

# *When the Diaspora Returns: Language Choices in Post-Independence Timor Lorosa'e*

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After four centuries of Portuguese rule, twenty four years of Indonesian occupation, and two years of United Nations' administration, East Timor gained independence on 20 May, 2002. I was there for the historic moment when the flag of the Falantil guerilla fighters was handed over to the fresh young soldiers of the East Timor Defence Force, the United Nations flag was lowered, and the new East Timor flag was raised.

I spent six months in East Timor/Timor Lorosa'e, from January to June, 2002. East Timor has the fascination of a place that both geographically and historically is a meeting ground for three different cultures—Asia, Melanesia, and the West, which was represented for 400 years by Portugal, and now, arguably, also by Australia.

East Timor is the first new state of the new millennium, the world's 191st state. It has a population of less than 800,000. It faces an unemployment rate of seventy per cent, an illiteracy rate of forty-three per cent, and over forty per cent of the population live on an average daily income equivalent to A\$1. It also faces a complicated and heated debate over language.

The new constitution of East Timor designates Portuguese as the official language, Tetum (the Indigenous lingua franca) as the national language, and English and Indonesian as working languages. There are also sixteen distinct local languages in the various districts. Indonesian is being officially phased out, but Indonesia remains East Timor's largest trading partner. The Minister of Education, Armino Maia, says that East Timor is still using Indonesia's educational system because the country does not yet have its own.

Why was Portuguese chosen as the official language of East Timor? Geoffrey Hull asks:

Wasn't Portuguese merely an imposed European language spoken by white administrators, missionaries and a minority of the indigenous population? Isn't Portuguese completely unrelated to Tetum and the other vernaculars, and therefore difficult for Timorese to learn? And after twenty-four years of Indonesian domination, hasn't Portuguese been largely forgotten in East Timor? Isn't its sudden revival both anachronistic and dangerously impractical?!

East Timor must confront the possibility of failing as a nation, like at least one of its neighbours, the Solomon Islands. Language questions will play a key part in East Timor's direction.

## THE REGENERATIVE SPIRIT

The following are examples of the practical consequences of choosing Portuguese as the official language, in a country where less than fifteen per cent of the people speak or understand it. In practice in any government or administrative written communication, the 'national' language Tetum plays poor cousin to 'official' Portuguese. Most of those who do speak Portuguese belong to the older generation; few people under the age of thirty years speak it because the Portuguese language was banned by Indonesia. Conversely, since all schooling was in Indonesian, most East Timorese under thirty can speak, read and write that language.

Some personal experiences demonstrate the difficulties of the language issue. I was asked by one member of the English staff at Universidade Nacional de Timor Lorosa'e to teach advanced English to a group of staff in preparation for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam. Achieving a particular grade in this exam is a prerequisite for overseas study in an English-speaking country, a highly desirable goal for many East Timorese academics. I agreed to teach, but before we began the Rector of Universidade Nacional de Timor Lorosa'e vetoed the class. The staff had to learn Portuguese first; this was a national priority, even for people whose field of academic specialisation was English. The chemistry lecturer, whose table was opposite mine in the staff room, was one of those who wanted to improve his English. He was a man of about thirty who had received his education in Indonesia, had some English, and wanted to learn more, so as to study in Australia or New Zealand. Although he was, for the time being, still teaching in Indonesian, he was expected to learn Portuguese, not just conversationally, but to a standard where he could teach chemistry in that language.

After my computer was stolen, a young friend introduced me to the computers in the well-funded Portuguese Language Centre. Learning to use the Portuguese version of Microsoft was not difficult. But after one session I was told that these computers were to be used only in Portuguese, not in English, so I was barred.

There is no English Language Centre in Dili, in spite of the willingness of AusAid to fund it, and in spite of the demonstrable keenness of East Timorese to learn English. It was blocked because influential East Timorese fear that English will wipe out its linguistic competitors—because it is a notorious killer of indigenous languages and cultures.

I learned about language problems in the justice system from a friend who was on a committee investigating a prison break-out. One factor in the unrest was a shortage of staff because to keep their jobs and gain promotion these Indonesian and Tetum speaking prison officers now had to pass exams in Portuguese. People spoke of the 'Mozambique clique' in government and the justice department enforcing Portuguese. The 'Mozambique clique' starts with the Prime Minister, Mari Alkatiri, and includes ministers in the cabinet, secretaries and advisors. Mari Alkatiri spent twenty-five years in Mozambique.

The day before I left, I was told that six lawyers, all East Timorese trained in Indonesia and working on various tribunals, had lost their jobs because they could not pass exams in Portuguese. In an August report, the government was considering

employing foreign lawyers (that is, Mozambiquan, Brazilian or Portuguese) because the legal system had virtually ground to a halt. Jose Ramos Horta has recently said (while visiting New Zealand) that his country's judicial and prison systems:

are still very fragile ... our judiciary is almost non-existent ... Some in prison, who if they go to trial they would get maybe three months, six months prison for petty crimes, they are there for a year or two years waiting for trial.<sup>2</sup>

Language is one large part of this problem.

Portuguese has been adopted as the language of instruction from Grade 1 in primary schools. Sister Aurora Pires, an East Timorese nun whose mother tongue is Portuguese, but who lived in Australia for twenty-four years, told me that she was worried about trying to teach her Tetum-speaking five-year-old pre-schoolers in anything other than their mother tongue. In this she was of course in conformity with the principle that *effective learning proceeds from the known to the unknown*, and with the UNESCO statement of 1953 that *the best medium for teaching is the mother tongue of the pupil*.<sup>3</sup>

When the Indonesians invaded East Timor, they established schools in villages and towns, with 6,000 Indonesian teachers who came and stayed. In comparison, the Portuguese, in 400 years had established only a handful of schools, and no colleges. Hence all literate East Timorese acquired the Indonesian language. Now, unemployed young teachers from Portugal go to East Timor on contracts for one or two years. Then they return to Portugal. In December 2002, fifty new teachers came from Brazil. In the remote districts of East Timor, Portuguese teachers are flown once a week by helicopter to teach the teachers who are then supposed to teach the children. With the best will and the most dedicated teachers in the world, it is hard to see how this is economically sustainable. Once the United Nations pulls out, the East Timorese Government will not even have helicopters.

The danger that many foresee is the formation of a non-Portuguese speaking underclass (especially in the countryside) dominated by an educated elite of Portuguese speakers who are mainly from the towns. The recent announcement that a school in which Portuguese is the language of instruction is to be established in Dili only adds to this division. In addition, there are plans for about 1,500 Timorese to attend a pre-university Portuguese course next year. All of my students who were training to become English teachers in secondary schools were also learning Portuguese. Although they grumbled, they seemed more or less resigned to this necessity.

It is a reality that the East Timorese voted overwhelmingly for Xanana Gusmao as President in May 2001. He received nearly eighty per cent of the popular vote. A former guerilla leader and seven-year prisoner in Indonesian jails, Xanana says that the Portuguese language is vital to East Timor's culture; that the culture is a hybrid of Indigenous and Portuguese elements. He argues that the use of Portuguese by the leaders of the independence struggle gave it symbolic value as the language of resistance, and that this language is what sets the country apart from its much larger neigh-

hours, both Indonesia and Australia. Portuguese, Xanana argues, is fundamental to national identity:

This was a political choice of undisputed strategic nature, which was and is to affirm our own identity, by virtue of the differentiation imposed upon us in the world, and above all, within a region where East Timor is exposed to a range of similarities and even cultural and ethnic ties ... The re-introduction of the Portuguese language and the development of Tetum will constitute the fundamental pillars of our existence as a people.<sup>4</sup>

Where does the reintroduction of Portuguese put the Indigenous language, Tetum? Following Indonesia's invasion in 1975, Tetum also became a language of resistance. Its survival and spread was aided by the Roman Catholic Church's decision in 1981 to adopt it as the language of ritual, as Portuguese had been banned. Elsewhere in Indonesia, only Indonesian can be used in religious services. It was the Catholic clergy, priests and nuns, and the native catechists they trained, who really ensured the spread of Tetum. The Tetum language and the Catholic Church together became points of resistance and a focus of national identity.

Tetum's written form was and remains incomplete, and there is a shortage of published materials. It does not yet have the vocabulary or structures to function as a language for modern government, commerce, higher education or law. The United Nations' electoral commission compiled and developed a lexicon of Tetum words for electoral and democratic processes, as part of their training program for local staff.

What colonial practices lie behind this complex linguistic situation? Why is it that, unlike the Indonesians who gladly got rid of the Dutch language, the East Timorese have chosen to re-establish Portuguese? Geoffrey Hull argues that whereas the Dutch and British in their colonies maintained a distance between the identities of the colonisers and the colonised, the French, Spanish, and Portuguese:

transformed an indigenous culture into a hybrid one, one so complex that it is now impossible to separate native and European elements without destroying the fabric of the culture itself and shattering the common ethnic consciousness.<sup>5</sup>

Thus Portugal's rule gave the East Timorese their modern ethnic hybrid identity. Portugal's rule also brought social, political and cultural unity to a people who were previously fragmented.

Without wanting to romanticise Portuguese colonial rule, which was quite capable of exploiting the natural resources of East Timor and ruthlessly putting down rebellions, Hull argues that during more than 400 years of colonial rule, Portugal left a good deal of the Indigenous social structure of East Timor in place. The Portuguese encouraged their administrators to marry local women (especially amongst the liurai or local kings) and to raise families. These liurai converted to Catholicism, were made peers of the Kingdom of Portugal, and adopted Portuguese surnames. Lisbon also ruled the island through a class of mixed-blood or Mestiço administrators known as Topasses or 'Black Portuguese'. The children of all these unions were educated in Portuguese. The most gifted studied in a boarding school in Soibada, then went to the seminary outside Dili for higher education. Successful boys aspired to study in Portugal, or Mozambique.

Luis Cardoso, in his 1997 autobiographical novel, *The Crossing. A Story of East Timor*, writes about his education. At his first school, on the island of Atauro, he describes the strangeness of learning to read in Portuguese, the names of things he knew in Tetum. He speaks of those 'distant paradisaic fruits', apples and pears, that he only knew from his reader:

Compositions were always written in praise of our distant motherland symbolised and guarded by two male angels far uglier than those in any sacred images, and whose portraits hung on the wall facing us. One was bald and fat and wore white decorated with gold lace. The other was gloomy and serious, dressed in a grey suit and possessed of a sharp, threatening nose and hair combed smooth in the style of the soldiers ... I was told that these angels were represented in Timor by the pale-skinned blond sergeant, the commander of the barracks, whom I feared because of his resemblance to the rain-nain, the spirit of the earth, confirming my mother's belief that white men had erupted in flames out of the earth's centre.<sup>6</sup>

Later, at the boarding school in Soibada (high in the interior mountains, where it rained all year round) a language policy was harshly enforced on the boys:

Although the school had been built in the midst of those hills, like an altar to learning, with people from different races and speaking different languages, Portuguese was compulsory in the grounds, and anyone who disobeyed would receive a sharp rap with a ruler.<sup>7</sup>

At his next school, in Lautem, the young Luis learns more about Portugal and its empire:

Although I knew that I would never visit the Portugal shown to me in the tourist guides—our schoolbooks—I delighted in imagining its cities, mountains, rivers, its people and language. I loved knowing of the existence, the possibility, of earthly paradises and promised lands, perhaps especially since there was no chance of such a thing in my own life. It was in my fourth year that I discovered the route taken by the discoverers back to Portugal. Macau and its capital, the City of the Holy Name of God. Goa, Daman and Diu; lost, lamented India. Mozambique as long and thin as a giraffe ... Angola grown fat on the diamonds of North and South Lunda and the oil of Cabinda. The Sao Tome and Principe Islands of Mario Lopes and cacao. Guinea-Bissau and the Bijagos archipelago. Cape Verde and the mournful music of Mindelo. Madeira and the Azores. Brazil and Dom Pedro's historic cry of 'Independence or death!' Portugal and Entroncamento, the railway junction where all the world's trains met. Sometimes, remembering my mother's suspicions, I doubted the existence of these lands. But sheer delight made me believe in those places as I did in the paradise lost by Adam and gained by death.<sup>8</sup>

Later, as a student, Cardoso goes to this magical railway station and finds it empty: 'a silent abandoned place where the remnants of empire were slowly dribbling away'.<sup>9</sup> At the age of ten, Luis Cardoso wins a place in the seminary at Dare, in the hills above Dili, where he learns Latin, reads Portuguese magazines and follows Portuguese sporting heroes, and for a few years enjoys a cultured Portuguese education:

We were taught to converse in various languages, to discuss ideas and to acquire a taste for reading and literature. There were evenings of art, classical music and films, and nights spent camping ... Each year brought the departure of students who, having completed their secondary education in Timor, were going off to Portugal to study Philosophy and Theology.<sup>10</sup>

## THE REGENERATIVE SPIRIT

Here, Jose Alexandre Gusmao (the future Xanana) plays football as goalkeeper, 'but is too busy making up sonnets to actually stop any goals'.<sup>11</sup>

At age fourteen, Luis is dismissed from the seminary and finds a place in the one secondary school in Dili. It is now that he notices the first stirrings of political activity; a young Jose Ramos Horta returns from training in journalism in Mozambique with radical ideas. Thoughts about the re-assertion of Timorese culture and the struggle against colonial subordination are surfacing. Australia too starts to become a presence. Luis' brothers 'dedicated themselves to flirting with Australian tourists and trying out the delights of the English language'.<sup>12</sup>

As for the teenage Luis himself, he says:

Despite being an island in the back of beyond ... the outside world still entered the palm-thatched houses. Nothing that went on abroad escaped our notice, thanks to those Australian tourists on their pilgrimages to the tempting beaches of Bali and those Australian broadcasting stations bombarding us with news and banned songs.<sup>13</sup>

By 1974 Australia has become 'an attentive, perhaps interested observer' of East Timor.

But, alongside the hybrid Portuguese–Timorese, there were always the *maubere*, the peasants. Cardoso describes them as:

excluded from the benefits of Portuguese colonialism ... barefoot and illiterate. They never had access to education, never read any schoolbooks, did not even know where Portugal was, could not speak the language and, in the majority, despite all the missionaries efforts, had not been baptised and were still immersed in pagan rites.<sup>14</sup>

These were the men and women who became the backbone of Fretelin after 1980, when the resistance had been almost crushed by Indonesia, and when Xanana Gusmao began the guerilla movement from scratch again. These are the people who now are demonstrating on the streets of Dili because after all their years in the mountains as guerilla fighters, there seems to be no place for them in the new society or its new armed forces—they are still the illiterate and unemployed, and do not speak Portuguese. These are heroes who, so far at least, will not let themselves be forgotten.

Hull argues that the more commercially minded and pragmatic Protestant powers—the British and Dutch—set out in the first place to trade and to exploit; thoughts of missionary activity only came later. Calvinistic Protestants were less interested than the Catholics in culturally assimilating their subjects, he argues. Protestants tended to interfere less with local religions and traditions.<sup>15</sup>

The Catholic colonial powers, on the other hand, had from the first a strong sense of their so-called 'civilising mission'. Attitudes towards that will be coloured by whether one stands inside the Catholic fold, or outside it. Although they were certainly avid for material gain from the lands they conquered, the Catholics were also driven by their sense of duty to bring the pagans of foreign lands into the fold of the Church and into what they considered the superior civilisation of Europe.

The pre-colonial religion of Timor (and of the chain of islands to the east, New Guinea, Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia) was neither Hinduism nor Islam. Rather, it was animism, which involves ancestor worship. It locates intention and

## GOLDEN

desire in the objects of the natural world itself: the stones, the trees, the mountains, the sea and its creatures.

Luis Cardoso writes of an 'indigenous environment in which the sacred presided over all everyday actions'—a fertile ground for missionaries.<sup>16</sup> He suggests that maybe the East Timorese became such devout Catholics because 'from worshipping stones to worshipping statues was but a step'.<sup>17</sup>

The opening chapter of *The Crossing* tells of the small boy and his family sailing overnight in a tiny boat from Dili to the island of Atauro. The islanders know the sea creatures, especially sharks, to be their ancestors: 'No one from the island was ever lost. Sometimes they lived in the sea, sometimes on the land.'<sup>18</sup> Another traveller, Simao, was about to wash his face in the sea water:

As he leaned over, he saw a shape in the blue depths, as long and white as a scimitar. Hands poised above the water, he stared at the shark coming in his direction. He remained absolutely still. The shark stopped inches from the surface. They looked at each other hard, like two passers-by trying to remember where they had seen each other before, flipping quickly through their respective memories. Then the shark performed a pirouette, as if to show itself off, and swam away. Before disappearing completely, it turned one last time to study Simao's expression. Simao sat as rigid and impassive as a statue.

'He wanted to meet you' ... It was the old man's voice. 'You've just received your first visit from my ancestor. A courtesy call if you like.'<sup>19</sup>

Until the 1975 invasion, less than half of East Timorese were practising Catholics. The rest continued to practise their traditional animist religions. But under Indonesian rule, every citizen had to belong to one of only five religions (Muslim, Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist, Jewish) or automatically be labelled a Communist (with all the danger that implied).

Now, ninety-five per cent of East Timorese are Catholics. The Tetum language, the Catholic Church, and, of course, Bishop Belo himself who shared the Nobel Peace Prize for his work, became points of resistance and a focus of national identity.<sup>20</sup> However, like Xanana, Bishop Belo remains a Portuguese Timorese. As Independence approached on 20 May 2002, the bishop issued an edict that Portuguese, and not Tetum, must be the language used at all official and local celebrations of the Mass on that day. This was a controversial edict that was nevertheless mostly obeyed.

Hull argues that there are many grounds for considering Timor as not a part of South-East Asia at all, but rather as an integral part of Oceania—the vast zone that embraces New Guinea and the islands of the Pacific. In human physiognomy, Timor is a region where the Mongoloid Malay race meets and is absorbed by the older Melanesian race. The arrival of Indian immigrants from Goa, and Chinese merchants and labourers from Portuguese Macao, introduced new strains into the population. The colonial government settled numbers of African soldiers from Angola and Mozambique in Timor, troops brought in to crush a string of native rebellions. In the first chapter of Cardoso's book, an African is the guard of the prisoner Simao who has been exiled to Atauro. Later, when he meets Portuguese-speaking Africans in Lisbon, Cardoso says: 'It was like living with ghosts straight out of my school books. We knew

## THE REGENERATIVE SPIRIT

all about each other's countries without having ever been there. We knew each other through the past.)<sup>21</sup>

These demographic trends combined to make the East Timorese population increasingly distinct and simultaneously tied by bonds of culture and blood to the peoples of the Portuguese Empire. Particularly after 1859, when Portugal sold all of its other possessions in the East Indies to the Dutch, attention focused on East Timor meant the development of different cultural forms from its neighbours.

In the post-war period of rapid decolonisation, Portugal followed French colonial policy, intending to retain at least some of its overseas possessions, as France had done in New Caledonia. In 1951, the dictator António de Oliveira Salazar implemented the policy of full *integration* of colonies with the metropolitan centre. Portugal's remaining African and Asian colonies were declared 'overseas provinces' of Portugal. Within this framework, East Timor had the additional status of 'autonomous region', in recognition of its long tradition of semi-independence within the Portuguese Empire.

While we may be sceptical of the logic of this reform (with its easy appropriation of Indigenous land), we can accept its compelling force among those who want to believe and belong. According to this logic, the Timorese could, and should, consider themselves just as Portuguese as the inhabitants of Lisbon. School children in Portugal were taught that Tatamailau, the loftiest peak in Timor, was 'Portugal's highest mountain'. According to this same logic, there was no reason for the Timorese to want to read and write their mother tongue. Since they were fully Portuguese, their true language was that of Portugal.

In the light of this centralist tradition in which they were raised, it is not so surprising that members of the senior East Timorese élite have remained staunchly pro-Portuguese (in spite of occasional anti-Portuguese rhetoric) ever since Portugal withdrew from the territory in 1975. Xanana Gusmao and Bishop Belo are two such individuals. What about the third of the three leaders, Jose Ramos Horta, who shared the Nobel peace prize with Bishop Belo? When the fledgling nation decided that East Timorese citizens could not hold dual passports (presumably out of fear of Indonesian numbers), Jose Ramos Horta said that if that happened, he would retain his Portuguese passport and cease to be a citizen of East Timor. The idea of exclusive citizenship was quickly dropped.

But what of the younger East Timorese, those raised under Indonesian rule? Hull presents this assessment in 2000:

Uncertain and insecure about their own culture, many of the younger generation are easily manipulated by foreigners now working hard to promote English as the dominant language for various self-interested reasons. The best linguistic regime for the new East Timor is—the youth are told—a binomium of English, the key to prosperity and happiness in the modern world, and Tetum, the true vernacular. Portuguese—they are told—is a useless relic of the past and should now be consigned to the dustbin of history.<sup>22</sup>

This point of view was brilliantly and mischievously put at a conference in 2002 in Dili at which four international scholars presented papers on 'East Timorese iden-



tity'. Arief Budiman, the Indonesian professor at Melbourne University, argued forcefully that East Timor should get rid of both Portuguese and Indonesian as relics of the colonial past, and adopt English as the language of capitalism (and therefore of globalisation and future prosperity). The furore amongst the mainly Portuguese speaking audience (including Bishop Belo) was intense, and demonstrated the huge emotional significance that the Portuguese language has in East Timor.

The return of diasporic Portuguese-speaking Timorese to positions in government and administration means that the country faces two particular dangers: that the current generation of Indonesian-speaking East Timorese could lose out on their life chances, and that language policies could lead to ongoing formation of a non-Portuguese speaking underclass dominated (or exploited) by an educated elite of Portuguese speakers.

There are good reasons for optimism. Despite the plethora of incidents of what can be seen as 'Portuguese paranoia', some policy-makers are aware of the dangers of this attitude:

The task of restoring Portuguese demands great sensitivity and generosity of the older generation, and the patriotic call to learn Portuguese should be issued as an invitation, from compliance with which all East Timorese, not an élite only, will benefit. If, on the other hand, the restoration of Portuguese is pursued in a harsh and inconsiderate manner, the defenders of the language run the very real risk of destroying it by turning the younger generation against an integral element of their heritage.<sup>23</sup>

This stance is expressed in a practical way through the work of the National Language Institute at the National University, which is associated with the University of Western Sydney. On the one hand, the National Language Institute:

strongly endorses the government view that public statements hostile to the Portuguese language in East Timor and defeatist comment about the future of Tetum as a partner of Portuguese seriously undermine the national language policy as a whole.<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, the institute is also actively supporting research into indigenous local languages, to codify them into written form and to develop literacy materials for each one. So far, they have produced books on Mambai, Baikenu and Waimaha. The institute is also working intensively to develop Tetum as a national language, producing dictionaries (including a Tetum / Indonesian one) and a Tetum Reference Grammar. They have an ambitious programme for the future. The hope is that Tetum will be able to function genuinely and as an equal partner with Portuguese, perhaps within ten years.

A second reason for optimism for language policy in East Timor arises in the area of education—the fact that government and many leaders recognise (at least at a theoretical and policy level) that:

what the new East Timor needs above all is an inclusive language policy, one which makes the most of all the languages—indigenous and foreign—currently available to the people. Just as a nation's cultural health depends on the preservation and fostering of all its indigenous languages and dialects, small countries need many languages to survive and prosper economically.<sup>25</sup>

## THE REGENERATIVE SPIRIT

What such an inclusive policy might mean in practice is something to be struggled over, and depends on financial resources as much as attitude. Another very small country that has faced similar questions about language and identity with notable success is Luxembourg, the country of only 250,000 people tucked between France, Belgium and Switzerland. There they run a multilingual education system to preserve their cultural distinctiveness at the same time as ensuring economic prosperity.<sup>26</sup> Nursery school (from age four) is in Luxembourgish.

At age six the children start primary school, and learn to read in German, and halfway through primary school, French is introduced as a foreign language. In secondary school French becomes the language of instruction while English is taught as a foreign language.<sup>27</sup>

It is to be hoped that East Timor may benefit from a gradual establishment of a genuinely inclusive multilingual education system, with help from overseas friends in any part of the world. Parallels with Luxembourg are not exact, in that in place of Luxembourgish there are sixteen local mother tongues; nevertheless, East Timor could develop the use of Tetum, Portuguese, English and Indonesian in a similarly structured way that promotes the various language skills of every single person in this tiny nation.

A third reason for optimism comes from the example of my own cross-cultural learning in the class room—one not directly related to language policy at all, but to another perplexing cultural difference. This discovery came with early efforts to list my students in alphabetical order in preparing a roll. All the East Timorese have many names, such as: Maria Jose Antonieta da Natalicia Marques da Costa; Vidal Campus Magno da Costa Silva; Neník Maria Imaculada Ximenes; Felisbertina Imaculata Conceiao Marques e Costa; Mario Olimpio Ribiero dos Santos; Maria Eurosia Carmu Bucar Real; Francisco Paixao Daninho Coelho da Silva; Gertrudes Maria de F F Alves; and Pauli Ferdinand Juliano de Jesus da C D X. In the last two examples, the initials stand for names but these are routinely not spelled out. When attempts are made to put student names onto a computer database, it is often impossible to find a family or surname. These names come from fathers and mothers and grandfathers and godparents, and so on. Sometimes it seems that there are only about forty names that are constantly re-circulated—da Costa, da Silva, Ximenes, Belo, Guterres, Pereira, de Jesus. But there is no idea of a surname as Europeans might recognise one. Every name is as important as any other, and a person can choose which name to use and when. This means that someone might be Marcus Amaral one day and Marcus Ximenes the next. Even the 'Marcus' is commonly replaced by a nickname.

This makes the compilation of alphabetical class lists problematic. So one day I asked each student to write his or her full name on the whiteboard as they came in. Then I asked them to rank the names alphabetically. They thought I was daft. This was kindergarten-level learning. One proceeds from Abia and Adelina through Bernardo and Eulalia and Felizarda to Joao and Maria and Remengito and Tomas to Viriato and Zulficar—alphabetical order by first name. Once you get used to it, it works, though I don't know how one might assemble a phone book for Dili.

Some students did adapt their naming practices to the Western model. They became Sam Soares, for example, or Horacio da Costa. But most students clearly preferred the cultural specificity of their own naming practices and clung to them tenaciously. And why not?

This odd little experience—where I adapted to the East Timorese way of doing things, rather than the reverse, and worked through what seemed to be muddle, in a place where I could have tried to impose my own habit—gives me unaccountable pleasure, and offers another reason to be optimistic about the strength and flexibility and tenacity of East Timorese cultural identity. It gives another reason to respect what I do not necessarily understand, and encourages me to be willing to help make things work in the ways that the East Timorese themselves have chosen.

#### Notes

- 1 Geoffrey Hull, 'Current Language Issues in East Timor'. Text of a public lecture given at the University of Adelaide, 29 March, 2000. Found on the web site of the Sebastião Aparício da Silva Project for the Protection and Promotion of East Timorese Languages. <http://laurel.ocs.mq.edu.au/~leccles/easttimor.html>
- 2 Email published on the ETAN list serve: east-timor@igc.topica.com List manager: John M. Miller fbp@igc.org
- 3 Quoted in Hull, 'Current Language Issues in East Timor'.
- 4 Gusmao, Kay Rala Xanana. President of the Democratic Republic of East Timor. 2002. Speech on the occasion of the Medal Ceremony by the Government of Brazil. Brasília, Brazil, 29th July, 2002. Received on list serve east-timor@igc.topica.com from 'John M. Miller' <fbp@igc.apc.org> Wed, 31 July.
- 5 Hull, 'Current Language Issues in East Timor'. I am heavily indebted to Geoffrey Hull for my understanding of the colonial history of East Timor. As a linguist whose mother tongue is Portuguese (along with English), he often seems to be defensive and protective of that language and culture in ways that strike me as problematic.
- 6 Luis Cardoso, *The Crossing. A Story of East Timor* (London: Granta, 1997) 31.
- 7 Cardoso, *The Crossing* 45.
- 8 Cardoso, *The Crossing* 51.
- 9 Cardoso, *The Crossing* 113.
- 10 Cardoso, *The Crossing* 63.
- 11 Cardoso, *The Crossing* 58.
- 12 Cardoso, *The Crossing* 62.
- 13 Cardoso, *The Crossing* 72.
- 14 Cardoso, *The Crossing* 118-19.
- 15 Hull, 'Current Language Issues in East Timor'.
- 16 Cardoso, *The Crossing* 100.
- 17 Cardoso, *The Crossing* 100.
- 18 Cardoso, *The Crossing* 21.
- 19 Cardoso, *The Crossing* 21-22.
- 20 See also Nancy Melissa Lutz, 'Colonization, Decolonization and "Integration": Language Policies in East Timor, Indonesia', paper presented at the annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association. Chicago, November 20, 1991. This version: 3 April 1995 from <http://coombs.anu.edu.au/CoombsHome.html>
- 21 Cardoso, *The Crossing* 112.
- 22 Hull, 'Current Language Issues in East Timor'.
- 23 Hull, 'Current Language Issues in East Timor'.

## THE REGENERATIVE SPIRIT

- 24 Lia-Lakan # 1 (22.4. 2002). Instituto Nacional de Linguistica. Universidade Nacional de Timor Lorosa'e. Email list managed by Lance Eccles: lance.eccles@mq.edu.au
- 25 Hull, 'Current Language Issues in East Timor'.
- 26 Alison Kelly, 'Letter from Luxembourg. Linguistic pride takes a pounding', *Guardian Weekly*, March 14-20, 2002, 23.
- 27 Kelly, 'Letter from Luxembourg. Linguistic pride takes a pounding'.

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