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## Book Reviews

Kent, Lia (2012), *The Dynamics of Transitional Justice: International Models and Local Realities in East Timor*

Abingdon: Routledge (= Series: Transitional Justice), ISBN: 9780415504362, 252 pages

The United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) has been widely regarded as one of the most successful internationally driven state-building endeavours since the end of the Cold War. Equipped with a solid and extensive mandate from the United Nations Security Council, UNTAET possessed legislative, executive and judicial powers. Its main tasks were to re-establish state institutions and local administration, to provide security and to form a new local police force. The narrative of a successful case of state-building in Timor-Leste crumbled, however, in no later than April 2006 when members of the Timorese armed forces, the police and armed civilians all fought against each other in the streets of the capital, Dili, leading to more than thirty casualties and the collapse of the Timorese security sector. International observers reacted by criticising the United Nation's inability to strengthen effective state institutions along with its attempt to transplant a purely Western model of state governance in Timor-Leste in the first place.

Thanks to Lia Kent's depiction of multifaceted perspectives and her thorough analysis, *The Dynamics of Transitional Justice: International Models and Local Realities in East Timor* provides a gripping account of the inherent challenges of building a state in a post-conflict context. While her main research interests are truth-seeking and approaches to justice in Timor-Leste after decades of human rights violations during the Indonesian occupation, the author also covers broader problems of post-conflict state-building.

The introduction elucidates Kent's specific research interest and provides informative insights about the fieldwork she conducted and issues related to that. Subsequently, the first chapter introduces readers to the theoretical underpinning of the book. Here, the author critically examines the idea of a construed "transitional" phase in which, according to the established concept of transitional justice and the application of a standardised transitional justice "tool-kit" approach, conclusive justice will occur by default. Additionally, Kent makes a case for a more flexible definition of "justice" that could apply to different and complex local contexts.

In Chapter 2, the author dispels the myth of a selfless, effective and prolific engagement by the United Nations by questioning the applicability of the liberal state-building paradigm in Timor-Leste. The United Nations' standardised approach to transitional justice was one of the main reasons actual Timorese victims were unsatisfied with the results. The portrayed success story of the United Nations in Timor-Leste was brokered by the UN itself, along with Timorese political representatives, in light of regional and national stability concerns. In reading the book it becomes obvious that the Indonesian government, the Timorese political elite and decision-making circles within the United Nations were simply not interested in challenging international cooperation with Indonesia after the events of 9/11 and, therefore, did not even attempt to initiate convictions of members of the Indonesian armed forces.

Referring to the Serious Crimes Process (SCP) and the Timor-Leste Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (CAVR), Chapter 3 deals with the measures taken by international and local actors concerning human rights violations during the Indonesian occupation. Again, the book makes it clear that the efforts of both the SCP and the CAVR were curtailed in order to meet the interests of UNTAET and leading Timorese politicians, respectively, but this decision was largely to the detriment of the actual Timorese victims.

Along this vein, Chapter 4 details the story of how the nation-building agenda of the Timorese political elite emerged, with particular reference to Xanana Gusmão. Kent elaborates how the narrative of a "Timorese struggle" fits into Gusmão's attempt to create a sense of national unity and political stability in Timor-Leste. Instead of prosecuting and condemning the perpetrators, Gusmão opted for reconciliation and forgiveness in dealing with members of the Indonesian military as well as with former pro-Indonesian Timorese militias who were involved in the massacres of 1999. Furthermore, the creation of a "struggle" narrative in connection with the re-labelling of victims as "martyrs" and "heroes of the resistance" aimed to mask the actual hardship of the Timorese people. As a result, the rival political parties and their leaderships sought to present themselves as extraordinary heroes of the resistance struggle in order to gain political legitimacy and attract voters. In contrast, Chapters 5 and 6 address the individual perspectives of Timorese victims on the grass-roots level. Here, the author describes how differently the issues of justice, compensation and reconciliation are perceived by various segments of the local population, and how each of these individuals or local communities has tried to deal with those notions.

Given the detailed empirical account of the book, it is evident that Lia Kent has spent considerable time in Timor-Leste and gained first-hand knowledge through her cross-sectorial interviews. In contrast to several other publications on Timor-Leste, the author succeeds in linking the international context and the international donors' motivations and actions with the Timorese context. However, in the process she also makes the reader aware of the existing frictions among the Timorese political elite and their alienation from average Timorese citizens.

*The Dynamics of Transitional Justice: International Models and Local Realities in East Timor* by Lia Kent is an excellent addition to the existing literature on state-building in post-independence Timor-Leste. The book is sure to interest not only practitioners and scholars working on Timor-Leste but also readers keen to learn about issues of state-building in post-conflict contexts in Southeast Asia and beyond.

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