Western Solidarity with East Timor: An Interview with David Targan

Hilary Kaplan

Abstract: An interview with David Targan, founder of the first American solidarity movement with the people of East Timor, which later became the East Timor Action Network (ETAN). A critical essay comparing the US and Portuguese solidarity movements precedes the transcribed interview.

David Targan, an Associate Dean and Associate Professor of Physics at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, sat down with me to tell his story of founding the first American solidarity movement with the people of East Timor in their struggle for independence and against Indonesia's violent occupation of their land. Targan began his efforts after the Santa Cruz Massacre of 12 November 1991; they eventually grew into the nationwide East Timor Action Network (ETAN). The work of his community coalition at Brown, and of ETAN, impacted not only the situation in East Timor, but also American domestic and international politics.

Since the early 1500s, East Timor had been a site of European expansionist presence. Portugal staked its colonial territory there in 1590 by establishing a trading post. Though ignored and neglected under the Salazar dictatorship, the colony was stubbornly held onto as a symbol of the enduring (though actually waning) global breadth of the Portuguese empire. A long decolonization process began when Salazar's regime was overthrown in 1974, although decolonization

Portuguese Literary & Cultural Studies 17/18 (2010): 379-402.

was not internationally recognized until 1999 (Almeida 595). As Portuguese authorities cleared out of East Timor in 1975, Indonesia saw room to invade. In the following six years, the Indonesian military killed approximately one third of the Timorese population, or 300,000 people, and displaced thousands of others while establishing a repressive occupation that continued for over twenty years.

David Targan describes the events that brought the situation in East Timor to international and, in particular, to American attention in 1991. Through his longtime friendship with a reporter who survived the Santa Cruz Massacre, in which Indonesian troops killed 271 people, Targan found himself in a unique position to build on Americans' nascent awareness of East Timor in order to help effect change in the region. His efforts were part of the international mobilization in support of East Timor that arose after Santa Cruz, which Portuguese anthropologist Miguel Vale de Almeida identifies in his lucid analysis of Portugal's 1999 solidarity movement with East Timor.

Colonial, postcolonial, progressive, and academic strains were all present in the organization Targan launched in 1991, which was composed of Brown University students and faculty and Portuguese-American residents of Providence, Rhode Island, who worked with Democratic and Republican congresspeople to enact transformative legislation. Ethnic and national identity also played a key role, both in understandings of the Timorese situation and in the dynamics of the Americans' work.

In 1991, Portugal was still officially involved in East Timor. The relationship of the American movement to colonialism, specifically Portuguese colonialism, is complex. Targan reflects on Portuguese colonialism, that,

> In terms of our thinking about whether Timor should be independent or not, as far as we were concerned, the colonization was benign compared to what was going on, compared to the current occupiers. We hadn't given it much thought beyond that. Also, whatever we would have thought about it would have been informed by our local Portuguese contingent, so I'm not sure we would have gotten a truly objective view of all that's going on politically. (12)

Americans were concerned about Timorese independence but, faced with visual evidence of genocide, their priority was to stop the violence and Indonesian occupation. The important "independence" was freedom from Indonesia. After that immediate need was met, perhaps deeper thinking about Portugal's relationship to East Timor would have been possible. However, Targan's group

was singly focused. Their awareness-raising quickly led to a tangible goal: to stop US supply of arms to Indonesia. For some people, a colonial critique was not necessary, or beneficial, to achieving this goal, which was figured as involving only the US and Indonesia. In its implication of US involvement in a distant genocide, the goal was a classic example of American progressive activism.

Targan also suggests that the group's view of Portuguese benignity may have been influenced by its Portuguese-American members, who perhaps had a different relationship to the work. As he recalls, "There was a lot of strong feeling of guilt, and also kind of a patriotic sense, going back, I think, to general feelings about having once been the superpower that it was, Portugal" (4). What Targan terms patriotism—a simultaneous longing for lost power and glory, however imagined they may have been, and a guilty sense of responsibility towards "Portuguese-speaking people and people with Portuguese blood [...] and names and everything else" (4)—Almeida identifies as "colonial nostalgia" (585, 589).[1] For Almeida, colonial nostalgia is something to be "cautious" of; his critique kept him out of the "Timorese cause" (a name which he finds laden with colonial nostalgia) until he was swept up in the 1999 demonstrations (585). I have only Targan's account of the American movement, but his memory suggests that the Portuguese-American members' colonial nostalgia may have infused the American movement from its start.

In the US movement, the notion of postcoloniality was subsumed under independence, an idea more easily understood by Americans who were uninvolved in the colonial relationship. Further, because the 1991 movement occurred during the long process of decolonialization, postcoloniality and coloniality were not distinct from each other. As we have seen, colonial nostalgia may have projected forward into the nationwide American movement, and Almeida certainly sees it in "the question of East Timor for the postcolonial reconfiguration of Portugal. The boundary between solidarity with East Timor and its inclusion in a transnational 'Portugueseness' bordering on colonial nostalgia was never drawn" (589). Portugal's "postcolonial reconfiguration" and its effect on Portuguese identity may have affected the ethnic identity of Portuguese-Americans involved in the US movement beyond the issue of colonial nostalgia, but that is outside the scope of this paper. We can, however, give one last analysis of the relative absence of a colonial critique in the US movement. Almeida notes that the 1999 movement depended on

> The creation of the notion of a special bond between East Timor and Portugal during the 1999 events in Lisbon, [which] was only possible on the basis of selective forgetting (of both [Timorese] rebellions and the anti-colonial movement)—a common procedure in the construction of collective memory. (593)

The American movement's lack of colonial consideration may have been an example of selective forgetting, or another collective identity procedure at work in the US movement. Selectivity, or perhaps just distant memory, might help to explain how Targan's feeling that Portuguese colonialism did not play a major role in his group's thinking fits with his statement that, "We initially had said, 'What is our goal? Our goal is independence of East Timor.' And we thought, yeah, that'll happen in 30 years, but at least let's get it started. And it turned out it happened in 8 years or less" (9). As we have seen, for Targan's group, independence resonated with freedom from the Indonesians. Yet with the projection of a thirty-year wait, independence also seems to concord with the slow process of Portuguese decolonialization. That terms such as "independence" and "colonialism" blur is perhaps characteristic of a multivalent movement.

The US movement engaged American democratic techniques of protest and political participation with a history of progressive activism. Via his friend Allan Nairn, Targan indirectly attributes his work to the examples of American activism against the US-supported violence in El Salvador and Guatemala in the 1980s (3). The progressive movements of the '80s and early '90s helped to create the worldwide anti-globalization movement that emerged in the late '90s, most notably with the December 1999 demonstrations against the World Trade Organization in Seattle. Portugal's 1999 solidarity movement brought together younger people aligned with this new critique of globalization and older citizens motivated by colonial guilt.

Targan's group joins the American progressive spectrum by virtue of having taken political action to change the existing federal policy (perhaps especially under a Republican administration). Because his coalition was diverse and their efforts were bipartisan, however, humanitarian may be a better word. Targan locates his personal motivation as a sense of responsibility to stop genocide, rooted in his own (Jewish) ethnic group's past persecution (10). He acknowledges that other coalition members had their own motivating factors. Targan's status as an academic (and administrator) provided him with the resources to take political action. He views this as a fortuitous "coinci-

dence" whereby he was able to produce change by combining his humanitarian instincts, insider knowledge, and location at a sympathetic and prominent university campus surrounded by a Portuguese immigrant community and represented by a powerful senator (4, 10-11).

The ethnic nature of Targan's personal motivation to act reminds us that the entire story merits a look at ethnicity, which played a key role for all of the movements' actors. Marshall Sahlins, in his essay "What is Anthropological Enlightenment?," asserts that nativism and re-ethnicization became important at the end of the twentieth century. In contrast to the idea that westernization was smashing local identities, Sahlins proposed that some groups developed unified, individual agendas in the global arena. The case of East Timor can be understood in Sahlins' terms. East Timor is a country of many ethnicities and their respective languages, yet, during the 1990s, they were seen as a unified ethnic group.[2] In order to separate themselves from the Indonesian occupiers, who also comprised a multitude of ethnicities, the Timorese movement re-ethnicized its people under a single ethnic identity. The people of East Timor had to create a unified identity in order to stress their difference from Indonesia.

Targan demonstrates the international community's acceptance of the asserted Timorese ethnic identity when he describes the Potemkin village that the Indonesian military created in Dili for the UN visit in 1991. He says:

> The idea behind the Potemkin village was to have people looking happy and going about their daily life. If they were asked by reporters or by members of the UN team how things were going, they would say, "Fine." But actually they were not Timorese. They were ethnically different. They were Indonesians. (1)

Targan's understanding of Indonesians as "ethnically different" from Timorese comes from the distinctive (unified, ethnic, thus national) identity that the Timorese resistance movement worked to portray. His personal understanding of ethnic/national identity surely also comes into play. When Targan says that his own heritage in a group "plagued by [genocide]" motivated him to act, he is calling on the memory of the Holocaust and his own identification with a unified Jewish ethnic group. Under this analogy, the Timorese were a unified ethnic group persecuted by a different unified ethnic group. Jewish ethnic/national identity is in fact quite complicated; it has been shaped both internally and externally and has changed throughout time. Timorese

and Indonesian identities are likewise complicated. But in the language of personal response to violence and suffering, some details are less important.

Ethnicity played a multifaceted role for the Portuguese-Americans in the Providence movement. On the one hand, they engaged the issue because of the Portuguese part of their identity, which, whether motivated by guilt, nostalgia, or another culture-bound emotion, was filtered through a Portuguese-created notion of "Portugueseness."[3] On the other hand, participation heightened their American-ness. Targan talks about a sense of political empowerment among all the members of the group as they engaged in the political process of educating, lobbying, organizing, phonebanking, protesting, and helping to shape legislation. He notes a particular change among the Portuguese-American participants, who, in their status as an immigrant group, were accustomed to maintaining a low profile and unaccustomed to having great political voice. Yet, he says, those who stepped up as leaders emerged as the most powerful spokespeople for the group's cause. The Portuguese-Americans were also a well-organized ethnic community and could turn out hundreds of people for a rally on short notice. As actors in the movement, both their Portuguese and American identities were constantly engaged. And, as Portuguese-Americans, their identities were not entirely the same as the Portuguese.

Finally, ethnicity, or more accurately, identity—constructed by the Portuguese about themselves and about the people of East Timor—was central to the 1999 movement in Portugal. Almeida notes "the way in which the media's interpretation of events in East Timor heightened Portuguese self-esteem [...] in fueling the mobilization" (588). Media, which in the US was used to raise awareness and bring an end to atrocity, in Portugal was crucial to the affirmation of Portuguese identity, which included embracing the East Timorese as Portuguese in spatial, linguistic, and religious terms. The radio integrated East Timor into Portuguese identity every half hour by announcing the time: "It's ten o'clock in Continental Portugal and in Madeira, an hour earlier in the Azores and five P.M. in Dili" (Almeida 589). In the Portuguese media, "East Timor was represented as Catholic and Lusophone [...] contrary to the evidence that Portuguese is not spoken by the majority of the population" (Almeida 597). Almeida proposes that the Portuguese assessment of Timorese identity was a cathartic act. He concludes that the 1999 movement was in fact "a national catharsis around issues of colonialization, decolonialization, and the reconfiguration of national identity through new processes of participatory politics" (592).

East Timor's construction of a unified identity during its struggle for safety and independence left a complicated legacy. In an interview conducted in 2000, resistance leader Constâncio Pinto says: "The major opponent that kept us together, that maintained our unity—Indonesia—is now gone, or at least no longer rules our country. So there is a risk of selfishness and divisiveness. And in fact this is happening now. The unity we had in East Timor is beginning to unravel" (Pinto 41). Without that unified identity, however, and without the identities active in the minds of Americans and Portuguese in the 1990s, where would East Timor be today?

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An Interview with David Targan, Associate Dean at Brown University
Conducted by Hilary Kaplan
December 6, 2006
Providence, RI

HILARY KAPLAN (HK): *What was your involvement with East Timor?*

DAVID TARGAN (DT): A friend of mine, Allan Nairn, who is a journalist, and another friend of mine and a close friend of his, Amy Goodman, who is a producer and has a show on Pacifica Radio called "Democracy Now!," in 1991 had visited East Timor as part of a group of journalists who were for the first time ever, since the occupation that is, allowed in and allowed to talk to people in Timor. The government had agreed to allow a UN site visit, and as part of that they had eased some of the restrictions on journalists. Up until then, it was virtually impossible to get in, although a few people like Allan were able to sneak in.

So the two of them went in. Prior to their going in, the Indonesian army had created kind of a Potemkin village. This they had done in the past when there were visits by the United States State Department, for example. They [Indonesia] are in some ways an ally to us, and at that point at least we were their primary suppliers of military support.

So it made sense for us to visit, although by and large they rejected US attempts at visiting East Timor. The idea behind the Potemkin village was to have people looking happy and going about their daily life. If they were asked by reporters or by members of the UN team how things were going, they would say, "Fine." But actually they were not Timorese. They were ethnically different. They were Indonesians.

HK: So they brought people in.

DT: Yeah. Actually, as part of an attempt to try to make Timor more clearly a province of Indonesia, they had already been engaging in various settlement programs and encouraging Indonesians to settle in East Timor. They had also threatened the Timorese people, saying, "If you talk to the journalists, we've already dug the graves for you and your families." And they had, in fact. They had dug ditches and made it clear to people that they can't speak.

In the meantime, there was a secret underground unarmed resistance movement. This was complementary to the small number of armed resistance guerillas that were pent up in hiding in the jungle. There was some communication between the two but they were kind of two separate operations. The primary leader for that unarmed resistance was Constâncio Pinto.

They had been looking forward very much to the UN visit and to the possibility that there would be journalists. They had intended to brave it out and ignore the warnings of the Indonesian military, and were going to stage, essentially, a protest. Even congregating more than half a dozen people in one place is a cause for arrest. I don't remember the exact number, but something around 6 or 7 people in one place is considered a problem from the Indonesian military point of view. To have some kind of a protest, that's actually more dramatic. So they [the unarmed resistance] were preparing for something; they had painted banners and they had made t-shirts, and they were going to have some kind of visible demonstration, so that the image of the Potemkin village would be shattered.

The visit, all of this took place in the capital city of Dili. All of a sudden, and I'm not sure why, the visit was cancelled. I'm guessing there were some restrictions that the Indonesian army had placed on the visitors, and the visitors from the UN didn't want to accede to those limitations. So the whole visit was cancelled. Reporters went home, except for a few. The few that stayed were staying at that point against the wishes of the Indonesian military. It included a handful of people including a British documentary maker by the name of Max Stahl, as well as some other correspondents, and Allan Nairn and Amy Goodman. Well, soon after the cancellation, the military went into the main church in Dili. The Catholic Church were kind of the protectors of the Timorese, and they thought it would be safe to harbor any resistance movement people within the church. It would be a violation of sacred space for the military to go in. But they did anyway.

They killed a young Timorese man.[4] In some ways it was just to show who's really in charge here. So for his funeral service, that turned out to be the

protest they had been talking about. There was a funeral procession, and as part of the procession, fundamentally what it was, was a protest and a political statement on the part of the Timorese. People unfurled banners; they took off their shirts and underneath their shirts were the t-shirts that said "Viva Timor-Leste" and other statements about Timor and their desire to be free. These were all caught on camera, and they were happy that there was a camera there, at least one camera, the camera of this British documentarian.

Allan and Amy were close to the front of the procession when all of a sudden there was a striking silence and something was clearly happening. They looked around and realized that they were surrounded by the Indonesian military, by soldiers. Amy and Allan realized they were about to be in the middle of another massacre, which would be part of a series of massacres that had occurred over time. Thinking maybe naively that they were press, that having a microphone and their press credentials and their US passports would protect them, they went right to the front of the whole group and made it clear that whatever they were going to do, they were going to be on television. They had cameras and microphones, things like that; it was going to be on radio, television.

They stepped to the front but the soldiers went past them and fired into the crowd, just opened up and starting killing people. And people ran. They tried to run into the cemetery, where they found that the cemetery itself was being blocked by another brigade of soldiers, and in the meantime the soldiers had also tackled Allan and Amy and hit Allan in the head with a rifle butt and pointed their guns at them. They were shouting that they were Americans and asking to be spared, because as Americans they belonged to the country that was supporting, that was making the guns that were in their hands. There was actually a brief moment where the military were caught off guard by that, and started paying attention to beating somebody else, and Allan and Amy got away. They hid in various hospitals that were starting to take in the wounded, people that were still alive. But they also knew that they were being chased by the military, and they were. They eventually made it to the airstrip where there was a plane coincidentally about to take off, to leave East Timor. And they were able to get themselves onto that plane and get out of there.

In the meantime, Max had taken all of this video footage. And the thing is that for American news media, it's really hard to generate any interest on the part of producers unless you have footage. Max that day had hidden in the cemetery; he had been able to get into the cemetery and had hidden in the cemetery, where there was a lot of gunfire and a lot of shooting at civilians, and

he managed to take one of his videotapes and bury it in the cemetery. When they finally came for him—they didn't kill him but they did arrest him—the videotapes that they did have were not of the massacre. He managed to escape, and in the middle of the night go back to that cemetery, pick up the videotape, and he escaped East Timor. So now we have some reporters who are being hospitalized in Guam, describing the massacre, and we had the video footage of the massacre by a British journalist.

HK: *That was Amy and Allan who were in Guam?*

DT: Right, being treated for their injuries. And we had the video footage at the same time. So then it was possible for them to make arrangements to get this story to the network news outlets. I think it was ABC with Peter Jennings, but I'm not sure, it might have been CBS. They did pick up this story, and it was the first time that there was some kind of breach in the security wall against journalists, and that picture of what was going on there, the true picture, was there for everyone to see. So that was a turning point right there. That was November 12th, 1991.

HK: *That was the Santa Cruz Massacre.*

DT: Right. And then about a month later, Allan and Amy were in the U.S. And I grew up with Allan, I knew him from childhood.

HK: *Where did you grow up?*

DT: In New Jersey.

HK: *And were you in touch with him this whole time? Did you know that he had gone, what was happening?*

DT: Yeah. He had gone there several times before and told me that he had never—. He had for many years covered some very sticky situations, put himself in some very tough situations down in Central America, and had exposed a number of military, both American and Central American, Guatemalan, operations that were part of the death squads at the time in Guatemala and El Salvador. So he had years of that kind of experience and already had a pretty good reputation.

He had kept me informed about his trips to Timor. The only thing I really knew about it was when he would come back and tell me that it made Central America seem like heaven in comparison; it was just so brutal and repressive. People could not speak; they could not get together. It was clear that he was an American, so people would come up to him and slip him little rolled-up

messages. When you read them they were little messages to the then, former, President Bush, and to the UN, just pleading for some intervention, probably not knowing that at the time, our government was really very much the contributor. We were providing the arms that were being used against them.

He had described it many times, so I knew about it from that. But this was the first time that he had been directly involved in one of the massacres. I realized that actually I'm here at Brown, there's a lot of politically active students and faculty, there's a large Portuguese population here, and there's also, at the time, Clayborn Pell was the Senator in charge of the Foreign Relations Committee in the Senate. So there was potential for some change as a result of this.

To build on that momentum of November 12th, we created an organization on campus to come up with a plan. We were thinking about what we can do, can we really have any impact, we're just a small group of people in a small state of the country. A lot of people don't even know where Rhode Island is. And no one knew where East Timor was. Now people do, a lot of people do, but back then they hadn't heard of it. Is there any chance that we could do anything? One of the members of the group said, "It's been my experience in the Azores that a small number of people can make some significant political change, and that they can really make a difference." So we got together students and faculty, and we worked with members of the Portuguese community, and then we met with all the members of Congress representing Rhode Island as well as southeastern Massachusetts. In Rhode Island, it would have been Pell, John Chafee, Patrick Kennedy, and gosh who was the fourth one? Well, Ron Machtley was the Republican congressman from Rhode Island.

The idea was to develop more of a presence within Congress and to see what could be done. We didn't know at that time how to proceed. But in any case, to educate members of Congress about what was going on. We were able to meet with these people and to let them know what was going on. But we hadn't yet figured out what we were going to ask them to do, other than to raise it as an issue. Senator Pell did raise it in the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, but it's not clear whatever happened with that.

We had a number of meetings downtown with some very interesting Portuguese women who played a major role, in that they were very outspoken and very persuasive, and I think members of Congress really listened to what they had to say. The Portuguese population, they listened to the Portuguese radio and television and they were very aware of what was going on in East Timor. I would have conversations with our custodian, who is Portuguese, and ask him

what people knew, and by and large people were very well-educated about what was going on there. It was seen, I think, by the Portuguese people—I think they saw it as a bit of a slip in their national affairs because all this happened, the invasion happened, when they were preoccupied with their internal revolution. They only had something like 75 Portuguese soldiers actually stationed there, so it was really nothing against hundreds of thousands of Indonesian military; it was not going to be a deterrent. I think people felt, frankly, guilty about leaving Portuguese-speaking people and people with Portuguese blood, many of them, and names and everything else, out there stranded and being systematically killed by the Indonesians. There was a lot of strong feelings of guilt, and also kind of a patriotic sense, going back, I think, to general feelings about having once been the superpower that it was, Portugal. There's a whole area that one could open up and talk about, probably, about their feelings toward their former colonies.

In any case, we had a lot of support from them, and some people made a huge difference talking to members of Congress. The ironic part of that is, this particular immigrant community did not really, I don't think they felt that they were empowered to have political power in the same way that other groups might. By and large it was not easy to persuade them to be anything more than just very knowledgeable and helpful. It really took a handful of people with real chutzpah to confront members of Congress and to break out of the mold of just trying to be a good immigrant population without creating problems for the city of Providence or Rhode Island. There were enough people that were like that, though, that it really made a difference.

Through the connections with the local Portuguese population, I began to be introduced to people from Portugal who were very close to the people here. And then in the spring [of 1992] I got invited, along with, they had spaces for four students, and would be willing to pay for some Brown students to go to Australia where they would—and this was kind of an expensive proposition—they flew them all to Darwin, Australia.

HK: *The Portuguese were organizing this?*

DT: Yeah. I don't know where the money came from exactly.

HK: *Was it the government, or a group?*

DT: I think it was a private group, but I think there's a lot of crossover between public and private funding. I don't really know who paid for it, all I

know is I had a ticket to go to Darwin, Australia. I had a group of students with me, and we got there and waited for this ferry boat, a Portuguese-flagged boat, to get from Portugal through the Suez Canal to the Indian Ocean. There was a storm on the Indian Ocean and they were making very slow progress. We were waiting for that ship to come in to Darwin to port.

In the meantime we made a number of telephone calls to the media, because this was fundamentally a symbolic effort on our part, so publicity would play a key role. The goal of this effort was to take a Portuguese-flagged ship with people who are clearly not armed or any physical threat to anybody and sail through what was by international law Portuguese waters, still, and arrive at East Timor being met by the unarmed resistance movement people led by Constâncio Pinto. That was the plan. Some people believed it was going to happen, and other people were more realistic about it and realized the Indonesian military would not let this happen.

I thought the latter; there was no way they were going to let us do this. But I called all sorts of news media outlets, NBC and ABC. These news operations don't have a lot of reporters. They did have a reporter in the Philippines, but no one anywhere close to that part of the world other than the Philippines. And they said, "Well, if they sink the boat, we'll be right there to cover it." It's like, "Great, we have to drown students from 25 different countries in order to make a news story."

We also knew that they were preparing a large armada of ships to prevent any entry into East Timor. There were enough news stories about this that somehow word got back. The whole event was covered by their magazine, the Indonesian version of *Time* magazine called *Tempo*. There was a general knowledge about what was going on among the Timorese, the Australians, and the Indonesians. It was interesting because the Australians had kind of a score to settle because during the invasion, a handful of very prominent people, the equivalent of Tom Brokaw or something like that, were murdered by the Indonesian army.

I don't remember their names, but there was a crew there murdered. It was a very vicious murder, horrendous, meant to show Australia that you might be friends with the Commonwealth and the United States, but we're the big power in the region. And they are, still today. But several journalists, I think five altogether, died at their hands, not in combat but directly murdered. They know that these are white people and they're not Timorese; they know who these people are. So the Australian populace was very much in favor of what we were

doing there in Darwin. There were also older people, some veterans of World War II still alive. During World War II, Australia was defended by the Timorese, who housed Australian troops and prevented the Japanese from reaching Australia. Except for a few bombings, I believe, Australia was untouched by that war. But they did recall the cooperation of the Timorese and their helping to fight off the Japanese. So it was really interesting to be there in Darwin and to know that people were very supportive of what we were doing.

Also, we met at the time with members of the Timorese refugee community, people who had somehow gotten out and established a small community in Darwin. So there were a lot of people we could talk to about what was happening, and those of us from here met Timorese for the first time there. They spoke English of course, because they were in Australia. It was very moving, the stories they had to tell us.

I had to actually leave, and brought another student with me, because prior to going we had been planning this huge forum, a campus-wide forum that would highlight what was going on, not just campus-wide but really meant for regionally, for people all over, to educate people and to get people thinking about what the next step could be and acting on it. We had to leave mainly because all the people involved in the planning were on the boat. There was nobody back here [at Brown] helping to plan. One of the students had prepped the Brown community by putting up very intriguing signs that were various threats that were pretty offensive, made by various politicians and generals in Indonesia towards the Timorese, basically threats that they would be killed. These were quotes from sources like *Tempo* magazine; these were not just picked up somehow, secretly. They were clear statements that we intend to massacre the Timorese. So these were provocative posters placed all around campus without explanation of what it was about, prior to and during our time in Darwin. It was getting people to think and wonder what the heck was going on, but not really telling them until we were closer to the time of the forum. Then we started explaining what this was all about.

At the same time, the ship did come in and picked up the students. I should back up for one second. We were there; there were probably about 25 members of the various newspapers and radio and TV stations in Portugal that were also there covering this; and then there was basically me, in terms of reaching out to the press. They all had been very successful in getting coverage back in Portugal, but the key thing was getting coverage of this story in the United States where the power lied. It was very funny; we had a bank of

phones and would make phone call after phone call to news outlets, but I think I was the only person that was making a phone call to CNN. So when it was my turn to use the phone, I'd make the best use of it that I could, and call contacts that people had referred to me. Finally somebody at CNN did agree to cover the story. I was on for no longer than 30 seconds or 45 seconds, but it was the only story about this, and only the second story in the United States on television about this. It was really quite a moment because basically for days everybody had been chattering away talking to their home newspapers—except for me, I was just trying to get somebody to listen. Finally we got through. I let people know that we need some quiet, this is big, and everybody was completely quiet during the interview. It was a moving moment.

So we had to come back, and the students got on the ship. Three of the four got on the ship. We had to come back and prepare. There were all sorts of huge liability issues and problems that one can imagine sending students into harm's way like that. But for whatever reason, the President [of Brown] at the time, Vartan Gregorian, was very sympathetic to this. He's Armenian, his background, and had pretty strong feelings about genocide. So, three students were on the boat, and I had another student. There were a few students here that had already generated a fair amount of publicity. We set up the event over in Solomon 101, the big lecture hall. We had invitations to members of Congress; it was a Friday night so they could be back in their home states at the time. Pell could not make it, but a member of his staff was able to come. The other people there were Barney Frank and Ron Machtley, then we had some scholars, and Allan was there.

We opened up with a video of the massacre. The representative from Pell's office got physically ill and decided he had to leave. I think he was prepared to say something but couldn't. It was clear that this was bigger than the members of Congress had thought. And now they were in an audience packed with people who wanted to know why this was happening and what they were going to do about it.

Barney Frank and a few other people went to dinner at the Faculty Club prior to the event. Afterwards we went over to Solomon and there was a huge number of people there. I thought this was bad timing on our part, maybe we had scheduled it at the same time as a concert or something, but they were there really for this.

The students on the boat had all along been filing reports in the *Brown Daily Herald* that were probably unlike any that had ever been filed in that

newspaper. They were basically reports from this boat, describing first what it was like to even see the shore of East Timor from where they were, and then for the fog to lift and for them to realize that they were surrounded by naval destroyers with their guns all pointed at them. This made for some riveting reading that helped in terms of publicity.

When I got to the front door, I saw Ron Machtley there. I was surprised to see him because he had called earlier to say he was feeling sick and couldn't make it. And he said, "Well, if these kids are on a boat in the Timorese waters, I can come from Portsmouth to Providence even if I'm feeling sick." It was really good of him to do that. Anyway, we all went in and the various people gave a talk about what's going on. We had hooked up a link from the telephone to the PA system in Solomon 101, and I had the satellite phone number for one of the students on the boat. We had a good conversation. It was funny actually, because you dial this number and you can hear the dial broadcast, and an operator answers, asking how can she help us? And it's like, "Well, we'd like to make a call to such and such number." In any case, they gave a very riveting story of what had transpired recently on the boat, and why they went out there.

Everybody was pretty primed at this point to do something. Ron Machtley, who was ill, finally said, "I need to leave, but I have been moved by this and support any action that we can take to stop it." He started walking out. Someone in the audience got up and said, "Well, wait a minute, this is not purely an academic conference, we have members of Congress here to figure out what we're going to do about it, and to take action." He heard that, walked back up to the podium and said, "If there is a bill to cut military aid to Indonesia, I would support it." Allan passed me a little slip of paper where he had written—cause he knew more about legislation than I did—"Would you be willing to draft this legislation and carry it forward?" So I asked him that. It was kind of an interesting moment—he's a Republican Congressman and the President was Republican and it's not an easy thing to go against the Administration. Easier then than it is now, I guess. He took a look out at the audience. Everyone was just waiting; there was a complete silence. Everyone was waiting for his next word. He said, "Yes." Everybody applauded. Then he left. And I thought, "I don't know what's gonna happen, but… ."

First thing Monday morning, I got a call from the attorneys down in DC who are in charge of drafting legislation. They wanted us to help them craft this legislation. So I got in touch with various groups and attorneys that were used to doing this kind of thing down in DC and we've worked together over

time. Then in June of '92, Machtley, at a time when people just had their guard down, proposed this and it was approved. He came out from the capital building and was surprised to find Australian Broadcast Corporation, Portuguese television, there was a whole contingent of—I don't think he quite realized the import of what had just happened, what he had just been responsible for. It sent a seismic shock wave through Indonesia. This was the very first action of any kind taken by the US government to rebuke its ally. So that was broadcast over Australian Broadcast, which of course reaches into Indonesia, as well as was heard by the Timorese, both the armed and the unarmed resistance movement people, listening to their radios that night. And that was the beginning of the end.

HK: *Who were the students that went with you?*

DT: I'd have to go back and look through the newspaper. Lauren Rider and …I forget. I'm so bad at remembering names of people. Three other students were involved. A part-Brazilian student who was part of this came back with me. These were all undergraduates.

HK: *How did they end up being the ones to go?*

DT: They had been members of this group of students and faculty and community members who were part of this movement.

HK: *So they had self-selected. They had found out, gotten involved?*

DT: And when it came, when they asked me are there any students that you know of, I said well, yeah, we have four actually, that want to go, and the Portuguese were willing to pay for that.

HK: *What sense did you have of being part of starting a movement or starting involvement? How much of a catalyst did you feel like you were being, and how did that change as things progressed?*

DT: Well, you did feel like you were part of something. It wasn't clear how successful it was going to be. We had a lot of students making very strategic phone calls to people from their home states. Most people don't really understand how a bill works, all the crazy steps that it takes to go from the proposal of a bill to making it law. It's very rare that one gets from point A to the end. But if you're strategic about it… . We had, for example, a list of all the members of Vietnam Veterans against War, I think it's called, that's probably not

the exact name of it, but we had lists of different organizations that we could count on to be helpful, and we knew what districts were key. My guess is, from some district in the middle of Iowa, people aren't aware that their member of Congress is not just good at getting them money for bridges and things like that, but turns out also to be a key member on a committee. So they were just called out of the blue and thought, "Oh my gosh, I can have an impact on this. I'm going to call my … Sure." We would say who we were, what we were doing, why we were calling them as opposed to one of the other 250 million people in the country, and I think those individual calls really made a difference.

Although Indonesia had hired a PR firm in DC, a prominent one, and spent a lot of money on it, they really couldn't do the same thing as we could do. They can't just call up somebody from Iowa and say anything. What we could do is say here's what's happening, it's plain and simple, it's genocide. And your phone call to Washington, and here's the number of your Congressman, will make a big difference. And it will in large part because so few Americans knew about it. Any Americans calling their members of Congress is going to have a huge impact in the minds of the staffers in that office. They just have to multiply however many calls by 100 or 1000 to think about how many voters out there are thinking about this. Even if only five people call, it's huge.

So people knew that they were part of something. And it was a good thing; we felt like it was the right thing to be doing. I also don't think we thought that—we initially had said, "What is our goal? Our goal is independence of East Timor." And we thought, yeah, that'll happen in 30 years, but at least let's get it started. And it turned out it happened in 8 years or less.

HK: *Have you been to East Timor?*
DT: No, I have not.

HK: *Do you have an interest in going?*
DT: I do. I just have had so little time to get away, but yeah.

HK: *And the students who were on the ship, they turned around.*
DT: Yeah, the boat was turned around. There was some conversation between the captain and it turned out to be the head of the Indonesian military was in the helicopter right above him, communicating with the captain. But they did turn around. That was a big relief on my part because the liability

of having students with huge guns pointed at them is pretty serious, since really, my job is primarily as an administrator.

HK: *But everybody was there of their own, independently.*

DT: Yeah, they were all adults, technically, but you can imagine it would have looked pretty bad if something had happened. And I wouldn't put it past the Indonesians to do something at that time. They had done things that were—they had killed, during that protest, one of the reporters, I believe it was a New Zealand reporter. So it wasn't above them to kill people as part of their effort to maintain a lid on things.

HK: *I was really interested to hear about the involvement of the Portuguese community members here, and the fact that they were more aware of what was going on. There was a social movement in Portugal at the time to support the independence of East Timor, and I don't know if you had any connection to that or awareness of that as it was going on?*

DT: I was aware that was happening. When I went over to Portugal—I did visit somewhat later, in '92 I think it was—and so I got to meet people who were leaders there. Also there were a number of people down in Darwin who were from Portugal, and it was very clear that people there felt very strongly about it. There was a small Timorese population within Portugal of people who had escaped. And there were at one point, at least several months after this incident with the boat, a group of Timorese who happened to be living in Jakarta, who jumped over the fence into the American embassy, and were allowed to leave under diplomatic cover, and went to Portugal. Since they technically were charges of the country of Portugal, Portugal did provide them some kind of minimal assistance and a place to stay. So I was aware of that.

Here, I think people were very aware of it. And also people were aware that something locally grown here was playing an important role. Also there were things like rallies. There wasn't a lot where there was a lot of Brown students and a lot of the Portuguese citizens [i.e., Portuguese Americans] all doing the same thing, really. It was happening at my level, working with members of the Portuguese community. They would say, "Well, we can provide you with 300 people to show up some place."

There was an event at the State House here, kind of a protest event. The Portuguese churches got together, rented dozens of buses. The front of the

State House building, not the lawn but the other side, that flat area, kind of a patio, was filled with hundreds of people. When I got there I was shocked at how many people were there. I had no idea. They were from all over southern New England—mostly Providence, Pawtucket, West Warwick, but also Massachusetts. People were, maybe they were emboldened by the fact that there was a lot of them all at once, but they were definitely more vocal about this. I got up to look out at the whole scene, and I realized there were no reporters. So I called all these TV crews from the phone that, you know, you walk into the State House and there's a state trooper and a telephone. I just said, "Can I use your phone?" and I called the three major networks here in Rhode Island. I actually thought of it at the time as really kind of racist, basically that because this was an event—and they knew about it, we had sent them press releases—but because it was the Portuguese community or something… . Somehow it really struck me as disrespectful.

The funny thing is, I try to stay out of the limelight as much as I can. For me it was personally kind of funny, because I finished talking to the media and then I open the door and go out, and apparently I was the person that was designated to speak to this whole group. All of a sudden it was like being some kind of revolutionary leader; it was a riot from my point of view. There were hundreds of people out there all holding candles and shouting, and I'm leading this whole thing. But it was very good; we had a very good turnout. And I think for staffers from the members of Congress that were there, those staffers really got the picture that if they want to turn out people, they can.

HK: *So you went and you addressed the crowd.*
DT: Yeah.

HK: *Had you prepared something?*
DT: No, just totally off the cuff.

HK: *What do you feel like were your motivations for being involved?*
DT: For me personally, I'm Jewish, and I think that there's not too many opportunities really to intervene in a genocide. And our history has been plagued by that, and this was a case where actually I could make a difference, just by coincidence really, because we had people at Brown that were very knowledgeable of the area, and the Portuguese community, and we had this confluence of—I was friends with this reporter, and we had some very influ-

ential members of the Portuguese community, and Senator Pell.

It was just kind of sitting there waiting for someone to do something. It helped that you could actually talk to people and explain to them things that they'd never heard of, and have them go away from that saying, "There is something I can do. I can call. I'm not totally helpless." In fact, one of the things that we would say is that the people there can't even speak to each other about this, in Timor. And we have this kind of luxury that we don't use, of being involved in our own political process. We're just frittering it away while people are being killed.

I think we were able to impact a lot of people really, Americans. We had a big presence in the state of Wisconsin where there was a Senate race. I don't remember who was the incumbent, but Russ Feingold, who is the current senator, was running for Senate. People at the University of Wisconsin and at several other places within Wisconsin were briefed by us about what was going on. The senator from Wisconsin at the time was just very much, there may have been some financial interest, in mining or something like that—there were a lot of situations like that when we looked into them. But in any case, he was definitely part of the problem in terms of the genocide, and he was booted out of there. A series of radio talk shows where we set up interviews with people to talk about what was going on, so I think everybody in Wisconsin at one point knew about East Timor, and knew that their senator had a pretty bad stand on that. And Russ Feingold actually—a lot of people on his staff credited us, and the national organization that had formed of groups like us, called the East Timor Action Network—credited us with getting him elected. So he was very helpful in subsequent years with helping us with the legislation.

HK: *So the East Timor Action Network formed in the US. Were you involved in the formation of that? Was it inspired by the work that was going on here?*

DT: It was kind of simultaneous to a group of people in New York City. I was connected with them and we communicated quite a bit. They got the word out to other places and formed units all over the country. That also provided us with a list of people, so that when the bill that Ron Machtley was putting forward was making its way through various committees, those people could make a difference and could make a phone call. Those were among our strongest supporters and key people within certain congressional districts.

HK: *How long did it take for this bill to be passed?*

DT: It was several months but I don't recall the exact—

HK: *What happened after that went through and your goal had been accomplished in that sense?*

DT: After that, we continued to support further legislation that provided further restrictions on training aid of various kinds, aid that would provide them with weapons and aircraft that only could be used for the kind of warfare they were practicing in Timor. In other words, it wasn't defensive warfare. It was really great for plowing down a whole village, but not for defending themselves against whatever threat they might be concerned about from the outside. So we worked with members of Congress, mostly from this area. But also, Nancy Pelosi, actually, was one of the key people we worked with.

HK: *It seems that you, and the group here, were really concerned with the violence that was going on, the genocide, occupation by Indonesia. How did you see that relating to the independence of East Timor from Portugal? Were you thinking about that at all?*

DT: We weren't really. We knew the history of it and how things were happening just prior to the invasion that related, and then the whole thing got sort of suspended. We knew that the decolonization had begun in effect, but then was, in fact the Indonesians took that opportunity to—so we knew about that. In terms of our thinking about whether Timor should be independent or not, as far as we were concerned, the colonization was benign compared to what was going on, compared to the current occupiers. We hadn't given it much thought beyond that. Also, whatever we would have thought about it would have been informed by our local Portuguese contingent, so I'm not sure we would have gotten a truly objective view of all that's going on politically.

HK: *You helped to bring Constâncio Pinto to Brown, as a student. That was something that you did following all of this?*

DT: Following up on that, yeah.

HK: *And you're still in touch with him?*

DT: Yeah, and his family.

HK: *Did you interact with any of the other leaders in East Timor?*

DT: Oh yeah. There are several that were in Darwin, but also, after independence, there was one who was outside of East Timor, José Ramos Horta. It's very interesting. He was here at Brown the same weekend that Richard

Holbrooke was here. Richard Holbrooke is a Brown grad but was involved in brokering some deals involving the former Yugoslavia, the war that was going on in Europe. I had told our news bureau that José Ramos Horta, or potentially Bishop Belo, were contenders for the Nobel Peace Prize. They were, at the time, thinking it was more likely it would be Richard Holbrooke, who obviously has never gotten it. Richard Holbrooke was going to be speaking at Brown, so they were going to be prepared to make the most of it.

Then they [the Nobel committee] announced that it was not him, and that it was José Ramos Horta. And in fact probably *the* key person to talk to about it here in the US was sitting over in List Art Center in a class, and not Richard Holbrooke. So the press came to my office and we figured out what class he [Pinto] was in. We went and got him out of class and he was on NPR that night talking about Belo and Horta.

But Horta was the external—he had gotten out. He had family members that were killed. He represented the Timorese to the outside world. I got to know him. The leader of the whole independence movement was Xanana Gusmão. I briefly got to know him during a visit to the United States that he made to get some loans from the World Bank. These were all just great people. Xanana, he's really like a poet and a fighter; he really is like Cesar Chavez or something like that, this kind of father figure or revolutionary figure.

HK: *When did you meet him?*
DT: Shortly after the independence, that must have been '99, 2000.

HK: *Well thank you so much.*
DT: Ok. You bet.

Notes

[1] Almeida notes identical feelings, including "guilt" and "a fascination with the Lusophonic aspects of the East Timorese," among the Portuguese who mobilized to support East Timor in 1999. To Almeida, these are constitutive of "ambiguity" in discourse and action (592). I am not sure that the same label can be applied to the Portuguese-American actors who, according to Targan, emerged as articulate leaders of the US movement.

[2] Almeida cites Lutz's ethnolinguistic review of East Timor, which identifies twelve local languages comprised of thirty-five dialects and sub-dialects (598).

[3] "Portugueseness" is an identity that encompasses and exceeds ethnicity and nationalism, and is predicated on many things, including Gilberto Freyre's notion of "lusotropicalism," miscegenation, Catholicism, language, and the Salazar dictatorship's promotion of a global lusophone identity.

[4] This occurred in October 1991, according to Constâncio Pinto: "In October, the Indonesians had shot to death a young boy." For the November 12 protest, "We had a Mass at the church for the student who was killed by the Indonesians. Then people marched from the church to the cemetery" (35).

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