

# History, Nation and Narrative in East Timor's Truth Commission Report

David Webster

Truth commissions, the current device of favour for societies emerging from violent conflict, are usually born from the compromises of peace settlements. Poised at junctures in which the future direction of a nation is at stake, they look back at the past with one eye firmly on the future. Each can be read as an effort to place the nation on a more secure footing as it moves into the future. East Timor's Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Reception (known by its Portuguese acronym as the CAVR), charged with giving the East Timorese people a space to tell their stories of 24 years of oppression, was assigned the job of "truth-telling." This essay reviews the CAVR's effort to provide a narrative of East Timor's national history.

The most famous truth commissions are those of Latin America and Africa. Argentina's National Commission on the Disappeared documented the massive violations of human rights under military regimes without having any powers to prosecute the perpetrators. Its widely disseminated report *Nunca Mas* (Never Again), for all of its revelations on the repression from 1976 to 1983, largely steered clear of historical context, making no attempt to answer the big questions, such as how the junta's brutality began and continued for so long. History took a more central role in post-junta Guatemala's Commission for Historical Clarification, whose report, *Memoria del Silencio* (Memory of Silence), offered a sweeping explanatory narrative of the nation's *langue durée*, bringing in political, economic and cultural analyses.<sup>1</sup> South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, born of a compromise to end apartheid, highlighted public hearings where the victims shared memories "shot through with accounts of what had happened to individuals and with lamentations of pain and suffering," in Gillian Slovo's words.<sup>2</sup> It has been criticized, however, for a thin historical analysis that failed to address the causes of human rights violations.<sup>3</sup>

1 Greg Grandin, "Chronicles of a Guatemalan Genocide Foretold: Violence, Trauma, and the Limits of Historical Inquiry," *Nepantla*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2000), p. 396.

2 Gillian Slovo, "Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa," in "Crime and (No) Punishment: A symposium on impunity and international justice," *Maisonneuve*, no. 4 (Summer 2003), p. 49.

3 Jacobus A. du Pisani and Kwang-su Kim, "Establishing the Truth About the Apartheid Past: Historians and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission," *African Studies Quarterly*,

The CAVR report, entitled *Chega!* (Portuguese for no more, or enough), is very conscious that part of its function is the search for a useable past. CAVR chair Aniceto Guterres Lopes begins by asking why a new nation, its eyes fixed on the hope of a better future, would commission a report anchored in the past. *Chega!*, he writes, is a refusal to forget. It aims to pursue accountability for past violations of human rights, not for the sake of revenge, but to “focus on the past for the sake of the future” of both East Timor and the international community (a major actor in the Timor tragedy).<sup>4</sup>

*Chega!* represents an impressive effort to construct a narrative largely based on the memories of the East Timorese. Still, it hews closely to the narrative already existing in writings on East Timor by outsiders—perhaps because the sources for the earlier years tend to be the same, or because *Chega!* is not so much writing a new story, as crystallizing stories already out there.<sup>5</sup> It denies any aspiration to be an authoritative history, but asserts a claim to being the first Timor-centric history, one driven by a multiplicity of voices, rather than being an elite or externally driven perspective. It stakes its claim to shaping the way East Timorese history is understood and influencing East Timor’s future in the directions of peace and mutual respect.

*Chega!*’s historical approach aims to help build the unity of a new state, stating: “The analysis and writing of East Timorese history is a critical step in nation building.”<sup>6</sup> East Timor was already forming as a nation in the minds of its people before it became a state. Still, there is much more to be done for a common identity to coalesce. A consensual historical narrative is often imagined to be the vital glue that ties new nation-states together. Certainly, *Chega!* wields history towards this end. It also makes a claim to have uncovered the truth, a more complex, Timor-centric, people-based history: “History telling that acknowledges complexity, that makes space for the voice of those often silenced, and that opens the way for open-minded reflection can make a contribution to building a nation where the idea of strength is based on respect for others, pluralism and democracy based upon the equality of citizens.”<sup>7</sup>

*Chega!*’s search for complexities and a non-elite perspective sits in uneasy tension with its quest for a single useable past. The historical chapter presents

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vol. 8, no. 1 (Fall 2004); Colin Bundy, “The Beast of the Past: History and the TRC,” in Wilmot James and Linda van de Vijver, *After the TRC: Reflections on truth and reconciliation in South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> CAVR, *Chega!*, preface by Aniceto Guterres Lopes, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Standard historical accounts include James Dunn, *East Timor: A Rough Passage to Independence* (Double Bay, NSW: Longueville Books, 2003); John Taylor, *Indonesia’s Forgotten War: The Hidden History of East Timor* (London: Zed Books, 1991); Jill Jolliffe, *East Timor: Nationalism and Colonialism* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1978); Carmel Budiardjo and Liem Soei Liong, *The War Against East Timor* (London: Zed Books, 1984).

<sup>6</sup> CAVR, *Chega!*, chapter 3, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> CAVR, *Chega!*, chapter 3, p. 5.

a narrative of an oppressed people continually fighting for their freedom and being punished for it, until they finally triumph. The East Timorese, after a divisive period, unified themselves and purged undesirable traits that held back their unity. Resistance coalesced on three fronts: military, clandestine and diplomatic, with the primè successes coming through a "David versus Goliath" diplomatic struggle in which East Timor found allies in international civil society. An ideologically driven campaign that divided Timorese society and alienated the international community gradually transformed itself into a united apolitical effort able to win international support. This narrative of *Chega!*'s, well-documented and accurate in its details, implicitly draws a road map for the future driven by the insistence on internal unity and non-confrontational diplomacy.

*Chega!* reacts, in many ways, to the official Indonesian historical narrative. East Timor, in that version, was unviable as an independent state. Indonesia had been forced into a messy intervention to prevent a Marxist-Leninist state, "another Cuba" that would threaten regional stability, or a descent into civil war. In any case, international realities meant that East Timorese independence was a "lost cause" and any effort to support that cause was quixotic at best, counter-productive at worst. This was a narrative that was widely accepted in Indonesia and abroad.<sup>8</sup> It was only slightly damaged by President B.J. Habibie's acknowledgement in 1999 that for "a long time, consciously or not, we have offered to the nation a version of reality that was not truly being experienced."<sup>9</sup> Even today, it remains strong, with many Indonesians blaming outside forces, especially Australia, for an "unjust" separation of East Timor from Indonesia.<sup>10</sup>

*Chega!*'s historical chapter begins well before the 1974 start date of the commission's mandate by identifying three major legacies of Portuguese colonialism. There was no development of self-government, no progress towards democracy or human rights, and the Portuguese held power through divide-and-rule tactics, reducing the unity needed for nation building.<sup>11</sup> The period, in other words, is understood in terms of a useable past—and the worst fault of Portuguese colonialism was its obstruction of nation building. Contrary to the standard colonialists' claim that their rule delivered unity

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<sup>8</sup> The official story is summarized in such works as *Chronology of East Timor Integration* (Jakarta: House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia, 1978). Media coverage often used the "lost cause" argument, for instance Marcus Gee, "Nobel prize is not help to East Timor," *Globe & Mail*, 16 October 1996.

<sup>9</sup> B.J. Habibie, speech to Parliament on East Timor, 21 September 1999.

<sup>10</sup> For instance, Lela E. Madjiah, *Timor Timur: Perginya Si Anak Hilang* [East Timor: The Departure of the Lost Child] (Jakarta: Antara Pustaka Utama, 2002). CAVR's effort parallels, for instance, the Papuan demand for a "setting straight" of the historical record (*pelurusan sejarah*) of their own incorporation into Indonesia. David Webster, "Already Sovereign as a People": A Foundational Moment in West Papuan Nationalism," *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 74, no. 4 (Winter 2001-02), pp. 507-28.

<sup>11</sup> CAVR, *Chega!*, chapter 3, p. 7.

and order, *Chega!* asserts that Portugal disrupted what might otherwise be a more united society.

The theme of striving for unity also pervades *Chega!*'s treatment of decolonization. The Carnation Revolution in Portugal opened up political space in East Timor, leading to the creation of the first indigenous parties. The Timorese Democratic Union (UDT) broadly consisted of elites who had worked with the Portuguese regime and wanted a self-governing state linked to Portugal, with little social disruption. The Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (Fretilin) stressed total independence and popular mobilization: while its name and symbols drew on the rhetorically powerful model of African liberation movements, such as Frelimo in Mozambique, its practices drew more on Brazilian popular educator Paulo Freire and the teachings of the Catholic seminary where most of the Timorese elite was educated. Politics in the 1974-75 juncture were dominated by the interplay of UDT and Fretilin. The two competed for support, then allied to pursue independence, then returned to a conflict that culminated in a short civil war. In *Chega!*'s view, both were essentially centrist parties, with ideological differences mostly manufactured as part of a competition for support manipulated by outside (Indonesian) forces.<sup>12</sup>

A key difference between the two parties was over the approach to rural society: where UDT drew support from traditional elites and civil servants, and had few plans for changing the social structure, Fretilin sought a bottom-up strategy, drawing on symbols like the Maubere. A term of contempt directed at hill people under the Portuguese regime, it was reclaimed by Fretilin as a badge of pride.<sup>13</sup> The UDT, worried about Fretilin's growing strength and encouraged to act by Indonesian intelligence agents, staged a coup in August 1975. Portuguese authorities fled. Fretilin fought back and won a military victory. According to the *Chega!* narrative, drawing on testimony from participants, both sides lost control of their forces and up to 3,000 people were killed. "The brutality of East Timorese people against each other in this brief conflict has left deep wounds in East Timorese society which continue to be felt to this day."<sup>14</sup> Unable to get the Portuguese to return or to attract international support, and reeling under Indonesian advances along the border, Fretilin declared independence in November 1975. UDT and its allies, who had retreated to Indonesian West Timor, responded by signing

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<sup>12</sup> CAVR, *Chega!*, chapter 3, p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> The "Maubere" symbol is described in *Chega!* (chapter 3, p. 27) and José Ramos Horta, *FUNU: The Unfinished Saga of East Timor* (Boston: Red Sea Press, 1987), p. 37fn. It is hard to escape the similarity to Indonesian nationalist leader Sukarno's use of the word Marhaen to exalt the rural poor and make them the symbol of Indonesian nationalism fifty years earlier. Sukarno's description of the Marhaen appears, among other places, in *Sukarno: An Autobiography as Told to Cindy Adams* (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1965), p. 63.

<sup>14</sup> CAVR, *Chega!*, chapter 3, p. 43.

an Indonesian-authored declaration of integration. In *Chega!*, the Indonesian invasion that began on December 7, 1975 is a foundational moment of suffering, in which all the East Timorese came under attack from an outside force.<sup>15</sup>

From 1975 to 1978, much of the population continued to live under Fretilin rule in the interior. The drive for social transformation accompanied the military imperatives of guerrilla warfare.<sup>16</sup> *Chega!* acknowledges Fretilin's achievements in building a self-reliant society, but highlights its deficiencies: party interests were put above the needs of the guerrilla struggle and the human rights of non-Fretilin people were violated. Still, *Chega!* sees a common national identity being forged in part by this collective memory of suffering.<sup>17</sup> In its liberated zones, Fretilin coupled the war of liberation from Indonesia with an effort to end exploitation within East Timorese society. *Chega!*'s pioneering chapter on the resistance points out: "Fretilin cultural activities aimed to develop a sense of nationhood, based on the idea that the nation could progress only if the people fought to free themselves from the negative mentality sown by colonialism. The theme of the poor needing to fight for their liberation had been developed before the Indonesian invasion."<sup>18</sup>

*Chega!* calls the war and famine of the late 1970s "the greatest humanitarian tragedy in Timor-Leste's history." Aided by US-made arms and bombers, the Indonesian army forced Fretilin into smaller and smaller mountain zones, until its leadership finally surrendered. Out of this darkest moment, however, was born a new hope. Under the leadership of Xanana Gusmão, Fretilin fighters who had escaped encirclement regrouped in the early 1980s and undertook new attacks to prove that the resistance continued. Armed struggle became a symbol, not a path to independence: in Xanana's most famous slogan, "To resist is to win." The new stress on unity and diplomacy was taken for pragmatic reasons of strategy, yet it also marked, in *Chega!*'s words, "a radical shift to the ideology of the Resistance."<sup>19</sup> Fretilin retreated from its programme of social revolution.<sup>20</sup> Xanana created the first coalition of Timorese groups to resist the occupation, spurred in part by calls for unity from the head of the Catholic diocese of East Timor, Monsignor Martinho da Costa Lopes. Xanana resigned from Fretilin to become a symbol of resistance for the entire nation, forming the National Council of Maubere Resistance

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<sup>15</sup> CAVR, *Chega!*, chapter 3, p. 65.

<sup>16</sup> Taylor, *Indonesia's Forgotten War*.

<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Jacques Bertrand has written about "a hidden transcript of shared suffering" operating among Acehnese, and the *Memoria Passionis* series on Papuan history and human rights uses this concept as its uniting theme. Jacques Bertrand, *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 173-4; *Memoria Passionis* (Jayapura Catholic diocese Secretariat of Justice and Peace, 2001-1005).

<sup>18</sup> CAVR, *Chega!*, chapter 5, p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> CAVR, *Chega!*, chapter 5, p. 32.

<sup>20</sup> CAVR, *Chega!*, chapter 5, p. 28.

(CNRM) in 1988. He divorced the guerrilla fighters from their affiliation to Fretilin in order “to make the armed front a genuine national force and consolidate its leadership role in the Resistance.”<sup>21</sup> The march was upwards towards unity, “from divergence to convergence,” as *Chega!* puts it.<sup>22</sup>

The church, convinced that the resistance was no longer dominated by the radicals of Fretilin, put its seal of approval on the coalition building in the late 1980s. Also, the church itself had been pushed in a more radical direction by its witness of suffering; offering refuge from the military, a “free space” for dissent and humanitarian aid, it gained the allegiance of the majority of the people during the Indonesian occupation.<sup>23</sup> In Catholic terms, Fretilin repented in the 1980s; it purged the elements of disunity that held the nation back from achieving its independence. The overall narrative in *Chega!* presents a fall into a divisive social revolution followed by purification and a forward march towards unity.

After its formation in 1988 as a new national coalition, the CNRM declared a policy of fighting on “three fronts”: military, clandestine and diplomatic. The stress was on the diplomatic front, led outside East Timor by José Ramos Horta and a network of young non-party figures, most of whom had grown up under Indonesian rule. As *Chega!* notes, the guerrillas “launched attacks with precision with a view to their impact on the diplomatic struggle, to impress on the world there was still fighting and that the international community must take action to resolve it.”<sup>24</sup>

*Chega!*'s chapter on the international aspects notes that the change in strategy in the 1980s forced a change in the functioning of East Timor's “diplomatic front.” Those who had been Fretilin's own representatives to the outside world, speaking on behalf of an independent republic led by a single party, became ambassadors of a coalition that did not claim to already exist as the legitimate government of East Timor.<sup>25</sup> Ramos Horta, Fretilin's representative at the UN, agreed to drop the annual resolution condemning Indonesia in favour of one that simply called for talks between the parties directly concerned. *Chega!* argues that the concessions were warranted: “The

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<sup>21</sup> CAVR, *Chega!*, chapter 5, p. 35.

<sup>22</sup> CAVR, *Chega!*, chapter 7, p. 86.

<sup>23</sup> On the role of churches as “free spaces” for dissent, see Stephen Lazarus, “Pulling the Curtain Down: An Introduction to the Role of the East German Protestant Church in the Peaceful Revolution of 1989,” *Many to Many* 3 (Feb. 1993). The role of the East Timorese Catholic Church is described in Patrick A. Smythe, *The Heaviest Blow: The Catholic Church and the East Timor Issue* (Munster: Lit, 2004); Rowena Lennox, *Fighting Spirit of East Timor: The Life of Martinho da Costa Lopes* (New York: Zed Books, 2000); Arnold S. Kohen, *From the Place of the Dead: The Epic Struggles of Bishop Belo of East Timor* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); and Robert Archer, “The Catholic Church in East Timor,” in Peter Carey and G. Carter Bentley, *East Timor at the Crossroads: The Forging of a Nation* (London: Cassell, 1995).

<sup>24</sup> CAVR, *Chega!*, chapter 5, p. 41.

<sup>25</sup> CAVR, *Chega!*, chapter 7, p. 79. Both the first and second prime ministers of the East Timorese state that gained independence in 2002, Mari Alkatiri and José Ramos Horta, are products of these first Fretilin external missions.

decision to use the system, however, was to prove correct."<sup>26</sup> The implicit judgment here is that East Timor got ahead diplomatically when it played by the rules of the international system.

The imperatives of a diplomatically driven struggle saw the East Timorese move away from the language of revolution and towards the language of human rights. *Chega!* simultaneously notes this shift, celebrates it, and is a product of it. In making a transformation to human rights language, *Chega!* insists, the resistance started to win victories. In place of old alliances with Marxist-inspired governments, the East Timorese built new alliances with forces better able to help their cause. Ramos Horta presented a formal CNRM peace plan in 1992, giving pride of place to human rights and confidence-building measures, and offering to accept a period of autonomy followed by a referendum. Symbolically, he devised the plan in the Dalai Lama's headquarters in Dharamsala, India. In many ways it was inspired by the Tibetan strategy of stressing cultural survival and universal human rights in order to appeal to supporters in the West. "The plan," *Chega!* notes, "was intended to put the Soeharto government under pressure by offering an honourable way out and to present the Resistance as the more constructive of the two protagonists."<sup>27</sup>

A diplomatic focus meant an enhanced role for clandestine activists working behind Indonesian lines. The *estafetas* (couriers) who had smuggled food and information to the guerrillas in the late 1970s and early 1980s became a transmission belt for information and action in the late 1980s and 1990s, and played an increasingly central role themselves in organizing media-savvy demonstrations at events like the Pope's 1989 visit to East Timor and the 1994 Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Jakarta. University students became increasingly important in the resistance. Timorese studying in Java forged links with Indonesian student radicals. One young Indonesian activist called Indonesians and East Timorese "passengers of a ship, who were facing the same pirates."<sup>28</sup>

*Chega!* gives considerable credit for the success of East Timorese diplomacy to alliances with "international civil society," defined as groups outside East Timor other than governments or businesses. While Western governments and business interests generally opposed East Timorese self-determination, *Chega!*'s international chapter argues that civil society tended to support it. *Chega!* is not the first historical account to note this contribution, but it provides a more complete account and gives official recognition to the role

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<sup>26</sup> CAVR, *Chega!*, chapter 7, p. 84. Ramos Horta chose the tactic quite deliberately, although it marked a departure from his initial style. Note the shift in language between his book *FUNU* (1987) and his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech of 1996, published as *Timor Leste, Nobel da Paz 1996* (Lisbon: Colibri, 1997).

<sup>27</sup> CAVR, *Chega!*, chapter 7, p. 88.

<sup>28</sup> CAVR, *Chega!*, chapter 3, p. 120.

of foreign supporters, often integral parts of the diplomatic front.<sup>29</sup> Non-governmental organizations eroded Western governments' support for the Indonesian occupation, while helping to shape the direction of East Timorese diplomacy and even East Timorese identity, as a people striving for peace and human rights—the identity espoused in *Chega!*. Church networks were especially important; as the role of the church in providing a space for dissent and a witness to suffering grew inside East Timor, global religious networks transmitted information, awareness and activism.

*Chega!* identifies three crucial turning points: the 1991 massacre at the Santa Cruz cemetery, the first such atrocity to be filmed; the capture of Xanana in 1992, transforming him from guerrilla leader to jailed hero of a nation; and the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize award to Ramos Horta and Bishop Carlos Belo, head of the East Timor Catholic Church. The grisly images of Santa Cruz “changed permanently the way the world perceived the Indonesian occupation.”<sup>30</sup> Xanana's capture made him a symbol who would take on the aura of “East Timor's Nelson Mandela.” Xanana's defence plea, which he was not allowed to read, reached far more people than his pronouncements from the mountains, becoming a smuggled document that carried the same resonance as Sukarno's similar defence plea when charged with subversion for fighting Dutch rule of Indonesia.<sup>31</sup> The Nobel served as the final legitimating stamp of approval, one viewed in *Chega!* as a validation of the resistance, its diplomatic strategy, and the work of international civil society networks.

There is an unexplored paradox here: the alliances were often with groups that worked for social change in their own societies. While allying with radical groups outside East Timor, the resistance was simultaneously purging itself of its own radicalism in the quest for greater unity. *Chega!* sees a pragmatic strategy aiming to disrupt Indonesia's diplomatic alliances and win the support of the most powerful actors as a “morally correct” strategy. To resist also meant to play by the rules.

The culmination of a decade-and-a-half of striving for Timorese unity came in 1998, when hundreds of Timorese met in Portugal and agreed to transform the CNRM into the CNRT, the National Council of Timorese Resistance. The UDT insisted that the word *Maubere*, which they saw as

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<sup>29</sup> A substantial chunk of the existing literature on East Timor is written by “international civil society” members who sympathized with or worked for East Timorese self-determination. On the role of the solidarity movement, see Carmel Budiardjo, “The International Solidarity Movement for East Timor,” in *East Timor Testimony: Photographs by Elaine Briere* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2004); Brad Simpson, “Transnational Peace Activism: The International Movement for East Timor and US Foreign Policy,” *Peace and Change*, vol. 29, nos. 3-4 (July 2004); David Webster, “Non-State Diplomacy: East Timor 1975-99,” *Portuguese Studies Review*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2003), pp. 1-18.

<sup>30</sup> CAVR, *Chega!*, chapter 3, p. 115.

<sup>31</sup> Sukarno, *Indonesia Accuses!* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1975); Xanana Gusmão, *A Travesty of Justice* (Fairfield, NSW: East Timor Relief Association, 1996).



"worse than Marxist-Leninist," be expunged. Suitably enough, *Chega!* reveals that the order to drop the word Maubere, Fretilin's cherished image of the common man struggling for liberation, came directly from Xanana, the jailed personifier of unity.<sup>32</sup> Even former collaborators were welcomed into the big tent, having made their ritual repentances.

The end of the occupation, like its beginning, came in fire and suffering. Although the Suharto dictatorship fell amidst the 1998 Asian crisis, the official narrative, driven by the assertion that Indonesian rule was the only way to prevent civil war, remained strong, and is one reason for the ferocity of Indonesian military reprisals following East Timor's 1999 referendum vote for independence. *Chega!* reports Indonesian troops and their militia proxies killed 1,200 to 1,500 people, forced over half the population (550,000 people) to flee their homes, and destroyed 70 percent of the country's infrastructure.<sup>33</sup>

*Chega!* gives considerable credit to diplomacy for bringing about international intervention to end the Indonesian army's occupation. The global climate had changed; Indonesia's former supporters were no longer so keen to pay the costs of continued complicity. Still, credit goes above all to unified resistance of the East Timorese nation.<sup>34</sup> From that remarkable courage and determination to resist comes *Chega!*'s vision of a future nation. The vote for independence itself emerges as a vital and (mostly) united act of nation-building by the nation's people.

Just as it combines domestic and international developments to offer an integrated history, *Chega!* also offers both domestic and international lessons. Its narrative of unity aids internal nation building. It does not go so far as one Palestinian activist has, in praising East Timorese "credible leadership" and "moral vision" as an example to be followed, but it does hold up East Timor as a model for other peoples.<sup>35</sup> *Chega!*'s hope is that "we can become a shining light to the world."<sup>36</sup> Its international chapter highlights the partnership with international civil society, calling diplomacy "the most important factor in achieving self-determination":

... [diplomacy] was ultimately successful because it focussed on internationally agreed principles, eschewed ideology and violence, was open to the contribution of all East Timorese, and made maximum use of the international system, media and civil society networks. As a human rights and moral (rather than ideological) issue, the question of Timor-Leste gained international legitimacy and support at the expense of Indonesia, whose case rested on force and had no basis in international law or morality.<sup>37</sup>

32 CAVR, *Chega!*, chapter 7, p. 89; chapter 5, p. 37.

33 CAVR, *Chega!*, chapter 3, p. 145.

34 CAVR, *Chega!*, chapter 3, pp. 152-3.

35 Nader Hashemi, "Why Yasser Arafat must go," *Globe & Mail*, 18 July 2002.

36 CAVR, *Chega!*, Introduction, p. 8.

37 CAVR, *Chega!*, chapter 7, p. 123.

East Timor's struggle, in the *Chega!* narrative, is proof that there is no such thing as a hopeless cause. To resist really is to win, eventually. This is a profound message of liberation: with determination and unity, people really can move mountains and achieve the seemingly impossible. This message, however, sits uneasily with the threads in *Chega!* that suggest victories are won by sticking to the rules of the international system and purging the struggle of radicalism in order to achieve unity. It is also undermined by the fact that East Timor paid a great price for its reliance on international institutions. The United Nations and foreign governments were either unwilling or unable to stop the Indonesian military's campaign of terror in 1999 in the months before the referendum and its scorched earth campaign in the weeks afterwards.

*Chega!* is plotted like a Catholic story, with original sin being washed clean through repentance and suffering until the final redemption. Historically, the arc is a Whiggish one of continual progress through the perfection of ever-greater unity. *Chega!* inverts Indonesian civil war rhetoric: East Timor is not a fragmented territory needing unity to be imposed from outside. Rather, the historical mission of the East Timor struggle is one of unity, undermined by Indonesian interference.

*Chega!* effectively undermines the Indonesian official narrative, but that narrative can only really be challenged within Indonesia. *Chega!* received little Indonesian attention and the truth and reconciliation process was unable to encompass Indonesia, where most of the worst offenders were sheltered. It will require Indonesian voices to challenge the old official narrative if there is to be any chance of an honest nation-to-nation reconciliation. There is some hope for that in the Indonesians who took part in the CAVR process and in those who are looking at their own history with more honesty. Some, like a former foreign ministry official who served as the government's spokesman on East Timor, are now having second thoughts: "We spoke of winning the hearts and minds, but we didn't know what we were doing ... East Timor became a police state, we were bribing people we thought were loyal to us, and doing horrible things to people we thought were not loyal to us."<sup>38</sup> Still, these voices remain a minority in Indonesia.

*Chega!*'s dilemma of being posed between a project of liberation and a drive to play by the rules of the international system is, in some ways, the dilemma of East Timor's existence as a new independent state. The "lesson" was that it was best to "play by the rules" internationally and purge radical influences to achieve internal unity. That meant avoiding confrontational public diplomacy. Timorese leaders since independence have shied away

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<sup>38</sup> Dino Patti Djalal, cited in Jane Perlez, "In East Timor's Story, Lessons for Indonesia," *New York Times*, 14 August 2006.

from conflict with Australia over oil and conflict with Indonesia over transitional justice. In the offshore oil case, playing by the rules has resulted in being deprived of millions of dollars of revenue that rightly belong to East Timor. The determination to seek good relations with Indonesia at almost any cost has led to total impunity for the Indonesian military officers responsible for gross human rights violations in East Timor. It has also put East Timor's leaders into conflict with civil society organizations (both in East Timor and Indonesia) and the UN who refuse to endorse a joint Indonesian-East Timorese government Truth and Friendship Commission designed to ensure continued impunity. The Timorese leadership seems not to fully believe the idea nurtured during the years of the resistance, that they can move mountains.

*University of Toronto, Canada, October, 2007*

ABSTRACTS

**How Does a Truth Commission Find Out What the Truth Is?**

*John Roosa*

This article reviews the data collection methods of East Timor's Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Reception (CAVR), whose 2,500-page report was released in 2006. The CAVR used four methods for gaining information about past human rights violations: oral statements recorded on tape, surveys designed by social scientists, oral interviews by experienced investigators, and community forums. The CAVR report relies heavily on statistical analyses of the oral statements and the surveys. The findings from such statistical analyses turn out to be of limited significance. The most informative parts of the report that convincingly reveal patterns of rights violations and add to what was already known about East Timorese history are based on the oral interviews and community forums.

**History, Nation and Narrative in East Timor's Truth Commission Report**

*David Webster*

In writing their report, the members of East Timor's Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Reception (CAVR) were keenly aware of the ways the understanding of history could shape the new nation. Offering a "focus on the past for the sake of the future," they searched for a usable past. There is an uneasy tension in the report between this quest for a single agreed national narrative of the past, and the search for complexities and an inside, non-elite perspective.

The CAVR report rejects the official Indonesian narrative that asserted Indonesian military occupation was the only thing preventing "civil war." It equally rejects the international understanding, dominant for many years, that East Timorese independence was a "lost cause." It presents a counter-narrative of a united people, fighting for freedom amidst repression, until their final triumph. It is framed almost as a Catholic story of original sin, suffering and redemption. An ideologically driven, internally divisive and internationally counterproductive campaign gave way to an apolitical, united struggle able to win international support, the report suggests. The narrative arc runs "from divergence to convergence," and rests on two key concepts: resistance and unity. Where resistance suggests a message of liberation against overwhelming odds, the imperatives of unity suggest it is important to "play by the rules" of the international system. In some ways this is the dilemma of East Timor as an independent state.

**The CAVR:**

**Justice and Reconciliation in a Time of "Impoverished Political Possibilities"**

*Joseph Nevins*

This article provides an overview of, and analyzes, how the final report of East Timor's Commission on Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (CAVR) treated matters of responsibility for gross human rights abuses; accountability and reconciliation. While the article acknowledges the value of the report, it highlights *Chega!*'s limitations.

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