Axis invasions and years of irregular warfare as 400 Dutch and Australian commandos picked off about 1,500 of the 20,000 Japanese soldiers. As Allied forces could not do this all on their own they relied heavily on local support. When the Australians pulled out in January, 1943, the Japanese exacted a heavy revenge, leading to the deaths of perhaps 60,000 Timorese (Dunn 2003, 22-4; defence.gov.au). With a 13% causality rate, Timor's per capita suffering ranks with Latvia, Lithuania, and the USSR. The dramatic nature of these statistics show students how geo-political conflicts can manifest themselves into local disasters. I encourage my students to question why a struggle between northern industrialised powers should have such a profound impact on a small tropical island.

From 1945 to 1974, East Timor provides a fascinating complication to the larger World History narrative of decolonisation. Placing the island's lack of a strong and broad based nationalist movement in the context of the popular revolts and people's wars, I ask my students what key variable East Timor lacked when compared to its neighbors in Indonesia and Vietnam or compared to other part of the Portuguese colonial empire such as Mozambique, Angola, and Guinea-Bissau (Westad 2005, 218-27). Obviously, educational policy, quotidian cultural contact, economic development and other key variable show that East Timor was at a very different stage than other colonies that became nations in the 1950s and 1960s. Conversely, Portugal was rather distinct from other post-war colonial powers. If Salazar's quasi-fascist Estado Novo seemed like a throwback to an earlier era, so to did its colonial policies. To add further complexity to the issue, the Carnation Revolution and its goal of immediate decolonisation further separates East Timor and the Portuguese colonial empire from other imperial end-games. To teach the confusing nature of identity in late colonial East Timor, I recommend Luis Cardoso's *The Crossing* (2000). His memoir captures the sense of cultural dislocation as the Timorese population struggle for meaning and definitions.

With the sudden promise of independence, there is the stunning example of FRETILIN's rapid and successfully growth and mobilisation. The party's organising skills, mass appeal, and significant social work can be compared with other leftist popular movements such as the Sandinistas, the Algerian FLN, and the Vietminh (Truong 1985; Fanon 1965; Stora 2001, 29-115; LaFeber 1983, 226-42; Wolf 1969, 159-247). By studying various popular liberation struggles, students would gain much from

exploring the similarities and differences in these Cold War popular movements. I also use FRETILIN as an example of the stretching of Marxism. Why did some members claim this identity? Why did FRETILIN's enemies seize upon this alleged Marxism as way to condemn the movement (Dunn 2003, 245-6)? This exercise challenges their notions of what we mean when we apply the terms 'Marxist' and 'Communist' to both revolutionary movements and to governing states. I ask my students to compare FRETILIN to avowedly Marxist movements elsewhere in the world. This consideration of FRETILIN places it in the larger World Historical narrative of 20th century revolutions (Anderson 1995, 138-9).

As a similar point of discussion, I also place the East Timorese church into the global narrative of late 20th century Catholic activism (Archer 1995, 120-33). I ask my students to consider how the church went from a pillar of the Salazar regime to Bishop Belo being a key leader in the struggle for national self-determination. East Timor should be compared with Latin American examples of Liberation Theology and its fellow travelers. One direct parallel would be between Bishop Belo and Bishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador.

To introduce the 1975 invasion and the subsequent Indonesian operations, I screen a clip from *Manufacturing Consent* in which Chomsky compares the Khmer Rouge's killing fields to Indonesia's invasion and occupation of East Timor (Achbar and Wintonick, 1992). While Chomsky's larger argument is about corporate media, his use of these two case-studies as comparative genocide is excellent for teaching what I call the 'hot battles of the Cold War'. I place these two examples in the larger Cold War narrative, presenting Cambodia as the worst possible Communist scenario and Suharto as the worst possible anti-Communist scenario (Kiernan 2008). This exercise in 'comparative killing fields' shows that with death tolls over a million on both sides, '[t]he Cold War was only cold for the rich and privilege places of the planet' (Aslam 2008, 27). This film segment is excellent as it raises two key issues for students in the United States of America: American complicity and the lack of media coverage. Interviews with Amy Goodman, Elaine Brière, and others show that the invasion and brutal occupation could not have been possible without specific arms from the United States and its allies.

For a perspective on the brutalities of the Indonesian invasion and occupation Constâncio Pinto's memoir is a very accessible, inspiring, and detailed account of the underground struggle (1999). Conversely, the history of counter-insurgency operations should include East Timor along with more famous Southeast Asian examples such as the Huk Rebellion and the Malaysian Emergency (Stubbs 1989). Indonesia's campaigns, 'Encirclement and Annihilation' and the 'Fence of Legs', show students of comparative military history the disastrous human toll of counter-insurgency (Taylor 1991, 79-131).

On a more optimistic note, the international campaign to end the occupation shows the potential for mass organisation around human rights issues. Amy Goodman and Alain Nairn's journalism, Noam Chomsky and Elaine Brière's activism, and Amnesty International and the East Timor Action Network's agitation provide us with examples of how grassroots movements can educate the public and make a difference in the world. Historically, students can compare this with solidarity movements in Latin America, Palestine, and South Africa. Since 1999, East Timor provides us with a useful case-study in peace-keeping and nation-building, but this takes us out of the realm of history and into the social sciences.

To conclude, East Timor, despite being small, lightly populated, less developed, marginalised, neglected, and even ignored can play an important role in World History courses. A rich example for both World Systems analysis and for Comparative History, East Timor's oft assumed irrelevance makes its relevance all the more striking. For if the world system can make its way to this far corner of Southeast Asia and if this small community has a shared experience with other communities in Asia and Africa, then we need to seriously reconsider the assumption that any part of the world can really be a backwater in the age of globalisation. East Timor is of pedagogical value to World History narratives but we also have a moral obligation. The tragedies of East Timor have been due to silence and ignorance, two enemies that we can fight in the classroom.

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