

***East Timor: Beyond Independence.* Edited by Damien Kingsbury and Michael Leach. Clayton: Monash University Press, 2007. Softcover: 302pp.**

On the back cover of this book, the editors confidently claim that: “This is the most comprehensive study of East Timor since independence ...” Indeed this book covers a raft of important issues that East Timor faces: the main headings are development, borders and security, politics and justice, resource and land management, education and language policy.

Turning to some of the major themes, perhaps one of the most topical is East Timor’s political divides. Various chapters touch on the political rivalry that has grown between the former Prime Minister Marí Alkatiri and his Fretilin supporters on one hand, and the opposition to Fretilin that emerged around the former President, and now Prime Minister, Xanana Gusmão on the other. (Sarah Niner and Michael Leach in their important respective chapters speak of the continuing persistence of leaders who emerged in the 1970s. In fact, their role in East Timor’s independence struggle has had an important legitimizing function with the electorate — more so than policy platforms.) In Kingsbury’s chapter on political developments, he points more sharply to Alkatiri’s alleged lack of tolerance for the opposition than the Introduction (also written by Kingsbury with co-editor Michael Leach).

Various chapters make reference to the other political divide that has fed into political troubles and violence in East Timor recently, namely the split between east and west, which played up into a dust within and between the western-dominated police and the eastern-dominated army. This divide is characterized in this book, variously, as a product of Portuguese and Indonesian colonialism, but more frequently as “artificial”: “such a division was largely artificial, as there is no east-west divide as such” (p. 22). What the contributors mean, of course, is that the east-west divide is one based on regionalism rather than on identity divisions (such as ethnicity or religion) that are more readily understood. But in a sense, all identity divisions are “artificial” — a division based on region no less so. (“Homogenous” South Korea, to take an example from the wider Asia-Pacific region, is one society that is heavily beset by regional divisions — divisions that come into play during presidential contests.) Niner argues that the Firaku-Kaladi (east-west) divide was no greater than the rivalry between Melbourne and

Sydney (potentially a meaningless comparison for non-Australians), and has only recently come to the fore due to the manipulation of political actors (p. 124). Niner makes an important point about manipulation of the divide, yet other commentators, most prominently James J. Fox, have placed greater stress on the potential problem of the Firaku-Kaladi division for some time now, particularly given the role it has played in tensions within the security forces from their inception. East Timor's east-west divide, however one might like to characterize it, is one that needs to be considered seriously. Leaving the origins of this problem aside, the more crucial question surrounds how this will play out in East Timor's future.

East Timor's development is another important theme. Jennifer Drysdale's chapter on the Petroleum Fund, whereby East Timor's government has put the returns on oil and gas into a fund thus preserving the principle, makes some interesting points about the "socialisation" of this idea (p. 160). Drysdale gives credit to the former Alkatiri government for not only setting this fund up, but also for engaging in widespread public consultation on the issue to the point that the dangers of the "resource curse" (which includes inflationary pressures of sudden revenues from valuable resources) have become widely accepted by the (largely poverty-stricken) general public. But does this mean that the public will be able to exert enough pressure to prevent future governments giving in to temptation and dipping into the Petroleum Fund?

Shifting from state building to nation building, East Timor's identity is yet another major theme to emerge in this volume. Michael Leach examines important sources of official discourse on East Timor's history, including the public statements of politicians (Jose Ramos Horta, then foreign minister and now President, is quoted as saying "if you take away Portuguese language and religion, there is no such thing as East Timor" — p. 194), what is taught in schools, and the wording of the Constitution. East Timor's approach to language policy is nicely outlined here, including the efforts by the political elite, most of whom are Portuguese speaking, to establish Portuguese (alongside Tetum) as an official language when more than 90 per cent of East Timorese do not speak it. On the precise numbers of local vernacular languages in East Timor, there is no agreement even in this volume: estimates range from sixteen to "a score" and in one chapter Waima'a is listed as a language in the text and a dialect on the accompanying map (p. 266). But a noteworthy point raised by John Bowden and John Hajek is that the majority of children in East Timor grow up with neither Tetum

(also spelt as “Tetun” in this chapter) or Portuguese as their first language. Helen Hill argues in her chapter on East Timor’s “hidden curriculum” that inappropriate messages are delivered to pupils that degrade the importance of the agrarian sector and unrealistically raise expectations. (Hill quite rightly challenges the use of the term “unemployment” which is routinely applied by the media and others to societies such as East Timor, when commentators should speak of “livelihoods” which would include subsistence farming and other means of support outside of formal waged labour — p. 231.)

There are a small number of difficulties in the text. The narrative on the crucial issue of East Timor’s economic situation may be too thin. It is not explained, for example, why East Timor is judged here to be “the poorest country in the world” (p. 19), yet the reader is told, on the Human Development Index it sits at 140 out of 177 states. (And the figure of US\$400 per capita GDP is surely *adjusted* for *purchase power parity* rather than “corrected for purchase pricing parity” — p. 19.) One contributor cites the SIL (formerly the Summer Institute of Linguistics) as a source for data on language and makes an oblique reference to SIL’s “ulterior motives” (p. 250, note 4). Is this a muted reference to SIL’s evangelical lineage? Referring to the Indonesian language (Bahasa Indonesia) in various places as Bahasa Melayu (i.e., Malay) — or in Kingsbury’s words, “Bahasa Melayu (more or less Indonesian)” (p. 23) — leaves one wondering if the legitimacy of Bahasa Indonesia as a language is being questioned here. (Incidentally, this is a line run by Acehese secessionists with whom Kingsbury has a well-publicised affinity.)

In summary, and keeping the book’s aforementioned self publicity in mind, there is still a great deal more to be said on East Timor’s journey since independence, particularly on the story of East Timor’s polity and political economy. But this volume is, overall, a valuable collection of chapters that covers a broad cross section of East Timor’s most pressing issues.

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