Australian Journal of Political Science,
Vol. 44, No. 2, June 2009, pp. 309–325

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

East Timorese Women Challenge Domestic Violence

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Timor-Leste's struggle for independence has won it high international profile. Yet there is little known internationally about the role women played in the resistance movement and how independence has affected them. Has democratisation brought women greater freedom and rights? This article argues that some East Timorese women benefited from the construction of a new democratic state by mobilising and unifying in the political space created post-1999. East Timorese women's NGOs allied with international organisations and NGOs to form a campaign against domestic violence. This article takes a constructivist approach, analysing how international norms of women's rights and gender equality have: (1) emerged, (2) reached a tipping point, (3) cascaded and (4) been internalised in a post-conflict, democratising context.

Introduction

Timor-Leste's struggle for independence won this country high international profile. East Timorese resistance leaders from Xanana Gusmao to José Ramos-Horta became famous as they sought to harness world support. Their success was marked by the foundation of a new East Timor state and the awarding of a Nobel Peace Prize to Ramos-Horta. But little is known internationally about women's role in the independence struggle and the subsequent turbulent development of the country. Yet women were instrumental in the independence movement; they fought, transported arms and supplies, established clinics to treat injured fighters and spoke out around the world on the injustices in Timor-Leste. It is well documented in gender and politics scholarship that international and civil conflict transforms women's traditional roles and responsibilities, increasing their participation in politics and the paid labour force (Meintjes et al. 2001; Rehn and Johnson-Sirleaf 2002). After the conflict however there is often pressure on women to return to gender roles as they were

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ISSN 1036-1146 print; ISSN 1363-030X online/09/020309-17
DOI: 10.1080/10361140902862818

pre-conflict. Such pressure can result in women losing their independence (Cristalis and Scott 2005). What has happened to East Timorese women since the end of the Indonesian occupation and conflict? Have independence and the formation of a new democratic state brought women greater freedom and rights?

Independence and the end of open conflict have not brought peace. Although Timor-Leste is commonly referred to as a post-conflict state, the term masks an environment that is often characterised by extreme instability and insecurity, as the crisis in 2006 and the attempted assassinations in 2008 illustrated. In this context, violence against women—which was common during the Indonesian occupation—is widespread and frequent. Thus, 'post-conflict' is problematic as it hides the reality of conflict for many East Timorese women who endure domestic violence. This reality has not been acknowledged in much of the scholarship on post-conflict reconstruction and nationbuilding, which has tended to focus on critiquing the United Nations' (UN) role in nation-building (Goldstone 2004; Downie 2007), and efforts of other international organisations—such as the World Bank and Oxfam–to promote development (Brunnstrom 2003; Moxham 2005). This scholarship not only ignores how women can be affected negatively by nationbuilding, but also obscures the opportunities that independence has brought for empowering women politically.

This article aims to shed light on how East Timorese women have benefited from independence. It argues that independence has created political space for some groups of women, and some men, to develop a strong and unified movement to campaign against domestic violence. It takes a constructivist approach analysing how norms of women's rights and gender equality have emerged, gained momentum and inspired this campaign. From a theoretical perspective this article investigates how international norms are negotiated on the ground in a post-conflict, democratising context. It examines whether these norms are implemented (1) from the top-down, with little regard to local practices, (2) as a result of alliances between local and international actors or (3) as a bottom-up process involving East Timorese women deploying international norms for their own purposes. To do this I will examine the evolution of a national campaign against domestic violence in Timor-Leste and the relationships between the various actors that have forged this campaign.

The article is divided into two time frames: 1999–2002 and 2002–7. The first period represents the era of United Nations (UN) administration; although Timor had gained independence from Indonesia, the United Nations Transitional Authority in East Timor (UNTAET) had a unique and powerful mandate to run the new state. In May 2002 Timor-Leste gained full and formal independence. Power was handed over from the UN to the new East Timorese government, run by Fretilin. This marked an important transition for local NGOs as their focus shifted from lobbying the UN administration to lobbying an East Timorese government. The aid context also shifted as many large donors left and funding for local NGOs became scarce. Thus, this division of time allows us to analyse how norms of gender equality and women's rights translated into campaigns against domestic violence in two distinct periods: one under UN rule and the other under East Timorese rule.

This article offers significant insights into the roles and relationships among various local and international actors during these two periods by drawing on the author's extensive primary research in Timor-Leste in November–December

2007. The author conducted 17 semi-structured interviews, lasting 50–120 minutes with local and international NGOs, UN agencies, donor agencies, government officials and with the President José Ramos-Horta.[1] Participants were asked a series of questions about how their organisation had worked with local and international actors to promote gender equality and what challenges they had faced in doing so. In addition, the author conducted three phone interviews with gender experts who had previously worked in Timor-Leste but were then based in Australia or the United States. The primary data collected from these 20 interviews were triangulated with data from official documents, reports and articles to provide a detailed case-study of international norm diffusion.

Norm Diffusion

International norms are increasingly seen as an important factor in influencing domestic political change (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Katzenstein 1996). Constructivists argue that regulative norms, which define proper behaviour, play a determining role in changing states conduct (Katzenstein 1996). Constructivist theorists have explained, for example, the adoption of gender mainstreaming policies and gender quotas worldwide as a product of norm diffusion (Krook 2006; True and Mintrom 2001). Constructivists highlight the role of domestic and international non-govermental organisations (NGOs), transnational advocacy networks and international organisations as critical agents in the diffusion of these norms (Keck and Sikkink 1998). They argue that actors within these organisations are 'moral entrepreneurs' who allow international norms to be translated into action (Risse et al. 1999). The underlying theoretical purpose of this article is to examine how international and domestic actors enable international norms to be translated into action.

Essentially, this article asks how are norms translated from the international to the domestic level? Constructivists have elaborated three main theories to explain how pressure from domestic advocacy groups and transnational advocacy groups forces states to change their rhetoric and policy. The 'boomerang model' suggests that domestic advocacy groups bypass their state and seek international allies to pressure the state from the outside (Keck and Sikkink 1998). The spiral model suggests that transnational advocacy networks are initially the critical agents pressuring governments to change (Risse et al. 1999). It proposes that once a government begins to make tactical concessions a domestic advocacy network will grow, strengthen and become the key driver for norm change. However, the spiral model assumes a repressive state and does not account for norm change in non-authoritarian states.[2] Furthermore, neither

[1]The author interviewed employees, or former employees, of: four international NGOs (Caritas, Oxfam, International Relief Crisis and Progressio); six local NGOs (Fokupers, Pradet, AMKV, Alola Foundation, Rede Feto and Women's Political Caucus); one senior government officer (the director of SEPI); the president of Timor-Leste; three UN agencies (UNMIT, UNIFEM and UNDP); and two donor agencies (NZAID and Irish Aid).

[2]Risse, Ropp and Sikkink use human rights norms to develop their spiral model of norm diffusion at the state level. They assume that the state targeted for norm change is repressive and thus contravenes human rights norms. The spiral model is useful in a context where regime change—or at least liberalisation and policy change–is often necessary to bring normative

of these models account for states that are administered by the UN and/or where there is an extremely large international presence. In this context there is an environment conducive to international norm diffusion as international organisations and international NGOs partner with domestic NGOS to fulfil their development mandates. Thus, it may not be useful to separate analytically transnational advocacy groups from domestic groups as agents for norm change.

Another, more general framework for analysing the diffusion of norms is to examine their lifecycle. Their lifecycle can be characterised by four stages; emergence, tipping point, cascades and internalisation (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). In the first stage, norm entrepreneurs actively build norms by calling attention to issues and using language that interprets and highlights these norms. There is then a tipping point when the norm has a critical mass of support, usually around one-third of the states in the system, and will then cascade. At the cascade stage, the norm becomes widely accepted at the international level and a new dynamic begins where states adopt norms regardless of domestic pressure. Finally, norms become so widely accepted that they are internalised and achieve a 'taken-for-granted' quality that makes conformity with the norm almost automatic (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 904). This lifecycle is generally used to describe the development of an international norm on the global stage, however it could also be applied at the state level to examine the dynamics of norm change within a polity. This article will test and elaborate on this framework of lifecycles to show how a domestic advocacy group initiated the process of pressuring the local political elite to adopt norms of gender equality and women's rights. It argues that the domestic advocacy group was successful in lobbying the government because it collaborated with international actors within their own state to form a collective campaign. This model is unique and distinct to both the spiral and the boomerang model of norm change.

Case Study: Campaigning Against Domestic Violence in Timor-Leste

Pre-1999: Traditional Norms in Timor-Leste

Domestic violence was not illegal under East Timorese customary law or Indonesian law. Traditionally in Timor-Leste cases of domestic violence have been and continue to be dealt with by *adat*, customary law. Under *adat* the main aim is to encourage reconciliation between the perpetrator and the victim and ensure the family unit is protected. Women brave enough to take their case to village leaders (who were predominantly male), find they are often blamed for the outbreak of violence (UNFPA 2005). In short, there is no traditional framework for guaranteeing women's rights to live free of abuse or to guarantee justice. This did not change under Indonesian rule. Indonesia had legislation criminalising rape but not for domestic violence or other gender-based

change. However, this is problematic with regards to Timor-Leste where regime change had already occurred. Thus, there was no limitation on domestic movements organising and they did not have to rely on international organisations or transnational advocacy networks to put pressure on the state from outside.

violence. The legislation was very narrowly defined: there had to be sexual penetration by a penis, and could not be committed by a husband to his wife (Cristalis and Scott 2005, 100). Domestic violence was a critical issue that was largely ignored, or tolerated, in traditional East Timorese society and under Indonesian rule.

These traditional norms of gender equality were challenged by East Timorese women. In 1975 female members of Fretilin, the pro-independence party, established a women's wing, the Popular Women's Organisation of Timor-Leste (OPMT) (Charlesworth and Wood 2002; Trembath and Grenfell 2007). Its founders included a select group of East Timorese women who had studied abroad and come into contact with feminism. They brought back the notion of creating the first political women's group in Timor (Cristalis and Scott 2005). OPMT organised discussions and made speeches on women's rights, challenging East Timorese traditions such as polygamy and *barlake*, a tradition which facilitated domestic violence as men purchased their wives and gained property rights over them (Cristalis and Scott 2005; Ospina 2006). While OPMT promoted women's participation in politics, their power in Fretilin was limited: there were only three women in the Central Committee, and it was men who made the decisions (Cristalis and Scott 2005).

The resistance struggle transformed East Timorese women's lives and traditional roles as many actively fought in Falantil, the resistance army (Cristalis and Scott 2005; Gender Affairs Unit 2002). Women constituted over 60% of the clandestine movement and were responsible for transporting arms and supplies, providing logistical support and some formed women's army units under the command of women. Throughout the occupation, OPMT became a forum for women from the most remote areas to mobilise and organise unlike ever before. By 1998 OPMT had around 70,000 women members, who were organised into over 3,000 secretariats, with one in each *aldeia*, or sub-village (Cristalis and Scott 2005). However, there was little political space, or support, for campaigning exclusively on other issues such as gender equality as there was a common consensus that the most important campaign was gaining independence.[3] While OPMT advocated for equality between women and men, its work in Fretilin was secondary to the overarching goal of independence. In short, OPMT had to subordinate their agenda to Fretilin's national liberation struggle.

Furthermore, during the Indonesian occupation gender-based violence was commonly used to shame East Timorese and undermine the resistance movement. The extent and scale of sexual abuse that women faced in Timor-Leste between 1975 and 1999 has been widely documented. Indonesian troops tortured, sexually harassed, raped and often killed women they suspected were linked to the resistance movement (Charlesworth and Wood 2002; Gender Affairs Unit 2002; Cristalis and Scott 2005; Ospina 2006). Isobel Lobato, the wife of Fretilin's President, had a stake driven through her vagina after being executed on the wharf at Dili in 1975 (Carey 2001). It has also been recognised that gender-based violence did not stop with the

[3]Personal Interview, Manuela Pereira (former director, Fokupers), Dili, 3 December 2007.

end of the occupation. Marital disputes that escalated into violence were common and regarded as normal in Timor post-1999 (Gender Affairs Unit 2002). In 2001, 40% of all reported crime in Timor-Leste was found to relate to domestic violence (Cristalis and Scott 2005) and 43% of respondents to an International Rescue Committee survey faced at least one incident of 'violence' from their partners in the previous year (UNFPA 2005, 9). As one East Timorese women explained, 'even these days, during this time of independence, I am still seeing things which are not right. East Timorese women are still living in violence. It is not the Indonesians, but East Timorese men, who are being violent' (Gender Affairs Unit 2002, 34). The Indonesian occupation both abrogated women's rights in violent ways and gave women the impetus to enter the political realm and challenge traditional norms inhibiting gender equality. However, there was no political space for campaigns against domestic violence, all were concentrated on the goal of independence.

1999–2002 Creating a New Paradigm

Norm Emergence

In the late 1990s gender entrepreneurs within nascent East Timorese women's NGOs identified gender-based violence as a priority. In 1998 *Fokupers*, the first indigenous women's NGO, became the first civil society organisation to focus specifically on gender-based violence in Timor. Their campaign began in 1998 when one of Fokupers' founding members, Maria Domingas Alves, 'Micato,' organised a rally in Dili to protest against the systematic violence against women. Fokupers' work on gender-based violence drew predominantly on a human rights framework whereby gender-based violence was seen as a breach of human rights (Charlesworth and Wood 2002; UNFPA 2005). This approach was informed by shifts in the international discourse on women's rights, which had become increasingly accepted as part of the human rights framework since the 1993 Vienna conference. Fokupers worked in clandestine–setting up shelters and providing support for survivors of gender-based violence. This human rights framework was popular among other East Timorese NGOs and international NGOs, such as Oxfam. In fact, Oxfam Australia began working with Fokupers in 1997 to protect people from the Indonesian military. They emphasised the importance of supporting women's rights within the rights-based framework, as one Oxfam employer stated 'Oxfam is very much into ... how you can advocate for women's issues, how you can help support women or organisations that do advocacy for women.'[4] Oxfam's support for Fokupers was one of the first examples of a transnational partnership between an international NGO and an East Timorese NGO to address gender-based violence. Prior to 1999, however, there was little international and local support for East Timorese NGOs that had an explicit gender perspective on human rights violations.

This all changed with the independence referendum in 1999 and the violent Indonesian withdrawal. The UN arrived and international aid poured into the

[4]Personal Interview, Salina Hanjan (Oxfam) Dili, 26 November 2007.

country to assist with the humanitarian crisis in which 1400 people lost their lives and up to 250,000 people were forcibly displaced (Cristalis and Scott 2005). In the aftermath, East Timorese Women Against Violence identified and worked with 232 survivors of gender-based violence committed by Indonesian militia (Cristalis and Scott 2005). A number of international NGOs, such as the International Rescue Committee, also identified gender-based violence as a critical issue. Through training and seminars, international NGOs introduced norms of gender equality and women's rights to be free from domestic violence to a wide range of East Timorese women and men. Many of these participants were employed by international NGOs or started up their own local NGOs. Milena Vilanova, an East Timorese women who worked with the International Rescue Committee, remembers when she first started working on gender-based violence in 2000 and 'didn't even know what gender is.'[5] In this regard, international NGOs introduced new norms and gave East Timorese women discursive power to work on gender-based violence.

The increase in international NGOs also fuelled the growth of an East Timorese NGO sector as international NGOs looked to partner with local organisations and fund gender-based violence projects. As a result, the number of local NGOs working on gender equality and women's rights increased dramatically from less than three in 1999 to over 20 by 2007 (Trembath and Grenfell 2007). International agencies also built on existing women's networks and organisations to promote norm diffusion. The International Rescue Committee, for instance, worked closely with OPMT who volunteered to distribute information and encourage people in remote, rural areas to attend workshops on gender-based violence.[6] OPMT had excellent networks at all levels of East Timorese society: from district to sub-district, village to sub-village, and it was easy and effective for the International Rescue Committee to spread their message in collaboration with them. Thus, the arrival of the international community paved the way for gender-based violence to be dealt with on a larger scale and for norms of women's rights and gender equality to reach a much larger proportion of the East Timorese population.

The presence and support of international NGOs for East Timorese women's rights NGOs enabled them to collectively challenge traditional norms that facilitated domestic violence. East Timorese women were able to target *domestic* violence as well as violence against women perpetrated by Indonesian forces. This represented a significant shift as the former Fokupers director, Pereira, explained that even she had thought domestic violence was 'normal' prior to 2000 as it was 'happening to everyone.'[7] Due to the arrival of international organisations Fokupers changed its focus between 1999 and 2001 and began to work on domestic violence. International organisations, Pereira explained, 'improved our attention, our knowledge about women's rights. Finally, we know about domestic violence, it's a crime.'[8] This shift in the campaign meant that violence committed by husbands, or other family members, was targeted in the same way

[5]Personal Interview, Milena Vilanova (former International Rescue Committee trainer), Dili, 23 November 2007.
[6]Interview, Vilanova, 2007.
[7]Personal Interview, Manuela Pereira (former director, Fokupers), Dili, 3 December 2007.
[8]Interview, Pereira, 2007.

as violence against women committed by the Indonesian army. The technical, financial, discursive and moral support of international NGOs and UN agencies enabled this shift in the gender-based violence campaign to occur.

East Timorese women took ownership of the issue, deploying international norms and practices promoting women's rights to create their own platform for action. In 2000 the National Women's Congress brought together over 500 women to discuss and write a platform for action, inspired by the global Beijing platform for action. They, like many women's organisations around the world, identified domestic violence as a critical problem that needed to be addressed. The congress was a pivotal turning point in the history of East Timorese women (Charlesworth and Wood 2002; Roynestead 2003; Whittington 2003; Pires 2004). It was the first time that so many women had been brought together from such a wide variety of backgrounds: rural and urban, diaspora and local. The congress allowed women to openly discuss and explore different approaches to improving the status of women in Timor. In the congress platform for action they demanded a law against domestic violence and from this came the impetus for national campaign in support of such a law (Gender Affairs Unit 2000). It was at this congress that the women of Timor transitioned from 'freedom fighters into ... a women's movement.'[9]

At the congress they also created an organisational platform to advocate for norm change. *Rede Feto*, a women's NGO network, became one of the key actors advocating for a law against domestic violence. Rede Feto, brought together 16 women's organisations that represented a 'broad cross section of society' including mass-based organisations, smaller village based organisations, cultural and rights based organisations, and political organisations, into a formal network (UNFPA 2005, 25). Rede Feto's purpose was to coordinate these different organisations to strategically campaign on common interests as outlined by the Timorese platform for action. Their aim was to have a mechanism to present the range of women's NGOs' views to UNTAET and the National Council of East Timorese Resistance (CNRT) in a unified manner (UNFPA 2005). The organisation was based in Dili where it could lobby those in power and work with the other women's NGOs (most of which were based in Dili). In fact, following the Congress they lobbied the CNRT to pass a resolution addressing gender-based violence (Cristalis and Scott 2005).

The congress and the formation of Rede Feto paved the way for the National Movement Against Domestic Violence (NMKV). A group of over 15 NGOs formed a coalition specifically to lobby for domestic violence legislation. They were supported by Oxfam Australia and UNIFEM, who gave them institutional capacity-building support (UNIFEM, n.d.). Their advocacy efforts led to the UN administration drafting a policy paper on domestic violence. The National Movement Against Domestic Violence successfully lobbied the legislation team responsible for drafting the policy paper to extend its civil society consultations to the district level so rural women could also contribute. The campaign against domestic violence was an East Timorese initiative but it was successful partly because it gained financial support from several international NGOs and UN agencies. Oxfam Australia, UNFPA and

[9]Phone Interview, Sherrill Whittington, (former director of the UNTAET Gender Affairs Unit), 8 November 2007.

UNIFEM became leading partners as the campaign directly fitted with their organisational interests in supporting women's rights and addressing domestic violence. Partnerships between local East Timorese activists and international NGOs provided a strong base for an advocacy movement and was the primary catalyst for international norm diffusion.

The relationship between international organisations and East Timorese NGOs was dynamic, as local NGOs evolved and new international NGOs arrived over the course of 1999–2002. Local NGOs were to a certain extent dependent on international NGOs for funds and international NGOs were dependent on local NGOS for implementation of their programmes (Abrahamsen 2004). However, the rapid growth of the NGO sector in Timor created many unsustainable local NGOs as some international NGOs did not strategically allocate their funds, nor did they develop local NGOs' institutional capacity to manage the funds. Manuela Pereira, the ex-director of Fokupers claims that although Fokupers received a lot of financial support there was little organisational development between 1999 and 2002. She explains that 'when UNTAET was here we had much money ... Our problem [addressing gender inequalities] was so big we focused on many things. Sometimes we don't know how to manage the organisation.'[10] As a result, Fokupers programmes also encouraged dependency; they would pass international NGOs' funds onto a group of victims without providing them any means to manage the money. Thus, although this period marked the rise of a locally driven, internationally supported, campaign against domestic violence, there were questions over its long-term sustainability.

Norm Contestation

These new norms of gender equality and women's rights were not readily accepted by the political elite nor the large majority of East Timorese. 'Gender' was a completely novel term for most living in rural areas and there was resistance to the work of local and international NGOs on gender-based violence.[11] As one NGO working on domestic violence in the rural districts explained, 'gender issues are still considered strange news; half of them say that you bring this kind of issue from Western countries.'[12] NGOs often used a rights based framework in their training workshops arguing that domestic violence was a breach of women's rights. This entailed a two-step process: first introducing and explaining human rights and second, using them to justify why domestic violence was wrong. This two-step argument was not always effective at convincing East Timorese. Many East Timorese saw a clear dichotomy between women's rights—equated with Western modernity—and tradition. NGOs promoting women's rights were seen as destroyers of East Timorese traditional culture. This affected the reputation and ability of East Timorese NGOs to conduct their work. Fokupers, for example, was disliked in some

[10]Interview, Pereira, 2007.
[11]The word gender does not exist in Portuguese nor in tetun, so there was no framework for conceptualising it.
[12]Personal Interview, Mercio Akara (founding member, The Association of Men Against Violence), Dili, 26 November 2007.

villages as it was seen as an NGO that promoted divorce and divided families.[13] In short, international norms were adopted and adapted by East Timorese women's NGOs but this did not lead directly to norm diffusion throughout Timor-Leste.

East Timorese political leaders also contested the diffusion of gender equality norms in the public sphere. They used cultural arguments to justify tolerance of domestic violence and undermine the work of the NGOs and the advocacy network. Post-1999 there was a desire to reaffirm traditional cultural practices, including those that disadvantaged women, to build patriotism and counter the large international presence that was driving nation-building (Charlesworth and Wood 2002). Xanana Gusmão, the leader of the resistance, in his 2001 New Year's speech to the nation criticised the:

> [o]bsessive acculturation to standards that hundreds of international experts try to convey to the East Timorese, who are hungry for values: democracy (many of those who teach us never practiced it in their own countries because they became UN staff members); gender (many of the women who attend the workshops know that in their countries this issue is no example for others) ... It might sound as though I am speaking against these noble values of participation ... What seems to be absurd is that we absorb standards just to pretend we look like a democratic society and please our masters of independence. What concerns me is the non-critical absorption of (universal) standards ... [and] that the East Timorese may become detached from their reality and, above all, try to copy something, which is not yet clearly understood by them. (Charlesworth and Wood 2002, 335)

Gusmão criticised the international community's top-down approach to development and democratisation in Timor which did not accommodate local practices or values. This was a common critique of the UN's work in Timor, but Gusmão used it to justify ignoring the struggle for women's rights, which he portrayed as part of a foreign culture. This argument gained support in Timor-Leste as it resonated with many East Timorese men who did not understand why the international community focused on women when there were other 'more important' issues, such as poverty, to address (de Araujo 2005). Notably, it is exactly this type of denial behaviour where governments invoke nationalistic arguments and refuse to accept the validity of new norms that is associated with the first step towards norm change in the spiral model (Risse et al. 1999).

East Timorese women activists, on the other hand, developed their own counter-argument to this cultural relativistic claim. They maintained that norms of gender equality and women's rights had an indigenous East Timorese history and were not merely impositions of the international community. For instance, they argued there was a long history of East Timorese women rejecting discriminatory practices that dated back prior to the UN administration of Timor. Fokupers and OPMT, for example, had both campaigned against the bride price tradition that saw women being bought as property by

[13]Interview, Pereira, 2007.

their husbands prior to 1999 (Charlesworth and Wood 2002). Milena Pires directly challenged East Timorese leaders at a CNRT Conference in August 2000 and argued that:

> [c]ultural discourse is invoked frequently to quash attempts to introduce discussions of women's rights into the East Timorese political equation. The incompatibility between East Timorese culture and what is popularly cited as a western feminist imposition is used to dismiss even the notion that East Timorese women's rights may need to be nurtured and defended so as to become a reality. (Charlesworth and Wood 2002, 336)

East Timorese feminist activists made the point clearly that culture was not a legitimate excuse for inaction on addressing domestic violence. They developed their own discourse to legitimate action against domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence. In short, East Timorese gender activists adopted international norms of gender equality and women's rights and drove norm diffusion in collaboration with international NGOs.

It is important to recognise that these new norms and discourses of gender equality and women's rights were not embraced by everyone within the broader women's movement. There were ideological tensions between those who lived in urban areas who had 'less traditional views than their rural counterparts' (Charlesworth and Wood 2002, 337). Women in the rural districts had little access to the outside world and lacked basic services, such as health care, and goods, such as newspapers. Their interests were more in line with Molyneux's notion of practical interests whereas women in Dili also held strategic interests.[14] The NGO sector and advocacy movements tended to be Dili-centric as this was where the UN, international NGOs and the East Timorese political leadership were based. Some East Timorese women activists also expressed frustration at the narrow focus of international organisations and media on certain East Timorese women, such as Milena Pires, who was in the consultative councils established by UNTAET. Critics argued that East Timorese women's leadership was conceived overly narrowly by foreigners and by some returnees of the diaspora. Essentially, collaboration between international and domestic actors was concentrated in Dili and thus norm diffusion was generally mediated by the East Timorese urban middle-class.

In summary, 1999–2002 was a critical transition period where civil society 'came from a stage of thinking [where] there was no special attention for women's issues ... to another era where we saw women's issues as a priority.'[15] Independence, and the arrival of the international community, gave them the space and resources to do this. Under Indonesian rule they had had to work clandestinely and there was no room to campaign for legislative changes. After 1999 East Timorese women mobilised, identified the need for domestic violence

[14]Molyneux sees practical interests arising from the actual condition of women's position in society. They are formulated by women themselves in response to life. Strategic interests, on the other hand, are derived deductively from a structural analysis of women's subordinate position and the formulation of alternative realities such as challenging patriarchal institutions. Strategic interests may threaten practical interests (Molyneux 1985).
[15]Interview, Pereira, 2007.

legislation and created an organisational platform to lobby for it. They worked with and were supported by international NGOs and donor agencies. As a result, domestic violence legislation was drafted: a remarkable feat for such a new small state dealing with so many other issues. Overall, this period saw the emergence of a new norm of women's rights to be free from domestic violence. Norm change was driven by East Timorese women and supported by the work of international NGOs and international organisations. Thus, this period illustrates how norm emergence can be a dynamic process that is neither top-down nor bottom-up.

2002–2007 Tipping Point

Norm Cascades

In May 2002 the UNTAET administration left, and Timor-Leste became a fully independent sovereign state. This was the tipping point for international norms of women's rights and gender equality leading to state action on domestic violence. José Ramos-Horta, in his first speech as foreign minister at the UN Security Council, put domestic violence as the top priority facing Timor post-independence (Cristalis and Scott 2005). Timor signed all the existing international human rights treaties, including CEDAW in December 2002. This decision was East Timorese-led and not UN-driven, according to Horta who claims it was 'my personal leadership and advocacy to accede to these treaties.'[16] Key national documents such as the constitution and the National Development Plan emphasised the importance of gender equality. In fact, the National Development Plan, which is the framework for development for government and donors, clearly placed gender equality as one of its top goals, alongside poverty reduction (The Democratic Republic of Timor 2002). Thus, there appeared to be support at the most senior levels of the East Timorese government for action on empowering women. Independence triggered a norm cascade. It was the breakthrough that East Timorese NGOs and their international allies needed, their advocacy efforts translated to government recognition of the importance of gender equality and women's rights.[17]

The transition to full independence also changed the funding environment for East Timorese NGOs. Many donors left and funding was reduced resulting in more competition between women's NGOs for resources. Pereira remembers that during this period 'we [Fokupers] had no money, we had no support.'[18] East Timorese NGOs either ceased to exist, or had to scale back, evaluate their programmes and become more strategic about how they operated. Donors that stayed in Timor changed their expectations of local NGOs and demanded more accountability in their reporting. As Edna Tesoro, international advisor to

[16]Personal Interview, José Ramos Horta (President of Timor-Leste), Dili, 4 December 2007.
[17]Fretilin, a political party with socialist leanings, had encouraged gender equality in the past but had never lived up to its rhetoric. At independence there was pressure from women within the party, such as Ana Pessoa a senior government minister, and external pressure, by advocacy networks to actively promote gender equality.
[18]Interview, Pereira, 2007.

Rede Feto, explained, 'before [in the UNTAET period] anyone could just be a partner of the donor agencies and the UN. Now, the donor agencies and the UN agencies realise they have to work with organisations that could really work and really deliver for East Timor.'[19] Thus, donors tended to favour well-established, Dili-based, NGOs with a strong track record of implementing programmes to address domestic violence. This reinforced the role of the East Timorese urban, middle-class in promoting norm diffusion.

Fokupers was one of the NGOs that benefited from this transition. They were initially quite a 'weak organisation,' according to the former director Pereira, due to a lack of knowledge about how to manage disagreements within the organisation. However, a German NGO funded organisational development to strengthen Fokupers' senior management and develop a consistent programme. After 2002 they moved away from a donor led programme to a more community directed approach. As Pereira states 'before we go to them [the community] and we have a programme, we have money. After [2002] we changed the strategy, the needs should come from them, we just facilitate.'[20] Fokupers's expectations of their partners also changed and they left USAID, because 'they don't support us, they just give us money to buy things.'[21] International norm diffusion also transformed the agents of norm change.

International and East Timorese norm entrepreneurs expanded the East Timorese women's campaign against domestic violence to include East Timorese men. A new men's association, *Assosiasaun Mane Kontra Violensia (AMKV)*, the Association of Men Against Violence, formed after a visit by a Nicaraguan men's group, *Puntos dos Encuentros* (Trembath and Grenfell 2007). This was a case of transnational policy learning as the Nicaraguan group illustrated to East Timorese how men could campaign against domestic violence. AMKV used their model to establish a men's discussion group and offer public education, to challenge traditional popular gender stereotypes.[22] It received financial support from Oxfam and coordinated with *Rede Feto* and other women's NGOs to campaign against domestic violence. AMKV illustrates how transnational advocacy networks can be effective in supporting the development of civil society groups through the diffusion of discourses, campaign strategies and organisational models.

Furthermore, the addition of men to the campaign against domestic violence broadened the campaign's discourse. AMKV challenged the traditional notion that gender-based violence was only a women's issue and concern. As founding member Mercio Akara states, many East Timorese find it:

> strange at first that a man comes and discusses gender issues. According to them gender is a Fokupers issue, or a women's issue. Sometimes some friends, women and men, look down on our activities and ask why are you involved in

[19]Personal Interview, Edna Tesoro (international organisational advisor, Rede Feto), Dili, 26 November 2007.
[20]Interview, Pereira, 2007.
[21]Interview, Pereira, 2007.
[22]Personal Interview, Mercio Akara (founding member, AMKV), Dili, 26 November 2007.

> that kind of issue? They think that a real man ... should be a strong man, smoker, play soccer, discuss politics, not gender issues ... It's challenging.[23]

As Akara explains, promoting gender equality was initially equated with the work of women's NGOs, such as Fokupers. However, AMKV began to change the notion of 'gender' in Timor by organising men to reflect on their gender roles. International NGOs, such as Caritas and Oxfam, also employed men to work on domestic violence programmes. These developments parallel the trends in global campaigns against domestic violence, which emphasise the importance of involving women and men, and not just women.

Norm Internalisation?

The final stage of norm diffusion requires that the state not only accept norm change but take action to implement it. The East Timorese government accepted norms of gender equality and women's rights at rhetoric level, but did they enforce them? In 2003 the council of ministers rejected draft legislation criminalising domestic violence. The National Campaign Against Domestic Violence (NMKV) organised an advocacy group and campaigned successfully for the legislation to be passed. Their work resulted in the reconsideration and passage of the draft legislation by the council. Their work was further reinforced by the launch of an annual 16 days of activism against gender-based violence. The 16 days of activism was a global initiative, established in 1991 to highlight the connections between women, violence and human rights and had been held around the world annually from 21 November to 10 December. East Timorese women's NGOs and the state's Office for the Promotion of Equality adopted this global campaign with the support of UNIFEM and UNFPA. While the campaign has been an ongoing success, the bill against domestic violence was held-up as it had to be harmonised with the penal code. In early 2008 Timor still did not have a domestic violence law but it is hoped that the law will be passed in the near future. The approval of domestic violence legislation was a major success for the campaign, and illustrated how an East Timorese initiative could be strengthened by the support of international NGOs and UN agencies. However, it also showed the need for continual pressure on government to ensure that domestic violence was addressed. In short, the state had not yet internalised norms of gender equality and women's rights.

In summary, the period from 2002 to 2007 was marked by several setbacks: the decrease in funding for East Timorese NGOs coupled with the increased pressure on East Timorese NGOs to be accountable and transparent in their operations and administration. The largest obstacle was the difficulty in gaining government approval for a domestic violence law and harmonising it with the penal code. However, this new phase of statehood saw the expansion of a campaign against domestic violence, the development of a new gender discourse that included men as agents of change, and pressure from civil society on the state to address domestic

[23]Interview, Akara, 2007.

violence. This period illustrates that norm diffusion is not a linear process of norm emergence, tipping point, cascade and subsequent norm internalisation. Timor-Leste did reach a tipping point at independence, which triggered a norm cascade. However, norms of gender equality and women's rights were not internalised at the state level; they were often endorsed in rhetoric but not enforced in practice. Despite the efforts of many international organisations and NGOs domestic violence is still common in Timor. Independence brought women space to raise the issue of domestic violence but true transformation of gendered social, political and economic relations within this new state is yet to happen.

Conclusion

This article found that international norms of women's rights and gender equality were implemented as a result of alliances between local and international actors. The campaign against domestic violence was driven by a strong movement of East Timorese women, most of whom had worked during the resistance for women's rights either within Timor or outside. They used the post-conflict phase to mobilise and unite on a national level and leveraged off the presence of the UN and other international NGOs to legitimate and fund their activities. Although the primary factor explaining the rise of a campaign against domestic violence was local women mobilising, it was strongly supported by international partners. Dynamic partnerships evolved as Timor transitioned from UNTAET rule to full independence in 2002. What is interesting is that the relationship between global gender equality norms and the local domestic violence campaigns did not only flow one way. While the global influenced the local (the notion of a 16 day campaign followed the international model), the local also influenced the global. In 2008 the UN Secretary General launched his own campaign to address gender-based violence, UNITE. Fokupers was highlighted in this UN campaign as an example of how NGOs can effectively support women survivors of domestic violence (UNITE 2008).

What is striking about the East Timorese case is that women have been able to transform from freedom fighters to a fully fledged women's movement within the short space of a decade. Furthermore, East Timorese have gained substantial victories in their campaign against domestic violence. This case illustrates the importance and challenges of locally driven initiatives to translate norm change into action and sustain a long-term campaign. It also highlights the need to elaborate a locally grounded discourse of gender equality, so that the political elite and other opponents cannot undermine norm change by claiming it is a western imposition on traditional culture. Lastly, it proposes that East Timorese women were successful in their campaign because of the alliances they forged with international NGOs and UN agencies. Their collaboration with international allies to lobby the state and civil society enabled the widespread diffusion of gender equality norms and the drafting of domestic violence legislation.

International Relations theorists can learn from this case study how local and global actors work in concert to spread international norms. Constructivist IR scholars should investigate further how such collaborations transform the

agents of norm change. More research must also be done to uncover how power is negotiated and transferred in these transnational partnerships and how they advance norm change as a collective. For gender and politics scholars this research points to the importance of post-conflict transitions and nation-building as unique opportunities for women to mobilise, develop a voice and advocate for gender equality norms. At the same time we must acknowledge that not all women have benefited equally from these developments. Intersectionality theorists would point out that the campaign for domestic violence in Timor was driven by Dili-based, middle class activists. Thus, the question remains: how do we translate norm change from the urban middle-class setting to the rural?

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