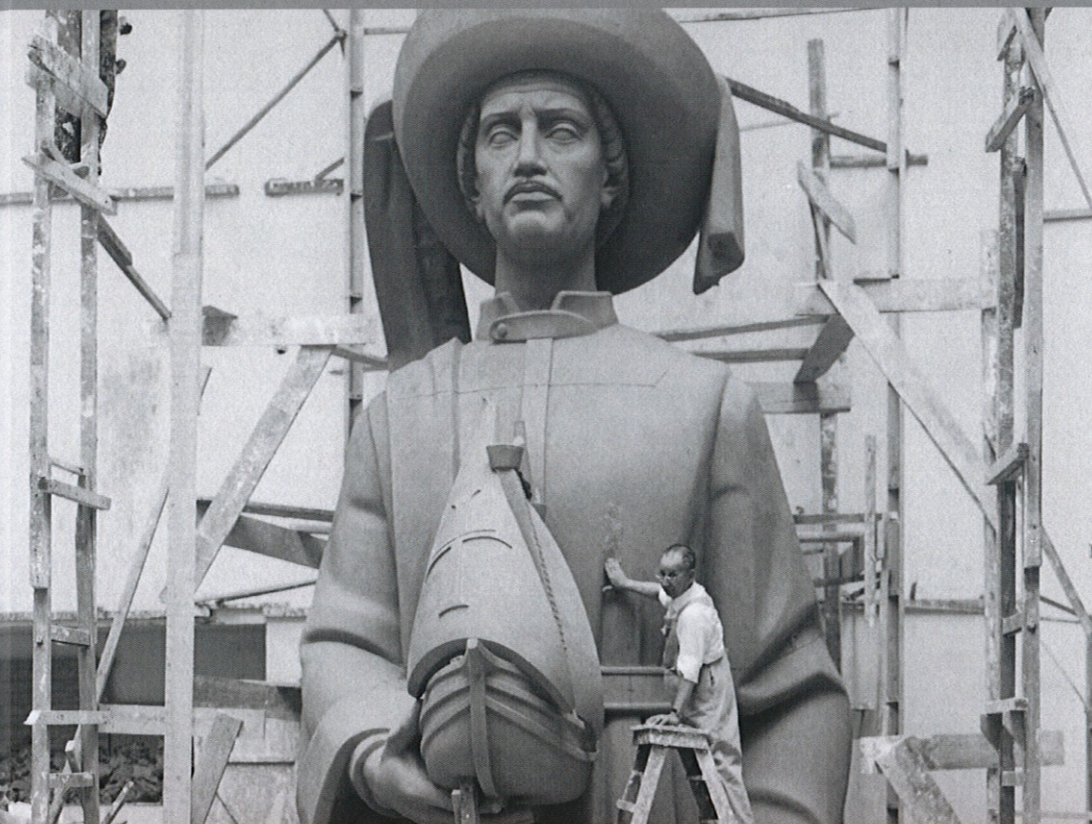


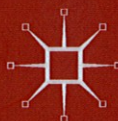
Palgrave Studies in the History of the Media



# Media and the Portuguese Empire

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Cover image: © Z1 Collection/Alamy Stock Photo. Photographer Mário Novais (1899–1967) captures a scene from the workshop where sculptor Leopoldo de Almeida (1898–1975) and his team finish the statue of Prince Henry, the Navigator, which was placed at the top of the Padrão dos Descobrimentos, the memorial designed by architect José Cottinelli Telmo (1897–1948) for the Portuguese World Exhibition of 1940. A more enduring copy of this memorial—the original one was made from wood—can still be appreciated in its original location by the river Tagus, in Praça do Império, the Lisbon *lieu de mémoire*.

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# East Timor and Portugal: The Ending of Empire in the Media

*Rita Ribeiro and Joaquim Costa*

## EAST TIMOR: THE LONG SHADOW OF THE PORTUGUESE EMPIRE

Despite approximately five centuries of Portuguese colonial presence in East Timor, the importance of the small island at the far edge of Asia was always more symbolic than actual in the Portuguese empire. It was more than two decades after decolonisation that Timor became particularly important to the Portuguese imagination in triggering a moment of national interpellation, which led to revisiting the country's imperial past and to a full assumption of responsibility for its postcolonial condition.

Following the ruthless Indonesian annexation of East Timor in 1975, Portuguese political forces and the media remained aware of the situation, especially from 1990 onward, and the case of East Timor was never completely obliterated from the public sphere. The awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1996, following the 'Santa Cruz massacre' (1991) and the arrest of *guerrilla* leader 'Xanana' Gusmão (1992), to Bishop Ximenes Belo and José Ramos-Horta 'for their work towards a just and

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peaceful solution to the conflict in East Timor' further contributed to keep Timor on the media agenda.

In the referendum promoted by the United Nations (UN) in August 1999, the vast majority of Timorese voted in favour of independence, anxious to put an end to Indonesia's occupation of the territory it had annexed in 1975, while it was still in the process of Portuguese decolonisation. The result of this popular consultation was not recognised by Indonesia, which unleashed a wave of persecution and violence against the Timorese people, threatening their democratic choice. Widely broadcast by the Western media, particularly in Europe, Australia and the United States of America, these events echoed insistently in Portugal, and this stimulated a movement of solidarity in favour of returning peace and freedom to East Timor.

Two main objectives underlie this text. Firstly, it is important to understand how the solidarity movement for East Timor was covered by the media, and what role the media played in shaping a consensual opinion on events and on the urgent need for political pressure to help deter the violence inflicted on the territory. To this end, we underscore the meanings articulated by the media regarding these events, and how they were crucial in the single voice raised in the ensuing social movement.

Secondly, we reflect on the postcolonial injunction that Timor represented for Portugal. In the protests that took place in September 1999, a cathartic process occurred, that not only symbolically closed the chapter of Portuguese colonial history, but also led to the reconfiguration of a collective identity. It is not our aim to describe the Timorese tragedy, but to analyse how it became a reason for reflexivity regarding Portugal's postcolonial condition and the country's redefinition in the contemporary world. Saying more about Portugal than Timor, the manifestations of support that multiplied throughout the country stirred up emotions that, while causing an adjustment to the identity of Portugal as a democratic, postcolonial, European and modern country, also absorbed the significance deeply associated with the collective memory of the empire and, in particular, the cultural heritage left behind by the presence of the Portuguese in what today is the Portuguese-speaking world.

### THE MEDIA AND THE POWER OF DISCLOSURE

After almost 25 years of occupation by Indonesia, the people of East Timor were called to the ballot to decide on their future as a country. Under the observance of the UN, a popular consultation was held with a view to putting an end to Indonesia's illegitimate annexation of the

territory. The referendum, held on 30 August 1999, confirmed the resolute decision of the Timorese to free themselves of Indonesian control: 78.5% voted in favour of independence. In Portugal, the referendum was widely and directly covered in the media. Television, the press and radio sent journalists to the country and they gave detailed reports about what was happening there prior to the Timorese going to the ballot box. An air of expectation was created regarding the outcome of the referendum and the way in which Indonesia would react to the results.

The media coverage was the result of the growing political importance that the referendum had assumed within the national and international context. However, media coverage was also motivated by another reason: the power to influence events when reporting them. The same global media which had ignored the genocide of around one third of the population throughout 25 years of Indonesian<sup>1</sup> occupation would be decisive in carrying the demand of international public opinion to halt the massacre of pro-independence Timorese in the wake of the referendum in 1999. The explanation for the dual approach of the Western media in denouncing the violation of human rights in East Timor lies essentially in their incapacity, in the context of the Cold War, to confront the interests of the Western powers and, by extension, their military and commercial allies.<sup>2</sup> It is a known fact that the USA, the United Kingdom and Australia were complicit in the invasion and in the bloodshed of the occupation that followed, and that the Western world, with the exception of Portugal, consistently paid little attention to the tragedy that was taking place.<sup>3</sup>

Studies on the media have long demonstrated the media's ability to instil the reality they produce. In contemporary societies, reality is media-reality, filtered and structured by the devices used by the mass media to shape it. In this, the media are central in forming, or deforming, a social consciousness through agenda setting, defining situations, opinion forming and selectively highlighting facts and meanings.<sup>4</sup> From this perspective, the presence of the media in Timor at the time of the referendum must be seen as more than responding to its function to provide information. In fact, even without any manifest intention, it must be said that it could operate as a dissuasive factor to the violence used by the Indonesian forces. States, even those for whom democracy is a hindrance, recognise the damage the media can do to them when it publishes attacks against human rights or democratic values. In the case of East Timor, intense media coverage of the violence also confronted the democratic countries with the political costs of inaction<sup>5</sup> and this led to certain countries repositioning their foreign policy in solving the conflict

in East Timor. For example, one analysis of the media effect in Australia is as follows:

our analysis suggests the particular importance of the journalists on the ground, reporting the situation in unprecedented numbers from the region. Their reporting built a framework for protest amongst the Australian people, which in turn proved crucial in pressuring the Australian government to change its policy. The journalist 'as witness' was provider of compelling evidence to the public.<sup>6</sup>

### MEDIA CONSTRUCTION OF EVENTS IN EAST TIMOR

When the first results of the referendum on self-determination for East Timor were published, they came with the images of violence that was devastating the territory which forced everyone, including journalists, to flee for shelter. In not accepting the decision expressed by the Timorese for an independent country, Indonesia, using military and police forces in the territory, unleashed systematic destruction, particularly in the capital, Dili. The dissuasive power of the media was no more than an illusion.

For at least two weeks, coverage of the situation was practically the only news in the Portuguese media. In the newspapers, East Timor was front-page news, often exclusively, throughout the whole of September 1999. More than 15 pages in the leading national newspapers were, in each edition, dedicated to news sent by envoys on the ground, along with editorials, articles, columns, interviews and illustrations on events in East Timor and on the mobilisation that, in Portugal, aimed to pressure for a political decision on international intervention to re-establish peace and provide humanitarian aid to the people.

In analysing journalistic coverage in two Portuguese newspapers—*Público* (daily) and *Expresso* (weekly)—throughout September 1999, we have identified five axes underlying the informative material produced by the leading press on the issue:

1. the violence carried out by Indonesian forces against the Timorese and the associated moral confrontation between those defending the democratic act of independence with their own lives, and those persisting in illegitimate and brutal occupation;
2. the emotional catalyst provoked by the tragedy that affected the Timorese people, including the most vulnerable (children, the elderly and women), who responded to their aggressors by taking refuge in the mountains, but without taking up arms;

3. the unanimous rejection in Portuguese society of Indonesian aggression, an attitude shared by the different political parties and by all social agents that participated in the movement for East Timor by taking action politically, through media coverage or in protests;
4. the spontaneous, large-scale mobilisation of the Portuguese who multiplied their demonstrations against the genocide taking place, and in their appeal for international intervention to bring peace to the territory;
5. the highlighting of the historical ties between Portugal and East Timor—namely, the Portuguese cultural heritage in the territory and the benevolent image that the Timorese seemed to hold of the former coloniser.

Although, strictly speaking, this analysis refers to the press, it can also be applied to other forms of the mass media, such as radio and television, which had dedicated broadcasts constantly, and sometimes exclusively, of events in East Timor, and to the movement in Portugal that appealed for freedom for the 'new' country. Furthermore, besides the intensity with which news about East Timor occupied the media, the perspective adopted in journalistic coverage was also unique in the way in which it suspended the ethical principles inherent in journalism. We refer, specifically, to the clear position adopted by both journalists and editors on the topic, which consented to neutrality, independence and unbiased opinions being usurped by positions imbued with questions of a moral, political and emotional nature.

Having described how the Portuguese media received events taking place after the referendum, it is important to understand what comprised the movement for solidarity with East Timor, and how the echo of the media's voice was expressed in this movement. The media did play a major role in mobilising the public in promoting some of the more symbolic initiatives that took place and, above all, in creating a feeling of legitimacy for the national movement for East Timor that left no room for dissension, and that aspired to no less than the success of the appeal for international intervention.

Within the context of expectation that had been created regarding the referendum, news on the results could be celebrated in neither East Timor nor Portugal because of the immediate reaction of extreme violence on the part of Indonesian and pro-Indonesian military forces. The global media then began to publish images and reports of loss of life,

destruction of buildings, the flight of the population to the mountains or their deportation to the western part of the island, and of Western people (including journalists) taking shelter in the installations of the UN Mission.

Within a few days the situation became dramatic but, contrary to other episodes of bloodshed during Indonesian occupation, this time the media were on the ground and, although restrained, they continued to report events. They could get hold of witnesses and give a voice and a face to the persecuted; they showed a suffering people, but a people serene in the conviction of their choice. In short, the media also dramatised the situation, making selections as to the protagonists and the focal points that led the eye and influenced the interpretation of the situation.

### PUBLIC MOBILISATION IN PORTUGAL: PROTESTS WITH A SINGLE VOICE

The information that arrived on the massacres gave rise to a national uprising in Portugal in the first weeks of September 1999. This mobilisation was consolidated by many public events, varying in scale and content, but all sharing the following elements: objectives, organisation, strategies and means. Without going into a detailed description of the protest demonstrations, we will give a brief analysis of the solidarity movement for Timor, based on information produced in the media.

Firstly, it must be explained that the movement to free East Timor was the most intense and spontaneous form of public action witnessed in Portugal since the revolutionary period of 1974 that put an end to the Salazar dictatorship. The multiple and imaginative forms of protest were rooted in objectives and arguments of solid cohesion: support for the democratic decision of the Timorese to have an independent country; condemnation of the violence inflicted by Indonesia (consistent with the understanding in Portuguese society of the brutality that annexation had represented for almost 25 years), and the appeal to the international community to intervene to ensure the conditions were in place for the self-determination of the Timorese expressed in the referendum.

Pursuing such an ambitious objective was due both to a certain naivety on the part of the masses protesting, and to a bold strategy. One of the essential elements of this strategy was the focus on defending human rights as the pivotal argument for all collective action, conducted at a political level and in the streets. In this process, we frequently see



the impartiality of the international organisations queried. According to claims circulating at the time, these organisations chose to intervene in other situations of humanitarian crisis and where there was a suspicion of genocide, moved by political and economic interests. From this perspective, the lack of action by the international institutions and powers in this case revealed how democratic values and human rights were used as spurious pretexts for a policy that was scarcely transparent and biased by the interests of states' foreign policy.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the eminently spontaneous nature of the protests and appeals, the movement was consolidated and expanded when several institutions joined it and assumed the initiative for the more significant public events. Once again the media were present, in coordination with associations, unions and other institutions which conducted operations on the ground. A revealing example of the role of the media in configuring the public movement is the three-minute silence held at 3 p.m., 8 September, on the initiative of the unions *União Geral de Trabalhadores* (UGT) (General Union of Workers) and *Confederação Geral dos Trabalhadores Portugueses* (CGTP) (General Confederation of the Portuguese Workers),<sup>8</sup> and widely covered by radio, television and the press. At this hour, throughout the whole country, thousands (maybe millions) of people filled the streets, leaving their homes, schools and workplaces. Only the tolling of bells and the sound of sirens broke the silence that was held for the victims of East Timor. Many people wept at this time of public sorrow. Again it was the media that promoted the use of white clothing and white streamers on buildings, one of the most common symbols throughout the whole movement, embodying the appeal for peace.

Apart from successfully mobilising the masses, it is important to realise that collective action was guided by the clear strategy to give media coverage to the conflict in East Timor. If the objective was to get international decision-makers to adopt specific measures to put an end to the massacre by sending in an international peacekeeping force and humanitarian aid, these decision-makers had to be the main targets of protest action. Consequently, major demonstrations in Lisbon regularly took place close to the diplomatic representations of the UN and the member states of the UN Security Council, particularly the US embassy.

With the same objective in mind, a human chain was also organised, linking the embassies of the USA and France, passing by those of the UK, Russia, China and the headquarters of the UN. A demonstration also brought thousands of Portuguese to the doors of the Indonesian embassy in Spain. The constant gathering of hundreds or thousands of

people in strategic places who, in silence or using slogans, appealed for a decision to free the people of East Timor had, apart from an immediate effect on the diplomatic representatives, the makings of a media event that could be broadcast on a global scale. The same interpretation applies to the reception in Lisbon of the Bishop of Dili, Ximenes Belo, who, on his arrival and throughout his whole route, was accompanied by a human chain dressed in white that welcomed him with words of hope and encouragement for the struggle of the Timorese.

Also important was the success of campaigns sending faxes and emails to entities with international political responsibility, such as the UN and some of the most influential countries. The traffic was so intense that it blocked the recipients' addresses and forced internet service providers to increase the capacity of their servers. The pioneering spirit in the use of digital communication, making use of the internet in a campaign for human rights, associated with the enormous participation achieved in Portugal and other countries, made this one of the first online social movements.<sup>9</sup>

The national uprising went beyond the major demonstrations already described. In each city, in each town, demonstrations were encouraged to show support for the Timorese cause, from the major national companies that placed white banners on the façades of their buildings in Lisbon, to local community associations that organised small-scale protest events. Throughout the country, minutes of silence multiplied, as did vigils, fundraising, expressions of mourning, solidarity performances, fasting and hunger strikes, the boycotting of products from Indonesia and from the USA, among other creative forms of protest and appeal, undertaken on the initiative of all kinds of associations, unions, companies, football clubs, churches and members of the community. At this time, economic, social and cultural status, as well as ideological and political stances, were levelled out. Mobilisation for East Timor was an unstructured movement but it had only one voice, marked by the social<sup>10</sup> and political<sup>11</sup> spread of the social agents involved.

In all demonstrations, the meaning of the struggle remained consistent and unswerving: concern for the violation of human rights, the appeal to respect the democratically expressed self-determination of the Timorese, and the appeal for international intervention to bring the bloodshed to an end. The banners and slogans amplified these feelings, concentrated on the word 'Timor' and the colour white, displayed publicly in a kaleidoscope of chanting, slogans, posters, banners, flags and sheets of paper.

In the total mobilisation that swept through Portuguese society, the role of the media is undeniable, as the media exercised all its powers of seduction, attention seeking, obsessively occupying the public space and launching protests that permanently fed the media flow. Within this context, the media coverage of events was strategically set up as a means of making the public aware of the atrocities being committed in East Timor and, above all, as a catalyst for a collective action that aimed explicitly to change the situation by pressuring relevant international bodies.

The Portuguese experienced the warm days of September 1999 in a state of exception. Since the revolutionary period of 1974–1975, no other event had created such a unique and exceptional atmosphere in the country. More than total mobilisation around the question of East Timor, what was particularly new was the way in which the Portuguese experienced the massacres occurring on the distant island as an issue that was deeply theirs,<sup>12</sup> as if it were impossible to return to normality without the Timorese achieving peace, as if the mourning that turned clothing white was a moral imperative when confronted by the unspeakable suffering they were seeing in the images and reports arriving from East Timor.

There will have been few moments in the history of the country that so completely produced a feeling of belonging to a collective configuration. More than just a moment of civic participation, through these days the Portuguese lived the experience of national communion, a suspension of daily order and a collective effervescence that Turner<sup>13</sup> suggests in the concept of *communitas*.

### EAST TIMOR AND PORTUGAL: THE PERSISTENCE OF HISTORICAL TIES

How can the total mobilisation of Portuguese society in defence of East Timor be interpreted? The extraordinary characteristics of the movement—its scale, intensity and the consensus with which it was experienced—lead us to query what motives shaped the emotions that sustained the Portuguese determination to join the Timorese cause, and why it came about in response to this particular situation of genocide, when other similar cases left them indifferent. Although we have examined the mobilising role of the media, another factor must be brought in: the historical relationship that links Portugal to East Timor, which began in the second decade of the sixteenth century, as a result of Portuguese

rule over territories in Asia that were part of its first empire. Throughout almost five centuries of Portuguese presence, and due to factors such as distance and the minor material appeal of the small island, colonisation amounted to little and was irregular. Historically, Timor-Leste is characterised by ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity, and Portuguese cultural influence turned out to be a unifying element of the territory. In addition to Portuguese involvement, East Timor was also disputed by the Dutch and suffered a devastating invasion by the Japanese in World War II. For several centuries, the Portuguese presence in East Timor was restricted to trade and Catholic missions, with Portuguese administration becoming effective only by the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup>

Although Portuguese colonial intervention had been precarious, the fact that it appealed more to alliances with local chieftaincy than to forceful subordination led colonial relations to intersect with the mythological narratives of the native people. Elizabeth Traube<sup>15</sup> demonstrates how the Mambai, one of the ethnic groups of the island, incorporated the Portuguese in their origin myths as their 'young brothers' and how colonial rule had been legitimised within an intricate symbolic system. Entwined in the mythical kinship system, the Portuguese had not only gained more control of the territory but attained symbolic legitimacy for their dominion, even if often repression and disrespect from the rulers could damage these chosen ties. For the Portuguese, even after decolonisation, the deference and esteem they found among the Timorese nourished the idea of a special relationship with the people of East Timor and helped to corroborate the mystification of Portuguese colonialism as benign.

Throughout the centuries, Portuguese influence was manifest mainly in the fields of language and religion. In spreading Christianity, not only did Catholicism arrive (harmonised with the local beliefs of the people) but so did the Portuguese language, even if only spoken by educated local elites and coexisting with native languages and dialects. These cultural traces left by a coloniser became central to Timorese identity,<sup>16</sup> giving structure to a feeling of national unity that was immensely important in the period following the departure of the Portuguese, by way of providing the condition for Timorese nationalism.

The April 1974 revolution began the process of decolonisation in the Portuguese overseas territories. As in the other colonies, in East Timor, political and military structures were formed to defend and prepare for independence and, between 1974 and 1975, these were being organised



to take over power.<sup>17</sup> But the future of the Timorese depended less on the coloniser that had already turned its back, or on the actual desire for independence, than on the power glancing over the shoulder of the small island. Ruling by a dictatorship in which the Western powers were complicit, Indonesia did not tolerate the threat of a communist interest in East Timor and in December 1975, nine days after the Declaration of Independence of East Timor by Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente (FRETILIN) (Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor), it began its military invasion of the eastern part of the island.<sup>18</sup>

The annexation of the territory of East Timor, in flagrant violation of the process of decolonisation already under way, and with the use of large-scale violence, was met by timid reactions from the Western democracies, with little interest in confronting their political, military and commercial ally over an irrelevant territory of dubious political viability. This is why 25 years of genocide suffered by the Timorese people, and the total isolation to which the island was subjected, were strategically ignored by the international community as collateral damage of the Cold War.<sup>19</sup> The end of the Cold War brought about important changes for the Timorese people afflicted by violence and hunger. The territory became less isolated in the 1990s and information began to arrive regarding the dramatic situation in East Timor. This opening granted to the island did not, however, mean that the aggression abated.

In November 1991, journalists from the UK and the USA filmed the massacre of hundreds of young people in the Santa Cruz Cemetery, where they were holding a procession in memory of the loss of a resistance companion assassinated by the Indonesian forces. The media coverage of this event, with the added emotion of seeing the bloodshed, hearing the screams of the persecuted and the prayers of the supplicants, on the global media was one of the most important steps in breaking the mantle of silence that, for decades, had lain over the country, and in demonstrating, without any doubt whatsoever, the brutality of the occupying forces. It was the media coverage of the massacre that led to the international condemnation of Indonesia's practices, drew attention to the flagrant violation of human rights and to the legitimacy of armed resistance.<sup>20</sup>

Throughout the world, but most particularly in Portugal, the Santa Cruz massacre unleashed reactions of revulsion and an appeal to protect the Timorese people. With the aim of keeping the case on the political agenda and in the international media, a sea voyage was planned from

Lisbon to Dili in a ferry-boat carrying students of different nationalities, the objective being to lay a wreath of flowers in the Santa Cruz Cemetery. Despite the Indonesian military forces preventing the boat from entering the port of Dili, the mission was successful in its intention to focus attention and international scrutiny on Indonesian repression. To top off the spiral of hope that was rising, in 1996, Ramos-Horta, FRETILIN's representative to the UN, and D. Ximenes Belo, Bishop of Dili, were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

In addition to the echo that the question of East Timor always found in Portuguese society, a brief reference to how the matter was dealt with politically and diplomatically is also important. Although recognising their inability to impose a solution, Portugal never ceased its enormous diplomatic investment in the case, even when it seemed impossible to prevent the integration of East Timor into neighbouring Indonesia. As Gomes recalls, 'our defence of the Timorese cause was seen, by most of our partners, as a quixotic attitude, bereft of political realism'.<sup>21</sup>

### EAST TIMOR AND THE REDEMPTION OF PORTUGUESE IMPERIALISM

Two facts are undeniable: the course of history made the paths of Portugal and the small island of Timor cross one another for several centuries and, even after losing colonial control over East Timor, Portugal did not dissociate itself from the future of the island, disturbed at the humanitarian and political situation created by Indonesia's hostile annexation. However, these circumstances seem insufficient to explain the total mobilisation and the strong emotional pull for Portuguese society to join the solidarity movement in 1999. Within this context, we must query the meanings that underlie collective action and how, in the question of East Timor, national reflectiveness broke out regarding Portugal's imperial and colonial history.

The Portuguese resolved the hurried way in which the 500 years of Portuguese empire came to a close through silence and silencing, as they felt anxious to end an absurd colonial war and to free themselves of an empire out of pace with the times. Facing the needs and the ambitions of a modern country, the Portuguese committed the colonial question to the archives, even if they had to absorb around half a million people landing in Portugal from the ruins of the empire.<sup>22</sup> In other words,



the Portuguese strategically denied themselves any mourning for the loss of empire and, in all fields of social life, with the exception of the arts, avoided the question becoming public and demanding a process of collective reflection.

It was, therefore, the tragic events in East Timor that triggered a reconfiguration of identity that had been suspended since the democratic revolution. The question of East Timor converges with the image that the Portuguese wanted to recognise for themselves at the end of the twentieth century. What feelings were built up, in these troubled weeks, regarding the country and its imperial wake? How was this imperial chapter closed and how did the country enter its (definitive) postcolonial era?

The first interpretation of the political and social movement in defence of peace in East Timor is related to the fact that the Portuguese saw themselves as a former colonial power, fighting for the peaceful independence of the former colony to which they were sentimentally bound by linguistic, religious and cultural ties. In fact, it was clear that the movement was always sustained by recalling the historical and cultural ties between Portugal and East Timor that, clearly, were woven into the colonial context:

In the centre of the city [Dili] traces of Portugal are well-known: the colonial style houses; ... the church of St Paul; the administrator's house with two ancient Portuguese cannons; the old Municipal Market almost in ruins and the hospital where, on a plaque, it reads: 'Inaugurated in 1848 by the Governor Óscar Ruas and restored in 1960'.<sup>23</sup>

It is important to emphasise that, in the media coverage, there was no nostalgia for colonial rule in the political and economic sense, but rather the redemption of a Portuguese cultural heritage and a 'Portuguese way of being in the world'<sup>24</sup> imagined as being benevolently civilising and undertaken out of 'a fond identification with the tropical environment'.<sup>25</sup> A description in the *Público* newspaper clearly illustrates a visit made by journalists to a village in East Timor:

'Portugal is our land', a nonagenarian began by saying, kissing the hand of the embarrassed journalists ... 'The Portuguese have to return. Timor is the land of the Portuguese' ... Religiously, the boys and the old man laid out the cloth and exhibited a very ancient Portuguese flag, red and green ... They were proud, silent, obviously happy ... Being the relic it

was, the symbol of the Portuguese Republic was folded up again and taken to a safe haven. Somewhere, in a shelter nearby, an old trunk or a well-hidden drawer holds this worshipped item, this strange and apparently useless secret, this bridge to the past – an idealised past that comes to merge with an imagined future.<sup>26</sup>

This emphasises the 'special' relationship between Portugal and the former colony, but also 'a fundamentally romantic idea of East Timor'<sup>27</sup> and of the period of colonisation. These visions reverberate with the ideological inclinations of Luso-Tropicalism, which, in the case of East Timor, will echo two symbols of Portuguese culture above all: the Catholic religion and the Portuguese language. Recall the opinion expressed by Durão Barroso:

This is an historic day [the day on which the results of the referendum were made known] ... But if this was possible it was due also to the presence of traces of Portugal in East Timor. The Indonesian occupier could not wipe out the traces of Portugal in East Timor. It was in Portuguese that the Timorese prayed in Santa Cruz [Cemetery], it was in Portuguese that they expressed their wish to be free and independent. Portugal was right in supporting the cause of East Timor and the people of Timor. We, in Portugal, are also to be congratulated for not having let go of the East Timor cause.<sup>28</sup>

In an article in the newspaper *Público*,<sup>29</sup> Miguel Vale de Almeida<sup>30</sup> denounces the 'disagreeable nationalist, neo-colonial and narcissistic undertones' summarised in a fascination with the fact that the Timorese 'prayed in Portuguese'. Marques<sup>31</sup> also shows the importance of the Portuguese language and the Christianity of the Timorese people as elements crucial to the process of keeping East Timor on the media agenda in Portugal. The preferential relationship of the Portuguese with East Timor, bearing a strong component of self-glorification, is clearly emphasised in the opinion of a reader of the newspaper *Público*:

When I was thinking that something other than blood ran through the veins of the Portuguese ... I became extremely proud to be Portuguese at this incredible solidarity I witnessed ... Everyone realised that this struggle is ours ... Because we are morally responsible for each life that has been taken. It is for us, the Portuguese, to do something.<sup>32</sup>

The argument was shared by public figures, from a wide range of ideological positions, who wrote or were interviewed for the national press: 'If Timor is not saved then there is no salvation for us' (José Saramago);<sup>33</sup> 'Portugal has an historical debt to Timor: mobilisation to address one of the most important issues of the close of the century, which is self-determination for East Timor' (Adriano Moreira).<sup>34</sup>

Although underscoring the historical and cultural ties of Portugal with its former colony, it is important to explain that the argument that gave body to the protests was always rooted in condemnation of the genocide suffered by the people of East Timor, and in the constant appeal that the democratic choice of independence should be respected in conditions of freedom and security. Let us look at an example that clarifies the argument centred on democratic values and human rights:

What is truly at stake in Timor is a civilisation of freedom, justice, human dignity, solidarity and democracy, against attempts of genocide, barbaric and arbitrary practices, total violation of the most elementary human rights, oppression and lies (Bagão Félix).<sup>35</sup>

What do the many arguments in the public arena tell us? What meanings go along with the movement for solidarity with East Timor and how did they intersect with the way the Portuguese saw themselves at the close of the twentieth century? Is there any nostalgia for empire in them, or is it more a need to appease colonial offences?

Mobilisation for the independence of East Timor, the most remote colony in the Portuguese empire, is a confirmation of this quality of cultural hybridisation in which the Portuguese like to see themselves—an empire of cultural ties, legitimate, perhaps even desirable, in a postcolonial country.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, the Portuguese found then an opportunity for redemption, alleviating the blame for colonisation (and for decolonisation) through acts of limited real influence, but of extraordinary symbolic effect. It was this context of the exceptional and effervescent that led the Portuguese to believe they had liberated East Timor in 1999. In fact, and above all, they were liberating themselves as a people from the disgrace of colonialism and its late ending.

Although Portuguese colonial rule had ended in 1975, it was, in fact, the events in East Timor in 1999 that ultimately brought the Portuguese to their new place in the world. Postcolonial Portugal is also to be the

European, modern Portugal. In this sense, the main *corpus* of arguments, which strategically and imperiously occupies opinions circulating in the media, in the political field and in the streets, was associated with the irrefutable primacy of democracy and human rights. The approach to the colonial issues is made obliquely, always replacing the much-postponed critical analysis of the imperial past by blessing the emancipation of the former colony. The movement of solidarity for East Timor was, therefore, seen as a fair struggle, rooted in the values that make Portugal modern and European. And this also says something highly significant about the way in which the Portuguese saw themselves in the movement for East Timor: they saw themselves on the right side, after having been on the wrong side. Therefore, the mobilisation for East Timor was produced and reproduced by the media as a narrative of modernity, in which the cultural empire is not a blemish but the re-imagination of Portuguese heritage in the world.

## NOTES

1. D. Edwards and D. Cromwell, 'East Timor. The Practical Limits of Crusading Humanitarianism', in *Guardians of Power. The Myth of the Liberal Media* (London: Pluto Press, 2006), pp. 109–116.
2. Ibid.
3. E.S. Herman and N. Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent. The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002).
4. D. McQuail, 'Processes of Media Effects', in O. Boyd-Barret and Peter Braham, *Media, Knowledge and Power* (London & Sydney: Croom Helm, 1987).
5. R. Tapsell and J. Eidenfalk, 'Australian Reporting From East-Timor 1975–1999: Journalists as Agents of Change', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 59: 4 (2013): 576.
6. Ibid., p. 592.
7. See, e.g., a letter written to the press by a reader: 'How can the Timorese imagine and trust that the petty world of power and interests, of commercial and pragmatic relationships, would accept lessons in morals, pain, hope and dignity?' Letter to the Editor, *Público*, 10 September 1999, p. 4.
8. UGT and CGTP are the main trade unions in Portugal.
9. J.M. Pureza, 'Quem Salvou Timor Leste? Novas Referências para o Internacionalismo Solidário', in B.S. Santos (ed.), *Reconhecer para Libertar. Os Caminhos do Cosmopolitismo Multicultural* (Oporto: Edições Afrontamento, 2004), pp. 397–426.
10. The journalistic description of the human chain formed in Lisbon on 8 September 1999 is an excellent illustration: 'nothing had ever been seen

like this in Portugal, since 1974. In Lisbon tens of thousands of people went hand-in-hand for Timor. "Yuppies", "hippies", residents of Zone J or the Quinta da Marinha private estate, politicians, students, TV stars, the old, the young, babies, Catholics, atheists, they were all there when the human chain went by ... in a tremor of huge emotion.' *Público*, 9 September 1999, p. 6.

11. Political consensus regarding the Timor question dates from long before the events of September 1999. Portuguese diplomacy, particularly in the UN and the institutions of the European Union, was thoroughly consistent over the years in dealing with this dossier (J. Gomes, 'A Internacionalização da Questão de Timor-Leste', *Política Internacional*, 25 (2010)). Besides this, consensus became established in all political parties represented in parliament and not only the parties in government, as shown in the minutes of the Lisbon Inter-Parliamentary Conference for East Timor, held in 1995. Assembleia da República, *Conferência Interparlamentar de Lisboa por Timor-Leste* (Lisbon: Assembleia da República, 1998).
12. M.V. Almeida, 'O Epílogo do Império. Timor-Leste e a Catarse Pós-Colonial Portuguesa', in *Um Mar da Cor da Terra* (Oeiras: Celta Editora, 2000).
13. V. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969).
14. L.F. Thomaz, *De Ceuta a Timor* (Lisbon: Difel, 1994).
15. E. Traube, 'Mambai Perspectives on Colonialism and Decolonization', in P. Carey and G. Bentley, *East Timor at the Crossroads: The Forging of a Nation* (London: Cassel/SSRC, 1995).
16. N. Mendes, *A 'Multidimensionalidade' da Construção Identitária em Timor-Leste: Nacionalismo, Estado e Identidade Nacional* (Lisbon: Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas, 2005).
17. We refer to FRETILIN and to União Democrática Timorese (UDT) (Timorese Democratic Union). See G. Gunn, *Historical Dictionary of East-Timor* (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2011).
18. J. Gomes, 'A Internacionalização da Questão de Timor-Leste', pp. 67–89.
19. E.S. Herman and N. Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent. The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002).
20. R. Marques, *Timor-Leste: O Agendamento Mediático* (Oporto: Porto Editora, 2005); R. Tapsell and J. Eidenfalk, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, p. 592.
21. J. Gomes, 'A internacionalização da Questão de Timor-Leste', p. 75.
22. M.C. Ribeiro, 'Empire, Colonial Wars and Post-Colonialism in Portuguese Contemporary Imagination', *Portuguese Studies*, 17 (2002), pp. 132–214.

23. *Público*, 4 September 1999, p. 11.
24. C. Castelo, 'O Modo Português de Estar no Mundo'. *O Luso-Tropicalismo e a Ideologia Colonial Portuguesa (1933-1961)* (Oporto: Edições Afrontamento, 1998).
25. G. Freyre, *O Luso e o Trópico* (Lisbon: The Executive Committee for the Commemorations of the Fifth Centenary of the Death of Infante D. Henrique, 1961).
26. *Público*, 4 September 1999, p. 12.
27. M.P. Pires de Lima and N. Nunes, 'Movimentos Sociais por Timor', *Travessias—Revista de Ciências Sociais e Humanas em Língua Portuguesa*, 6-7 (2008): 165-89.
28. *Público*, 4 September 1999. José Manuel Durão Barroso was, at the time, the leader of the opposition as the president of the most important right-wing party. He was the President of the European Commission from 2004 to 2014.
29. *Público*, 13 September 1999, p. 16.
30. Miguel Vale de Almeida is a Portuguese anthropologist.
31. R. Marques, *Timor-Leste: O Agendamento Mediático*.
32. Letter to the Editor, *Público*, 9 September 1999, p. 12.
33. *Expresso*, 11 September 1999, p. 4. José Saramago was a Portuguese writer, awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1998. He was known for his communist political statements.
34. *Expresso*, 11 September 1999, p. 10. Adriano Moreira is a Portuguese politician who served as Minister of the Overseas Provinces during the dictatorship and was president of a conservative party in the 1980s.
35. *Público*, 11 September 1999, p. 14. António Bagão Félix is a Portuguese conservative politician.
36. M. Cahen, 'Portugal is in the Sky: Conceptual Considerations on Communities, Lusitanity, and Lusophony', in E. Morier-Genoud and M. Cahen, *Imperial Migrations. Colonial Communities and Diaspora in the Portuguese World* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 297-315.