The East Timorese Global Solidarity Movement and the Human Rights Strategy

The East Timorese Global Solidarity Movement, State Denial, and the Human Rights Strategy: Discourse, State Power, and Political Mobilization

By

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Abstract

A small island nation near Australia was invaded and occupied by the Indonesian military regime in 1975, which lasted until 1999. This dissertation examines the global solidarity movement, whose success was due to the skill of its leaders, the collective agency transnational mobilization, effective social movement framing, which helped to create, act upon, and transform important critical junctures throughout the conflict. The East Timorese resistance movement against the Indonesian occupation took an ethnically and politically fragmented society and transformed it into a powerful transnational resistance movement that brough together military, clandestine, diplomatic, and global civil society actors together in supporting East Timor’s right to self-determination.

Social movement frames punctuate the severity, immorality, and injustice of conditions. However, existing accounts on claims-making, framing trajectories, and outcomes tend to downplay the influence of contingency and indeterminacy in social movements. Indeed, as social constructionists contend, collective constructions are historically produced and culturally contingent. As claims-makers advance public claims developed within institutional realities, this underscores the range of contingencies and uncertainties actors manage in mobilizing their agendas. With East Timor's case, this sandwich thesis contends that understanding social movement framing and trajectories requires keeping institutional, discursive, and geopolitical contexts intact. Movements are embedded in histories, institutions, or fields that shape the outcome of framing trajectories and the outcome of social movement claims-making. However, social constructionists help us understand that resources, frames, and opportunities are perceived and constructed by actors. Therefore, the theoretical perspective provides substantial credence to the roles of contingency and human agency in social movement mobilization. Ultimately, objective structures, such as political/discursive opportunities or legal texts, are not enabling but generate social movement action insofar as moral agents perceive them. Often, this work is discursively constructed. This reality underscores the dimension of contingency in social action and social movement framing and mobilization because objective structures do not automatically determine what actors will select as a specific course of collective action or framing strategies.

Frame and framing trajectories are particular to, and instantiated in, the contexts and develop over time as moral agents mobilize meaning by interacting with targets, sensitive to local conditions, emergent contingencies, and competing interests. By focusing on the social framing process, I show how framing or collective action frames emerge and are diffused in different ways across national contexts. The emphasis is not to address the broader institutionalized logics, such as political/discursive opportunities and geopolitics, but to understand how these aspects are incorporated in the framing practices of moral agents as strategic action as “endogenous to a field of actors” (Lounsbury et al., 2003:72), whose interests and national, not only transnational, but embeddedness also influence the interactional dynamics of their framing actions and trajectories. In this way, framing practices can be understood as struggles over audiences' minds and hearts, where actors compete in moral politics to secure symbolic power and political legitimacy.

The macro-level logic indeed impacts the structure of frames. The diffusion and acceleration of claims within historically contingent events depend simultaneously on pre-existing, strong cultural framing and an influential social movement culture rooted in the abstract ideals of human rights that are transnationally dispersed but integrated. Strategic framing choices depend on various logic. Firstly, expanding political and discursive opportunities is crucial in accelerating mobilization. Moreover, the diffusion of frames and public claims can further propel mobilization and help to build convergences across sociopolitical allies. Agency and structure are often interpenetrating. Namely, depending on the choices made by actors at specific ‘critical junctures,’ they can either propel the social force of mobilization or hamper it, depending on perceived choices (agency). Social movements, especially transnational advocacy networks, prove more effective in frame diffusion when they build solidarities around shared meaning and international norms (human rights) that allow them to converge effectively around shared purposes and sustain collective mobilization across extended periods. Transnational networks of solidarity (the global solidarity movement) harnessed collective mobilization at the global level by converging the diffusion of their frames and claims around human rights talk. The thesis also considers various logics such as path dependency, contingency, historical events, and geopolitics in shaping the national and global movement mobilization and claims-making field.

Acknowledgments

If Cleopatra was not as beautiful, Mark Anthony and Julius Caesar may not have fallen in love with her, and there might not have been a Roman civil war in the first century BC, and the entire course of history might have been entirely different. Not so serious, right? But what do we mean when we understand specific historical events, such as the dissolution of the Soviet Union or the spreading of a new COVID mutation, as inevitable or necessary? Commonly we often think about determinism and chance. Yet, big or small events can change the course of history, resulting in entirely different outcomes.

According to Stephen Jay Gould, out of all the animals living during the Cambrian explosion, we would have likely selected Anomalocaris as the ancestor of modern-day insect creatures. But, on a grand scale, evolutionary history is not the “survival of the fittest.” If one plays back the tape of life, something like the modern life arrangement may not have occurred at all. This is an uncomfortable truth, and everyone aware of it knows it. But with contingency in mind, it is profoundly amazing to us that of all possible outcomes, we are here. Small contingencies make considerable differences in the long run; pivotal moments like a bit of tuck of gravity, hurling an asteroid to earth, and ending the dinosaur dynasty, allowing mammals (plesiadapiforms) to emerge and take over. The pikaia was a primitive known example of a chordate, an animal with a notochord (see Morris and Caron, 2012) that eventually became part of the backbone on later animals, human’s oldest ancestor. The pikaia survived. Not because it was the strongest, most intelligent, or fastest. It merely survived. Indeed, it is a wonderful life.

Firstly, I express my deepest gratitude to Gregory Hooks. Greg supported me from day one. He believed that I had great potential when we first met. Greg, you are a model of integrity. You have helped to breathe intellectual life in me and have allowed me to become. Dorothy, I have learned so much from you, and our conversations have always energized me intellectually. Your work has always rigorously challenged our ontological and epistemological assumptions and helped us think more reflexively about our role as sociologists in the production of sociological research. I have enjoyed our conversations, and you have helped to instill in me a deep appreciation and respect for the possibilities social constructionism can provide in understanding social movements and social problems. Vic, you are very down to earth. Your authenticity, historical mind, intellectual rigor, guidance, and kindness have helped to inspire me. Our conversations kept me focused, and you have provided unparalleled guidance to proper historical thinking. I also thank you for steering me towards my dissertation topic.

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Life is so weird, but that is what is so beautiful about it. All the love, the pain, the joy, the work, the beauty, and the suffering would be incomprehensible without their relation to one another. They sharpen and clarify each other. Khalil Gibran once said, “The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain.” I wouldn’t have it any other way.

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Declaration of Academic Achievement

I, Julian Torelli, declare that this thesis titled, The East Timorese Global Solidarity Movement, State Denial, and the Human Rights Strategy: Discourse, State Power, and Political Mobilization, and works presented in it are my own. I confirm that I am the sole author for Chapter 1, Chapter 2, Chapter 3, Chapter 5, and Chapter 6. Chapter 4 is a coauthored article, with me being the first author.

Chapter 1

Introduction

We hear much about all kinds of egregious acts that occur worldwide. However, not all these acts attract significant attention or calls to action. How many know about the 1988 Iraqi extermination campaign of the Kurds known as the “Anfal”? How many know that when Indonesia invaded East Timor in 1975 and occupied the island for over two decades, they murdered one-third of the island’s population through starvation and killings – in proportional terms, one of the largest massacres of the 20th century? How many know about the contemporary repression and oppression of West Papuans? Because East Timor is about as far away politically and geographically removed from the United States, Canada, and Australia – the story never made front page news, even when several Western journalists were eyewitnesses to mass murder. Central to social movement persuasion is framing and discourse. Framing problems in particular ways are crucial for generating resonance and building alliances across various sectors of civil society.

      Considerable social science research has documented the significance of framing for social movements (Snow, 2004; Snow et al., 2014). Frames a crucial for political mobilization and punctuate the severity, injustice, and immorality of social conditions (Loseke, 2003). The ability to tell a compelling narrative and moral suasion is necessary for potential grievances to lead people to overcome their collective action problem (McEntire, Leiby, and Krain, 2015). In addition, some frames have the capacity and power to coalesce, converge, and mobilize multiple movements and constituencies (Lakoff and Johnson, 2008). Framing, in social movement studies, has been conceptualized effectively as a strategic attempt of movement actors to make claims that resonate within the existing context. These are called “master frames” (Benford and Snow, 2000). More generally, human rights discourses are overarching, remarkably adaptable, or transposable (Sewell, 1992) cultural schemas and master frames.

       Master frames such as the universalist “human rights” standard provide ready-made, practical, and discursive tools for social movements. Moreover, the discourse of human rights coincides with the tenets of international law, which has favored self-determination resistance movements. The “framing” (Snow et al., 1986; Benford and Snow, 2000; Spector and Kitsuse, 1977) of the East Timorese resistance and solidarity allies drew crucially on law and legal discourse, particularly a discourse of human rights rooted in foundational texts of international law. But they also drew on cultural forces to warrant effective public claims. Social movement actors often frame forms of injustice as violations of human rights.

Moreover, the human rights movement often constitutes more than a recourse to international law or appealing to legal discursive opportunity structures (McCammon et al., 2007), and legal activism. People employ human rights discourses as resources to promote identity/self-determination or interest politics. The international human rights regime, which was aggressively promoted by Western state powers following the end of the Cold War, “provides a language that activists can use to press their cases whenever a new issue becomes important” (Howard-Hassmann, 2018:44).

Framing and claims-making are central concepts that tie the articles together. Sociologists consistently underscore the significance of discursive struggles alongside legal and political struggles for greater human rights protection. Social movement organizations and allies seek to mobilize on the terrain of civil society and therefore seek to morally persuade potential supporters, adversaries, as well as to disseminate their claims to domestic and international audiences (Jenness, 1995; Fujiwara, 2005; Risley, 2011; Skillingon, 2012; Snyder, 2008; Moulin and Nyers, 2007; Mahood and Satzewich, 2009). This struggle is partly through what social movement scholars call “framing.” In understanding framing and social movement mobilization, social constructionist approaches (Benford and Snow, 2000; Loseke, 2003; Best and Loseke, 2018; Spector and Kitsuse, 1977) attend to how movements, organizations, and constituencies frame issues differently and the framing strategies they employ to build resonance and momentum for a movement. The issue of framing in social movement studies is looms large and is of central concern in all three articles of this sandwich thesis. In the Conclusion (Chapter 6) we will return to the issue of framing in more detail in the section *Lessons Learned in Framing*.

**Movement infrastructures emerge primarily as organizational structures or political opportunities (McAdam, 1999; Tilly, 1977). The United Nations and its system of legal discourses, human rights conventions, and institutions, helped to spur, generate, and reinforce East Timorese mobilization by providing political opportunities for enabling the efficacy, resonance, and persuasion of human rights advocacy. According to Della Porta and Tarrow (2005), resources, and opportunities “are perceived and constructed by the activists” (159). As this thesis contends, ultimately, objective structures (such as political opportunities or existing legal structures) are not enabling in themselves, but rather, generate social movement action insofar as they are perceived as enabling by activists themselves. In this way, the materiality and objectivity of structures and the subjectivity of social action cannot be separated. The two are interrelated and inextricably linked. The discursive work of solidarity activists and allies’ matter in the mobilization of human rights, its resonance, and viability. Often, this work is discursively constructed. Indeed, social constructionist perspectives have helped to weaken strong objectivist claims and claims of realist determinism, that deep structures and opportunities guarantee mobilization and framing trajectories. Social structures are a necessary condition for movement success, pre-existing any rounds of agency, but agency is necessary for the production, reproduction, or challenge of social structures. This further indicates that there is a dimension of contingency in social action and social movement framing because structures do not guarantee that actors (activists or state actors) will select courses of action or framing strategies. Hence, social constructionist perspectives provide important roles to contingency and human agency. The issue of social constructionism will be addressed in several chapters throughout the dissertation (Chapter 3, Chapter 4, and Chapter 5).**

The success of the East Timorese liberation struggle (historical context and detail will be provided on the Timorese liberation and resistance movement in Chapter 2) must be understood as an amalgamation or confluence of social forces operating at the intersection of agency and structure. Nothing was inevitable or leaning toward Timorese independence, and the importance of contingent social action, framing, and mobilization or agency helps to explain the movements success. East Timor could have ended up absorbed and fiercely resisting colonial structures of domination. Thus, the movements success cannot be explained at the level of structure alone, although there were existing structural transformations that were crucial in reshaping the geopolitical field and global political economy in ways that were favourable to mobilization and the global solidarity movements frame resonance.

Focusing on the social movement framing of the global solidarity movement, with a particular focus on the Canadian, American, and Australian sections, the articles in this thesis seek to understand the ways that solidarity activists sought to persuade national and international audiences to care about the plight of the East Timorese and how state officials challenged their human rights claims in ways that denied human rights abuses in East Timor.

Chapter 3 demonstrates how solidarity allies were instrumental in translating and shifting the discourse on East Timor from unworthy to worthy victims of human rights abuses (Torelli, 2020). Timorese activists made effective in-roads on the non-state diplomatic front in contesting the involvement of Western state powers in unconscionable human rights abuses in East Timor. Focusing on the Canadian section of solidarity activists, the first article seeks to understand the framing strategies used to punctuate the severity, immorality, and injustice of conditions*.* Understanding and care for the importance of human rights is not everyone’s automatic reflex or impulse. Therefore, narrative becomes important in persuading audiences to care (Loseke, 2019). One of the most important framing strategies for human rights claims-making is to delineate a clear moral narrative. Claims-makers offer competing, counterhegemonic narratives that produce an emotional and moral resonance in targeted audiences, which is inextricably linked with constructing an “injustice frame” (Howard-Hassman and Lombardo, 2007:29).

Chapter 3 underscores the importance of historically contingent discursive opportunity structures, national contexts, and foreign policy discourses in shaping and enabling the trajectory of framing strategies in the global solidarity movement. The results for this research have been published in *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*. Hence, the first two chapters focus on solidarity activists' political claims-making (Spector and Kitsuse, 1977), the second dealing predominantly in a cross-national analysis. The cross-national analysis advances our knowledge on the discourse actors adopt in a frame diffusion, as well as attempts to “develop explanations for the presence and forms of frames and discourses” (Caiani, 2023:199).

From this perspective, the study of framing strategies through a theoretical understanding of discursive opportunities and constraints – namely the “political-cultural or symbolic opportunities that determine what kinds of ideas become visible for the public, resonate with public opinion, and are held to be “legitimate” (Caiani, 2023:199) by the audience, foreign policy elites, and within a particular historically contingent national context – are crucial for the study of social movement framing. Instrumentally, collective social movement actors may render discourses resonant in populations they wish to address by bridging cosmopolitan frames with those in specific cultural environments.

Because institutions and discourses are path dependent, although historically contingent, domestic contexts may have embedded within them resilient national cultures and historical discourses that determine and facilitate which frames can resonate with deep-rooted historical traditions and shape their trajectory (Della Porta, 2022). Human rights are not always an automatic impulse or reflex. Thus, activists often seek to contextualize their claims within specific national situations (Best and Loseke, 2018). Effective frames and building frame resonance vary across time and space, depending on the targets and political, discursive, and legal domestic and international opportunities. Rights-based frames often offer a powerful way to appeal to international bodies and gain sympathy. Therefore, recontextualizing universal human rights discourse and legal concepts into local terms that resonate with national concerns is also crucial in human rights activists’ discursive work and frame diffusion. The issue of frame diffusion will be revisted in the Conclusion in the section Lessons on Frame Diffusion and Transnational Movements. In Chapter 4, we make reference and contribute to diffusion debates and pay close attention to variations in framing strategies. Social movement frames are also diffused across nations.

Chapter 4 examines the various counterclaims and repertoires of denial advanced by state officials to deny atrocities and historical events and deflect responsibility for Indonesian human rights abuses. Attention in this article is focused the definitional contests, but most importantly how states use counterframing strategies to deflect criticism. Counterframing strategies are also contingent, insofar as they alter with changing institutional and geopolitical contexts. When East Timorese atrocities were ignored, and little information existed, state officials could readily deny and displace blame. But following the Santa Cruz massacre, as a transformative event, states could no longer deny atrocity or displace blame for them. They could however rationalize and challenge the prognoses and solutions offered by human rights activists.

Key conceptual issues will be unpacked in greater length in the Concluding Chapter of the thesis, discussing in particular concepts such as frame, frame diffusion, contingency, critical junctures, and structure, as these concepts can help pave the future for further research and underscore the lessons learned from the dissertation as a whole.

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Chapter 2

Historical Contexts, Archival Data, and Methodology

**Historical Context**

East Timor came under the colonial control of the British, Dutch, and then the Portuguese, the latter controlling East Timor between 1702 and 1975, after the Netherlands yielded the territory to Portugal. During the Second World War, Japanese forces invaded East Timor (see Chapter 4 for more detail) in 1942, occupying the territory until September 1945. During this period, Indonesia gained their independence from the Netherlands in 1949 under the leadership of Sukarno, an Indonesian revolutionary and pro-independence nationalist and serving as the first Indonesian president (1945-1967), with West Timor integrating into Indonesia, and East Timor remaining under Portuguese colonial rule.

Within Indonesia, General Suharto came to power with the promise of making changes to the constitution and establishing the New Order regime. Sukarno was removed from power by General Suharto through a Western-backed military overthrow on 30 September 1965. Between October 1965 to March 1966, known as the anticommunist pogroms or policide, members of the Indonesian Communist Party were eliminated “down to the very roots” (Robinson, 2018:165), as well as thousands of peasants and Indigenous leaders (Roosa, 2020). In a Cold War climate, General Suharto appealed to the geopolitical imperatives of U.S. foreign policy, and in particular the Truman Doctrine of communist containment. At the same time, they regarded East Timor as geopolitically irrelevant, economically poor, and unviable as a nation-state. Moreover, Australia was the first state to recognize Indonesia’s annexation of East Timor *de facto*, then *de jure*. If East Timor acquired independence the likelihood would have been the nationalization of oil reserves. With Indonesian sovereignty over East Timor, both Australia and Indonesia could partition the oil reserves. Thus, in 1991, both parties signed the “Timor-Gap Treaty”[[1]](#footnote-1) which designated Indonesia as having sovereignty over East Timor and as the 27th province of Indonesia (King, 2002; Clark, 1992).

In Resolution 1542 (XV) on 15 December 1960, the United Nations General Assembly, which declared the territories under Portuguese administration to be non-self-governing territories within the meaning of Chapter XI of the Charter of the UN, which referred to “territories whose peoples have not yet attained a full measure of self-government,” and in accordance with resolution 1514 (XV) which declared that inter alia that immediate steps would be taken to transfer power to the peoples of those territories without any conditions or reservations. The declarations referred to Portugal as the administering power, affirmed in Resolution 3485 of 12 December 1975. Between and 1974 Portugal was reluctant to fulfill its obligations under international law.

Before and after the Second World War, Portugal was ruled by a series of dictatorships. First under António de Oliveira Salazar (1932-1968) and then under the *Caetano regime* (1968-1974). The liberal Carnation Revolution, where members of the armed forces on April 25, 1974, overthrew the Caetano authoritarian regime, leading to a transition to democracy. The new regime initiated overseas decolonization, which sparked democratic aspirations in East Timor. This newly acquired freedoms in the colonies led to the founding of three political parties in East Timor: the *Timorese Social Democratic Association* (ASDT), the *Democratic Union for Timor* (UDT), and the *Timorese Democratic People’s Union* (APODETI). ASDT supported independence and APODETI endorsed integration with Indonesia. In local elections held in early of 1975, the *Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor* (FRETILIN) won 55% of the vote. Both FRETILIN and UDT supported independence.

After a brief civil war, and while Portugal was reducing its presence in the territory, without properly transferring administrative power to locals nor guiding the process of decolonization, on 28 November 1975, FRETILIN declared independence. Prior to this declaration, FRETILIN requested that the Portuguese return so that a peaceful transfer of power could occur in East Timor. The UN Security Council designated Portugal as the administering power of the territory. With support from UDT with the hope of regaining a stronger political foothold, Indonesia invaded East Timor on 7 December 1975.

Following the Indonesian invasion in 1975, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 384, determined that the Indonesian invasion and occupation of East Timor was illegal under international law, and called upon “all States to respect the territorial integrity of East Timor as well as the inalienable right of its people to self-determination in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV); calls upon the Government of Indonesia to withdraw without delay all its forces from the Territory; Calls upon the Government of Portugal as administering Power to co-operate fully with the United Nations so as to enable the people of East Timor to exercise freely their right to self-determination; Urges all States and other parties concerned to co-operate fully with the efforts of the United Nations to achieve a peaceful solution to the existing situation and to facilitate the decolonization of the Territory.” In 1976, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 389, which reaffirmed the right of the people of East Timor to self-determination and continued to call upon all States to respect the territorial integrity of East Timor and upon the government of Indonesia to withdraw all of its forces from the territory, and to facilitate a peaceful solution to the decolonization of the territory. The United Nations continued to regard Portugal as the legal Administering Power of East Timor. East Timor became recognized under international law, not as a State, but as ‘a non-self-governing territory’ in the Declaration on Decolonization because of its *de facto* status as a Portuguese colony. This legal status granted non-self-governing territories with the right to self-determination under international law. For political reasons, however, Western states were unwilling to challenge anticommunist Indonesia in a Cold War international context, which prevented East Timor from becoming independent and limited support from the international community (Webster, 2020). Hence, both East Timor (self-determination) and Indonesia (integration and annexation) sought to legitimate their respective claims to sovereignty over the territory in the eyes of the international community.

Following the Indonesian invasion, an Apostolic Administer from Dili, Monsignor Da Costa Lopes, led a public campaign in 1981-1982 by publishing letters overseas in newspapers about famine, death, and human rights abuses in East Timor. In 1985, Amnesty International published a report titled *East Timor: Violations of Human Rights. Extrajudicial Executions, Disappearances, Torture, and Political Imprisonment*, which cited that 200,000 East Timorese were killed. This report helped to galvanize Western solidarity for atrocities throughout the 1980s and led to the formation of the East Timor Alert Network (see Chapter 3 for more detail).

On 12 November 1991, a mass killing of unarmed demonstrators in Dili, Santa Cruz, led to the deaths of more than 270 people (Kingsbury, 2013). After Santa Cruz, transnational solidarity and mobilization expanded dramatically, leading to the formation of various NGOs, including the East Timor Alert Network in Canada (ETAN), the East Timor Action Network in the United States (ETAN), Friends of East Timor and the Australia-East Timor Association. In 1996, José Ramos-Horta and Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo received to Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts to bringing peace in East Timor during the Indonesian occupation (1975-1999).

In the mid-1990s, the Clinton administration began to establish stricter conditions on military aid to Indonesia, and on Indonesia’s human rights record in East Timor. Other countries like Canada and the Netherlands cut off aid to Indonesia completely. The 1997 Asian Financial Crisis weakened the New Order Regime and allowed the international community to exert pressure on Indonesia. With the end of the Cold War in 1991, Indonesia lost its geopolitical significance. The 1998 May Riots in Indonesia further destabilized the regime, forcing Suharto to step down on 20 May 1998. Suharto was superseded by B.J. Habibie who recognized the major shifts occurring regarding international opinion on East Timor. Following his entry into office, he announced his support for a referendum on wide-ranging self-determination in East Timor.

On 5 May 1999, Indonesia and Portugal held a Popular Consultation in East Timor. The agreement became the focal point of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1246, under which the UN Mission to East Timor (UNAMET) were deployed to hold a referendum. Resolution 1246 was adopted unanimously on 15 September 1999, after recalling previous resolutions on East Timor, that authorized the establishment of the Multinational International Force for East Timor (INTERFET) to restore peace and security, especially after a violent campaign led by Jakarta-backed militias. On 20 August 1999, the Timorese people rejected “special autonomy” with a 78.5%vote, opening the pathway to full independence. On 30 August 1999, 78% of East Timorese voted for independence.

After centuries of Portuguese colonial rule, an Indonesian occupation that lasted 24 years, East Timor gained its independence on 20 May 2002, emerging as the world’s newest nation-state. Timor-Leste’s transition to statehood has also been accompanied by a transition to democracy.

**Archival Data and Methods**

Historical sociologists tend to read history backwards for some origin point or premise, and not read forward. For instance, from the perspective of world history, the emergence of capitalism is a contingent event. But from the perspective of eighteenth-century France, capitalism was a durable feature in the background of social life. Despite shaping many dimensions of people’s lives, the consequence of capitalism was not consciously experienced and conceptualized until the emergence of political economy in the nineteenth-century (Sewell, 2005). Unpredictability and contingency are a crucial aspect of social life and history. Things cannot be predicted from the start.

For Sewell (1992), structures are real, but they are also transformable. They are transformable and changeable insofar as they are made by humans, both through practical activity and through reconceptualization’s that such social activity imposes sequentially and temporally over time. Life is fraught with events, some of which change institutions and structures, intensify agency, and the course of social movements. In much historical sociological writing, contingencies are irrelevant (Sewell, 1996). For instance, Sewell contends that Immanuel Wallerstein argues from the end state of capitalism back to what occurred in its founding moment through the collapse of feudalism. Nevertheless, Wallerstein’s account is “full of contingencies”: “in Wallerstein’s analysis. The contingencies, choices, and consequences are foreordained by the necessity” (Sewell 1996:250). Sewell argues against teleological temporality and for eventual temporality that sees “the course of history as determined by a succession of largely contingent events” (Sewell, 2005:83). This sandwich thesis takes contingency seriously and utilizes documentary and historical research as a methodology for sociological analysis (Linders, 2008, 2015; Linders et al. 2023; McCulloch, 2004; Fitzgerald, 2012; Sweeney, 2005; ). According to Scott and Marshall (2015:3), historical and documentary research as methodology is “research that uses personal and official documents as source material. Documents may include newspapers, diaries, stamps, directories, handbills, maps, government statistical publications, photographs, paintings, gramophone records, tapes, and computer files.” Historical and documentary research is used to tap into the global solidarity movements' rich archival sources to create a theoretical understanding of the broader sociological narrative through the study of multiple documents surrounding the Indonesian occupation of East Timor. Historical and documentary research is often associated with qualitative content analysis research methodologies and grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2006).

Devices such as specific word choices, metaphors, descriptions, arguments, and visual images help establish social movement discourse and frames. Focusing on textual analysis and particular words and discourses is a primary approach to qualitative framing analysis. The advantage of qualitative historical research is that it allows room for subtleties, historical contingency, and meaning making in analysis.

Historical and documentary analysis often focuses on primary and secondary sources, and data analysis involves both primary and secondary dimensions. Primary sources are evidence that people have left of their past activities, such as organizational records, pamphlets, letters, speeches, and newsletters. Secondary sources include evidence that actors leave from their past social activities, often in the form of interpretations made by others. However, primary historical data analysis involves an interpretation of raw materials. The interpretive aspect of this dissertation is heavily influenced by grounded, constructionist methodological approaches to coding, categorizing, and data analysis (Charmaz, 2006) and attentive deductively to prior social theories in social movement theory.

Social scientists using historical documents must discern documents' intended, received, or internal meaning, which is an interpretive problem. Further, documents, as presented in the archive, can often be selective regarding the information and knowledge presented. Actors often need to record everything about events, so missing data is an issue. Most importantly, the production of historical documents and recording itself is informed by the social, cultural, economic, and political landscape of which actors are a part. This means that social scientists must be sensitive to the social context and historical contingency of events surrounding the social production of archival meaning.

The act of doing historical documentary research involves various stages that have helped to structure the data analysis of this sandwich thesis. Moreover, documentary, and historical methodology incorporated inductive, grounded sensibilities and guidance to help group, code, and categorize the data into broader abstract concepts, attending to the importance of the researcher's interpretation and social theories (Charmaz, 2006). Firstly, some preliminary background to the research, primarily in terms of understanding the historical nature of the conflict, was necessary.

Some vital and important disadvantages must be due to missing or never-produced documents (Linders, 2008). This is the nature of historical archival research and offers some limitations. Moreover, the type of documents the researcher should choose is critical for constructionist archival research (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). The select public documents are central to constructionist archival research and understanding social movement discourse: speeches, media articles, and newsletters, for example. Most importantly, constructionist archival research underscores the notion that historical documents do not speak for themselves. They must be made to speak by the analyst. Two acts of interpretation are crucial and central to making sense of textual data (Denzin, 2008; Holstein et al., 2013): *writing and reading*. The former involves producing, and the latter involves understanding and making sense of what activists wrote and the discourses and messages they sought to communicate. This is central because the primary research question concerning the first two articles is how activists in the global solidarity movement sought to persuade particular audiences to care about the plight of the East Timorese? Part of understanding social movement discourse is to reconstruct, through archival documents, the author's (actors who produced the documents) participation in the process of social construction and social movement (human rights) mobilization from the glimpses that documents provide.

Because historical analysts must, in some shape or form, attribute our participant's actions to motives that we cannot directly perceive, then explicit methods for stepping outside the data to make such connections are essential (Prior, 2003). This means that theory is essential here and influences our methodological decisions regarding collective data, selecting, extracting, and comparing document contents. Further is the problem of inference (see Linders, 2008). Therefore, theoretical assumptions are crucial for the interpretation of archival documents. Theory helps us understand historical locations and that discourses and claims do not occur in a vacuum. Concepts like motivational framing, therefore, are linked to broader sociohistorical structures such as discursive opportunities that provide a “there-there” to the historical locations of actors. Therefore, historical-interpretive perspectives when it comes to documentary/historical research are important because they allow me to simultaneously illustrate and describe the social processes through particular meanings and discourses get constructed and to explore what factors might influence the trajectory of framing and the extent to which political actors engage in moral politics and persuasion, through a comparative historical and cross-national comparison.

The archival data is based and was collected from the Timor International Solidarity Archive Database (TiSa) and the Toronto papers of previously untapped East Timor Alert Network archival material retrieved from the William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections at McMaster University. Although this archive consists primarily of Canadian materials, it includes various boxes containing newsletters from organizations outside Canada. The physical archive contains 4.6 meters of textual records and thirty video cassettes. Whereas research for the first two articles is based primarily on ETAN/solidarity movement newsletters and papers, for Chapter 3, data is drawn primarily from newspaper media sources.

The categories and concepts of analysis emerged inductively from the textual data, in an iterative fashion. Each article provides further detail and elaborations on the data and methodology as tailored to the research goals of each substantive chapter. Qualitative content analysis and grounded methods for coding are used to interpret and contextualize meaning from the content of textual, archival data, adhering to a naturalistic paradigm, and concern with reporting on historical facts accurately. Codes for the papers were derived directly from the text data, iteratively, often with the support of existing theoretical presuppositions (theories of discursive opportunity structures, for instance) which help to interpret social dynamics and relations emerging from the data codes, categories, and historical sequences and facts grounded in the textual data. For instance, chapter 3 codes three distinct frames directly from the archival data (newsletters) but employs theory-building strategies for further contextualizing these codes within broader theoretical framing concerns within the sociology of social movements and social problems theory. Hence codes are directly derived inductively but are also directed, where analysis iteratively moves between data and theory or relevant research findings as guidance for initial codes. The codes are uniquely derived (they are not superimposed or applied from existing literature) but are derived from the ‘natural’ data so to speak. Hence codes and categories are created to best capture what is going on in the data. The aim is to develop codes and categories (for instance, unique frames or deflection strategies) confidently that reflect the data. Indeed, these categories then is contextualized within the existing relevant literature to demonstrate what is shared and where new codes may diverge, or how these codes help to innovate existing theoretical understandings or provide a unique scope in theoretical debates on social movement framing or say sociological understandings of denial and deflection

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Chapter 2

‘The Hidden Holocaust’: The East Timor Alert Network (ETAN) and Human Rights Claims in Canada, 1985-1998

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‘The Hidden Holocaust’: The East Timor Alert Network (ETAN) and Human Rights Claims in Canada, 1985-1998

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Abstract

This article examines the East Timor Alert Network’s (ETAN) claims-making strategies regarding support for human rights and self-determination of East Timor during the Indonesian occupation from 1975-1998. This research seeks to understand how ETAN attempted to persuade Canadians to care about a geographically distant horror. I examine various claims-making strategies that ETAN used to encourage Canadian audiences to evaluate the problem as an object of public concern, the Timorese as victims deserving of their sympathy, and Canadian government as condemnation-worthy.

**2.1 Introduction**

Indonesia’s armed forces swept through East Timor on December 7th of 1975, a small pacific island 300 kilometres northwest of Australia. Timor was a Portuguese colony throughout the 16th century until the Dutch forced the imperial power to the eastern half of the island in 1641. With the overthrow of Portugal’s authoritarian Salazar regime in 1974, its colonies were granted with the right to self-determination. Before the invasion, a brief civil war broke out between two rival political parties: Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (Fretilin) and the Democratic Union of Timor (UDT). Indonesia feared a newly independent state in East Timor would make alliances with external geopolitical threats, like the Soviet Union. Left to their own devices, a “Marxist tyranny”3 would emerge. The Indonesian state depicted Fretilin as “a communist wolf wearing nationalist sheep’s clothing.”4 Shortly after Fretilin declared East Timor to be an independent democratic republic (November 28th 1975), on December 7th, Indonesian forces invaded the island, committing various human rights abuses and atrocities.

As the events in East Timor unfolded, a group called the East Timor Alert Network (ETAN) emerged in Canada. ETAN felt strongly that this was an issue that Canadians should be deeply concerned about, given that from ETAN’s perspective, Canada was complicit in the atrocities by virtue of its supply of arms, tactical advice, commercial and military aid. Worst, still, ETAN pointed out, this support was extended in a shroud of secrecy. As non-governmental advocates joined the movement to support East Timor’s struggle for independence, Canadian advocacy groups like ETAN refused to accept the Canadian government’s argument that the invasion of East Timor was a *fait accompli*, namely that Indonesia’s annexation of East Timor was irreversible, and that East Timor actually desired integration. ETAN campaigned to tell the story of terrible mass violence in East Timor and to bring that violence to an end. Initially, ETAN had difficulty generating public interest in the East Timor human rights crime story. Ultimately, however, it succeeded in drawing significant attention to the issue and in exerting enough public pressure that ETAN succeeded, contributed decisively to the visibility, and thus viability of the East Timor issue in Canada.

This paper examines ETAN’s campaign to constitute the human rights issue in East Timor as a problem that should concern Canadians. It analyzes the ETAN’s activities and strategies regarding support for the East Timorese during the Indonesian occupation from 1975-1998. How did the ETAN persuade Canadians to care about geographically distant East Timor and to construct the causes of the problem for the Canadian public? How did they make it all work out? What strategies were employed to make claims about human rights violations in East Timor viable? This paper describes the claims-making strategies that were used by ETAN and by providing an account of the emergence, organization, and movement of their claims-making activities; to empirically detail and trace the viability and resonance of ETAN’s claims.

**The East Timor Alert Network (ETAN)**

According to Fernandes “there was very little coordinated activism on behalf of East Timor until 1985.”5 The story of activism on behalf of East Timor in Canada began with Elaine Briere, Derek Evans, and Maureen Davies. Peter Monet and David Webster joined later. Although Julia Morrigan and Derek Rasmussen of the East Timor Program, as well as Audrey Samson and Bill Owen of the Canadian section of Amnesty International were early forerunners of East Timor advocacy in Canada, it was the East Timor Alert Network that would take centre stage after 1985, when it formed in 1987 with the support of the Canadian Council of Churches. In 1988, David Webster joined the group.

ETAN subsequently joined the international solidarity networks coordinated by Carmel Budiarjo in the United Kingdom and Luisa Teotonia Pereira in Portugal, and others. ETAN’s successor organizations were The Canadian Action for Indonesia and East Timor (CAFIET) and ACT for Disarmament. Other key members of the Network were Ross Shotton, Maggie Helwig, Kerry Pither, Bella Galhos, and Abé Soares. The Network had chapters all over Canada, from Halifax to Vancouver. Their efforts focused on raising public awareness about the Indonesian occupation of East Timor and Canada’s complicity in the atrocities, publishing newsletters, writing to political MPs in an effort to change government policy, public demonstrations, producing films, and writing news articles in the Canadian media, all with the attempt to change Canadian foreign policy to support East Timor’s right to self-determination.

This paper uses a social constructionist approach to the study of social problems6. Constructionists studies of social problems focus on the viability of claims78, namely their vitality, the extent to which claims-makers use resonant frames to persuade audience members to care and evaluate the problem as intolerable. For instance, viable claims are those that construct victims as types of people worthy of sympathy.9 This paper thus examines ETAN’s meaning-making activities and strategies in making their claims viable.

This research draws from previously untapped archival material from the East Timor Alert Network fonds at McMaster University. The fonds was acquired by David Webster in 2008 and accrued to the William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections. This paper draws from a variety of sources, ranging from photographic material, media coverage, newsletters, lobbying letters, and speeches. However, its source base is incomplete and thus limited. It tells a story chiefly from the perspective of the Toronto papers. Other chapters existed elsewhere in Canada, such as Ottawa, Halifax, and Vancouver. A fuller account of the viability of the Network’s claims in Canada would include these papers, as well as trace ETAN’s connections to the larger transnational solidarity movements of citizen activists supporting East Timor’s struggle for independence. This paper is thematically structured around six claims-making strategies. In order to encourage sympathetic responses from Canadian audiences, ETAN (1) invoked the Holocaust to make moral claims to victimhood, while also promoting human rights in East Timor, (2) constructed typifications of pure and courageous victims, (3) strategically deployed a vocabulary of human rights as a legitimating moral discourse, (4) personalized the testimonies of Timorese victims, (5) strongly condemned and encouraged condemnation of Canadian government “complicity” in Indonesia’s occupation of East Timor, and (6) used photography as a humanizing strategy.

**2.1.2 East Timor and the Jewish Holocaust**

ETAN constituted the Holocaust as a vernacular resource10. Moral vernaculars are part of claims-makers’ social problems work, involved in defining and classifying events11. These can be forms of talk, frames, or schemes of interpretation that organize social problems discourse. Vernacular discourse practices constitute social problems as moral objects. Claims also construct specific types of people, or “people categories12. These are accomplished through victimization practices13 that classify those who have been greatly harmed as victims worthy of sympathy and those who incur the harm as perpetrators deserving of condemnation. Victims are good people, greatly harmed, through no fault, and for no good reason14. Cultural feeling-rules tell us that sympathy should be felt for innocent and morally worthy people who suffer greatly and are not responsible for the injustice. The vocabulary of the Holocaust constructs apocalyptic frameworks and deploys rhetorical idioms of calamity15, that invoke representations of unimaginable human destruction.

The historical horror of the Holocaust has become a paradigmatic example of genocide. As an “atrocity tale,”16 the Holocaust is part of our popular moral discourse, but heavily imbued with symbolic meaning. Drawing on the holocaust as an available cultural and moral vernacular diagnoses the problem and articulates what the problem is “about.” Haunted by images of mass killings and dying, “by death in general,”17 the Holocaust evokes an alarming set of images, serving as a collective representation of universal injustice and grave inhumanity, the “embodiment of radical evil.”18 Atrocity memories like the Holocaust are part of our popular lexicon unambiguously distinguishing good from evil. ETAN’s claims depicted scenes of ethnic cleansing, absolute domination, and genocide, as formula stories19 using the Holocaust to effectively delineate the victims from the perpetrators, and to invoke representations of unimaginable human destruction. Formula stories offer compelling narratives and reimaginings that possess both persuasive and affective force.

Through the vernacular discourse of the Holocaust, ETAN constructed the objects of harm — a crime against humanity and genocide against an entire people. This “diagnostic frame”20 tells us what type of problem it is and who is responsible: Indonesia is carrying out state-sponsored genocide in East Timor commensurate to the Holocaust. Invoking the vocabulary of the Holocaust further establishes the frightening dimensions of the problem, intensifying the urgency of preserving human rights internationally, and relying on our sympathy for Holocaust victims to persuade us to sympathize with the people of East Timor. It also portrays the East Timorese as victims totally subjected to Indonesian rule and genocide. Holocaust memories were evoked to claim “victim status” for the Timorese and name Indonesia as perpetrators of genocide. ETAN came to regard Indonesia’s “illegal invasion of East Timor in 1975” as the beginning of a history of atrocities that culminated in a series of mass murders that left 250,000 Timorese dead, a “wrath” described as one of the most “obscene abandonments of world moral order since the Holocaust.”21

Frames, as interpretive structures22, are overarching processes for categorizing events as part of the reality-assigning practices of social problems work. Human rights abuses occurring in East Timor were essentially framed as a “hidden holocaust” or “hidden genocide” (see *Figure 2*), which served to draw attention to a secret horror concealed from public scrutiny, raising further questions about Canada’s compliance towards those responsible for crimes against humanity. The “hidden holocaust” was thus part of a moral call to break the silence over the least known genocide in the worlds and to invigorate collective action. For instance, Derek Rasmussen of the Indonesia East Timor Program wrote the following in a tabloid titled “East Timor: A Call for Justice” published by the *Nuclear Free Press*, and in *Briarpatch*, a left-leaning magazine in Regina, Saskatchewan, establishing the commensurability between East Timorese victims and the victims of the Holocaust:

East Timor is the worst act of genocide since the Jewish Holocaust. At least one-third of all living East Timorese have been killed. For official purposes, the Timorese language has been banned, their culture dismantled.23

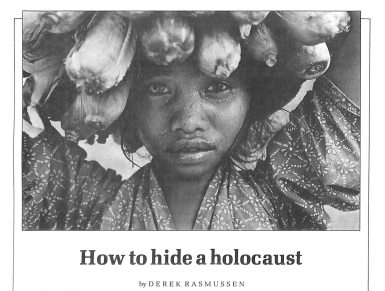


Figure 1 (From Rasmussen’s article published in *Briarpatch*. The photo is by Elaine Briere, courtesy of Elaine Briere).

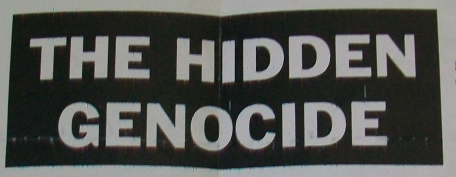


Figure 2 (From ETAN leaflet).

That same tabloid also asserted that the world was ignoring “the hidden holocaust of East Timor.”24

Rasmussen’s claims highlighted Canada’s complicity in Indonesian human rights violations. Rasmussen quoted a priest who witnessed the violence first-hand, calling the barbarities, “the cruelties, the pillaging, the unqualified destruction of East Timor, the executions without reason,” an “organized evil.”25 Rasmussen and the Network drew from Amnesty reports, especially AI’s 1985 report titled *East Timor: Violations of Human Rights*, which had “vast credibility.”26 In 1985, Rasmussen wrote a “hard-hitting piece”27 in the *Globe and Mail*, titled “East Timor, a Tragedy Ignored.” While Briere’s images cover the front pages of the article, Rasmussen reproached Canada’s military trade with Indonesia, noting that while Foreign Affairs Minister Joe Clark denied the atrocities in East Timor, AI sent their 1985 report to Canadian officials. For instance, Rasmussen quoted Brian Cameron, AI’s spokesman in Ottawa: “I am astonished that External Affairs said that … for the past six years we’ve been providing External Affairs with information that shows a systematic pattern of human rights violations.”28 According to ETAN, Canadian government officials often ignored the evidence or discredited those who spoke out against the ongoing human rights abuses, deploying a counterrhetoric that deflected responsibility from Indonesia and reattributed blame to Portuguese and Freitlin irresponsibility.29

The genocide and starvation, according to a Timorese priest quoted in Rasmussen’s article was the result “of the full-scale incendiary bombing by Indonesian forces.”30 Indonesian troops “herded the starving Timorese into military-run “resettlement” camps.”31 In 1985, Bishop Belo listed a detailed account of army abuses in East Timor, including “successive, systematic and regular ‘cleaning-up operations’ of the Indonesian army against centres of resistance”; summary executions by shooting; “the concentration of the population in resettlement camps in inhuman conditions.”32 There was the attempt to “Indonesianize” the Timorese people “through powerful Pancasila campaigns,” Indonesia’s state ideology.33 In 1981, Martinho da Costa Lopes, an apostolic administrator from Dili, spoke of the catastrophic consequences of *Operation Security*, alternatively known as the “fence of the legs”34 in letters released to the public, and of many Timorese that were killed, including “innocent children, pregnant women and defenseless people without any crimes except their willingness to be independent from all oppression.”35 Women in East Timor especially were portrayed as indubitable victims of genocide, subjected to rape, assault, forced sterilizaiton, birth control, depo provera; a family planning program that the Network referred to as a thoroughly “genocidal policy.”36

In 1988 and 1989, Elaine Briere and David Webster and other members of ETAN continued to raise concern over the continuing “killing fields” in East Timor, which she called one of the “most violent and preventable of modern-day genocides.”37 Her claims appeared again in a 1988 *Globe and Mail* article titled “Tribulations of a Tiny Nation, where she argued that “200,000 people have died in East Timor since 1975,”38 the result of famine, massacres and military confinement. ETAN used the scary number39 and incidence estimate of “200,000” as a statistical resource to establish the frightening parameters and magnitude of human rights abuses in East Timor40. Briere’s claims also condemned Canadian complicity in the atrocities through its “considerable diplomatic support” to Indonesia, “in its effort to have the issue removed from all U.N. agendas.”41 David Webster wrote in the *Toronto Star* and *Peace Magazine* that Indonesia aimed to “destroy the Timorese as a distinct people,”42 and Bev Bedford in the *Winnipeg Free Press* calling it a “Holocaust in Paradise,”43 which became one of the Network’s evocative campaign slogans:

A hidden holocaust has engulfed East Timor. In fourteen years of Indonesian military occupation, 250,000 out of a population of 680,000 have died, a result of war, bombing of villages, illness, and deliberately induced famine …44

…250,000 of the pre-invasion population of 680,000 have died under military occupation, a holocaust which makes the killing fields of Cambodia look positively benign.45

It is the worst genocide per capita since the Holocaust! The murders, mass executions, torture, rape, resettlement camps, gas attacks and starvation policies have been all well documented and are still going on to this day.46

Through the interpretive frame of the Holocaust, ETAN instruct audiences to perceive the plight of East Timorese victims as equivalent to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. As a discourse of undeniability,47 the language of the Holocaust paints the East Timor issue as extreme, severe, and urgently in need of Canadian attention. A mass violence that should not be denied. Invoking the Holocaust characterizes the events in East Timor as unchallengeable, undeniable, or “that which should not be denied,” a “never again”48 reality. It works as the benchmark of ultimate horror. The Holocaust represents an evil that must obviously be avoided. Its invocation connects East Timor to the universal elements of human existence that hold absolute moral warnings from history.

However, ETAN advanced claims to counter government statements that the deaths of the invasion were caused by natural processes. Famines, when caused by natural factors, are terrifying realities. ETAN endowed famine and starvation in East Timor with special horror, namely as caused and compounded by the policies of the Indonesian state, which Canadian arm sales helped to sustain, the U.S. supplying 90% of the arms. Briere appeared in Mark Archbar and Peter Wintonick’s 1992 documentary film based on Noam Chomsky’s *Manufacturing Consent*, in which she called the Indonesian invasion of East Timor one of the great “evil deeds of history.” Famine and starvation were not merely the consequence of endemic malnutrition in the region or problems with its agricultural base and landscape, as some Canadian officials defined it,49 but rather, the result of deliberate Indonesian policies:

…they took women aside and flew them off to Dili in helicopters for use (as sex slaves) by the Indonesian soldiers. They killed children and babies. But in those days, their main strategy and main weapon was starvation.50

What had happened and was happening for ETAN, was neither inadvertent nor accidental, but systematic, willful murder. The claims, therefore, impute moral responsibility, or culpability to Indonesia for the deaths.

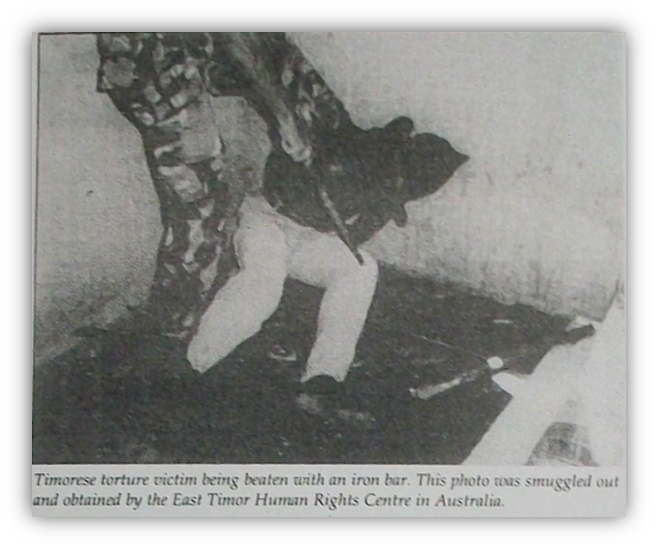


Figure 3 (Timorese torture victim. In *East Timor Update*, September 15, 1996, Number 47. Published by ETAN. Manuel Soares “murdered in cold blood”).

Canadian news outlets, such as the *Ottawa Citizen*, also described the situation in East Timor as a “horror,” and the Indonesian military occupation “Hitlerian.”51 Answering the question, “Why should we care?” Joan Thomson, part of the Network’s Calgary chapter, portrayed the Timorese as innocent victims, and Indonesia as akin to Nazi criminals. She wrote the following in the *Calgary Herald*:

Canadians should care. We are known to feel strongly about human rights issues, and we are proud to be international peacekeepers. That most of us do not know that the federal government is supplying arms to Indonesia – arms being used to murder innocent civilians, including women and children, simply because they were born in East Timor … Why should we care? Because indifferences prevailed when rumors the Nazi atrocities began to surface 50 years ago. People questioned reports of atrocities but did very little to help the victims. When the evidence was finally unveiled, it was too late. There is still time to address the tragedy in East Timor.52

Here, Thompson seeks to establish the cultural resonance of their claims by invoking the Canadian collective identity of humanitarianism and peacekeeping; a moral duty to commit to such principles in foreign policy. She provides the “motivational frame”53 that gives justification and warrant for action to solve the problem. Moreover, her appeal to Canadian “cultural feeling-rules”54 and why they should “care,” taps into our sense of pride as international peacekeepers and preservers of humanitarianism. Peacekeeping has a special place in Canadian collective memory and identity. Invoking our pride as “international peacekeepers” conjures up emotions and images of courageous actions in catastrophic situations, protecting people who are in mortal danger55, helping to resolve the conflicts of horrifying predicaments and to bring peace, compassion and order to far-distant, war-ravaged areas. The claim invokes a symbolic idealization of values that Canadians should hold and thus work as culturally viable frames. As Thomson urges, our cultural feeling-rules about being proud international peacekeepers, global humanitarians, and strong supporters of human rights, should induce in us the sympathy to care for the plight of East Timor, and help them. These Canadian cultural feeling-rules are general conventions about how we ought to respond emotionally to specific issues with sympathy and compassion; making human rights claims resonate more effectively with the public and persuading them to help the victims.

These claims attempt to evoke our compassionate and sympathetic feelings about caring for human rights causes abroad, not be complicit in genocide. Further, it tells us that the Timorese are suffering horribly, and Canadians should worry. Worse still, it tells us our government is complicit in that suffering by selling arms to Indonesia. By tapping into these “cultural feeling-rules” and themes, and foregrounding Canada’s betrayal and dishonor of its peacekeeping and humanitarian spirit, ETAN sought to encourage anger, moral outrage, condemnation, and loathing for Canada’s complicity. Thomson’s account also contains “stock characters,”56 of which Timorese victims are contrasted with Indonesian victimizers. Thomson’s account and call on Canadians to “care” portrays the Timorese as innocent and blameless civilians, being murdered by Canadian arm sales to Indonesia. Her account, therefore, portrays the Timorese as morally worthy victims, helpless and deserving of Canadian care and sympathy.

Reference to the Nazi Holocaust is also evident in Thomson and the Networks claims, which reaffirms a historical moral imperative, namely that the Holocaust occurred precisely because ordinary people ignored the unbelievable oppression inflicted on innocents by the German Reich. The imperative demands that we do not, like the millions of people who went about their daily lives, deliberately turn a blind eye to the suffering of those we do not directly relate to. They were indifferent to the injustices. Constructing the Timorese as “victims of our indifference”57 was important in competing for media attention.The Holocaust was humankind’s darkest hour. Thomson’s employment of the Holocaust rhetoric in effect says, “This is your chance to do it right this time, step up and act!”

The “hidden holocaust” was also employed by sympathetic Canadian parliamentarians who helped to sustain the Network’s claims politically. For instance, David Kilgour at the United Nations Decolonization Hearings, described that “this has been called the “hidden holocaust,” the tragic events that have ravaged the population of East Timor,” citing “accurate estimates” of deaths being as many “as 200,000” of a population of nearly “700,000” who have perished from acts of violence, starvation and disease since the 1975 invasion by troops of Indonesian General Suharto,”58 namely genocidal policies, the outcome of a deliberate and premeditated plan, undertaken as a means for destroying the Timorese as a nation. Further, as a “hidden holocaust,” Kilgour and members of ETAN implicated Canada in the horrors, noting its complicity in the “holocaust,” primarily through economic ties and diplomatic support at the United Nations. Kilgour further invoked Canadian collective identity and its humanitarian legacy, calling on Canada to revive its “past record to protect human rights.”59

Linda Hossie of *The Globe and Mail*, Louise Crosby of the *Ottawa Citizen*, and David Todd of *Southam News*, the *Calgary Herald* and CFMT-TV in Toronto were critical in keeping the East Timor issue alive in the Canadian media. These Canadian journalists, sympathetic to the Network’s claims and cause, were particularly vocal in expressing moral outrage over the atrocities in East Timor and were integral to sustaining the framing of Indonesia’s occupation of East Timor as synonymous with the Holocaust. For instance, David Todd wrote the following in the *Weekend Observer*, “by any sensible yardstick what has transpired in East Timor since 1975 has been a holocaust,” where “200,000 Timorese civilians” were killed by the Indonesian government in battle and in “concentration camps or through famine.”60 Phrases like “concentration camps” immediately conjure up images of the Holocaust. Other titles that appeared in Canadian newspapers included “Death in Paradise,”61 “Horrors continues in East Timor,”62 and “Our Brutal Friends.”63 These articles were written primarily as a response to the Santa Cruz Massacre in Dili, 1991, which helped to confer victim status to the Timorese by absolving them of responsibility for the massacre. *Globe and Mail* reporter Linda Hossie published a highly critical article of Indonesia’s illegal occupation of East Timor titled “East Timor: Will Ottawa Put its Money Where its Mouth Is?” also condemning Canada’s complicit silence:

Genocide is a subject that comes up repeatedly in relation to Indonesia. Its campaign of forced birth control, the massacre of innocent civilians and the suppression of centuries old cultures are all part of Indonesia’s repressive tactics on the islands such as East Timor … Canada has been surprisingly – shockingly – muted in its outrage.64

Hossie’s article, which featured Briere’s images, underscored the early violence of the invasion; the pointless killing of innocent civilians, for no reason at all. She describes how during the first twenty-four hours Indonesian soldiers show 150 people “at random,” including “women whose terrified children had to be torn from their arms.”65 Todd and Hossie’s responding claims were a triumph for publicity of the East Timor issue in Canada, critical in sustaining its viability in Canadian news pages. Briere’s film also sought to evoke anger, horror, and indignation from members of the Canadian public. Many of these claims invoked themes of “Nazi collaborators,” comparing Suharto’s evil deeds to the Holocaust and shaming Canada for its willful complicity in war crimes. Perpetrator of genocide and their accomplices are to be held responsible, condemned, and brought to justice.

The “hidden holocaust” frame constituted the issue in East Timor as a moral emergency, but also an ignored and silenced reality of “forgotten victims”. Forgotten victims must be heard. Further, the framework conveys an overlooked horror of systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder, executed without contrition and outside the complete view of international monitors and the media, and whose enormity paralleled that of the “holocaust.” It is “hidden” in the sense that it had remained invisible, officially unrecognized, but also whitewashed in a shroud secrecy: Indonesia’s denial over its responsibility for the deaths, and Canada’s complicity in that concealment. Through these claims, one is reminded of the secret horrors that have left an indelible stain on history, such as Stalin’s early “hidden holocaust”in the 1930s, during his forced collectivization of agriculture in Ukraine. In a manner redolent of tours once provided to visitors in Stalin’s Russia, Jakarta restricted and controlled access to the island by humanitarian groups, diplomats, and journalists. These claims also convey the sense in which the existence of the Timorese in their entirety is urgently in peril and on the brink of destruction, escalating and intensifying quickly, a desperate moral exigency in need of immediate redressing.

**2.1.3 Victim Typifications and Human Rights**

Loseke builds on Holstein and Miller’s idea that the label victim constructs people as *not responsible* for creating the harm experienced, whereas victimizers and those who assist them, such as accomplices, are to be evaluated as responsible for committing this harm.66 Victim and victimizer categorizations in claims-making activity, for Loseke, construct “people categories” or people types inhabiting “particular moral universes” which simultaneously places them within “particular universes of sympathy-worthiness or condemnation-worthiness.”67 Claims-makers, therefore, also construct preferred emotional orientations. For instance, within folk reasoning, a moral person unjustly harmed deserves our compassion, sympathy, concern, and help. According to Loseke, “pure victims” are types of people that are constructed as in no way responsible for their plight.68 Victims perceived to be innocent and undeserving of harm are categorized as moral and sympathy-worthy, whereas those placed within blameworthy social problems categorization systems are instructed to be evaluated as immoral and deserving of condemnation.69

Joan Thomson’s emphasis on Indonesia’s murder of innocent “women and children” brought into the focus the “ideal victims”70 who were caught in the terror without choice, which are most likely to evoke sympathy. At the 1988 United Nations Decolonization Hearings (UNDC), Elaine Briere framed the Indonesian invasion as a “massive slaughter of defenseless people” and that since 1975, East Timor had been subjected to “one of the world’s most brutal and unprovoked wars, made all the more horrific by the fact that it was a war waged against a small, largely unarmed, civilian population.”71 These “innocent civilians” and “defenseless people,” in both Briere and Thomson’s accounts cast the Timorese as victims being overcome by a more powerful, aggressive perpetrator, dramatizing their essential innocence while simultaneously drawing historical links to the Nazi genocide. The consequences of assigning victim status to the Timorese is “exoneration of responsibility.”72 Victim designations absolve people from fault for their troubles and render them “worthy of other’s concerns”73. Thomson and Briere’s accounts of innocence establish the Timorese as defenseless people being murdered by a brutal regime that is guilty of a condemnable “unprovoked” aggression against a smaller, “unarmed” neighbour, which instructs audience members to evaluate the East Timorese as victims in no way responsible for the harm, injustice and oppression that befell them, and therefore as innocent of provoking their own victimization. Designating them as “innocent” further establishes their essential purity,and that sympathy should be felt for innocent and morally upright people74. Those who are not responsible for the harm they experience are deserving of public sympathy75. Therefore, both Briere and Thomson construct the Timorese as people who had done nothing wrong to provoke the attack. They are cast as defenseless victims trapped within yet resisting an oppressive occupation that is beyond their immediate control, locked out from the outside world. This further describes the Timorese as “oppressed victims” of Indonesian rule who are “suffering horribly”76. As oppressed victims of human rights abuse and genocide, they are constrained by Indonesian rule. These victims are ideal and sympathy-inducing in the sense that they are experiencing grave injustices and horrendous violence through “no fault of their own.”77.

These victim images — a people in desperate need of help by the international community — justifies intervention on their behalf. They are also afforded victim status because they are to be evaluated as a morally upright people — “peaceful lifestyle,” “paradise,” and “friendly” — now courageously resisting an unprovoked invasion and struggling for their right to self-determination. Claims and narratives construct representations of the types of people who are affected and harmed by the problem78. Briere’s *Bitter Paradise: The Sell-Out of East Timor* was instrumental in framing the genocidal dimensions of Indonesia’s occupation, Canadian complicity and idealizing the Timorese to make them *morally worthy and pure victims*.The process ofconstructing “victim purity” emphasizes that “victims are in no way responsible for the harm they experience”79. Briere’s narrative framing of East Timor as a “paradise” served to counter the accounts offered by Canadian representatives, such as Glen Shortliffe, who framed Timor as a barren wasteland. In a process of constructing people, Briere’s narration of the Timorese at the beginning of *Bitter Paradise* portrayed them as a good natured, “gracious and dignified” people devoted primarily to innocent activities like family affairs and claims, “hospitable to strangers,” and cooperative and helpful to one another, where serious crimes like “murder and rape were virtually unknown” to the Timorese. They were a self-sufficient *people, free of problems and bothering no one*. They were typified as a innocent people living in peace and hence morally pure. She even describes how sleeping in a Timorese women’s house felt “indescribably pleasant and serene.”80 Briere’s halcyon images evoking a pre-invasion existence of serenity and paradise, and a people typified as morally good and harmless in a “peaceful land,” was starkly juxtaposed to the brutality, hell and monstrosity of Indonesian rule. This is made all the more horrific, for Briere and ETAN, by the fact that a “big and bad” and well-armed offender is torturing and murdering a small, unarmed people in an unprovoked attack, made possible by Canadian arm sales to Indonesia. These claims evoke images of the underdog and that we should feel sympathy for underdogs. Through these victim and victimizer accounts, or what Foucault calls “dividing practices”81, the Timorese are constructed as pure victim types who are morally pure and innocent, contrasted starkly to the enormous sufferings, destruction and horrifying consequences that the Indonesian occupation has caused this way of life, as well as the complete complicity of Canada in cultural genocide.

These “people categories” — a peaceful, innocent, good and harmless people now suffering greatly and unjustly — encourages audience members to judge and classify the Timorese as pure victims who are not to be blamed for inviting the harm and injustice, nor deserving of it, as commentators inveighed Indonesia’s invasion that accompanied “mass rapes, torture, and other violations of the heretofore peaceful people’s civil rights.”82 Briere constructs the Timorese as “perfect victims,” namely a good people, now greatly harmed, through no fault of their own, and for no good reason83. Briere’s claims also inveighed against the devaluation of Timorese culture, namely that Western industrial societies have much to learn from indigenous people and that chance is gradually slipping away as well allow their cultures to be destroyed in the face of “the industrial age.” Here, Briere constructs the moral purity and worthiness of the Timorese people, which evokes a tragic nostalgia of “a way of life soon to be lost” and made irreplaceable if not contested successfully by the international community: “the Timorese way of life holds the answers to many of our modern-day problems … the terrible irony behind the destruction of societies like those in East Timor is that they are the surviving models developed countries need to emulate if we are to live in harmony with nature and with each other.”84 Audiences are instructed to evaluate the Timorese as morally worthy, deserving of assistance and public sympathy, because they have much to teach us about our own destructiveness.

UN resolutions 384 and 389 recognized East Timor’s right to self-determination and called on all states to respect its territorial integrity, and for Indonesia to withdraw its forces immediately from the island. The Timorese resistance portrayed themselves as defending their country in the face of invasion, oppression, and genocide. Both the Timorese85 and the Network invoked a vocabulary of human rights to push their case and appeal to the sympathy and support of the international community, dedicated to upholding the fundamental principles of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR). This language held moral resonance with international audiences. East Timor’s resistance was to an *illegal* and *oppressive occupier*:a militant colonialism in an age of decolonization, which had been granted no international and legal legitimacy to invade and occupy. Indonesia’s claim to sovereignty over East Timor was never accepted by the United Nations. It remained an open legal issue. The Timorese were thus constructed, by the Network, as an innocent people unjustly invaded, unjustly subjected to a war, whose primary aim was to destroy those who opposed an unjust (forced) integration86.

At the UNDC, Briere drew on the revered and morally resonant language of rights, values, and principles of both the UDHR and the *Charter* to defend East Timor’s right to self-determination. Briere used this moral vocabulary and discourse of human rights to win the sympathies of committee members and the world that East Timor was deserving of their rights and its protection. This vocabulary allowed the ETAN to examine the problem through a normative language and framework of human rights and to speak of *victims of human rights abuses, genocide, and crimes against humanity*. Briere argued that “the people of East Timor have been under an alien subjugation by Indonesia for almost 14 years and have been denied their fundamental human rights.”87 Indonesia invaded the territory without provocation, against the will and “wishes of the Timorese people” who died “in great numbers to defend their rights as stated in Resolution 1514 (XV).”88 Where was this “right to self-determination for the Timorese people?” questioned Briere. Indonesia breached the principles of non-interference in the internal affairs of states and the respect for the sovereign rights and territorial integrity of all peoples as enshrined in the *Charter,* by illegally occupying the island. Briere anchored ETAN’s claims in the values of rights, in a language of sympathy, but also in a moral order that respects “all that is human,”89 namely that affirms the universality of “humanity in the abstract.” Briere and ETAN advanced claims based on the language of entitlement90 that emphasized the morality of opportunity, rights, freedoms, and that condemned oppression in East Timor. Their claims sought to expand the distribution of human rights in East Timor grounded in a morality of equality before international law, respect for human dignity and a language of liberation that asserted East Timor’s freedom to collectively choose how they might realize their life. ETAN often appealed to Canadians with the following slogans for purposes of recruiting members, soliciting funds, and constructing the moral worthiness of the Timorese, casting them as deserving of Canadian help: “Help Free East Timor,” “Where is Canada’s voice?”, “Who Cares about East Timor? You Do,” “Help Drum Indonesia Out of East Timor!”, “East Timor is a Canadian Issue.”

*Figure 4* implicitly conveys the absolute value of children. Violence perpetrated against children is a horror story. Yet, ETAN’s image plays on the juxtaposition where we expect Canada, as a “generous donor” to Indonesia, to use our “tax money” to invest productively in foreign aid that helps poor children, not bombs them. The image communicates to Canadians that “we have been duped.” What is happening with our tax dollars is the opposite of what we would expect. Further, it serves as a diagnostic frame that attributes blame for genocide in East Timor to (a) Indonesia for illegally occupying, repressing, and violating fundamental human rights, and (b) implicates Canada as an accomplice whom, through foreign aid deals and investments, make it possible for the Indonesian regime to carry out its violence. The image serves to elicit moral indignation from the Canadian public: our tax money is linked to genocide. The use of children is strategic: we see the plight of East Timor through the face of a child. The vulnerability and innocence of children, as worthy ideal victims, key into cultural themes that induces empathy. Yet, with Canadian financial support, these “children’s villages” were being destroyed. Victims, particularly children, deserve protection. By designating the Timorese as victims, generalizing the child’s innocence to all East Timor, ETAN attempted to bring legitimacy to their claims in the name of humanitarianism and justice.

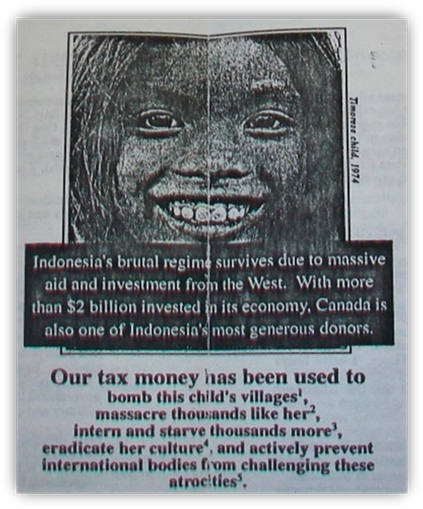


Figure 4 (Photo by Elaine Briere, courtesy of Elaine Briere. ETAN Leaflet).

The Dili Massacre of 1991 led to the deaths of close to 300 pro-independence demonstrators and the political persecution and torture of many students. In response to international outrage, Indonesia labelled these pro-independence demonstrators as “dangerous,” “brutal,” “ill-bred delinquents,” “belligerent,” “acting destructively,” “emotionally” and “aggressively”91 Indonesia’s *Advanced Report of the National Commission of Inquiry into the November 12th Incident* *in Dili* exonerated the government and military command from responsibility, blaming the demonstrators for “premediated provocation,”92 which according to Indonesia’s account, precipitated a tense and antagonistic atmosphere which led to the stabbing of an Indonesian army officer. This was aggravated by the “provocative belligerence and aggressive attitude”93 of the Timorese “crowd.” The Indonesian government framed their soldiers as “victims” and the “brutal crowd” as the real victimizers, namely as responsible for provoking the soldiers to fire. The claims and counterclaims regarding who was the “victim” and who was the “perpetrator” played out internationally, with eye-witness testimonies supporting the accounts of pro-independence demonstrators94. As a “victim contest”95, the Indonesian government subverted the relational pair of victim-perpetrator (that is, “they” as the perpetrator) and claimed themselves to be the “victims,” labelling the demonstrators as “security disrupter perpetrators (SDP)”96.

ETAN, however, challenged these attributions of responsibility. They deflected responsibility from the real “victims” — the pro-independence demonstrators — who they claimed were marching peacefully, and reattributed blame to the Indonesian military who had fired without provocation. ETAN’s claims absolved the East Timorese demonstrators from responsibility in and lack of control over the harm they experienced. Their “vocabularies of motive”97 characterized Indonesian officials and military as attempting to neutralize their actions by “blaming the victim.”98 For ETAN, as well as for outside investigations into the events such as the *International Committee of Jurists*99, Indonesian officials placed their responsibility for unethical action onto the “victims” in order to exonerate themselves by dehumanizing the demonstrators. For instance, to demonstrate the magnitude of evil of the Indonesian military and their dehumanization of the Timorese, ETAN often quoted statements from General Try Sutrisno, the commander of the Indonesian Armed Forces, who stated that Timorese who resist integration are “delinquent (ill-bred) people who have to be shot, and we will shoot them.”100 These statements were used to construct images of the Indonesian military as purely evil. ETAN’s descriptive practices, therefore, designated the Timorese demonstrators and the procession as “peaceful” and the demonstrators as “unarmed” and “truly defenseless” “victims” killed in “cold blood.”101 The Dili Massacre was a “planned military operation against unarmed civilians.” These claims deflect responsibility and are designed to address the problem, bestow “victim status”102 to the Timorese, the real victims and therefore to exempt them from blame. This victimization strategy provides exoneration from responsibility, which led Indonesian officials to neutralize their moral culpability by invoking vocabularies that “denied the victim.” Exonerating the Timorese of responsibility for the harm that ensued, they are designated as the innocent party in the conflict; ideal victims blameless of wrongdoing and who played no active part in their own victimization. The Timorese are designated as “innocent” victims and hence moral.

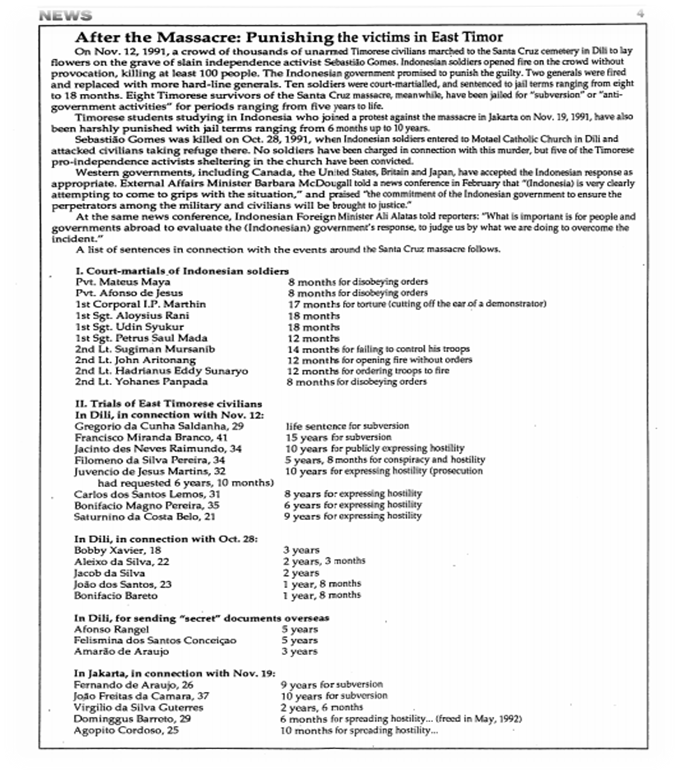


Figure 5 (From ETAN newsletter)

Therefore, to address the problem of victim-blaming, the Network created images of the Timorese demonstrators as ideal, innocent victims — defenseless and peaceful — but also as courageous victims heroically defending their fundamental rights and advancing peace and justice. For instance, Constancio Pinto’s account framed the demonstrators as having innocent and pure intentions and the Indonesian troops as instigating the violence, “our plan was to demonstrate peacefully. None of the marchers did anything to provoke the Indonesian troops.”103 Police agents provocateurs, according to Pinto’s account, began throwing rocks, breaking windows, and beating the demonstrators with sticks. By virtue of acting peacefully and on account of advancing their just cause, the Timorese here are cast — but also presenting themselves — as agentic, courageous victims beyond rebuke, shielded from the blame of complicity in bringing about their own harm. Acting within the bounds of internationally recognized human rights helped to elevate their victim status, securing the innocence of these courageous victims in defending their fundamental rights not to be arbitrarily incarcerated and tortured.

As we have seen, the “hidden holocaust frame” was used as a strategy to bring attention to and unveil a carefully guarded secret of mass murder, to the victims of our silence and indifference. The historical aberration of the Holocaust was used as a paradigm of empathy. Packaging claims and grievances in terms of a holocaust and, more specifically, a “hidden holocaust,” can stir sympathy and assemble moral support for a cause. It universalizes atrocity and victimization. The Network sought to effectively bring the “hidden” stories of Timor’s “forgotten victims” to the attention of the public. This would prove to be an important strategy, considering that Timorese voices were often deemphasized in the Canadian news media. With no Timorese diaspora in Canada, media coverage remained scant. However, this would change with the arrival of Bella Galhos and Abé Barreto Soares in Canada. The plot of social problems formula stories is extreme harm.104 Who were the harmed victims of human rights abuses, crimes against humanity and genocide in East Timor? Personalizing victim stories served as vivid accounts of repression, violence, suffering, and trauma experienced by the people of East Timor. These horrific testimonies would be used to cut through the passivity of Canadians and to draw news attention to the unrelenting death and destruction in East Timor. The horror arrived at the doorsteps of Canadians, and the courageous victims who spoke out would end the silence.

**2.1.4 Personalizing Victims and Everyday Terror in East Timor**

Viable claims construct compelling images of extreme harmand construct “images of victims as “pure.”105 First-person victim stories were used to motivate Canadians to become concerned about the horrors in East Timor and to feel sympathy for the horrible suffering of the harmed victims of East Timor. These first-person accounts are examples of what Loseke calls “personalizing victims,” a claims-making strategy used to “encourage audience members’ feelings of sympathy”106. The testimonies of the invasion and occupation conveyed the widespread pain, horror, and nightmarish reality of terror that the majority of Timorese experienced as they were attacked, displaced, starved, tortured and forcibly relocated into “concentration camps.” As dramatic evidence, they testify to the fear they experienced during childhood when Indonesian forces entered and searched their homes. The stories act as motivational frames instructing Canadians to evaluate the Indonesian occupation as morally troublesome by highlighting the extreme, “horrifying consequences” of the problem107. The stories served to encourage moral outrage, shock, anger, and indignation, directing the Canadian public to assess Indonesia as a perpetrator of great harm and war crimes, Suharto as a war criminal, and embarrassing supporters like Canada as complicit in sustaining that harm.

Abé Barreto Soares, Bella Galhos, and Constancio Pinto were among the many Timorese who gave talks at dozens of North American speaking tours that included screenings of Briere’s 1997 film *Bitter Paradise*, and footage from the Dili Massacre. Bella and Abéboth became representatives to Canada of the Timorese Resistance Coalition, the National Council of Maubere Resistance (CNRM). Their stories provided Canadians with a direct bridge to the East Timor issue. Soares, Galhos and Pinto were depicted as courageous victims and survivors taking great risk to provide testimony to their people’s subjugation to core human rights abuses and crimes against humanity: extrajudicial incarceration and killings, torture, and arbitrary arrests. Their stories came to typify the “horror story”108 of East Timor in Canada.

Compelling victim accounts key into the rationalities of commonsense reasoning about human rights problems. Many of the stories that filled ETAN newsletters were often offered without interpretation, conveying implicitly and commonsensically that these abuses should be evaluated as violating fundamental values of life and that the Timorese are truly victims. The sheer weight of the details of physical, emotional, and moral suffering “told a story” about systematic rights abuses perpetrated against the Timorese. Canadians, upon reading these gruesome and harrowing stories of absolute domination and unbearable suffering, are directed to evaluate the harm as so great that it should in no way be tolerated. ETAN specified the need to “draw public attention to a situation which is one of heightened terror.”109 For instance, George Adamson, a member of ETAN, wrote the following in the *Peterborough Examiner* in 1993:

If the full story be told in detail it would be shocking, not boring. The detailed testimony of East Timorese victims, involving torture, intimidation, killing and blackmail is enough to arouse outrage and raise questions as to why our government, over the years, has been so compliant toward those responsible for crimes against humanity.110

The full horror story, for ETAN, would elicit negative emotion and dramatize the most horrid dimensions of the problem. These stories of oppression filled ETAN’s newsletters to make visible and remind audiences that the problem was commonplace, and demanded serious attention:

The East Timorese people are subjected to many forms of human rights violations, including rape, forced abortions, mass executions, and torture. In one gruesome example, an East Timorese priest told a visiting journalist about a 15-year old girl who was arrested, raped repeatedly and killed after her genitals were cut off and placed in her mouth and her breasts were cut off and placed one in each hand.111

This gruesome account depicts Indonesia as irredeemably evil, inhumane, cold-blooded, monstrous, and sadistic mass murders killing the most innocent and vulnerable. Ghastly stories like the above were used to raise awareness about the severity of the problem as morally reprehensible and to elicit fear, outrage, and revulsion, with the hope of motivating Canadian citizen engagement.

A first “historic conference”112 took place on October 19th and 20th, 1989 at Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario. This conference “brought together activists, academics, students and politicians from Portugal to Japan,”113 and was critical in promulgating the movement to support East Timor, as well as in disseminating firsthand accounts of oppression and horror. Jose Gutteres’ and Ramos-Horta, two Timorese exiles, were invited to speak at the conference, along with the founding members of ETAN, such as Elaine Briere and Derek Evans. The Carleton conference acted as a springboard for inserting the Network’s claims into the public and media discourse. It also helped to put the issue on the political agenda, as it drew support from Canadian political MPs like David Kilgour. Major Canadian newspapers, primarily in central Canada, responded to the sense of urgency generated by the conference, calling on Canadian help. For instance, the Ottawa Citizen republished the horror tales of Ramos-Horta, describing the testimony as a “shocking rights abuse.”114 Jose Gutteres’ testimony was repeated in the *Globe and Mail* and the *Gazette*:

Still another victim, Jose Gutteres, 34, who arrived in Lisbon last year, was arrested as a Fretilin fighter. He claims he was beaten at an army post in Dili and was then stripped, had his arms and feet tied, and was held underwater in a tank for long intervals.115

His testimony served to affirm and give meaning to ETAN’s claims about systematic human rights abuses in East Timor by personally focusing on the grim details of the violence he experienced.

In 1991, ETAN distributed a public report on torture to inform Canadians about the rights violations following the Dili Massacre. The report detailed the torture story of Abilio Mesquita, a “torture victim”116 and Timorese student who was arbitrarily arrested for partaking in the pro-independence demonstration. The report asserted that “any Timorese exercising the right to demonstrate and protest against the military’s presence and their atrocities against an *innocent people*, is treated like a criminal.”117 Abilio and other students were singled out by Indonesia as part of its “campaign of terror” during the aftermath of the Dili Massacre. Abilio’s “torture story” was used by ETAN as a case of the “widespread violations” of human rights “at the hands of military intelligence.”118 Mesquita’s story appeared in various Canadian newspapers, including Toronto’s *Now* and the *Catholic News Times*:

They tried to implicate Father Ricardo and the bishop of East Timor, repeating over and over again that it was they who had ordered me to organize the demonstration. I denied this and said: “No, I joined the demonstration because I was conscious of what was going on in East Timor, the atrocities and injustices against innocent people. I joined on my own free will and without influence from anyone, and because I wanted to defend the right of independence for the people of East Timor. “In answer, they took the iron rod again and kicked and punched me repeatedly and then finally, took a large stone, smashing it on my head. Blood was streaming down my face and I fell over. While I was lying on the ground, they took a rifle butt and smashed it into my face, and from this my right jaw broke. In agony, I shouted: “Oh Jesus.” They mocked me, saying, “Go and call your Jesus to come down and help you.” I wanted to cry but no tears came.119

The extreme violence of Abilio’s testimony and his helpless suffering — calling on Jesus to help him — characterizes the Indonesian military as deeply callous, inhumane, and responsible for arbitrary and blameworthy injuries. The pain, through this account, are inflicted deliberately by Indonesian officers almost for the sake of it, making Mesquita’s story and the Indonesian occupation particularly terrifying, for its captures the sadistic and unjustly arbitrary violence committed by the Indonesian military. Further, Mesquita’s account contains nothing that encourages evaluating the harm as created for a “good reason,”120 or that Mesquita was in any way responsible for creating his own harm. Mesquita is one of the many “innocent people” who are unfairly treated like “criminals” in East Timor for no good reason. The crime? For ETAN, a peaceful demonstration supporting their United Nations Charter rights to self-determination, promoting democracy and human rights. Abilio’s story instructs Canadians to sympathize with his plight and the Timorese as collectively involved in a “respectable project,” a just cause in the face of a “big and bad offender.”121 ETAN also published “A Refugee Story,” which detailed the gendered atrocities committed against Maria Gorete Joaquim, calling on Canadians to “stop being a part of this atrocity and speak up for justice everywhere,”122 appealing to our feelings of anger upon hearing the injustice. Mesquita and Joaquim’s stories were used to validate the gravity of evil in Indonesia’s occupation of East Timor. ETAN also recounted the victim human rights abuse story of José António Belo (see Figure 6) and the violence against women in East Timor. Bella Galhos arrived in Canada through the World Youth exchange program. She became a symbol of suffering for the Timorese people. Figure 7 is part of Bella’s victim story.

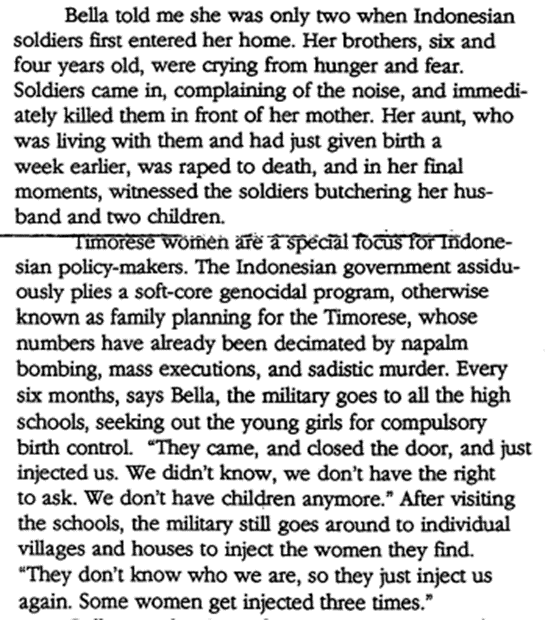
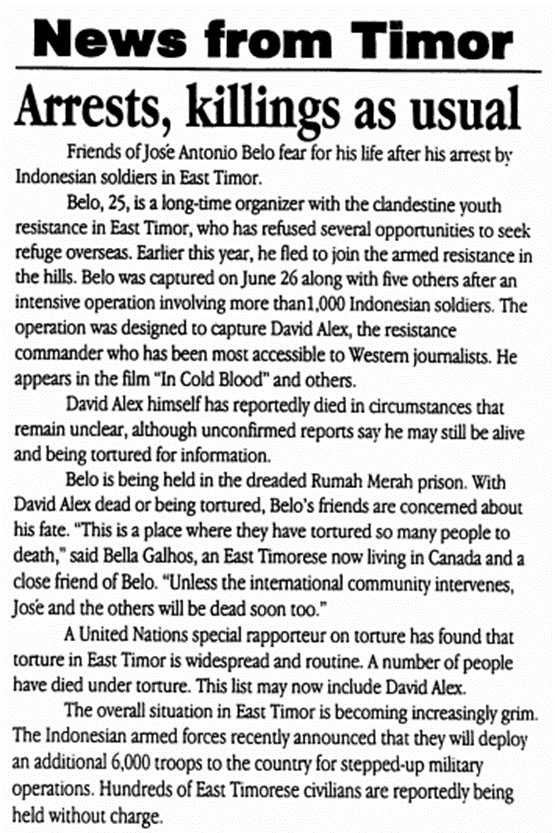


Figure 6 (ETAN Newsletter, Fall 1997)

Figure 7 (ETAN Newsletter, Spring 1995)

During the early 1990s, ETAN (both Canadian and American sections) coordinated and hosted speaking tours throughout North America. Danilo Henriques, Bella Galhos, Constancio Pinto, and Abé Barreto Soares were among the five Timorese who shared their stories with North American audiences. In a 1993 talk titled “East Timor: A Western Made Tragedy,” Henriques implicates the West, particularly the United States, as directly responsible for the tragedy through its sale of weapons to Indonesia “used to kill and maim my people.”123 Abé spoke about the horrors of oppression in his childhood, repeating the terrible scenes at both the North American tour and at the 49th Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights:

I still remember the horrors of my childhood, but one incident stands out in my memory more vividly than others. One afternoon I was playing football with my friends in the street and an army truck drove past full of hansip, the armed militia. The men were shouting and singing – and holding high the severed heads of several guerilla fighters. It was a warning to us not to support the resistance. I felt very frightened.124

His testimony tells of the terrifying dimensions of slavery and tyranny that comprised the normal reality of East Timor. Abé also used poetry and music to sensitize Canadian audiences in understanding the importance of land and peace in Timorese traditions, but also as a cultural device to promote the freedom of Timor-Leste. Poetry and song offered a counter-discourse to colonial identity (see *figure 8*). The poetic voice of Abé was a voice of Timorese liberation from Indonesian colonial rule, representing the Timorese realities of national suffering and a collective identity awaiting peace and self-determination. The language of poetry and music was employed to move people by using more than just “the facts.”

Music too was important in establishing the emotional resonance of the problem and its worthiness of Canadians’ attention. Abé along with Aloz MacDonald founded the musical group “Abé ho Aloz” dedicated to performing songs for East Timor in Tetum, Portuguese, Indonesian, and English. Together with international artists touring across Canada they released a charity audio album titled “20 Years of Resistance to Genocide in East Timor.” Richard Davis of CBC Radio Canada called the grassroots project “a moving testament to the ongoing struggle for self-determination in East Timor … as East Timor itself — small, compelling, and *worthy of our attention*.”125

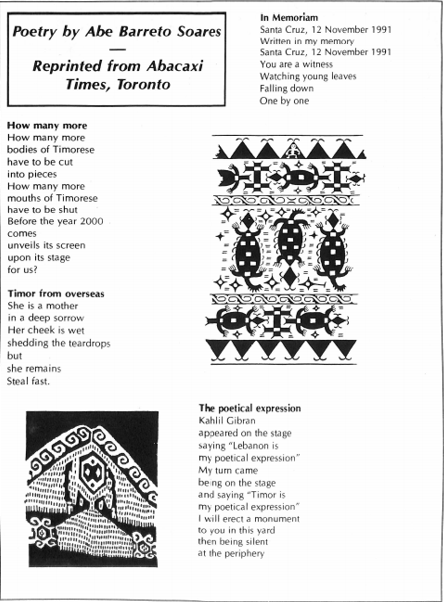


Figure 8 (From ETAN Newsletter, July 1993).

The exposition of “physical scars” as symbols of atrocity also came to typify the horrors of Indonesia’s occupation in East Timor, as well as the shame of Canadian complicity. “Team Timor,” a satirical mockery of “Team Canada,” a name given to Canadian business leaders and politicians involved in high profile trade missions to “repressive regimes around the world, including Indonesia,” was a 1997 cross-Canada media campaign led by the Timorese victims who were affiliated with ETAN. The major theme of the campaign was “human rights and social justice before trade.”126 The campaign called for barring Suharto entry to Canada for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and to be put on trial for war crime and crimes against humanity. ETAN organized a mock trial strategically located on the West block of Parliament Hill in Ottawa across the street from national press galleries, where Timorese victims told their shocking testimonies. The event was open to the Canadian public. Shocking expositions of physical scars and stories about painful loss and suffering made manifest through visceral, firsthand accounts testified to the moral reprehensibility of repression, oppression and rights abuses in East Timor, with the hope of shocking foreign audiences (Canadians) to gain their sympathy and support. The campaign led to various responding activities that conferred public legitimacy to the issue in Canada. Among the major Canadian newspapers, the *Toronto Star, Ottawa Citizen, Gazette, Edmonton Journal, Winnipeg Free Press* and Quebec’s *Le Devoir*, covered the campaign. The moral resonance of the East Timor human rights “horror story” was tactically achieved by having Timorese describe the brutality of the Suharto regime and its occupation of the island. Canadian news stories sustained these testimonies in the media, what some called “brutality reports” and “harrowing tales”127 with each “victim testimony” adding a “new horror story”128:

“We are the generation that has lived through genocide,” Galhos, 25, told a solemn gathering yesterday … “I’m talking about murder, I’m talking about rape, I’m talking about mothers still looking for their children.” Thus, began three hours of graphic, often heart-breaking and sometimes harrowing testimonials to the ongoing repression and brutality of the Suharto regime.129

The graphic violence and oppression of these stories were used as testimonial resources to encourage audience members to evaluate the Indonesian occupation of East Timor as a horrific injustice and crime against humanity deserving condemnation. The narratives of harmed victims further direct Canadians to evaluate them as stories of *extreme human rights abuses*, encouraging the emotion of sympathy and evaluations that, by virtue of their pure suffering, need and deserve Canadian help.

No longer here are the Timorese depicted simply as passive, defenseless, ideal victims, but also as agentic in seeking help, and heroically taking risk to help others. The testimonies demonstrate the courageous efforts of survivors of genocide to speak out against Indonesian perpetrators and Canadian complicity, despite the significant personal sacrifices involved in providing testimony. Although morally pure, they now also come to typify agency, power, resilience, courage, survival, and strength, which, by virtue of their heroism, seeks to evoke admiration and encourage people to join their struggle. In other words, the Timorese giving testimony were portrayed entirely as innocent, courageous victims with little but their cause to sustain them. The symbolic power of their personal sacrifices adheres to their beliefs and resolve to uphold a just cause. They are not depicted as, nor depict themselves as complicit in bringing their own suffering, but as striving to end it. Thus, both their courage and essential innocence come together to produce victims that should be positively evaluated as worthy of our attention and concern. For instance, Soares knew that communicating the plight of East Timor to the outside world was a great risk, yet his resolve to stick to a higher cause despite the dangers posed to himself and his family underscored his essential courage: “I may have to sacrifice my family for this cause but compared to them (others in East Timor) mine (sacrifice) is little. Their families were killed, mine is still alive.”130 Timorese presented themselves as courageous victims, that “in spite of all tribulations, the East Timorese people continue to resist heroically all attempts by the Indonesian military to crush their spirit.”131

**2.1.5 A Willing Accomplice to Genocide**

Who was to blame for East Timor’s pain? For ETAN, Indonesia was the chief perpetrator. However, the Canadian government was constructed as a baneful accomplice, or complicit collaborator in the horror. For ETAN, between 1975 and 1991, Canadian policy was actively complicit with and supportive of Indonesian rule in East Timor. ETAN depicted representatives of the Canadian government as immoral people helping to sustain the extreme harm in East Timor, having base motives and being insensitively indifferent to the plight of the East Timorese. But how to explain this “complicity”? Why did Canada, from the perspective of ETAN, choose to turn a blind eye on the suffering in East Timor?

ETAN constructed the Canadian government as inhabiting a condemnation-worthy category deserving the emotional response of condemnation.132 The affective orientations encouraged here were feelings of shame, betrayal, and anger at Canada’s violation of the human rights moral order in foreign policy. Here, Canada is constructed as the villain type of *accomplice*.

ETAN specified policies and practices that facilitated Indonesia’s repression in East Timor. For instance, the Canadian government acknowledged the de facto incorporation of East Timor as Indonesia’s 27th province as a fait accompli while not granting full legal recognition of the annexation. But for ETAN, East Timor was not a fait accompli. The people of East Timor were being subjected to a protracted war, systematic rights abuses, and genocide. Further, they were resisting Indonesian rule. Essentially, successive Canadian governments treated Indonesia as a significant trading partner, while simultaneously downplaying the importance of East Timor in the interests of a strong bilateral relationship with the Suharto regime. This position represented “complicity in genocide of the East Timorese people, who have still not been allowed to exercise their right to self-determination.”133Canada’s complicity in genocide consisted of the following: (1) Canada was a steadfast supporter of Indonesia since the invasion, following the course of action adopted by other allied countries. Canada abstained from the original United Nations resolutions condemning Indonesia’s invasion of Timor, voting unilaterally on the side of Indonesia since 1980. Since the 1980s onward, Canada voted with Indonesia at the UN which opposed resolutions affirming Timor’s right to self-determination. After 1982, no more votes on this issue were cast. Representatives of the Canadian government also actively lobbied to have the issue removed from the UN agenda; (b) Canada’s silence of the issue also contravened its own moral claims about defending democratic and human rights principles abroad. Trade and profits where prioritized over people and their human rights; (c) Canadian companies held major commercial investments in Indonesia, with Canada being Indonesia’s third largest foreign investor. Since 1975, Canadian companies sold ammunition, military vehicles, transport planes, and helicopter engines to Indonesia which were used in the regimes counterinsurgency war against the island and used to conduct “brutal attacks on the civilian population of East Timor.”134The authorization of military export permits, for ETAN, violated Canadian policy of not selling arms to conflict zones. From these policy and practices, ETAN’s claims constructed a “causal story.”135Canadian support for Indonesia rule helped to “bankroll” the dictatorship, further emboldening the regime, and ultimately leading to the intensification of repression and mass murder in East Timor:

Canada has not only remained silent but has also actively assisted Indonesia in carrying out its genocidal policies by providing diplomatic, economic and military support … Canada and many other United Nations countries have always chosen to support the Indonesian regime with aid dollars rather than live up to their human rights rhetoric much to Indonesia’s delight. Meanwhile, Canada’s consistent attitude has been that there is no point badgering Indonesia since the situation in East Timor is irreversible. This is only true because of the complicity of states such as Canada.136

As a prognostic frame, ETAN insisted that change in policy such as suspending aid, halting trade in military exports (through an arms embargo), and diplomatically supporting East Timor’s independence movement would alleviate Timorese suffering and help to advance self-determination. Canadian humanitarianism and our pride as international peacekeepers were vocabularies of values used as discursive resources to “ground” and justify claims about Canada’s moral responsibility in redressing the issue, pressuring Canada to enact a peacekeeping mission. Answering who was responsible, ETAN claimed:

We are. Canada has been an important ally to the Indonesian dictators. Our government has offered both international legitimacy and considerable economic support. We have even sold arms to the Indonesian military. Most importantly, Canada has conspired to maintain the silence on the continuing genocide in East Timor. It is in this vacuum of information that Canada can maintain its self-image as peacekeeper.137

Speaking “as Canadians,” at the 1989 UNDC hearings, Briere and the Network expressed their shame and outrage that Canada has been a willing accomplice to genocide:

I am ashamed that my country, Canada, has been a willing accomplice in the ongoing tragedy in East Timor. I am ashamed that Canada sells military equipment to Indonesia, gives money for so-called development projects in East Timor, and lends legitimacy to the Indonesian occupation through its diplomatic silence … I am outraged that the profits Canadian companies make in Indonesia seem to be more important than the lives of the East Timorese people or adherence to international laws of which Canada is a signator.138

Here Canada is cast as a willing accomplice to genocide. Briere’s moral outrage directs audiences to evaluate Canada’s complicity as purely selfish, opportunistic, and as violating deep humanitarian cultural themes. The idea that victimizers and their accomplices are blamed for causing and sustaining harm is bad enough. But when extreme harm is created for reasons that are evaluated as morally base, worse, that is, for no good reason. Canada was made complicit in the extreme harm, and for worst possible reasons, economic, disregarding the human consequences of its profitmaking, undervaluing human life and overvaluing commodities. ETAN’s claims provided Canadians with a vocabulary of motive and framework of interpretation to account for Canada’s silence, denial, and inaction, but also its active complicity in Indonesia’s war against East Timor. Motives are ways of accounting for actions and producing moral evaluations. ETAN looked for vested interests, such as Canadian companies who profited from Indonesia’s takeover of East Timor. ETAN constructed motive accounts to challenge government claims that the issue was simply irreversible.The real motive behind Canada’s support of genocide, for ETAN and sympathetic responding claimants, were political and economic self-interests, opportunism, and avarice: “Some might call it plain old greed.”139 These underlying motives, for ETAN, betrayed humanitarian cultural themes about how Canadian foreign policy should work on the world stage. Economic interests and opportunism were linguistic devices used by ETAN to talk about the motivations behind Canada’s willingness to turn a blind eye to Indonesian atrocities in East Timor.

ETAN often contended that Canada’s humanitarian rhetoric was invoked to cloak these morally base motives. Canada’s profitable relationship with Indonesia ensured that transgressions of international law and widespread human rights abuses were ignored. The reason why Canada and the world stood by and watched “this holocaust to happen” was “clearly economics.”140 Self-interest and profits were determining Canadian policy towards Indonesia, allowing it to overlook the “murderous regime” and “actions of tyrants if it is to our advantage.”141 For instance, Canada’s “hypocritical” stance backed Kuwait, yet backed off East Timor. Briere was quoted a news piece by Ahmed Elamin saying “(The department of) external affairs is so opportunistic and selective that it has ignored justice and human rights in favour of business.”142

Briere’s *Bitter Paradise* was also effective in constructing Canada as worthy of condemnation and encouraging particular affective orientations143 associating the Canadian government with anger, condemnation, and East Timor with tragedy, sadness, and compassion: “a sad story”144. Responding claimants in the Canadian media joined Briere and ETAN in shaming and excoriating Canada for its complicity in the horrors of occupation, and their quiet inaction in the face of a humanitarian catastrophe:

Since then, 200,000 East Timorese have died in an orgy of bloodshed that former solicitor general Warren Almand describes as the worst per capita genocide since the Nazis “final solution”…Her new film *Bitter Paradise: The Sell-Out of East Timor* is a raw, riveting, shame-inducing examination of a culture in extremis and of the smug, exculpatory hypocrisy of those Canadians who serve as Faustian accomplices to an ongoing crime against humanity. See it and weep for your country’s dishonor in the name of greed and hypocrisy.145

Evocative words and terms such as “crimes against humanity,” genocide, final solution, hypocrisy, shame, and greed doubtlessly highlight the gravity of Canadian complicity. The Canadian government, media and business community were personified as colluding victimizers, working together to keep the silence and denial over the East Timor horror story**.** ETAN’s claims underscored the spectre of hidden political and economic forces at play and driving the silence over the issue. As “Faustian accomplices,” the Canadian government is framed as acting immorally to advance its own interests. Like Faust, Canada’s pact with the Devil makes them the Devil’s accomplice. Deal with the Devil works as a folklore cultural motif that plays into the melodramatic theme that typifies Canada as surrendering its moral integrity and sacred humanitarian principles in exchange for profits and material riches. Canada is corrupted by the influence of money, while it turns its back with indifference to East Timor, as Indonesia perpetrates its crimes against humanity. ETAN delivered the curse of public denunciation146. Canada is not what it appears to be, namely, a defender of human rights, nor a country that promotes international peace. The former identity is now made to be a sham appearance. The new identity, a nation complicit in genocide, becomes from the perspective of its condemners, the “basic reality.”147

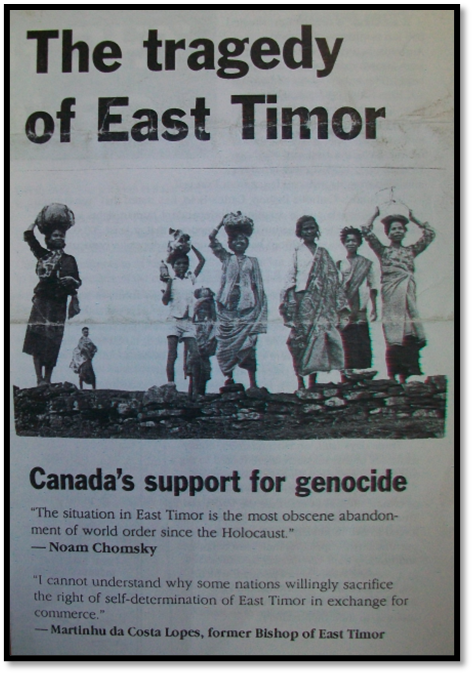


Figure 9 & 10 (ETAN Information Leaflets, photo’s taken by Elaine Briere, courtesy of Elaine Briere)

**2.1.6 Conclusion**

The goal in this paper was to understand how the conflict in East Timor came to be regarded as an issue in Canada. I have discussed some major strategies that ETAN used. This paper has shown that these strategies, though not exhaustive of the strategies involved, were significant resources for keeping the Network’s claims alive.

Claims-making brings social problems into existence. As Schneider writes, “No claims-making. No social problems. Full stop.”148 This case of the East Timor issue in Canada sheds light on how claims may be rendered viable. In order to achieve claim viability, ETAN used highly resonant frames in their claims-making activities to instruct audiences to care and feel sympathy for the victims of East Timor: the discursive images, vocabulary and moral significance of the Holocaust as a vernacular/symbolic resource in claims-making; the use of photography in claims-making, which cannot be underestimated; personalizing the stories of the harmed victims; and collective identities. Viable claims construct images of extreme harm and pure victims who are in dire circumstances, which encourage audience members to evaluate the issue as clearly intolerable.

Many claims-makers who have advanced victim narratives have also deployed the collective representation and idea of the “Holocaust” (but also genocide and crime against humanity) to establish equivalencies with the Jewish historical experience to create awareness of, and sympathies for, their experiences of victimization149. As a collective memory and symbol of radical evil, the comparing one’s plight to the Holocaust can be effective for producing authoritative victim narratives. ETAN “piggybacked”150 their claims on pre-existing frames that hold broad cultural resonance in the West. In a process of constructing familiarity151, ETAN made the Timor issue recognizable to Western audiences by placing the Indonesian military – war criminals and mass murderers – on par with Nazi officers, the prototypes of the ultimate perpetrators of genocide, in an effort to construct images of depraved victimizers, as well as to recall the humanitarian struggles of the past.Best names this generic process “frame extension.”152 New problems are linked as instances of culturally known and already-familiar types of social problems, such as the Holocaust.Further, the moral vernacular “Holocaust” is used in claims-making to construct the Timorese as victims and to “dramatize their essential innocence.”153 ETAN’s dividing practices constructed the Timorese as benevolent, courageous, and ideally innocent victims of genocide and Indonesia as an evil and morally condemnable military regime committing unconscionable acts of human rights abuses against morally upright civilians.

Powerful victim images are also central to the claims-making process. Viable claims are those that construct images of victims as pure, morally worthy and deserving of public sympathy154. This case of East Timor demonstrates the importance of constructing collective victim identities in the viability of social problems claims, namely the construction of categories of people who are *in no way complicit in creating their harm*. For instance, Johnson has described the formal features of making viable “child abuse” claims and the character of “horror stories”155 and Loseke underscores that viable claims construct “extreme images of conditions” and “images of victims as “pure,”’156 as with the case of wife abuse. However, victim typifications can overlap. ETAN typified the Timorese as courageous victims as both innocent and highly agentic, refusing to refrain from resisting to unjust rule.

Indonesia’s campaign of violence in East Timor was, in part, successfully described as genocide in Canada (and abroad) precisely because the resistance movement and their sympathizers overseas, such as ETAN, managed to construct and promulgate compelling claims, narratives and images of the conflict in which the Timorese were depicted as ideal (innocent), courageous victims of crimes against humanity.157 Innocent because they suffered an unprovoked attack, but courageous because they persisted with resisting an oppressive and illegal invasion. The viability of ETAN claims (and the Timorese who were affiliated) was accomplished by constructing the Timorese as pure, good, courageous and heroic victims instructing Canadians and the international community to evaluate them as meritorious, their suffering as intolerable and deserving of our sympathy. However, as this case shows, claims-makers must also key into their cultures appropriate humanitarian themes and feeling-rules to engage “the emotions of others.”158 ETAN frequently invoked Canadian narrative identities of humanitarianism and international peacekeeping to both justify their claims about Canada’s moral responsibility to redress the issue and to appeal to the noble side of Canadians, namely their “capacity to care about others.”159

By upholding the normative language of the UDHR, ETAN essentially framed the Timorese as *victims of human rights abuses and genocide* — mass violence and crimes against humanity. Invoking a vocabulary, or discourse of universal human rights to defend claims about East Timor’s right to independence brought further moral legitimacy and resonance to their claims, grounding them in fundamental values and standards of human dignity. Together with resonant collective representations of victims bolstered by a discourse of human rights, Briere’s photojournalism put “a human face to the tragedy”160 and “brought home forcefully the human factor”161 behind Amnesty International’s bare documentations of human rights abuses in East Timor. Her photographs were effective strategies for humanizing the Timorese and capturing their gracious innocence.

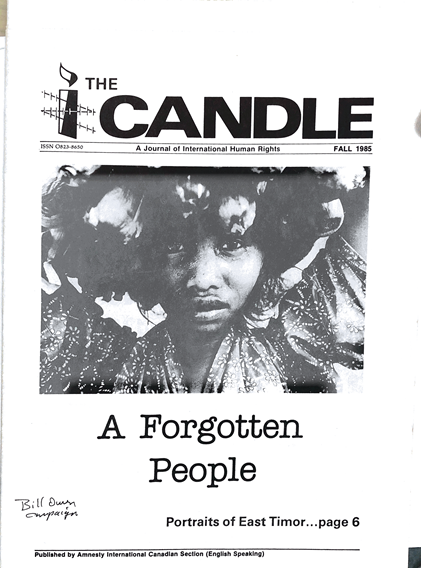


Figure 11 & 12 (Photo’s by Elaine Briere from AI’s Candle, Series 7, Box 20, courtesy of Elaine Briere)

Photographs humanize victims of oppression and human rights abuse, conferring a sense of authenticity to that which may otherwise be construed as abstract and difficult to invest in emotionally. Without Briere’s images, Timorese victims — their personified and immortalized innocence, grace, and harmlessness — would have remained faintly imagined. But Briere’s images merged emotional resonance with documentary accounting, providing Canadians with visual collective representations of people that worked as instant, poignant, humane, and enduring reference points for the visualization of the types of people — a morally good people — harmed by a vicious occupation. Her images were inserted into the global solidarity movement to help weave a human narrative with affective appeal in the hope of encouraging audiences to evaluate the Timorese as victims worthy of sympathy, and nudging Canadians and the international community into action. AbéSoares used poetry, performance, and music as claims-making devices to infuse themes of resistance to foreign rule, freedom, indigenous reassertion, survival, and oppression with emotive force. Song and poetry are unconventional claims-making “languages.” Yet, as claims from the “underside,”162 they were significant resources for sustaining the vitality of Timorese cultural themes and a spirit of struggle, which were used to restore and revitalize what colonialism attempted to destroy.



Figure 13 (Abé Barreto Soares performing)

Loseke163 and Christensen164 argue for more attention to visual image claims as emotional appeals in persuading audiences to care about social problems. Christensen addresses the issue of constructionists’ preferences for analyzing words as deeply rooted in Western liberal democratic traditions which has led to the systematic exclusion of groups who may use alternate nondiscursive/discursive artistic forms of claims-making. Their call, following Miller,165 is to give more attention to the lived experiences of marginalized claims-makers. Without proper attention to song, poetry, performance and “subjugated knowledges”166 in claims-making, we risk purging these marginal voices and the arts more generally from the legitimate domain of the social problems process.

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46See endnote 43.

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Chapter 3

Discursive Opportunities and the Motivational Framing of Human-Rights Activism for East Timor: A Crossnational Analysis

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Discursive Opportunities and the Motivational Framing of Human-Rights Activism for East Timor: A Crossnational Analysis

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Abstract

Drawing from previously untapped archival data, our research undertakes a crossnational analysis to understand how critical organizations within the global solidarity movement for East Timor in Canada, the United States, and Australia adapted their human-rights claims and rhetorical interventions to their specific national contexts to produce politically and culturally resonant motivational frames aligned with their states’ discourses of national identity and foreign policy to support humanitarian intervention in East Timor. We identify crossnational differences in the framing of their political discourse: (1) Canadian groups mobilized a humanitarian peacekeeping frame, (2) U.S.solidarity groups tapped into a democratic-exceptionalist frame, and (3) Australian activists drew from a remembrance-moral debt frame. We conclude by underscoring the importance of discursive opportunities and national historical contexts for studying the mobilization of human rights and crossnational variations in motivational framing.

**3.1.1. Introduction**

In 1975, Indonesia invaded the territory of East Timor, leading to a prolonged military occupation where an estimated quarter of the population in East Timor died between 1975 and 1999. As a result, the international community faced a massive humanitarian crisis in East Timor for twenty-four years; however, one that was consistently downplayed, denied, and ignored by Western state powers and the media. Reports about the oppression and indiscriminate killings during the years of the full-scale invasion initially surfaced through Timorese Catholic Church sources, reports from Amnesty International, and occasional undercover journalists (Webster 2009, 2020; Nevins 2005; Fernandes, 2011; Robinson 2011). In December 1975, the United Nations Security Council unanimously ordered Indonesia to withdraw its invading military forces from East Timor without delay and called upon “all states to respect the territorial integrity of East Timor as well as the inalienable rights of its people to self-determination” (United Nations Security Council, Resolution 384, 1975, East Timor). Western states responded by fostering stronger diplomatic, economic, and military ties with the Indonesian regime. During these periods, Western nation states like the United States, Canada, Australia, Britain, and Japan provided Indonesia with enormous diplomatic and military assistance, supported the invasion of East Timor, and deliberately ignored human-rights abuses in the territory. While the United Nations presented East Timorese and solidarity activists with political opportunities to leverage their claims (Nevins 2005; Webster 2013), Western states overshadowed the United Nations in their symbolic authority, influence, and capacity to enforce international law partly due to the Cold War superpower rivalry between the United States and USSR, but primarily to preserve its economic interests and investments in Indonesia. When this global binary order ended, new opportunities emerged to challenge U.S. hegemony (Wallerstein 2014: 163) and foreign policy, especially from a human-rights perspective. Moreover, the turn to global economic liberalization policies and concerns over democratic rights increasingly exerted pressure on former semiperipheral and authoritarian Cold War allies in Asia to adopt internal democratic reforms. Along with these structural changes in the geopolitical economy, the conflict in East Timor was marked by a critical juncture. On November 12, 1991 the Indonesian military police opened fire on peaceful and defenseless demonstrators, most of whom were students, without warning or provocation, which led to the death of over 200 people. The Santa Cruz massacre made it very difficult for Western states to defend and justify the atrocities of the Indonesian state and their foreign policies and relations with the regime. This mass atrocity generated international public outcry at the apex of the Cold War’s end, which led to the expansion of various solidarity groups within different national contexts worldwide.

How did these solidarity groups seek to persuade their national citizenry and foreign policy officials to care about atrocities and crimes against humanity in East Timor, like the Santa Cruz massacre? Our article explores variations in the solidarity movements’ “motivational framing” in Canada, the United States, and Australia through a crossnational analysis. We show that the historical relations of the United States, Canada, and Australia within the post-World War II geopolitical context and the specific interests of the three in the East Timor Pacific region were of considerable strategic importance for the moral and political framing of the global solidarity movement: the United States is a global hegemony, Canada, a semiperipheral “peacekeeper,” and Australia as a regional hegemon. These historical positionings, namely culturally and historically defined constructions of national understandings, allowed the solidarity movement’s campaign to draw from different nationalist discourses of foreign policy that constituted important elements of their broader imagined political community (Anderson 2016) to render their motivational framing of human-rights abuses in East Timor culturally and politically salient and to make their claims resonate with intended national audiences. Solidarity groups’ strategies for “mobilizing shame” frequently underscored a disparity between their nationalist foreign policy discourses and how their respective states violated these national public morals in practice regarding East Timor. We argue that national contexts, particularly states’ ways of framing their national identity, history, and foreign policy, influence how movements frame their struggles concerning these states. In particular, whether movements will engage in a politics of shame to mobilize states towards humanitarian intervention.

Motivational framing strategies are impinged by crossnational and historical variations in cultural and national contexts. Therefore, social movement frames are constrained and enabled by discursive structures and opportunities within their cultural environments and nationalpolitical contexts (Benford and Snow 2000; della Porta and Tarrow 2005; della Porta et al. 2020; McCammon et al. 2007). However, we do not suggest that cultural and national contexts determine the trajectories of movement frames; instead, these “strategic contexts’’ (Linders 1998; Immergut 1992; Benford and Snow 2000) provide actors with discursive opportunities for political claims making, namely they both limit the range of possibilities for framing problems and enable actors to elaborate particular frames for understanding the intersections between human rights, national identity, discourses of foreign policy, and for mobilizing sociopolitical constituencies and alliances as a counterhegemonic strategy. The nation, conceived as a symbolic and cultural construct, is defined and redefined by the interests of particular claimsmaking groups, activities, and strategies whereby they exercise claims, definitions, or hegemony over historically constructed understandings of national identity for the strategic realization of specific foreign policy aims, and as justifications for humanitarian intervention.

Our research draws from and contributes to a rich tradition of comparative analysis in the literature on social movements and social problems (Ferree 2003; Koopmans and Olzak 2004; McCammon et al. 2007; Giugni et al. 2005; Motta 2014; Ferree 2012; Vasi et al. 2015; Bail et al., 2017). This tradition examines similarities and crossnational differences across movements (Amenta et al. 2010; Almeida 2014; Best and Loseke 2018), variations in framing strategies and the diffusion of tactics (Benford and Snow 2000; Wood 2012), emotions (Loseke 2019; Bröer and Duyvendak 2009), and considers the role of national political contexts, emotions, and the historical legacies and discourses of foreign policy in the mobilization of social movement frames. Moreover, the broader geopolitical contexts, such as the different roles nation-states play in the world and how they legitimize their rule and positions differently in the geopolitical order, organize the range of political and discursive opportunities available for mobilizing social movement frames. Solidarity activists in Canada, the United States, and Australia sought to bridge this gap between transnational human-rights discourse, geopolitical contexts, and their national discursive opportunity structure (Koopmans and Olzak 2004; McCammon et al. 2007; Caiani, della Porta, and Wagemann 2012) to mobilize their states to support intervention. Our comparative analysis demonstrates and underscores that movement framing and frame outcomes are historically contingent on the discursive opportunity structures of particular societies and their political, national historical traditions, and cultural contexts.

**3.1.2. Discursive Opportunity Structures, Motivational Framing, and National Identity**

While many researchers have adopted a comparative historical framework to study the East Timorese transnational movement (Cabral and Martin-Jones 2008; Weldemichael 2012; Webster 2020; Loney 2018, 2020; Fernandes 2011; Simpson 2004), a paucity of research exists concerning the framing strategies in the movement’s human-rights claims making (Gunderson 2012, 2015; Torelli 2020). We address these concerns by combining theoretical insights from social constructionist perspectives on social problems (Spector and Kitsuse 1977; Best and Loseke 2018) and social movement theory into our crossnational empirical analysis. Claimsmaking and framing are about persuading others (Spector and Kitsuse 1977; also see Spector 2019). It consists of various activities by which groups (whether advocacy or social movement organizations, legislators, community activists, or journalists) attempt to persuade audiences (constituencies, the government, the public in general, or parliament) to perceive that an issue warrants attention and is urgently in need of rectification. Frames must also resonate with broader meaning systems, historical currents, and sociocultural discourses within respective national cultures. Social movement claimants often use “motivational framing” (Benford and Snow 2000; Snow, Vliegenthart, and Ketelaars 2018), tapping into available cultural vernaculars and contexts (Best and Loseke 2018; Loseke 2003; Ibarra and Adorjan 2018; Jasper and Polletta 2018) to evoke strong emotional reactions from targeted audiences, such as solidarity, outrage, or shame, and to mobilize public support for a cause. Therefore, human rights claims can amplify and tap into national identity concerns and discourses of foreign policy to mobilize sociopolitical constituencies and expand the cultural resonance of human rights, often by appealing to a nation’s broader “imagined political community” (Anderson 2016; also see Forsythe 2000).

Social constructionist approaches within nationalism studies have effectively debunked primordial theories regarding the nation state instead as a recent, socially constructed artifact and the outcome of a historically and geographically contingent process (Anderson 2016; Bourdieu 2014; Gellner 2006; Hobsbawm 2012; Brubaker 1996). Benedict Anderson (2016) used the ‘imagined political community’ concept to study the origins and spread of nationalism and the historical development of national identity. Anderson emphasized language as the integrative glue, but understandings of the nation also draw on history and historical memories. Moreover, Hobsbawm and Ranger (2012) have written extensively on “invented traditions,” namely those political traditions and national self-representations invented, constructed, formally instituted, and cultivated for scrupulously political ends and proclaimed to be timeless but which are historically relatively recent. Nations as an imagined political community and nationalism as an invented tradition have the symbolic power to generate shared sentiments that help to form collective identity and bind people together in solidarity. Invented traditions also provide states with various symbolic resources to establish a continuity between the past and the present and allow states to assert their power as transcending time and history. Everyday public transcripts, which Scott (1999: 18) contends are the “self-portrait of dominant elites as they would have themselves be seen,” are often responsible for reproducing political traditions and national imaginaries. These dominant transcripts can constitute discourses concerning respect for national sovereignty, human rights, democracy, freedom, or political economy and the institutionally sustained practices of official relationships between heads of state.

Sociologists have also begun emphasizing claims-making practices of “nationalist sense making” (Brubaker 2010:380). It is hardly surprising that political elites and activists have invoked nationalist discourses and feeling rules (Hochschild 1979; Loseke 2019) as powerful devices to promote and mobilize public participation and support for particular causes (Smith 1992; Brubaker 1996; Calhoun 1997; Bonikowski 2017). Often, the distance between public state rhetoric and practice constitutes opportunities for mobilization (Keck and Sikkink 1998). This is because official nationalist discourses, or public transcripts, of the powerful often contradict the lived, material structures of hegemonic rule in national and geopolitical contexts. Consequently, claims-making groups may respond strategically by appropriating these dominant discourses to contest and shame practices of state complicity in human-rights abuses and confer further legitimacy to their claims. In Steinberg’s (1999: 772) words, activists may usurp power holders’ “own moral authority by snatching their words from their mouth.” Cultural schemas (i.e., frames) and ideas are socially embedded and historically contingent (Marx 1978: 595); they connect to an underlying structure—a historically rooted but dynamic national and cultural context. Actors operate within existing material, historical, and cultural contexts or “discursive fields” (Steinberg 1998). Discursive fields—as a constraining and enabling cultural environment—provide actors with “discursive opportunities” and contain the “genres that collective actors can draw upon to construct discursively diagnosis, prognosis, and motivation” (Steinberg 1998: 856). Such fields are partially structured through ongoing processes of hegemony and may contain a medley of discourses. For instance, English cotton workers selectively appropriated the language of the powerful—”political economy, radical politics, national identity, and religious virtue and family and household life” (Steinberg 1998: 858)—to subvert prevailing discourses and practices that legitimize power. Using the rhetoric of the powerful in a symbolic struggle to discredit them, the spinners subverted the original messages of bourgeois politicians by pressing their claims of national identity, thereby casting them as the “enemies of the country” (Steinberg 1999: 763) for violating their principles.

Similarly, the discursive opportunities afforded to solidarity activists in national and global contexts—such as the language of human rights—can be strategically mediated through a local, nationally bound field, in effect “harnessing hegemony” (Steinberg 1999; Maney, Woehrle, and Coy 2005; Leitz 2011) as a discursive tactic for moral accountability and the mobilization of shame. Their motivational repertoires often appropriate resonant cultural and symbolic templates of the national situation they navigate to articulate claims about workers’ rights, human rights, or national identity (Spillman 1997; Steinberg 1999; Zubrzycki, 2001). National historical contexts and discourses of national identity and foreign policy have become particularly crucial in shaping the framing of political discourses across the ideological spectrum (Busby 2010, 2007). These broader national historical and cultural contexts constitute discursive opportunities for claims-making groups to repurpose for promoting and grounding their claims (Giugni et al. 2005; Koopmans and Olzak 2004; Koopmans and Muis 2009; McCammon et al. 2007; Ferree 2003).

Sociologists define discursive opportunity structures as “institutionally anchored ways of thinking that provide a gradient of relative political acceptability to specific packages of ideas’’ (Ferree 2003: 306; also see McCammon et al. 2007; Amenta et al. 2010; Koopmans and Olzak 2004). Tapping into these discourses that are viable and have momentum allows claims makers to enter the morally legitimate sphere of public discourse. Discursive opportunity structures determine which ideas are perceived as realistic, salient, and legitimate within a nation state at a specific time. These opportunity structures provide “institutional and cultural access points (Ferree et al. 2002: 62), enabling actors to bring their claims to the political forums of a state and adapt their human-rights claims to nationalist discourses that have momentum at a historically specific conjuncture. Therefore, claims makers seek to align their framing efforts with widespread hegemonic beliefs and feeling rules within their broader national and geopolitical contexts (Broer and Duyvendak 2009; Loseke 2019). These opportunities offer a degree of discursive openness in the political culture and to political elites’ interests and perspectives where movements can strategically utilize this discourse. Moreover, crossnational differences in framing demonstrate the importance of national context, state structures, geopolitics, and political cultures in shaping distinct movement strategies (della Porta et al. 2020).

Particularly in the post-Cold War climate, transnational activists pressured Western states to adopt foreign policies more attuned to advancing human rights. As a result, states remain the principal organizing structures on the global stage and the main targets of transnational solidarity networks (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco 1998). Activists may shame states as part of their strategies for drawing attention to existing discrepancies between foreign policy practices, government rhetoric, and complicity in human-rights violations. Discursive opportunities allow transnational activists to engage effectively in “accountability politics” (Keck and Sikkink 1998; also see Nevins 2004) to highlight contradictions between a state’s national commitment to specific values and ideologies and how their foreign policies materialize in practice. Shame is a politically and socially constituted “emotion code,” a “set of socially circulating ideas about which emotions are appropriate to feel when, where and toward whom or what, as well as how emotions should be outwardly expressed” (Loseke 2009: 497).

Busby (2010) finds that states are concerned about maintaining their international selfimage, which gives claimants leverage to influence foreign policy decisions. Movement claimants tactically promote discourses of national identity and foreign policy to ‘mobilize shame,’ which assumes that nations experience shame when “its conduct is perceived to be degrading, unworthy, humiliating, in essence, shameful” (Drinan 2001: 32) and worthy of condemnation (Loseke 2019). As Keenan (2004: 435-436) writes, states are exposed “in some significant way to the force of public opinion, and that they are (physically or emotionally) structured like individuals in a strong social and cultural context that renders them vulnerable to feelings of dishonor, embarrassment, disgrace, or ignominy.” The “mobilization of shame,” or what Canadian anthropologist Noel Dyck (1985) refers to as the “politics of embarrassment,” rests on the notion that by exposing the disjunction between publicly affirmed values and behavior, activists can shame states into changing their actions and press their moral claims against state actors. Thus, human-rights activists may draw on powerful metaphors: “the eyes of the world, the light of public scrutiny, the exposure of hypocrisy—as vehicles for the dream of action, power, and enforcement” (Keenan 2004: 438, 446). The mobilization of shame often presupposes that “dark deeds are done in the dark” and that publicity and exposure have the power to strike proactively in the service of justice.

**3.1.3 Background, Data, and Methods**

At the beginning of the Indonesian invasion of East Timor in 1975, there was increasing opposition from civil society groups in the West. However, these groups found that generating publicity about the illegal occupation and Western state complicity and interest in the issue of East Timor’s human rights during the 1970s and early 1980s proved difficult (Webster et al. 2019). Ultimately, the Western media presented the occupation as an armed conflict, with both sides resorting to methods and tactics of political violence.

The Santa Cruz massacre, where Indonesian soldiers suddenly gunned down nonviolent, peaceful student marchers in 1991, helped pave the way for an international outcry and galvanized international solidarity networks to support East Timor’s right to self-determination. The Dili massacre, in particular, was a transformative event for the East Timorese liberation solidarity movement (Hess and Martin 2006). The Dili massacre intensified public reaction to Indonesian human-rights abuses in East Timor, revitalized solidarity and activism, and generated greater visibility of the issue in Western public discourse. The major organizations operating in Canada, the United States, and Australia were ETAN/Canada, ETAN/US, and the Australia-East Timor Association. The post-1991 claims-making activities of the solidarity movement are our central focus. That is, two seminal events bookend this decade: in 1991, the Santa Cruz massacre and in 1999, the East Timor independence referendum, and the nominal end of the conflict and the resolution for all the activism conducted up to that point. This decade saw the most sustained, committed, and focused activism by organizations in their respective countries.

ETAN/Canada was formed in 1986/7 (see Webster 2020) by Elaine Brière, Derek Evans, and Maureen Martin with support from the Canadian Council of Churches. Three main groups operating in Canada: The East Timor Alert Network (ETAN), which became the national organization; the Canadian Action for Indonesia and East Timor (CAFIET); and Canadian Parliamentarians for East Timor (CPET), although smaller groups existed prior to these (Webster 2020) despite little coordinated activity (Fernandes 2011). Timorese diaspora activists, such as Bella Galhos and Abé Barreto Soares, were also at the forefront of Canadian action for East Timor. The East Timor Action Network (ETAN) was formed in the United States in 1991 with the coordinated help of the Canadian section of the network. ETAN Canada and the United States had chapters nationwide, such as Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal, and Calgary. Although there were many others, Charlie Scheiner, John Miller, Lynn Fredrickson, and Matthew Jardine were some of ETAN/US’s central members, with one of its significant newsletters titled Estafeta. The Australia-East Timor Association (AETA) was the most prominent national organization fighting for East Timor’s human rights. Friends of East Timor (FOET), a smaller group, also emerged in Australia.

We base our crossnational empirical analysis on archival data from the Timor International Solidarity Archive Database (TiSa) and the Toronto papers of previously untapped East Timor Alert Network archival material retrieved from the William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections at McMaster University. 1 Although this archive consists primarily of Canadian materials, it includes various boxes containing newsletters from organizations outside Canada. The physical archive contains 4.6 meters of textual records and thirty video cassettes. Our research draws from various sources in the archive, including leaflets, newsletters, news clippings, published testimonies, United Nations speeches, and documentary material. In addition, our research draws on the claims making of significant movement organizations in each of our selected countries; however, we also focus on closely affiliated organizations of civil society: in Canada, the East Timor Alert Network (ETAN) and the Canadian Action for Indonesia and East Timor (CAFIET); in the United States, the East Timor Action Network (ETAN/US); and in Australia, it is the national organization the Australia-East Timor Association (AETA), and a smaller organization Friends of East Timor (FOET). The political claims making of solidarity activists gradually led to the formation of Parliamentarians for East Timor (PET) in 1987, an international association of Members of Parliament, Congressmen, Senators, and other political representatives from fifteen countries representing four continents with over 250 members. Influenced by solidarity activists, PETs also advocated for East Timor’s right to self-determination. We provide a close, interpretive reading of approximately 250 newsletters, over 30 speeches, 100 news articles, documentaries, and other media dating between 1975 and 1999. Through these archival materials, we examined the motivational frames mobilized by the solidarity movement.

The categories of our comparative, crossnational analysis, such as, for example, “human rights” and “national identity,” emerged from an inductive analysis of the textual data: newsletters, speeches, media clippings, documentary evidence, testimonies, and congressional and parliamentary debates. Our analysis assumes that these newsletters and media address multiple audiences and the general public, including politicians, constituencies, journalists, citizens, and potential adherents. However, the global solidarity movement did tailor their framing to particular audiences. For instance, decolonization speeches are directed to United Nations members to mobilize international state action. Moreover, parliamentary and congressional debate transcripts seek to appeal to both national audiences and key political leaders. Although our analysis may not represent all activists’ views, our focus remains on the textual data made public by the movement, specifically their newsletters.

**3.1.4 Crossnational Variations in Motivational Framing**

The following section shows how each solidarity group drew from nationally situated political cultures. We identified how solidarity activists invoked nationalist discourses to legitimize recognition and motivate action on East Timor, reorient foreign policy, and shame governments for failing to uphold this moral order. Movement organizations attempted to reconstruct shared history and national identities as compatible with promoting human rights abroad. We show how distinct national political contexts shaped and enabled different framing outcomes. We identify three crossnational differences in the global solidarity movements’ motivational framing and politics of shame: (1) Canadian groups mobilized a humanitarian-peacekeeping frame, (2) U.S. solidarity groups tapped into historical and contemporary cultural myths and memories that privilege democracy, freedom, and autonomy, concomitant with discourses of choice and equality, to produce an exceptionalist-democratic frame, and (3) Australian activists drew from a remembrance-moral debt frame.

**3.1.5 Canadian Humanitarianism, Peacemaking, and Multiculturalism**

The language and public rhetoric—an “invented tradition” (Hobsbawm 2012)—advanced by Canadian foreign policy elites have long framed the Canadian state’s “imagined political community” as one that is capable of perceiving and arbitrating upon humanitarian problems on a global scale, which historically, has held broad cultural resonance within the Canadian body politic (Thomsen and Hynek 2006; Dorn 2005; Shawki 2008). However, Canada’s inconsistent interventionist policies and its long, violent history of colonialism on indigenous peoples complicate this sanitized national imaginary. Since Lester B. Pearson won the Nobel Prize in 1957, Canadian foreign policy discourse has embraced an image of international peacekeeping and humanitarianism in the name of compassion, security, and good governance— acquiring a reputation as a “custodian of global civility” ( Härting and Kamboureli 2009; also see Lipset 1986, 1990; Baer, Grabb, and Johnston 1993).

Foreign policy documents have also sought to define the meaning of “Canadian values” as an integral part of Canadian national identity, portraying Canadians as avowedly sympathetic to global suffering and who have an “exceptional propensity for compassion as observers of global suffering” (Mahrouse 2008: 98). For instance, during the 1990s, the Canadian values of humanitarianism and peacekeeping were routinely invoked and promoted by the Chrétien government. In 1995, the Liberal government of Canada issued an official public document on foreign policy titled Canada in the World. This document articulated distinct cultural values that should govern Canadian behavior in the international community. The document cataloged various positive attributes that defined the meaning of the Canadian discourse on Canadian values: “Our principles and values—our culture—are rooted in a commitment to tolerance; to democracy; to equity and human rights; to the peaceful resolution of difference . . . to social justice. . . . Canadians wish these values to be reflected and advanced internationally” (DFAIT 1995: 8). One predominant theme in the moral discourse on Canadian values is humanitarianism. Canada in the World affirmed that international assistance “is one of the clearest expressions of Canadian values and culture—of Canadians’ desire to help the less fortunate and of their strong sense of social justice—and an effective means of sharing these values with the rest of the world” (DFAIT 1995: 40). Canadians’ desire to help others build peace, the document further states, “reflects some of the most deeply held and widely shared Canadian values” (DFAIT 1995: 24). The document characterizes Canadians as peaceful people willing to help others settle conflicts, achieve peace, and support victims of crimes against humanity through humanitarian actions abroad. Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy and the Liberal Chrétien government were highly dedicated to human rights, social justice, and humanitarianism. This “discursive opportunity structure,” where political discourse is more or less isolated from civil society’s interests, made more amenable to the demands of social movements, allowed to effect policy changes.

Fernandes (2011, 2015) argues that by establishing credible facts about mass atrocities in East Timor, what Keck and Sikkink (1998) refer to as “information politics,” and building robust alliances across various constituencies of civil society, the global solidarity movement was able to produce a “structure of legitimacy.” ETAN/Canada’s discursive strategy also centered on and reinforced the structure of legitimacy, generating legitimacy and political responsibility by linking the suffering and plight of distant East Timor resonate with salient political claims and public political traditions regarding the position of the Canadians in international politics. We focus on how the meanings of the nation evoked by these elites were then strategically redeployed by the network as part of its accountability politics and for the mobilization of shame. Accountability politics are processes that publicly underscore international compromises, principles, and values to which a state has engaged in complying, such as human rights or democracy, or its nationalist discourses and rhetoric of peacemaking, humanitarianism, and multiculturalism—and using these moral standards and national cultural myths to expose the disparity between discourse and practice (Keck and Sikkink 1998), namely how the Canadian states actions and complicity in East Timor were completely violating them. The politics of accountability is particularly effective at highlighting the hypocrisy of specific policy stances and mobilizing shame. Therefore, the political claims of policy officials provided a structure of discursive opportunities to pressure the Canadian state to live up to these values and commitments. These values served as compelling warrants to connect Canadian foreign policy with the morality of its global role in world affairs.

Although Canada has not historically been active in promoting human rights and peacekeeping (Webster 2022),2 ETAN deployed this collective identity—constructed and promoted chiefly by foreign policy elites—not as fact but as a social movement frame for mobilizing shame at Canadian complicity and support for human rights in East Timor. Leaflets appealed to Pearsonian pride and national feeling, making claims about how Canadian complicity in human-rights abuses betrayed the way Canadians ought to feel sympathy for the plight of victims of human-rights abuses:

As Canadians, we pride ourselves on our international reputation as a peacekeeper and power broker. But there is a dark side to our foreign policy—a policy that encourages and subsidizes business and cultural ties with Indonesia, a country responsible for the deaths of more than 200,000 people on the tiny island of East Timor (Leaflet, WRDA, Box 1).

In answering audience questions as to who was responsible for Indonesian human-rights abuses in East Timor, ETAN attributed blame to Western state powers, particularly Canada, while highlighting how Canadian state complicity violated prevailing features of Canadian nationalism such as peacekeeping:

We are. Canada had been an important ally to the Indonesian dictators. Our government has offered both international legitimacy and considerable economic support. We have even sold arms to the Indonesian military. Most importantly, Canada has conspired to maintain the silence on the continuing genocide in East Timor. It is in this vacuum of information that Canada can maintain its self-image as a peacekeeper (Leaflet, WRDA, Box 1).

Canadian activists thus appealed to the symbolic authority of “peacekeeping” as moral leverage to expose the distance between Canadian discourse and practice, mobilizing shame to embarrass the Canadian state into saving face by closing the distance. East Timor was framed as a “Canadian issue,” not a far-off, forgotten struggle, evoking themes of peace and human rights that were considered a respected element of Canadian self-identity. At the United Nations Decolonization Hearing, Jeffrey Rudolph and David Webster of ETAN/Canada appealed to Canada’s moral responsibility to preserve international peace and be a moral force for good in the world:

Canada could use its significant economic weight and respected international reputation. as a defender of peace and purveyor of human rights to actively lobby for the withdrawal of Indonesian forces from East Timor . . . call on a referendum and right the wrong done to the East Timorese people (UN Special Committee on Decolonization, 1991, Jefferey Rudolph, WRDA, Box 8).

Canada is a trading nation, but Canadians also understand that we should speak out and take action for a better and more peaceful world. . . . Canadians have also demonstrated through polls and submission to the recent foreign policy review that we are a people who want our government to project positive values. . . . (Presentation to the United Nations Decolonization Committee, July 11-13, 1995, David Webster, WRDA, Box 7).

These warrants or motivational framing played on Canadian values to point out a disjunction between Canadian actions in Indonesia and East Timor and deeply held cultural values— claims-making strategies for morally shaming Canada into compliance with its own publicly avowed moral principles. Sharon Scharfe’s book, Complicity, demonstrated Canada’s role as a significant player in the global political economy. The book was directed primarily toward a Canadian audience, serving as “an expose of the Canadian government’s complicity in facilitating the ongoing occupation and the wide gap between official, high-minded rhetoric and official practice; and, most significantly, the book is a plea to the Canadian people to help change its government’s policies and practices toward Indonesia and East Timor so that they are consistent with the best of Canada’s political and moral impulses.” Canada’s role in genocide opened Canada to charges of hypocrisy, constituting a Faustian bargain whereby nations like Canada were trading their moral principles for wealth and power:

In 1975 Suharto actually came to Ottawa … with Pierre Trudeau who was the Prime Minister then. This was six months before the invasion of East Timor. East Timor was something that was being talked about at those meetings; there's very little doubt. I mean, government knew what was gonna happen and they did nothing because they wanted to be friends with Suharto and with the Indonesian government, so they sold out the principles that Canada says it stands for about being an international peacemaker, and they displayed the total moral hypocrisy of the Canadian government by going along with this and allowing these killings to go on and not saying a word (*From Bitter Paradise: The Sell-Out of East Timor*).

ETAN, Timorese refugees, and parliamentarians strategically invoked the discourse of Canadian humanitarianism to make their human rights claims resonate with these historically broader nationalist discourses and as a rationale for practicing consistent humanitarianism instead of selective interventionism. At both bilateral and multilateral levels, in some instances, Canada had actively promoted the acceptance of international human rights standards. The Canadian state firmly committed (albeit formally) to integrating human rights fully into the broad sweep of Canada’s external relations (Scharfe, 1996:7). Yet, Canada was betraying its moral stance as a middle-power.

Successive Canadian governments persistently downplayed the risk of weapon exports to Indonesia, affirming that there was no reasonable risk of being used offensively against the civilian population. Nevertheless, in collusion with significant weapons manufacturers, including Pratt and Whitney, Lockheed Martin, and British Aerospace, the United States, Britain, and Canada were instrumental in arming the Indonesian army’s military occupation of East Timor and enabling the regime to carry out state terrorism and pacification campaigns against innocent civilians, with ninety percent of the weapons used by the Indonesian forces in their invasion were from the United States (Green and Ward, 2004). Members of ETAN highlighted how Canadian arms sales to a “genocidal regime” violated its long-standing policy that it would not sell weapons to regimes committing human rights abuses, invoking the absence of Canadian values in guiding foreign policy:

All in all, it’s not an impressive showing from a government that likes to talk about controlling the weapons trade and a country that likes to be thought of as a voice for international human rights. Where is Canada’s voice?” (*Webster, David. The Activist, Volume 7, December 1991, WRDA, Box 24)*.

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As a dominant strategy for galvanizing outrage, the mobilization of shame was necessary for pressuring the Canadian state to alter its foreign policy by publicly revealing embarrassing information about illegal weapon sales to Indonesia, besmirching Canada's humanitarian, and peacekeeping identity. Canadian solidarity activists effectively insinuated Canadian responsibility through material and moral leverage. Like the United States and Britain, Canada provided Indonesia with military aid while simultaneously promoting international human rights, peacekeeping, and justice in public. ETAN/Canada linked the discourses of Canadian human rights and dominant themes existing within Canadian national political culture to their states' actions as weapons suppliers to a regime committing human rights abuses. Canada’s self-professed values and legitimizing mythmaking affirmed in Canada in the World made the state vulnerable to viable political shame. Moreover, solidarity activists also underscored the hypocrisy of Western state ‘interventionism’ by drawing compelling equivalencies between the Indonesian invasion and Iraq’s 1990 invasion of Kuwait, as both invasions violated the same fundamental precepts of the UN Charter. As Klaehn (2003:52) writes, “in response to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, Canada went to war for the first time in 40 years and justified its actions with moral appeals to Canadians’ collective sense of common decency” often because East Timor did not fulfill the broader (geo)political-economic and strategic interests of Western state powers.Setting the socio-political context for the U.S.: The U.S. is coming off the Kuwait war, where discourses of freedom are floating around, and U.S. interventionism seems to be commonly accepted in the United States. The “new world order” as Bush explained, ushered in a new era of American dominance, where the U.S. could act as the world’s police force. Even though many activists may not agree with the U.S. foreign policy, framing issues like the East Timor crisis in these terms, where the U.S. has an “obligation” as the worlds superpower to help, may have been beneficial. Furthermore, with the downfall of the Soviet Union, and with it the threat of communism gone, the U.S.’s historical reasons for supporting the Indonesian regime and Suharto in particular, their staunch opposition to communism, was gone, creating a political opening for East Timorese groups to exploit. Activists would have seen this as an opportunity to now put extra pressure on the U.,S. government, now that their principal reason for supporting Indonesian (their anti-communism) was now no longer valid. This was an opportunity to emphasize how the U.S. government needs to support human rights and freedom in East Timor because the U.S. is so powerful:

The East  Timorese people gain new hopes when the Democratic Party won the elections in the US. The East  Timor ese people nurture the hope that President Bill Clinton does personify the spirit of Liberty of the American people, and give a new dimension to the problems which only US attention may solve” (ETAN/US,1994/09).

Motivational frames can also resonate if they properly use cultural feeling rules encompassing victims' sympathy (Loseke, 2019). For humanitarian empathy and compassion to be elicited, it is imperative that the narrative of suffering strongly testify to the innocence of those that suffer (Wilson and Brown, 2008). We feel an obligation to assist and help those who appear to have not been actively provoked or seemingly invited and thus deserving of their suffering (Loseke, 2019). Elaine Brière’s 1997 documentary *Bitter Paradise: The Sell-Out of East Timor* portrayed the East Timorese community as an Indigenous people resisting the advance of militarism, oppression, and a false mythology of progress through the “civilizing mission” (also see Webster, 2020). Historically, European conquerors, missionaries, and colonial administrators violently denied Indigenous peoples an identity (Spivak, 2005). Portuguese colonizers in East Timor often cast its people as "Maubere," a term referring to the Timorese as uncivilized and backward (Ramos-Horta, 1987:109) that the resistance movement reclaimed to convey nationalist pride, strength, and preserve their inner spiritual domain and cultural identity from foreign domination (Chatterjee, 1991). References to imperialism, colonialism, and exploitation in the Timorese nationalist movement resonated strongly with the discourses of African self-determination movements, particularly in Mozambique and Angola. Borja drew striking parallels between the struggle for self-determination in East Timor and other “Third World” countries’ historical experiences by deploying the language of decolonization. Third Worldist politics (Prashad, 2007; Webster, 2013), specifically the Front of the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) against Portuguese rule heavily influenced Fretilin (Jolliffe, 1978:63). The Liberation struggles in Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique all witnessed protracted struggles against former imperialist powers in pursuit of decolonization. The armed guerilla struggle in East Timor, influenced by Marxist thought in Portugal (Niner, 2009:22-23) was to be a “protracted war” guided partly by strategies developed by Mao Zedong (Kiernan, 2008; Shoesmith, 2020:172). Consolidating national unity in East Timor became a primary strategic aim within Fretilin rhetoric. For example, Fretilin’s program of literacy emphasized the vitality of Timorese identity. The Timorese resistance, as previously discussed, reclaimed the term ‘Maubere’ in a symbolic struggle to redefine its collective identity in the face of occupation and erasure. The term ‘Maubere,’ therefore, would serve as a linguistic “weapon of the weak” to resist the imposition of the dominant Indonesian language and identity, and further, as a rallying symbol and collective representation of Timorese cultural survival. The term was initially used by Portuguese colonial administrators to refer to backward mountain people in East Timor (Jolliffee, 1978; Hill, 2002:74), reclaimed by the Timorese resistance as embodying national pride. For example, Xanana Gusmão wrote many poems throughout his resistance to the Indonesian occupation, especially during his time in prison.

The colonial tropes of the “civilizing mission” were also used by the Indonesian state to justify its military occupation, the forced integration of Timor as its twenty-seventh province, and Western-oriented Indonesianization while advancing the interests of capital. There were also genuine efforts to censor Brière’s documentary *Bitter Paradise: The Sell-Out of East Timor.* Her film was virtually blacklisted from broadcast in Canada even though it was awarded Best Political Documentary at Hot Docs in 1996. The Canadian Broadcast Corporation (CBC) dropped plans to air the film, and when TVOntario aired the documentary, they received complaints from Inco, a major Canadian mining company with investments in Indonesia and one of TVOntario’s most prominent donors; it was taken off the air for the rest of the series[[2]](#footnote-2). As Herman and Chomsky (2002; Mills, 2000) contend, interlocking institutional structures and interests often exert power over public discourse.

Brière and ETAN/Canada’s pro-Indigenous framing and anticolonial rhetoric resonated in a Canada that was becoming more conscious of its genocidal past and ongoing processes of settler-colonialism against Indigenous peoples. Their human rights claims drew strong comparisons between East Timor and Canada’s identical mistreatment of Indigenous peoples while also challenging Canada’s self-righteous multicultural identity while, at the same time, appealing to this identity to instruct audiences to care about the cultural continuity of the East Timorese by framing Canadians as preservers of cultures and as valuing cultural diversity:

Canada’s commitment to multiculturalism and the preservation of languages is highly regarded throughout the world, and places Canada in a unique position of being able to foster these values internationally. Here cultures and languages are being destroyed, as in East Timor, Canada should be working to preservethem (*“East Timor and Canada’s Foreign Policy,” Submission to the Special Joint Committee Reviewing Canadian Foreign Policy, from the Portuguese-Canadian National Congress, June, 1994, TiSA*).

Canadian parliamentarians also extended anticolonial rhetoric based on a vocabulary of entitlement while also characterizing Canadian trade policy with Indonesia as opportunistic, callous, and self-interested, further jettisoning its moral responsibilities that arose in its trading relations with a regime militarily occupying and committing human rights abuses against an innocent people: “We have to ask ourselves what this says about Canadian values, about our expressed desire to contribute to social justice, peace, and stability.” In a speech to the United Nations Decolonization Committee, Canadian MP Ray Funk emphasized the vanishing ways of life of Indigenous peoples, framing the rights of Indigenous peoples as a set of global entitlements to political, economic, and cultural self-determination, namely their right to be free and independent. In the following, Funk encourages his audience to sympathize with the plight of East Timor by making comparisons that resonate with historical and current colonial practices in Canada:

A large number of my own constituents are Aboriginal Canadians, and I can see some instructive parallels between their situation and that of the Timorese … the Canadian experience has clearly demonstrated that policies which attempt to impose a way of life on indigenous peoples, even when those policies are relatively humane and well-intentioned, are largely doomed if they do not involve the active understanding, consent, and participation of the indigenous people themselves … I know that many Canadians are also beginning to realize that our colonial relationship with the First Peoples of Canada has been expressed in the misuse and degradation of land. We and the industrial world have much to learn from the remaining tribal peoples of the world about living in a sustainable relationship with our planet. We may not be able to survive if we do not. The affirmation of the rights of the East Timorese is an important step in recognizing the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples all over the world to some control over their own affairs. The world is going to have to recognize that we can no longer displace or eliminate tribal peoples just to get access to their resources (*Presentation to the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization, August 9, 1990, Ray Funk, Member of Parliament, Prince Albert/Churchill River House of Commons, Canada, WRDA, Box 7*).

Ray Funk, the second Canadian M.P. to address the United Nations about East Timor, challenged Western governments’ complicity in genocide in East Timor, particularly Canada, by building and expanding on the shame of Canadian settler-colonialism. For members of the solidarity movement, the solution to the problem was to extend the same rights of self-determination and international justice afforded to Kuwait. By associating the historical and ongoing realities of the Canadian settler-colonial state to Canadian foreign policy and practices of violence abroad, activists and sympathetic M.P.’s could effectively demonstrate how cynical geopolitics and material interests took precedence over the fundamental principles of the United Nations system and the human rights of the East Timorese, further seeking to evoke negative emotions from Canadian audiences and producing opportunities to mobilize shame.

ETAN’s framing was also sustained and validated by some Canadian journalists who saw Canada’s failure to uphold its own publicly affirmed morality as violating its historical legacy as being a “neutral and peace-promoting country on the world stage,” critically putting into question Canada’s global self-image when it came to East Timor: “If Canada is the peacemaker, the aid-giver, a nation truly kinder and gentler than our great neighbour to the South …. Canadians have always been told such things by their governments, yet few have dared to ask if such flattery was warranted …”.[[3]](#footnote-3) ETAN newsletters often encouraged Canadians to engage in a letter-writing campaign demanding their government end complicity and support a policy prioritizing human rights. Letters by the Canadian public were sent directly to the federal government concerning East Timor. Most letters, directed at prominent politicians like Jean Chrétien himself, called on the Canadian government to speak immediately with ETAN, demanding that their taxes be used for peace (“Our taxes for peace!”), to suspend Indonesian aid, and calling complicity a “silent conspiracy,” naked hypocrisy, and an “abandonment of world moral order.” Other letters and sympathetic parliamentarians emphasized Canada’s Pearsonian legacy and called on Canada to regain its peace-making and human rights identity:

In the past Canada has earned a world-wide reputation for our respect for human rights, both at home and abroad. Canada must regain its former position as a world leader in peace-making and human rights issues, and you must understand that these should take priority even over the short-term pursuit of the dollar (*Letters from Concerned Canadians, WRDA, Box 2*).

Canada has been a leader in the search for peace internationally. We are not showing leadership now. Let us show leadership again. As a former cultural hero of a particular generation said, “Let’s give the sanctions a chance, let’s give peace a chance (*House of Commons Debate on Indonesia & East Timor, 1991, WRDA, Box 21*).

Elaine Brière's documentary *Bitter Paradise* served to galvanize outrage and shame, a “moral shock” (Jasper and Poulsen, 1995) of state complicity in genocide that mobilized many Canadians to join the network and write condemnatory letters to Canadian politicians:

I recently watched a video entitled “Bitter Paradise – The Sell-Out of East Timor” and was horrified and appalled at the major role that Canada is taking in the genocide of the East Timorese people … never again will I vote for a party that has blood on their hands and knowingly and willingly takes part in the murder of innocent people … After all, weren’t Canadians all horrified by what went on in the concentration camps of Germany? This is no better! Suharto should not be allowed into Canada any more than should the Nazis who gas thousands of Jews during the Holocaust. Oh, but I forgot, Canada is a haven for Nazi criminals! You are shaming your country (*Letters from Concerned Canadians, WRDA, Box 2*).

These letter-writing and media excerpts demonstrate the strength and appeal of the peacekeeping frame shared by ETAN and concerned Canadian citizens. Canadian citizens' use of the frame is some evidence of its appeal and spread, where citizens, by contrasting their sense of Canadian identity against the way the Canadian state was acting, used this to motivate why they believed Canada needed to intervene on behalf of the East Timorese. We find in the next section that American organizations also drew from themes and ideologies which form part of the American national identity, that is, their supposed commitment to democracy and freedom.

**3.1.6. American Exceptionalism and the Democratic Deficit**

Since the end of the Second World War, American foreign policy has been predominantly shaped and conditioned by the political culture and narrative of American exceptionalism, and Americans and political commentators often consider their country and foreign policy to be exceptional (Hodgson, 2009; Delistraty, 2019; Sirvent and Haiphong, 2019). More central has been the prevalence of the exceptionalist-democratic frame in the rhetoric of US presidents and political officials, namely the belief that the United States has an ‘exceptional’ moral responsibility to redeem the world by extending freedom and democracy to all peoples. Prominent political leaders have often expressed the fundamental importance of promoting and defending the American values of democracy, freedom, mutual toleration, humanity, and dignity worldwide, having the ability to do so as a global hegemony, namely a military and economic superpower. Take, for example, Jimmy Carter’s 1977 speech, two years after the Indonesian invasion and Henry Kissinger’s statements regarding the indispensability of American global leadership in 1978 (also published in 1998 in *Society*):

No one nation by itself can build a world which reflects all of these fine values. But the United States, my own country, has a reservoir of strength—economic strength which we are willing to share, military strength which we hope never to use again, and the strength of ideals which we are determined fully to maintain as the backbone of our foreign policy .....I see a hopeful world, a world dominated by increasing demands for basic freedoms, for fundamental rights, for higher standards of human existence. We are eager to take part in the shaping of that world *(The Department of State, News Release, March 17 1997, The Humanitarian Project, TiSA).*

Without our commitment to international security there can be no stable peace. Without our constructive participation in the world economy, there could be no hope for economic progress. Without our dedication to human liberty, the prospect of freedom in the world is dim (Kissinger, 1978).

Despite these affirmations, these foreign policy elites supported death-squad regimes in El Salvador and the violent Indonesian occupation and extermination of East Timor. The U.S.’s political discourses of democracy, human rights, and freedom are sharply gainsaid by its support for murderous regimes and antidemocratic forces, cynically determined for political economy and geopolitics reasons. These official political discourses, or narratives, provided ETAN/US and Timorese activists with a strategic political context to frame crimes against humanity in East Timor motivationally. Solidarity activists evoked the image of the U.S. as a leader of human rights, democracy, and freedom. The U.S. state has used this nationalist rhetoric of freedom and democracy as a crucial instrument of its claims to exceptionality. By drawing reference to these discourses and the way the United States had failed to live up to its global image and identity, East Timor solidarity groups hoped to shame the United States into action. ETAN/US and their allies framed the United States as a mighty nation and a hegemonic superpower with the ability and power to resolve regional conflicts and a responsibility to protect victims of political terror and human rights abuses. Although American exceptionalism has often been used to justify war and imperialism, ETAN/US used it as one discursive strategy and motivational frame to compel change in American foreign policy and intervention in the human rights crisis in East Timor. Indeed, like activists involved in the solidarity movement, we would contend that any commitment to democracy in the domestic sphere by the United States does not often extend abroad. US foreign policy appears to be primarily driven by ideological, national strategic, and economic interests rather than a commitment to human rights and democratic values.

Moreover, we also recognize that humanitarian interventions can manifest as new forms of imperialism (Forte, 2010, 2012; Bricmont, 2007; Chomsky, 2008). Nevertheless, such discourses are open for mobilizing and challenging hegemony (Maney et al. 2005). For example, the following newsletter reads:

As we hear from the East Timorese diaspora in Portugal, Macau, Indonesia, Canada, Australia, Mozambique and elsewhere, and from solidarity activists in many countries, it is clear that people all over the globe are looking to the United States, ETAN/US, as key to ending their 17-year nightmare” (*Estafeta, Newsletter, 1993, TiSA*).

This quote is followed right after with an imploration of help “1993 is a crucial year. We need your involvement, and your financial support, to take advantage of the opportunity provided by changes in American awareness and administration.” (ETAN 1993). This quote makes it very clear that the U.S. is seen to hold a lot of sway within the international community, and this sentiment is also meant as an appeal to readers to demonstrate how important it is for them to draw awareness to this issue, and to, as citizens of the United States, lobby the U.S. government to help the East Timorese. George bush was seen as resistant to cutting ties with Indonesian , whereas Clinton was seen as potential friendlier to human rights and rectifying this throughout the world. A similar framing was advanced by closely allied U.S. Church organizations, such as the Clergy and Laity Concerned (CALC), who called for U.S. responsibility:

As the world’s leading power and Indonesia’s principal source of military and economic aid, the United States has all along been in a position to exert influence on the Suharto government’s actions (*“East Timor: An Act of Genocide,” CALC Report, Vol. VI, No. 2, Special Issue, The Humanitarian Project, TiSA*).

American global leadership here is understood as decisive in building a coalition of governments to support East Timor’s international rights to self-determination and end the Indonesian occupation and genocide, and, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, insofar as the United States remains the sole superpower capable of building, fostering, and directing an international system devoted to democracy, the international rule of law, and human rights. Furthermore, ETAN/US argued that the power of the United States (and its citizens) was integral to ending the nightmare faced by East Timorese. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, there was no contesting America’s status as the most powerful country in the world and as the country which prided itself as the “leader of the free world”. America is described as the only state that could change East Timor's situation towards one that reflects the universally accepted standards of freedom, democracy, and international law. This proclamation clearly articulates how the U.S. needs to take action on the conflict because of its potential to end it. Proclamations such as “The United States is a “Symbol of human rights and democracy” (Estafeta, Newsletter, 1994/09, TiSA) were common in the newsletters and worked as a way to both demonstrate the United States standing and perception on the world stage but also draws attention to the norms and values that the United States has tried to uphold in the international arena.

The imprisoned leader of the National Council of Maubere Resistance (CNRM), Xanana Gusmão, writing a letter addressed directly to members of ETAN/US and published in a 1994 newsletter, asserted that: “As with all conflict, only the US possesses the power to alter situations which, like that of East Timor, turn unacceptable in the face of universal standards of Law, Justice and Peace...we know that only the US can tilt the scales our way” (Estafeta, Newsletter, 1994/09, TiSA). America is described as the only nation capable of effectuating change to the conditions in East Timor towards one which reflects respect for universally accepted standards of freedom, democracy, and international law. These claims articulate how the U.S. needs to take immediate action on the conflict and genocide because of its doubtless capacity to end it. American global hegemony and the United States' moral responsibility to protect democratic rights abroad provide a justification for action; they work as motivational frames. This is most clearly affirmed in an article written by Noam Chomsky, who answers Americans’ questions about the reasons why they should care about East Timor, highlighting the indispensable role the United States could play in promoting and preserving democracy abroad and attending to the suffering of victims of genocide: “The US government has played a decisive role in escalating these atrocities and can easily act to mitigate or terminate them” (“Why Americans Should Care about East Timor,” Noam Chomsky, in Mother Jones, August 26, 1999). Americans, Chomsky argued, should devote their attention to East Timor because:

The first is that East Timor has been, and still is, the scene of enormous massacres and suffering. Many of the terrible things that happen in the world are out of our control. We may deplore them, but we cannot do very much about them. This case is quite different, hence far more important. What has happened and what lies ahead are very much under our control, so directly that the blood is on our hands. The second reason is that by considering what has happened in East Timor since 1975, we can learn some important things about ourselves, about our society and our institutions... to the extent that we see ourselves as citizens in a democratic community, we have a responsibility to devote our energies to these ends. The recent history of Timor provides a revealing insight into the policies of the US government, the factors that enter into determining them, and the ways in which our ideological system functions (*“A Curtain of Ignorance,” in “East Timor: Beyond Hunger,” Southeast Asia Chronicle, Issue No.74, August 1980, TiSA*).

This framing resonates profoundly with democratic cultural themes. First is that East Timor is the site of an enormous human catastrophe, made materially possible through Western support. The United States was directly involved in supporting the invasion and arming it militarily. However, also, the United States has hegemonic leverage; namely, it could intervene to stop the genocidal dimensions of the Indonesian occupation. Finally, the United States was not acting on East Timor because the Timorese were understood as “unworthy victims” (Chomsky and Herman, 2002), and no powerful interests served in alleviating their suffering or taking steps to end it. Chomsky’s work was in a symbiotic relationship with solidarity groups. Chomsky’s statements regarding democratic responsibility must be understood in terms of two underlying realities of state foreign policy operations: the material and the rhetorical. These two domains created political opportunities for activists to mobilize around a politics of moral accountability, demanding states act consistently on democratic values and close the gap between these two political-economic dimensions. Evident in Chomsky’s statement is a claim about linking U.S. hegemonic power to substantial democratic and moral concerns, namely, the American state (and the West more generally) should be practicing consistent democratic exemplarity.

Chomsky’s claims raise critical questions about the ways in which the American ideological system undermines democracy itself, where fundamental facts of U.S. sanctioned atrocities scarcely enter the electoral arena or public discourse. Namely, coupled with the sordid reality of U.S. complicity in East Timor, the American ideological system poses severe threats to the abstract American democratic ideal and to historical values of liberty and equality, constituting a democratic deficit in the American body politic.

Moreover, appeals to their responsibility as citizens of a democratic community in actively fulfilling those values is an essential motivational frame for raising issues of democratic accountability. ETAN/US member Matthew Jardine underscored the same underlying theme in an op-ed titled “West’s Hands Dirty in East Timor.” Here, Jardine holds a mirror up to the U.S.’s hypocrisy for breaching publicly affirmed values, that is, targeting Western states, specifically the United States, that refuse to apply to themselves the same standards they apply to others:

“Accountability is one of the two or three keys to democracy,” Richard Holbrooke stated during his visit to Indonesia. Indeed. Just as Jakarta should, Washington and its Western partners-in-crime with Indonesia must fully account for their collective role in the mass killings and destruction that took place in East Timor beginning in 1975 (<https://etan.org/et2000a/february/1-6/1oped.htm>)

Like Canadian activists, ETAN/US applied the standards of international laws and political discourses (democracy, freedom, human rights) that the West claims to promote and uphold to Western state power itself. Indeed, like their Canadian counterparts, American activists advocating for East Timor would contend that the ideology of the U.S. as a champion of ‘democracy’ and morality, or peacekeeping, in the world constitutes a facade of false images (Chomsky, 1992) that ideologically conceals a profit-driven policy of *realpolitik,* especially within the Cold War context.

The global solidarity movement, ETAN/US, also mobilized around their governments’ unfair and unequal treatment between what they regarded as two equivalent forms of invasion and human rights abuses. East Timor was often juxtaposed with Kuwait to demonstrate the US’s complicity, hypocrisy, and selective interventionism regarding supporting democracy and international law. This also allowed the solidarity movement to link Western complicity and inactivity to political-economic and geopolitical interests. Moreover, this comparison helped to bring the attention of U.S. Congressional investigations to the Indonesian invasion and occupation of East Timor. While the United States supplied 90% of Indonesian military armaments, major American media gave little coverage of human rights abuses in East Timor. Like solidarity groups in Canada, ETAN/US’s frame extension involved piggybacking abuses in East Timor on Iraq’s “carbon-copy” invasion of Kuwait, an act of aggression and international human rights violation widely condemned by Western powers who intervened on behalf of the victims. Solidarity activists treated East Timor as a different instance of an existing human rights problem (e.g Kuwait) deserving equal treatment under international law. Moreover, many references were also made to East Timor’s “killing fields,” drawing direct equivalencies to Cambodia, where the Western press condemned Cambodia’s “genocidal policies” yet downplayed atrocities in East Timor (Herman and Chomsky, 2002).

Similarly, ETAN/US denounced the selective interventionism of their own country, as the United States intervened quite vigorously against Iraq due to its invasion of Kuwait. However, the U.S. only meekly responded to Indonesia’s continued violence against East Timor. Xanana also equated East Timor’s case with that of Kuwait “The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was promptly punished, while the US continued to acknowledge Indonesian sovereignty over East Timor ”. Xanana then goes further, comparing the response to East Timor to that of Haiti “Haiti became a military objective for the US because of the existence of a military dictatorship which killed democracy and freedom. In East Timor, the occupationists continue to capture and torture the local population, which demands its freedom” (*Estafeta, Newsletter, 1994/09, TiSA*). The claim being made above is that the U.S. will only protect against human rights abuses when it is politically expedient and profitable for them to do so, calling into question the U.S.’s commitment to human rights and its exceptionalism. Drawing parallels between East Timor, Kuwait, and Cambodia was necessary for their motivational framing, namely invoking a set of familiar and emotionally charged representations of past or current events, trigger phrases like “killing fields” and “concentration camps,” provided an apparent rationale for Western interventionism.

Between 1980 and 1989, individuals in the United States interested in East Timor began to expand their activities and organizational networks, partly due to detailed conditions in East Timor revealed in 1989 when Indonesia opened East Timor to foreigners again. Members of Congress due to the effective lobbying of Timorese like José Ramos-Horta, members of Congress extended their support to East Timor, began taking more direct action on the issue, and enlisted their peers. For instance, in 1984, the *Boston Globe* reported Congressmen as pressing Reagan’s Secretary of State George Shultz for an equitable settlement of the conflict in East Timor, and to support self-determination, with the journalists appealing to the anticolonial ethos of the American Revolution: “nothing could be more consistent with the original, anticolonial spirit of the American Revolution” (11/07/1984, "A Letter to the Secretary," *Boston Globe,* TiSA). Other Timorese refugees and activists also tapped into discursive opportunities that drew on the historical resonance of the American Revolution and freedom from foreign domination, articulating a morally potent motivational framing. During a North American speech tour organized by the American and Canadian section of the East Timor Alert Network, Timorese refugee and diasporic activist Elizabeth Exposto appropriated the dominant discourse of ‘American freedom’ as a “weapon of the weak” (Scott, 1985; also see Steinberg, 1999:751), in effect using this public transcript to challenge the U.S. state to live up to its democratic ideals, and to shame its complicity in violating these same principles by condoning, and supporting Indonesia’s militarism throughout the archipelago, and in particular, committing human rights abuses in East Timor:

We believe that you as taxpayers and residents of the United States have a right to know what your government is doing to support the Indonesian occupation of East Timor and the oppression of the East Timorese people. Young people like me still have a simple faith in the goodness of the American people – that once you know how your government is involved in East Timor, you will pressure your elected representatives to end US complicity in the occupation of my country … All the people of East Timor want are the right to experience the same freedoms that people in this country take for granted. These freedoms were expressed in your own Declaration of Independence over two hundred years ago. Please help make your dream of 1776 real for us. And please, ask your new President and your members of Congress to stop supporting repressive military regimes like Indonesia. Ask them to support the people of the United States instead. Because as we have noticed, there are many people in this country too for whom the dream of ‘life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness’ is still very far away (*Clandestine Front National Council of Maubere Resistance (CNRM),* *North-American Speaking Tour, Elizabeth Exposto, 1993, “East Timor: Towards ‘Life, Liberty & the Pursuit of Happiness,’ TiSA*).

Timorese activists like Exposto appropriated evocative political terms such as “freedom,” “rights,” and “democracy,” often used by those in power positions to appeal directly to the American people. Here she articulates a moral authority for collective action in support of East Timor's right to self-determination by grounding a sense of injustice in resonant American values and core cultural beliefs. Moreover, she invokes the American Revolution, particularly U.S. political discourse on liberty from colonialism and foreign rule, drawing striking parallels between the American revolutionary, anticolonial struggle against Britain, and East Timor's related resistance to the Indonesian military occupation. This comparison connects the emancipatory aspirations of the Timorese to fundamental American values such as liberty and democracy, creating opportunities to mobilize shame against the American state.

Political outcomes were also affected by political opportunities and configurations (McAdam, 1999) that emerged in the US. Appealing to the United States' moral responsibility for promoting democratic values, with solid information politics, was critical in persuading members of Congress to reduce military exports to Indonesia (also see Lundry, 2022). Solidarity groups in the United States increasingly influenced the strategic success of US foreign relations with Indonesia and East Timor. Solidarity with East Timor registered increased viability after the end of the Cold War. Indonesia lost its strategic geopolitical position as a bastion of anti-communism, and a wave of pro-democracy movements destabilized the authoritarian Indonesian regime. The wave of pro-democracy movements in Indonesia made it more important to cast claims through a ‘democratic frame.’ Dr. Vincente Soares Faria’s - the political coordinator of the East Timorese intellectual forum (Forsareptil) - testimony to the US House of Representatives in May 1999:

The resolution of the Timor Leste problem has to be put in the frame of democracy, justice, and peace … We demand that: The U.S. government, which claims to be the pioneer of democracy and human rights, participates more actively in supporting the attempts made by UN, government representatives from Portugal and Indonesia in resolving the problem of East Timor in a democratic, just, and peaceful way … It is our expectation that the suffering of the East Timorese finds its place in the heart of the government and the people of the U.S. Your involvement and support is very much necessary to carry out a peaceful process for resolving the East Timor problem. Our values of democracy will be at stake in the struggle of the Maubere people. Long live democracy in America and long live the struggle of the Maubere people! (“*Paramilitary Violence in East Timor,” testimony from a briefing by the House Human Rights and Progressive Caucuses and a hearing of the Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights of the International Relations committee, May 4 and May 7, 1999, TiSA*)

The quote above invokes America's claim as a pioneering democratic country and its continued support of the Indonesian dictatorship, a shameful discrepancy. These discourses of shame were brought directly to bear in Congressional halls and halls of power.

Solidarity groups worked through Congress and pressed for the democratic realization of self-determination in East Timor. Solidarity activists, as previously mentioned, successfully reduced US military trade with Jakarta. For example, in 1993, ETAN persuaded Congress to suspend the transfer of F-5 and F-16 warplanes to Indonesia, and in 1994, the State Department issued a ban on small arms transfers to Indonesia. Initially, East Timor was met with indifference from Congress; however, with both information politics - Congress being indifferent primarily because of ignorance about the facts - and strong cultural framing about supporting intervention, Congress came to pass legislation supporting East Timor's independence. For instance, Congressional debates demonstrate the moral rhetoric surrounding justifications for humanitarian intervention and resolution to the conflict and support of the Timorese, making a particular historical reference to the U.S. as standing up to dictators like Hitler, Stalin, Hussein, Milosevic, and protecting freedom and democracy. The nationalist rhetoric here referred to America’s “glorious past.” This rhetorical strategy deploys mythic histories and representations to define a set of values and virtues the nation must regain to “emulate its original greatness” (Levinger and Lyte, 2001:178-179; Smith, 1992). These myths were important for motivationally framing the problem but also in formulating the remedial activities needed, which led to the U.S. opposing Indonesia during the 1999 East Timor crisis:

Mr. Lantos: ...to argue at the end of the 20th century that we should revert to isolationism is really a sorry spectacle. What it reveals is that nothing, nothing has been learned from the bloody experiences of this entire century … But let me state for myself that I think our participation in the Second World War was one of the most glorious aspects of the whole of American history. Our standing up to the regime of Stalin and other Communist dictators in the second half of this century is among the most glorious aspects of our history … and what we are seeing unfolding in East Timor now represents just another chapter in the determination of the American people and the American government to stand up to the horrendous dictatorships that still are present in many parts of this globe. (*Congressional Record, 1999, TiSA*).

Mr. Porter: The people chose to be a free country, a free people, free to make their own laws and practice their own religion, and most importantly free from the terror and oppression which Indonesia has imposed on them since 1975. It is this same freedom that our country stands for, fought for many years ago and must continue to protect around the world (*Congressional Record, 1999, TiSA*).

These congressional records demonstrate the persuasiveness of the democratic exceptionalist frame and the discourse of freedom. They were used in the halls of power to propel change in government action towards East Timor. These records appeal to the democratic reputation of the United States, the “most glorious aspects of our history,” and how the U.S. needs to move towards this aspect of its identity, not away from it. Moreover, we see emotions' importance in framing the East Timor debate in these Congressional Records (see Keys and Yorke, 2019). These national imaginaries are imbued with emotions and feelings and were necessary for triggering human rights activism and political attention in Congress. The mass atrocities in East Timor produced guilt, shame, and revulsion from members of Congress and the Senate. Politicians sympathetic to East Timor in the US, Canada, and Australia framed human rights in language that explicitly invoked international law and internationally recognized human rights principles. However, these congressional statements have more to do with emotions encompassing the idea that it was morally legitimate and necessary for the United States to dissociate itself from murderous regimes that did not and do not, even minimally, respect human rights nor stand for democratic processes. In some sense, these claims attempt to reclaim American virtue (Keys, 2014). Similarly, in the next section, we demonstrate how Australian organizations mobilized a “debt-remembrance” frame, informed by their cultural notion of the “Fair go,” to propel action from the Australian state.

**3.1.8. “Fair Go”: National Imaginary, Egalitarianism, and Australia’s Debt to East Timor**

Like the Canadian and American case, Australian solidarity activists harnessed hegemony to challenge it (Maney et al., 2005). Namely, activists mobilized the dominant terms of representation in the framing of their political discourse to generate change in Australian foreign policy. Activists frequently invoked collective debt memories and the national tradition of ‘fair go’ to expose the contradiction between these values and Australian betrayal of the East Timorese. Australian solidarity networks and civil society groups promoted this debt of gratitude to convey a sense of ethical responsibility to return the favour by advocating for East Timor’s right for independence.

Australia, as the closest “Western” power to East Timor, has a long and complex history with its geographic neighbour. As for Canada and the United States governments, the East Timor solidarity movement blamed the Australian government for actively supporting the initial Indonesia invasion of East Timor and their subsequent occupation. Australia also drew the ire of the movement due to its supportive economic policies with the Suharto regime, embodied through the Timor Gap Treaty, which laid out the partition of oil and gas reserves located in the territorial waters of East Timor. Despite the complex current geopolitics, Australian human rights groups, particularly the FOET organization, used the historical association between East Timor and Australia during World War II as a primary motivational frame, arguing that the Australians owe the East Timorese a historical debt. Constructionists have emphasized the social dimensions involved in the interpretive work of nationalist sense-making and historical remembering (Adorjan and Kelly, 2021). The claims of Australian groups made reciprocity appeals: “Has Australia conveniently forgotten its debt to the East Timorese?” (*Australia, 1995/07*). This remembrance invocation is strategic as a discursive narrative that seeks to invigorate the issue's relevance while also granting moral authority to their claims.

During World War II, the East Timorese people helped Australian soldiers against the Japanese with vital support, many of whom also fought alongside Allied troops. In effect, the Australians used Timor as a military base; they protected Australian soldiers, and their actions in East Timor may have prevented a potential invasion of Western Australia by the Japanese (Australia, 1993/02). After the allied troops withdrew, East Timor suffered enormously at the hands of Japanese forces, where forty to seventy thousand men and women were tortured and killed. The number of East Timorese who died during WW2 exceeded the total number of Australian casualties. Because of this, FOET argued that Australia is partially responsible for the East Timorese plight during World War II. Considering these tremendous losses and damages, both to Timorese human life and infrastructure, Australian veterans and the public have come to recognize the debt they owed to the Timorese people for the heroic sacrifices they made for Australia.

Australia failed East Timor by deliberately obstructing Portuguese efforts at responsible decolonization (Ramos-Horta, 1987). Moreover, Australia's selective blindsight, justifications of the Indonesian invasion and occupation, and reluctance to support ten United Nations resolutions demanding the withdrawal of Indonesian forces from the territory all included complicity and Australia's eagerness to recognize and grant legitimacy to the Indonesian occupation. Activists built on the Australian national imaginary by, quite compellingly, portraying Australia as untrue and perfidious to its moral values for betraying East Timorese by callously turning its backs on its debt obligations to a people that had made tremendous sacrifices during World War II. This allowed solidarity activists to reveal Australian moral hypocrisy in accepting Indonesia's occupation, oppression, and genocide of a defenceless neighbouring people. Therefore, Australian solidarity groups accentuated a disjunction between Australia’s national self-identity and its complicity and absence in helping the Timorese.

The Australian-East Timor Association (AETA) and Friends of East Timor (FOET) historical debt claims often underscored how Australia’s business as usual with Indonesia over East Timor was an object of controversial concern among both the Australian public and World War II veterans. The war generation spoke of a blood debt owed and needing fulfilment to the East Timorese for their unwavering support during World War II. For example, veterans are also depicted in the newsletters as condemning Australia’s brutal policy towards East Timorese, veterans being a commonly used interest group (especially in the U.S. but also in countries with strong remembrance cultures such as Australia and Canada) to determine what is morally righteous: “The surviving veterans can never forget the East Timorese and use every opportunity they have to speak out against Australian government policy on East Timor .”(*Australia, The Inside Story, 1995/07*). For a country such as Australia, with a national identity built on its war history, appealing to veterans is an important discursive strategy used to gain sympathy and legitimacy for the cause.

In the remembrance of the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, the critical place of East Timorese was downplayed, ostensibly because “it is easy to believe that such an omission is directly related to the political necessity for the Australian government to minimize the East Timor contribution to Australia’s war effort, to try and justify the shameful betrayal of our friends in the past 20 years” (Australia, *The Inside Story,* 1995/07). However, most importantly, Australia’s debt to East Timor was invoked as a motivational frame or warrant directed at the public and government, serving to ground and promote claims about ending Australia’s support of the Indonesian occupation of East Timor, to recognize its “double standard on freedom,” and to fulfil its historical responsibility to East Timor by supporting their “inalienable rights to freedom” (Ibid page 9). For example, one FOET newsletter read:

It is important to remember that most of the Australians who experienced the horror of World War Two saw it as a war against fascism, against the sacrifice of small nations and peoples and… secure freedom and human rights. The invasion of East Timor by the Indonesian military dictatorship, and the Australian government’s ongoing support for this outrage, goes against every value and principle that Australian experience in the Second World War stood for. As a nation we should commemorate the appalling suffering of the Second World War, and thank those among us who fought or worked to end it. But we should not let this commemoration be hijacked or corrupted by current government interests. We need to acknowledge the role played by our unsung East Timorese brothers and sisters, and repay our debt by bringing to an end our government’s support for their invader.(*Australia, The Inside Story, 1995/07*).

The Australian movement for East Timor was generally fraught with political differences, primarily between liberal and radical voices **(**See Freney, 1991; Scott 1994). For instance, *Green Left Weekly*, an environmentally concerned left-wing organization appropriated the Australian national myth of fair go to press their moral claims about supporting East Timor:

According to Dan Nicholson, a spokesperson for the group, the Australian government “should give East Timor a fair go,” by allowing “access to the resources and revenues to which East Timor is entitled under international law. (*Green Left, 1993*).

If we did that we might go some way towards providing reparation for our connivance in the deaths of 300,000 East Timorese people since the 1975 invasion by Indonesia and we could claim to finally be repaying the Timorese for the 40,000 lives they lost during World War II when they helped stop the invasion of Australia. (*Green Left, 1999*).

The concept of the “fair go”, emblematic in Australian culture (Barry, 2017) refers to the belief that Australians must treat others equally and look after their friends and compatriots. A sense of injustice was contextually linked to the entrenched Australian national myth and values of the “fair go” to produce a nationally imbued “injustice frame.” Noam Chomsky also adopted the moral-debt discourse, in particular, to mobilize moral shame at the Australian government’s complicity in the horror and its ignominy for betraying the blood debt owed to the Timorese for their heroic actions during the Second World War, a profound justice that was being denied:

This horror story can be brought to an end if the rest of the world shows even a fraction of the integrity and courage shown by ordinary Indonesians, who are protesting at what their government is doing in East Timor, under conditions that are vastly more onerous than any of us face or can imagine. And I do not even speak of the incredible courage of the Timorese, which shames all of us, perhaps Australians in particular, because of the debt of blood which remains from World War II, (the Timorese assisted Australian soldiers fighting the Japanese, and helped to prevent a Japanese invasion of Australia) (*Chomsky, 1995*).

Following the turning point of the Santa Cruz Massacre in 1991, Monsignor Hilton Deakin, a Catholic bishop and crucial campaigner of East Timor’s liberation struggle for self-determination in Australia, in a news article titled “Church Urges End to Timor Shame” called on Australians not to forget with equal moral indignation that the events are “closer to home,” and that Australia “should remember the burdens the East Timorese shouldered during World War II, adding: “We have an unpaid debt to these largely unsung heroes.”

Just as the East Timorese struggled and sacrificed themselves to end the Second World War and help Australian soldiers; Australia has a moral duty to reciprocate by ending its support of Indonesia’s occupation and genocide of the East Timorese. The invocation to act is based on an understanding that not only do Australians owe a debt to the East Timorese for their actions in aiding Australians, but also that now Australians have an obligation to help East Timor during their own time of need. Despite the use of the World War II remembrance frame, which signifies Australia’s proud history of a nation which stood against genocide in World War II, and the national myths surrounding it, FOET understood that Australia has its own past of colonial repression and genocide itself (Moses, 2005), and continues to arm and finance regimes accused of genocide throughout the world. Despite these contradictions, FOET continued to use the World War II remembrance frame strategically in order to appeal to the sanitized national myths of their home country. This was also done by the other major Australia East Timor organization, AETA. According to David Scott of the AETA, the Australian public understood the wartime debt owed to the East Timorese:

Since late 1975, opinion polls and discussions with thousands of people have shown that almost all Australians were, and still are, sympathetic towards the people of East Timor and their right to self-determination. For some, this is a matter of simple human rights and horror of the invasion; for others still, it is a matter of supporting the social changes Fretilin has begun in East Timor, and for many older people, it arises from an acknowledgement of Australia’s wartime debt to East Timor.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The national imaginary of fair go and the emotions of gratitude experienced by many veterans to the East Timorese aligned with the objectives of solidarity activists and NGOs seeking to support the Timorese people and their right to self-determination. It exemplifies a “frame alignment” strategy and tactic for motivational framing whereby existing values and beliefs are invigorated and amplified (Benford and Snow, 2000).

Australian Diplomat James Dunn was also key to campaigning for the people of East Timor. In 1977 he gave his testimony of the Indonesian atrocities in East Timor before the United States Congress, which became the Dunn Report, based on interviews with Timorese refugees. In his book *Timor: A People Betrayed*:

From 1978 onwards, the Australian government openly condoned the Indonesian invasion, and even began to assume the role of an accomplice by rallying to Indonesia’s defense in the Parliament, and in international forums, whenever allegations of Indonesia’s harsh occupation policies were made. In contrast to its attitude to the annexation of Baltic states which, forty years after the Soviet annexation, the government was still stubbornly refusing to recognize, a little more than two years after the invasion it recognised Indonesia's forced incorporation of East Timor, and thus acquiesced to the ruthless suppression of its peoples. Australia’s neutrality in the conflict would have been an abrogation of responsibility; its consent to integration was an act of shame and hypocrisy, shame because of its debt to the Timorese people, hypocrisy because while the Timorese were being ruthlessly forced to submit to Indonesian rule Australia was vociferously calling for an end to acts of aggression or oppression in Poland, Afghanistan, South Africa, and Kampuchea” (378).

Another strategy used was to appeal to the values fought for during World War II, particularly those of democracy and fighting for freedom against totalitarianism and fascism. FOET and other Australian East Timorese activists laid claims as the arbiters of these values by claiming that they were now fighting for the same values that veterans of World War II fought for. The government looks hypocritical by commemorating Australia’s role during World War II while simultaneously supporting an anti-democratic regime and the subjugation of an entire group of people. FOET used the World War II frame to capitalize on World War II remembrance culture (commonly evoked as the last “good” or moral war), a national rhetoric that existed among Australian World War II veterans during the battle of Timor, which is profoundly influential in Western nations (Crampton and Power, 2005). This untold story of military history emphasized the importance of the Timorese to the survival of the Australians, exemplifying their great comradery, friendship, and goodwill. However, also a recognition of the suffering they placed on the Timorese and the debt of justice and remuneration they owed to the Timorese. This also represented the simple heroism and intercultural bond between the Australians and the East Timorese. Using World War II and claiming their values adds moral weight to their claims and appeals. “For Australians, the war for freedom that we remember ended on August 15th, 1945. For some, that war goes on….”. The moral caution of World War II and Nuremberg was to endorse humanitarianism and establish a universal prohibition and intolerance of crimes against humanity to ensure that the full horrors of Nazism did not re-emerge.

All this moral debt talk proved to be an effective claims-making strategy, which finally compelled Australian troops to secure East Timor by leading and deploying a peacekeeping mission, followed by the arrival of UN forces in 1999. This was regarded by many local Timorese as honouring Australia’s debt to them. However, contention over Australia’s role in East Timor continued throughout the 2000s, as Australia’s continued expropriation of East Timor oil resources became the next battleground for activists, who continued to use the “fair go”, the World War II remembrance frame and the moral debt argument, this time asserting that Australia needed to “payback” East Timor for all of its stolen resources.

**3.1.9. Conclusion**

We have argued that national contexts remain crucial for transnational contention as social movement actors frame their political discourse concerning particular states and foreign policies. More broadly, our research sheds light on the motivational framing strategies for advancing international human rights advocacy and how the international community can support marginalized groups demonized by their states and deemed unworthy of the full array of civil rights. National contexts and the domestic structure of discursive opportunities were crucial in shaping frame outcomes, mobilizing the global solidarity movements’ human rights claims, and legitimizing moral action. Our cross-national empirical analysis provides further evidence of the relationship between human rights mobilization and nationalist foreign policy discourses and how human rights claims are contextualized, embedded, and extended within specific historical, national, cultural, and political contexts (Best and Loseke, 2018; Lamont et al., 2016; Merry, 2006). Namely, situational and historical contingencies impact variations in movement framing and the framing of political discourse.

Moreover, transnational movements can also effectively ‘harness hegemony’ by appropriating the terms and representations that structure discourses of the powerful in the service of human rights claims-making and support for Indigenous national self-determination. The global solidarity movement's discursive strategy constituted a hybrid approach that harnessed and challenged hegemony (Steinberg, 1999; Maney et al., 2005). Furthermore, our research underscores the entanglements of national identity and emotions, particularly for the mobilization of shame in transnational human rights diffusion and contention and the framing of political discourse (Broer and Duyvendak, 2009). According to José Ramos-Horta, shame and the weight of public opinion ultimately liberated Timor-Leste (see Horta, 2000; Hill, 2002; Nevins, 2005). Indeed, the global solidarity movement played a prominent role in shaping national and international politics around the issue of Timorese Indigenous national sovereignty and, in effect, their claims-making impacted why states like Canada, the U.S., and Australia decided, in the end, to intervene in support of Timor-Leste’s right to self-determination (see Lundry, 2022; Webster, 2020; Fernandes, 2011, 2021; Robinson, 2011).

More research is needed to determine the full legislative and public effect these framings had on the issue and its response. Future research should explore these framings' effect on recruitment to an organization’s cause and analyze whether frames that resonate with broader socio-political discourses can more effectively recruit adherents. Future research should also pay closer analytical attention not only to how nationalism and discourses of foreign policy shape the motivational framing of human rights but also to the potential variations in the diagnostic and prognostic framings of crises. The social problem work required for these solidarity organizations to make citizens care about an issue with so little relevance to their daily lives is of great theoretical and practical value. To that end, researchers should examine whether the way activist organizations frame a social problem is picked up and echoed by conscious constituents in their nation-state. We provide some evidence of this through Canadian letter writing and U.S. congressional records. However, future research can show the diffusion of these discourses and framings from organizations to citizens. Some recent research has shown that linking culturally resonant frames can successfully shape policy outcomes (Qiaoan and Saxonberg, 2022). Many crises today, like East Timor, can be considered “forgotten” and protracted struggles and issues, such as the Yemeni Civil War and its current humanitarian crisis or the ongoing West Papua conflict with Indonesia, where some have accused the latter of genocide. Claim-makers are constantly struggling to make citizens knowledgeable about an issue and, more importantly, to make these issues objects of public concern.

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Chapter 4

Deflecting Responsibility: Denial, Displacement, and Rationalization in Western State Counterframing for Human Rights Abuses in East Timor

Deflecting Responsibility: Denial, Displacement, and Rationalization in Western State Counterframing for Human Rights Abuses in East Timor

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Abstract

The research examines archival documents from public media, interviews, and Congressional debates from 1977 to 1998 to understand the social and state organization of strategies for deflecting responsibility. Developing a model of state-organized denial, this research explores how geopolitical contexts, interstate relations, and a profit-driven realpolitik state policy mediate state officials’ displacement, rationalization, and outright denial of Indonesian human rights abuses in East Timor. Comparing these three distinct strategies for deflecting responsibility temporally, focusing primarily on U.S., Canadian, and Australian state officials, the analysis demonstrates strategies for deflection and cover-up of mass murder and human rights abuses in East Timor in the service of Cold War anticommunism, realpolitik, as well as geopolitical and domestic state priorities as organizers for counterframing and state-mobilized denial. This research underscores the importance of advancing an institutionalist perspective through the concepts of path dependency and contingency in understanding denial, counterframing, and state strategies for deflecting responsibility.

**Introduction**

Suffering in geographically remote places is even more prone to speedy and thorough deletion in a politics of selective amnesia. The horrors of East Timor, however, were “not so distant” insofar as they were not only committed by the Indonesian military but facilitated with the aid of powerful Western states (Nevins, 2005). The quarter-century-long tragedy that befell the people of East Timor between 1975 and 1998 until their independence vote in 1999, achieving statehood in 2002, is well-documented (Robinson, 2009; Fernandes, 2022; Simpson, 2004; Webster, 2020). Western states colluded with the Indonesian military regime and multinational corporations in deflecting responsibility for this discreditable truth because such states viewed Indonesia as economically and geopolitically strategic. Western state officials, with help from the established media (Herman and Chomsky, 2002) engaged in what Herman and Peterson (2010) call *atrocity management,* namely strategies employed to deflect responsibility from Western-approved violence onto its enemies and to deny and rationalize human rights abuses in the territory. The decision to support the Indonesian invasion and occupation is based on geopolitical considerations, rationales, and successive, systemic Western state policy, not human rights conventions. In Bauman’s words (Frankel, 1997:37), Western state ministers condoned Indonesian extermination of the East Timorese because “there was no place for them in the world that the rulers of Indonesia were trying to build; we may say that the destruction of East Timorians was – for the Indonesian regime – an act of creation.”

The contention here is that geopolitical and profit-driven foreign state policies operate as underlying institutional forces in structuring and reproducing state repertoires for deflecting responsibility for human rights abuses instead of acting to rationalize the human rights dimensions of suffering and absolve perpetrators and consign responsibility to outside forces and abstractions. Deflecting responsibility exhibits a series of strategies where state powers seek to neutralize accusations of human rights abuses and complicity and shape public perceptions by deflecting attention and blame away from regimes culpable for repeated and consistent human rights abuses. In effect, the repertoires advanced by Western state powers served to deflect responsibility from the Indonesian regime and state policies and absolve themselves, as complicit actors, of ultimate responsibility for human rights crimes. At the geopolitical level, deflecting responsibility involves downplaying, rationalizing, and displacing blame. It is a strategy used by governments to pursue an otherwise morally questionable agenda while at the same time minimizing accountability for the human suffering generated by their policies and actions, and the actions of client-states.

As a strategy for rationalizing U.S. foreign policy, the domino theory contended that the fall of Indochina would trigger nations in Southeast Asia to succumb to communism. The domino logic would also serve as a convenient rationalization and framing for justifying U.S. (and Western) support of political leaders amenable to U.S. state influence. For U.S. foreign policy elites, the defeat of communists in Indonesia through a violent CIA-backed purge (Roosa, 2020; Robinson, 2018; Simpson, 2008) and subsequent support of Indonesian militarism throughout the archipelago was important for preventing Indonesia from aligning with the communist forces of the Cold War, and to prevent other “dominoes” (Thailand, Malaysia, Philippines) from following suit. The overthrow of President Sukarno and the elimination of leftist and Indigenous forces in Indonesia were also necessary to open the doors for U.S. and Western imperial and geopolitical interests in Southeast Asia. For instance, the Timor Gap Treaty served corporate oil interests while providing Indonesia and Western allies with geostrategic deep-sea lanes for military activities and training. General Suharto took full advantage of these geopolitical tilts in U.S. foreign policy and ‘harnessed’ the hegemonic command of anti-communism to gain Western state forces' support in the Cold War international context.

      The analysis illustrates how rationalization, displacement, and denial – as strategies for deflecting responsibility – sustained the Western state's irresponsibility by deflecting individual, state, and, most importantly, systemic responsibility (state policy) for human rights abuses in East Timor—as part of a successive, bipartisan, profit-driven realpolitik Western state policy, state officials deflected attributions of responsibility from the rights-abusing Indonesian regime doing the denying, and by extension, sought to absolve themselves of culpability and neutralize the public criticisms advanced by Timorese activists, church leaders, and human rights organizations. In short, deflections of responsibility by Western states reveals a deep pattern of state denial of human rights abuses and the material and geopolitical consequences of supporting and shifting the blame for wrongdoing away from Indonesia. State officials engaged in “counterframing” strategies (Benford and Hunt, 2003) in response to emerging human rights claims for SMOs (social movement organizations) supporting East Timor’s right to self-determination. Counterframing strategies for deflecting responsibility emerge from the “spiral effect” (Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink, 2013; Shor, 2008) that explains states progress support for state repression to “rule-consistent behavior” via the denial of human rights claims, which emanates from the boomerang model proposed by Keck and Sikkink (1998), as SMOs mobilizing based on human rights play an instrumental role in the socialization of human rights norms. Whereas repressive states which directly commit human rights abuses may consistently deny, norm-violating democracies tend to adopt a distinct strategy of denial because they tend to, at least, maintain a façade of moral sensitivity, superiority, and legal adherence to international human rights norms. Therefore, democracies may have more to lose and are vulnerable to the mobilization of shame (Torelli and Drago, 2023; Keenen, 2004). Hence, denial is interactional and must be understood within the context of the relation between human rights claims and counterframing dynamics.

My contention is state counterframing to human rights claims, can be both incremental and path dependent. The longer the path, the more costly it is to alter the direction, which helps to underscore an understanding of why states adopt long-term strategies for denying and deflecting responsibility. Switching to some previously plausible path or foreign policy alternative – as activists sought to mobilize Western states to prioritize human rights over trade in foreign policy – becomes less likely (Goldstone, 1998; Mahoney, 2000; Mahoney and Schensul; Pierson, 2000). Path dependency is understood as the tendency for foreign policies and practices to develop their own self-reinforcing logic, due to the significant costs of changing directions (geopolitical, material, and reputational) (Pierson, 2000b). Foreign policy legacies of the Cold War, such as the domino theory, are embedded in path dependent political and economic contexts, where repertoires of denial and deflection strategies are adopted to sustain institutional patterns, strategies, and practices in advancing and preserving keystone state policies. However, contingent events open up the possibility for effectively challenging strategies for deflecting responsibility. During critical junctures, state officials may change tact and adopt different strategies in responding to challengers.

Western state officials deployed three predominant strategies for deflecting responsibility: displacement of blame, rationalization, and denial. The paper is divided into two parts: (1) repertoires of denial about historical events, such as the Indonesian invasion of East Timor, famine, and rationalizations for supporting the invasion and occupation; and (2) repertoires of denial focused on undermining the credibility of people like Lopes and SMOs taking a similar stance in an early effort to neutralize public criticism throughout the late 1970s and the 1980s, until the 1991 Santa Cruz massacre sparked an international outcry over human rights abuses in East Timor, and promulgated a movement to support their cause. Moreover, the fall of the Soviet Union removed the geopolitical incentive to continue supporting anti-communist Indonesia. Hence, Western states began to withdraw from geopolitical rationalizations and focus more on challenging the prognoses offered by SMOs, instead of forthrightly denying atrocities and human rights abuses.

**The State Organization of Denial**

State crime, genocide, and crimes of the powerful (Chambliss, 1989) in general, have found evidence of the exercise of techniques of neutralization, counterframing, and repertoires of denial (Cohen, 2013; Cohen, 1993, 1996; Alvarez, 1997; Neubacher, 2006; Bryant et al., 2018; Hooks and Mosher, 2005; Del Rosso, 2011, 2022; Yildiz and Baert, 2021; Benford and Hunt, 2003). Ward and Green (2004:320), contra constructionist readings of denial, contend that “actors conceal because of their anticipation of how a social audience would label if it became known.” Hence, denial cannot be understood as strictly public. State actors may draw from a complex of deflection strategies that deny, reclassify, sanitize, and rationalize atrocities they are complicit in.

Building on Sykes and Matza’s (1957) model and adjusting it to an understanding of denial by both direct perpetrators and states accused of complicity in human rights abuses, Cohen (1996) analyzed official ‘repertoires’ collectively organized by the state in response to reports of human rights abuses. States routinely and systematically conceal their responsibility for, or knowledge of, human rights abuses, often encompassing both pre-emptive and post hoc dimensions: literal, interpretive, and implicatory. These varying repertoires of denial may occur in a single sequence but simultaneously in the same statement. Literal denial constitutes outright, factual, and blatant denial, namely “the assertion that something did not happen or is not true” (Cohen 2013:7). Interpretive denial considers the raw facts and does not necessarily deny that something did happen. Instead, as Cohen writes, “they are given a different meaning from what seems apparent to others” (Cohen 2001:7). Lastly, implicatory denial does not dispute fact or interpretation but the moral significance of the claims and their moral responsibility. State denial publicly or privately rebuts, undermines, or neutralizes human rights claims through counterframing strategies. Benford and Hunt (2003) have identified four types of counterframing tactics: problem denial, counter-attribution of blame, counterprognoses, and attacks on the collective character of human rights activists. Problem denial resembles Cohen’s concept of literal denial. Character assassinations delegitimize dissenters. Counter-attributions mobilize sanitizing alternatives for who or what is to blame, shifting the meaning of ‘diagnoses’ (Benford and Snow, 2000). Although counterprognoses often emerge from the former strategy, if human rights claims are effective and abuses compellingly documented, deflectors may not challenge the diagnostic dimensions of claims but rather their prognostic elements. Why they do so is contingent on specific state interests, structural power, and the geopolitical dynamics of inter-state relations.

Recent studies focusing on the denial of genocide and human rights abuses have drawn from both neutralization theory and Cohen’s conceptual toolkit to analyze the case of Rwanda (Bryant et al. 2018; Hintjens and Oijen, 2019), Cambodia (Kiernan, 2017), Bosnia (Massey, 2021), and the current plight of the Rohingya in Burma (Crouch, 2021). This literature, however, tends to focus predominantly on direct perpetrators rather than on the symbiosis between the people engaged in state crimes and state actors who are complicit in them. Moreover, this research remains rigidly psychological, social-psychological (Cohen,1996), and culturalist (Sutton and Norgaard 2013), or as analyzing repertoires of denial and neutralization in individualist, instead of institutionalist terms. To deny can amount to subtle processes of ‘turning a blind eye, burying one’s head in the sand and now wanting to know” (Cohen, 2013: 6). Strategies of disinformation and cover-ups are often sanctioned practices of states. Denial constitutes a nexus of interactions between deliberate concealment and impression-management and the institutional processes and strategic priorities that frame responses. With East Timor, the prevailing Cold War climate that associated Fretilin with communism and the possibility of regional instability shaped Western state policy.

Empirical sociological studies have effectively conceptualized denial as socially patterned and structurally produced. For instance, Hook and Mosher (2005) avoid scholarly tendencies towards individualizing denial by arguing that torture and abuse at Abu Ghraib is a disturbing manifestation of what Weber calls the “iron cage of rationality.” Although George W. Bush did indeed deny responsibility by portraying torture and abuse as “isolated incidents” committed by a few low-ranking bad apples, the problem of abuse and the broader motivation behind it is to be located in the consequences of state policy implemented at the highest levels of government, and systematic practices related to United States interrogational techniques, as well as a commitment to calculated efficiency and callous cruelty (Hooks and Mosher, 2005:1628). Often, denial is symptomatic of larger geopolitical and economic forces. In other words, systematic state policy may subordinate the use and support of violence to rational calculus, as in Bauman’s (2000) analysis of formal rationality as a significant contributing factor in the horrors of the Holocaust. Although social psychological, and cultural explanations matter in shaping repertoires of denial, in some instances, the professed structural imperatives of geopolitics and political economy serve as the primary materialist basis for the production, organization, reinforcement, rationalization, and perpetuation of institutionalized state practices of denial. The atrocities state actors select as worthy or unworthy of attention should be understood within the context of what Marxist scholars call “political economy” (also see Herman and Chomsky, 2002), with state-centered concerns for geopolitical rationalizations. For instance, historical and contemporary instances underscore the importance of the geopolitics of denial (Aybak, 2016; Specter, 2022).

Often, these geopolitical and geostrategic rationalizations are fraught with realist assumptions about big power dynamics and international relations, as with the United States Monroe Doctrine (an appeal to geopolitical necessity) for undermining democracy and supporting rights-abusing regimes in Latin America (Bevins, 2020). Strategic deflections of responsibility may also appeal to geopolitical rationalizations, as with the case of East Timor, which allows us to understand denial as organized at the level of the state and international relations, structural path-dependency in foreign policy, and geostrategic interests rather than focusing on individualist accounts.

Moreover, allied states may be compelled, through geopolitical necessity, to follow their stronger allies and seek to manage intended and unintended, but not unanticipated adverse consequences of previous political decisions and policies. State-organized denial and rationalization can be systematically organized and reproduced by state officials in a concerted effort to cover up acts of genocide and human rights abuses in a broader effort to minimize moral controversy in the cynical preservation of vital geopolitical, *realpolitik* objectives and a profit-driven foreign policy. As a predominant counterframing strategy for deflecting responsibility and justifying atrocities, states can ‘harness’ the hegemony of historical or contemporary ideologies resonant in the political and international environment. Western states, particularly the United States, ‘harnessed’ anti-communist ideological hegemony. The broader geopolitical contexts that make the ‘harnessing’ of this counterframe and rationalization available to state actors in deflecting responsibility from rights-abusing regimes like Indonesia is well worth unpacking theoretically.

**Harnessing Anti-Communist Ideological Hegemony**

The U.S. government was supportive of General Suharto. It feared that Indonesia, with its vast oil reserves, population, and geostrategic location, would become the next “domino” to fall to communism. Being ardently pro-Western and anticommunist during the Cold War, Suharto appealed to Nixon and Kissinger. Drawing on recent U.S. documents, contextualizing analysis during the Cold War rivalry, scholars have documented Western state fears regarding Sukarno and Indonesia’s strategic importance to the United States (Simpson, 2008; Roosa 2006, 2020). Suharto would appeal to the geopolitical relevance and resonance of Cold War anticommunism, particularly in U.S. foreign policy, often manufacturing a political reality that resembled typical Cold War dynamics, such as a 'communist threat.' The violence of the anticommunist pogrom must be understood in the broader Cold War context, not to absolve Indonesian actors but to reveal a widespread structure of international complicity, compliance, and institutionalized denial and deflection. The magnitude of violence of the anticommunist purge is partially explained by political pressures and the Suharto regime's desire to prove its dedication to anticommunism in return for Western aid and investment.

The Indonesian military regime frequently complained about fundamental security concerns regarding East Timor. East Timor, being geographically close to Indonesia’s borders, Indonesian officials warned of a political threat. Jakarta worried that an independent East Timor would invite intense communist diplomatic attention. In a December 6th, 1975, meeting between President Ford, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, and General Suharto, President Suharto expressed fears that a Marxist-led Eastern Timor would produce a breeding ground for communist insurgencies and potential infiltrations throughout Indonesia. It is indisputable that following the Vietnamese communist triumph in Indochina, there may have well been a general consternation of communist influence and expansion in Southeast Asia from Western officials. Hence, the perceived security-based objections were a reality. However, despite these concerns, especially from U.S. officials, Suharto’s rhetoric, prefiltered by the Cold War ideology, was also an attempt to justify an expansionist Indonesian policy throughout the archipelago by ‘harnessing hegemony’ (framing) and appealing to the geopolitical posturing concerns of Cold War U.S. foreign policy domino logic – that if one country succumbs to communism, it will act as a catalyst in another country, creating a rippling, demonstration effect, causing nearby nations to fall to communism. Namely, that communist regimes would flourish, particularly after Vietnam’s triumph – one after another.

Nevertheless, this foreign policy conception was debunked when communism failed to spread outside Indochina, except for Laos and Cambodia, which remained outside the spread of communism. Thus, the U.S. sought to ‘contain’ the spread of communism (Truman Doctrine). In China, the Communist Party took control, while the Korean War ended with an armistice that divided the country in two and installed a communist government in the North. France struggled to regain colonial control in Vietnam after the Second World War. By 1954, they were facing imminent defeat under the communist leadership of Ho Chi Minh. The American government feared that a Vietnamese victory would act as a springboard into Southeast Asia. Eisenhower’s ‘domino principle’ established the foundation for the American state’s latter interventions, as Lyndon B. Johnson and John F. Kennedy used the theory to justify further interventions. Indonesia’s anticommunist posturing (framing) took full advantage of this tilt in U.S. foreign policy, which appealed in particular to Henry Kissinger. The domino logic and Cold War ideology of anticommunism would provide Indonesia and Western allies with a pretext for invasion and as a rationalization for supporting, obscuring, and ignoring human rights abuses in the territory and justifying a policy of complicity.

Although denial, in the sociological literature, tends to be conceived as a predominantly socio-psychologistic process – often as a psychological defense mechanism in response to feelings of guilt or shame – this paper steers understanding of denial (in line with recent theorizing) about the role geopolitics and political economy play in structuring the official organization and rationalization of denial. The Cold War geopolitical domino logic and anticommunist ideological hegemony were harnessed by Indonesia and advanced by U.S. officials as a cynically convenient rationalization for justifying support of the invasion and occupation, deflecting or neutralizing responsibility for Indonesian atrocities, as counterprognoses to human rights claims, and ultimately for continuing a policy of complicity. Indonesian and Western state denial constituted a sustained set of official repertoires that deflected responsibility for the suffering of the East Timorese through strategies of denial, blame displacement, and rationalization.

           However, despite these official repertoires of denial, Indonesia greatly exaggerated the links between Fretilin and communism and the ‘communist threat’ by ultimately fabricating “press reports claiming Chinese agents were orchestrating anti-Indonesian and pro-independence sentiment in East Timor, and that Beijing was providing Fretilin with arms and military preparation for a communist coup.” Therefore, the ‘threat of communism’ served more as a justification for Indonesia’s expansionist militarism, associating Fretilin with communism and East Timor more generally as a bulwark for communist activities while at the same time fulfilling the political-economic objectives of Western imperialist powers.

Moreover, Western-state officials understood East Timor as ‘primitive; and innately inclined to conflict and violence, all of which steered Western foreign policy away from supporting self-determination as a viable alternative (Simpson, 2005). According to U.S. declassified National Security archives, General Suharto said, “if Portuguese Timor were to become independent, it would give rise to problems. It was not economically viable. It would have to seek the help of another country, but Portuguese Timor would be of interest only because of its political importance. There was a big danger that communist countries – China or the Soviet Union – might gain the opportunity to intervene.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam in Australia also signaled to Indonesia that East Timor should be integrated into its territory, claiming that “an independent Timor would be an unviable State and a potential threat to the area.”[[6]](#footnote-6) The delicate UDT-Fretilin alliance had broken down partly due to a propaganda campaign launched by the Indonesian government and supported by the United States, inflaming misleading concerns about Fretilins alleged communist tendencies. The Indonesian regime strategically and cynically labeled East Timor as a bulwark of communist activity: “Those who want independence are those who are Communist-influenced.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

           The 484 diplomatic cables and documents from 1974-1976 published by Foreign Minister Alexander Downer[[8]](#footnote-8) reveal that a couple of months after the Portuguese overthrew the fascist Caetano regime and began to pull out of East Timor, Gough Whitlam, through his private secretary Peter Wilenski, suggested that the Suharto regime launch a “clandestine” operation in Portuguese Timor to “ensure that the territory would opt for incorporation into Indonesia.”[[9]](#footnote-9) Not only was the invasion fully endorsed by Whitlam, but, according to Harry Tjan, Australia’s “role could be to ‘neutralize’ unfavorable opinion in other countries towards an Indonesian takeover.”[[10]](#footnote-10) Whitlam’s tactical plans to deceive the Australian people and the world were also made clear in other reports: “the Prime Minister noted that, for the domestic audience in Australia, incorporation into Indonesia should appear to be a natural process arising from the wishes of its people.”[[11]](#footnote-11) Whitlam did not simply ‘accept’ the Indonesian plans of invasion. He actively persuaded Suharto to proceed. For twenty-five years, Australia’s liberal and labor parties, the U.S., Canada, and Britain, preserved ‘good relations’ with the Suharto regime. Western states considered the Indonesian military dictatorship a dependable instrument for repressing the Indonesian masses, making labor docile, and protecting their strategic and commercial business interests. Hence, geopolitical, and geo-economic interests can coexist and work in combination. The Downer diplomatic cables also exhibit a profound lack of feeling regarding human rights abuses in East Timor, and they also reveal an organized coverup inextricably linked to the Department of Foreign Affairs' need to recognize Indonesian sovereignty of the Timor territory primarily to commence negotiations over petroleum in the Timor Gap. For instance, Richard Woolcott wrote back to Canberra, saying, “It would seem to me that the Department of Minerals and Energy might well have an interest in closing the present gap in the agreed sea border, and this could be much more readily negotiated with Indonesia ... than with Portugal or independent Portuguese Timor.”[[12]](#footnote-12) Woolcott also cabled Australia, advising that the government should “assist public understanding in Australia” and to counter any “criticism of Indonesia.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

**Data and Analytic Strategy**

This research extensively uses previously untapped archival data and qualitative content analysis (QCA). QCA is an approach to studying texts that seeks to uncover patterns of meaning in data (Hsieuh and Shannon, 2005). This research is based on archival data from the Timor International Solidarity Archive Database (TiSa) and the Toronto papers of previously untapped East Timor Alert Network archival material retrieved from the William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections at McMaster University. Although this archive consists primarily of Canadian materials, it includes various boxes containing newsletters from organizations outside Canada. The physical archive contains 4.6 meters of textual records and thirty video cassettes.

I present a discourse analysis of political talk from archival data from media reports, congressional records, debates, public statements, interviews, documentary films, standardized government letters, secondary sources, and speeches between 1975 and 1998. In this section, I outline the archival data and my analytic strategy. Various public avenues for political talk – media, United Nations speeches, interviews, Congressional statements – allow political officials to influence and manipulate the framing of specific public problems.

The categories and concepts of analysis emerged inductively and iteratively from the textual data (Altheide, 1987). I provided a deep reading of all relevant textual materials, coding loosely, to understand the patterns, issues, and strategies used to counter human rights claims from various social movement organizations in the East Timorese global solidarity movement. The final coding scheme emerged gradually through various turns of coding and reflection on coding and categorizing. The strategies coded and categorized emerged fully inductively. However, I did enter the research with Stanley Cohen’s sociological denial theory in mind and his triad of literal, interpretive, and implicatory denial. The categories developed, although relevant to Cohen’s triad, are based on my interpretation of the data. These emerged codes demonstrate forms of literal, implicatory, and interpretive denial; they should be understood as aspects and instances of these forms. In other words, the codes and categories developed in the data process emerged directly from the archival data, further contextualizing these categories, once complete, within the existing theoretical literature concerning the sociology of sendal. Hence, codes were directly and uniquely derived inductively but then directed, where analysis moves iteratively between data and existing theory and relevant research findings to frame the paper's contributions. Hence the literature served to solely sensitize and contextualize archival research findings into relevant and applicable theoretical literature, linking the findings to broader theoretical implications and understandings existing within the sociology of denial, political sociology, and the sociology of social movements and social problems theory. As data analysis emerged, a common conceptual scheme of “deflecting responsibility” developed. This concept appeared as a catchall that included various strategies of denial, rationalization, and displacement. In other words, strategies emerged as applicable to these broader concepts. These codes' strategies seek to disaggregate, unpack, and explain how states deflect responsibility.

**Strategies for Deflecting Responsibility**

The chief aim of the sociology of denial regarding challenges from human rights claims is to document and develop an empirical and theoretically-substantiated analysis, understanding, and explanation of the forms of denial emerging in the data and the discursive, organizational, and state, administrative strategies officials deploy in downplaying accountability in human rights abuses, and how these strategies further structure the bureaucratic-organizational reproduction of successive state responses to ongoing human rights claims. Moreover, these forms of denial must be historically contextualized and linked to underlying logics of specific conflicts and geopolitical strategies predictive of state foreign policies for deflecting responsibility in the preservation of inter-state relations.

           Denial of state violence and rights abuses is often provoked by the social and political movement and momentum of human rights claims. State officials tend to react to human rights mobilizations, but denial can be pre-emptively mobilized, revealing that officials are aware of issues. The fact that states deny signals that human rights mobilization is working effectively and may be a foreshadowing sign of coming improvements or future condemnations of human rights-abusing regimes and state behavior, as it often involves states' implicit acknowledgment of the relevance of human rights claims and the validity of its norms. In other words, forms of denial may “serve to fortify human rights norms, resulting in long-term improvements” (Cole, 2012:956) and may, with time, work in the favor of human rights organizations. Denial is often produced on a discursive and institutional terrain in which social movement organizations may actively engage with the rhetoric of state officials, opening foreign policy elites to challenge, critique, shame, accountability, and embarrassment. The frame resonance of social movements are affected by opportunities available in the discursive and political environment, including the framing and counterframing of institutional foreign policy elites (McAdam, 1996). The ‘talk and talk back’ (Steinberg, 1999) to human rights claims occur within complex and multi-institutional environments, such as Congress, parliament, the media, universities, public letters, debates, or at the United Nations.

Stanley Cohen and Hannah Arendt have written extensively on denial. Their theories underscore how the reality of state crimes and human rights abuses are rationalized, manipulated, reconfigured, and displaced by powerful state actors. States reconfigure potentially damaging information by denying, reframing, and sanitizing ongoing or historical events. State actors may also launch attacks on the credibility and reliability of the observer, trivializing reports of human rights abuses from below (Cohen 2001:105; also see McMullen, 2006; Benford and Hunt, 2003). Western state actors deflecting responsibility for Indonesian atrocities in East Timor sought to neutralize public criticism regarding support for the illegal occupation, to justify a policy of complicity, and as a method of moral disengagement—their strategies for deflecting responsibility encompassed denial, displacement, and rationalization. State officials actively worked to deny accountability for Indonesian atrocities in East Timor, especially when challenged with charges of complicity. State actors can deflect responsibility from perpetrators and shift blame to other groups or circumstances, deny perpetrators responsibility for causing violence, thereby absolving specific parties of moral accountability, as well as recontextualize the sources of violence and suffering. Moreover, states may pre-emptively rationalize support or, in post hoc fashion, rationalize continuing to support for a rights-abusing regime.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Denial** | **Rationalization** | **Displacement of blame** |
| 1. Trivializing human rights reports. 2. Downplaying atrocities and human rights abuses. 3. Delegitimizing dissenters and human rights activists (“shooting the messenger”). 4. Denying facts (what Stanley Cohen calls ‘literal denial’). | 1. Harnessing anti-communist hegemony. 2. Geopolitical necessity and inevitability (in response to emerging and intensifying human rights claims from SMOs, state officials responded by strategically counterframing that Fretilin were “Marxist” and “Communists,” (also see Zuo and Benford, 1995). This serves predominantly as “counterframing” strategies that do not specifically deny atrocities and human rights abuses, but rather seek to blunt SMO’s prognostic framing. 3. Acknowledgement of human rights abuses, but justifications for continuing to support. This can be understood as a conciliatory approach to foreign policy. 4. The unviability of East Timor as an independent nation-state. | 1. Blaming third party agents and events for violence and instability (Portugal, Fretilin, civil war, and the East Timorese people). 2. Primordialism and foreign policy, and orientalist imagery. 3. Material environment and climate. 4. Historical underdevelopment and chronic impoverishment. |

Figure 2 (Model: Strategies for Deflecting Responsibility, with concrete examples).

Denial, displacement, and rationalization were crucial strategies for deflecting responsibility. Western state officials often downplayed the urgency and moral call to intervene and put an end to the occupation. Deflecting responsibility, therefore, also involves diffusing and neutralizing the veracity, public problem, and moral force of human rights claims by presenting an image of justification, legitimation, and disavowal of state violence. Deflecting responsibility can be understood as strategies for manipulating and shifting attributions of blame away from perpetrators and those complicit states doing the denying. In deflecting responsibility, and neutralizing the human rights claims of solidarity groups, Western states sought to neutralize public criticism and depoliticize the issue of Timorese self-determination. Figure 2 provides a summary of strategies used by state actors for deflecting responsibility, which are covered in more detail in the results section.

Moreover, historical institutionalism and the concept of path dependency and contingency helps us to understand how particular events and ‘critical junctures’ shape the trajectory of state strategies for deflecting responsibility. Path dependency reminds us that neither individuals nor organizations self-consciously make decisions on a continuous basis. Once a path is chosen (even if the full implications of choosing the path are poorly understood), inertia makes it difficult to abandon the path. Strong human rights mobilization through transnational advocacy networks and boomerang tactics (Keck and Sikkink, 1998) indicates that the costs (downside) of practices of denial and of being on the path (support for occupation) were not fully perceived by policy elites. Although policy elites believed that opposition would emerge, they believed that they could effectively neutralize public dissent over the issue and criticisms from human rights organizations. In the instrumental and strategic realm, however, it was perceived as costly to make changes. As solidarity activists underscored, these countries knew that Indonesia was pursuing genocidal policies. They did not act on this knowledge because the (perceived) geopolitical and political-economy costs were too high. Although throughout the 1970s and 1980s, foreign policy elites were able to manage growing public criticism through denial strategies, as well as Indonesian closure of the island to international scrutiny, although particular unexpected and contingent events did backfire (Hess and Martin, 2006). Indeed, this made it much more difficult for Western policy elites to deny atrocities. Hence, the ‘critical juncture’ of Santa Cruz promulgated a shift in counterframing strategies, one from outright to denial and displacement of blame, and appealing to geopolitical necessity and rationalizations to mobilizing counterprognoses (Benford and Hunt, 2003). After 1989 the geopolitical competition against communism, which heavily influenced Western foreign policy toward Indonesia for forty years, became increasingly harder to justify. Both the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Santa Cruz converged as overlapping critical junctures. Without the geopolitical logic and the ideology of anticommunism, there was no longer a rationalizing imperative to extend support to Indonesia. This change in the geopolitical order acted as an unexpected, contingent, and emergent political opportunity structure for those committed to advancing human rights to press their governments to match rhetoric and discourse with concrete policy action.

As institutions and foreign policies are path dependent (Mabee, 2011; Della Porta, 2022), we might expect resilience of the counterframing and denial discourse of state officials, as the strategic and instrumental costs of accepting human rights claims and foreign policy alternatives would be too high from a geopolitical and political-economic perspective. For instance, Pierson (1994) argued that entrenched social programmes in the United States and Britain deflected attempts by right-wing regimes to destroy them, whereas right-wing regimes slowed down the initial adoption of social programmes (Amenta, 1998).

Moreover, the interactional strategies of state officials for deflecting responsibility and neutralizing growing opposition from human rights social movement organizations are often mobilized to prevent institutional changes and policies. The path dependency and contingency of institutional logics of denial must be understood within a broader interactional context that considers the political claims-making and counter claims-making between human rights SMOs and state officials in shaping the trajectory of particular conflicts. Denial exhibits a path dependence that institutionally constrains future policy decisions and reproduces the continuity and durability of state denial. These strategies were crucial for neutralizing oppositions for distinct policy alternatives that would threaten keystone policies of anticommunism, profit-driven *realpolitik,* and geopolitical and instrumental strategic priorities. Indeed, as path dependent policies for supporting the Indonesian occupation and annexation of East Timor, geostrategic concerns, and corporate investments, all made it more costly to leave this trajectory the more time passed.

States can influence audiences. They can justify their foreign policies and practices, and they can excuse violations by shifting responsibility for them. Whether or not states effectively deflect responsibility for their complicitous actions and the violations of client-states depends on how persuasively and effectively they package or frame their counterframing actions, and how acceptable they make them appear to relevant audiences, both domestic and international. States also deflect and neutralize pressures. Human rights mobilizers are in situations where SMOs and targeted state compete on the front of international and domestic publics to garner support. But human rights SMOs and scholars need to understand how states are counterframing their accusations, and they need to recognize the significance of both the rhetoric and the content and framing of accusations and counteraccusations, as well as path dependency and the effects of contingent events on this interactional dynamic.

**Displacement of Blame**

Displacement of blame seeks to absolve and deflect rights-abusing states of ultimate culpability in human rights crimes by blaming other agents or endemic circumstances as sources of harm. As Douglas (2013) contends, blame displacement constitutes a forensic strategy for manipulating and deflecting attributions of responsibility away from states doing the denying. Plausible deniability is then reinforced by displacing blame onto external proxy ‘perpetrators,’ such as insurgents or endemic forces in the environment, often framed as impersonal and agentless, wherein the attributions of blame are more ambiguous, and the veracity of human rights claims are less easily established. As a strategy for moral disengagement, displacement diffuses and suppresses moral dilemmas and responsibilities by blaming external factors for what are state-orchestrated human rights abuses. As Stanley Cohen (1995) argues, what is being denied are not simply matters of fact but matters of interpretation. In a similar vein, in ‘counter-attribution,’ a problem is recognized but “alternative interpretation of who’s or what’s to blame” are mobilized (Benford and Hunt, 2003:163; also see Nikolayenko, 2019). Therefore, counter-attributions challenge the root cause of death and suffering as proposed by human rights claims.

To deflect responsibility from Indonesian systematic human rights abuses, and to divert attention and moral concerns away from complicitous Western states, Western state officials, when challenged with reports of abuse and human rights claims, they often displaced blame elsewhere: Fretilin, Civil War, the Timorese people, and material landscape.

Frequently, Portugal was to blame for violence, death, and instability in East Timor. This served as both a strategy of displacement and rationalization. Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Joe Clark, responding to Elaine Briere of ETAN and Canadian parliamentarians supporting East Timor in the House of Commons, in various statements sought to absolve Indonesia of responsibility, blaming “brutal” Fretilin attacks, as well as Portugal’s sudden reckless colonial withdrawal, while at the same time depicting Indonesia as necessary for peace, safety, and stability in the region:

Observers estimate that there are approximately 15,000 troops in East Timor, rather than the 40,000 you assume, whose duties include infrastructure construction, maintenance of peace and good order, and control and capture of Fretilin guerillas involved in hit and run attacks against government troops and Timorese civilians. These guerilla attacks are brutal … contrary to what you have concluded, the presence of Indonesian troops is essential to the maintenance of public safety (Clark, 1987).

Fretilin – who were a guerilla force resisting Indonesian annexation of their territory – are cast here as aggressors who should be condemned, and Indonesia is cast as a benign state. In Clark’s counterclaims there is an acknowledgement that Timorese civilians have been killed, but only when Fretilin attacked Indonesia, and that the regime responded to secure public order.

The civil war was also invoked to redirect blame and responsibility for rights abuses away from Indonesia. Denial facilitated by a reframing of suffering through the civil war narrative to evade accountability, mobilized by Ford and Kissinger, was part of the Indonesian intelligence strategy before the invasion. Blaming ‘civil war’ effectively absolved the Indonesian military and intelligence impunity for their responsibility in directly perpetrating violence and generating the conditions for political conflicts between the East Timorese. Edward E. Master’s cited the civil war as responsible for the deaths (primarily during the invasion) and blamed the Portuguese first: “the ambassador did not miss any opportunity to blame Portugal, although he did not specify how the Portuguese, who pulled out of their half of the island four years ago – and never carpet-bombed or defoliated the place – might be responsible for the current famine” (Kohen and Quance, 1980). Ambassador Critchley also blamed the death toll on the civil war, “…many died during and because of the civil war before Indonesian intervention. Some thousands have left East Timor. We do not wish to get into discussion of how many died; what matters is helping the living.”[[14]](#footnote-14) The death of innocent civilians during the Indonesian invasion and subsequent occupation were often described as a result of ‘crossfire’ during the ‘civil war,’ which suggests that the conflicting forces emerged and originated within East Timor. In Australia, when Gough Whitlam was asked “would you deny all the reports of atrocities in East Timor? Would you deny the claims that one hundred thousand people have died as a result of the Indonesian takeover?”, he responded by saying that “I’m not in a position to say how many people have died. What I do remember of course is that the Vice Governor of East Timor, Francisco Xavier Lopes da Cruz said early in 1976 that there were 60,000 victims of the war, that is the civil war which was won with Portuguese weapons by Fretilin, and then the second civil war, which was won by all the other parties with the assistance of Indonesians.”[[15]](#footnote-15)

These accounts, however, were largely discredited by direct eyewitness observers who testified to the deliberate, indiscriminate massacre of unarmed civilians by Indonesian military troops during the invasion. Western state powers were instrumental in deflecting responsibility and international criticism away from Indonesia and portraying the regime as a benign and responsible state (also see Job, 2018). Indeed, this may reflect the uneven treatment of genocides and mass atrocities in Western foreign policy.

The Australian embassy and other Western state officials also provided a public relations cover for the Indonesian authorities by blaming the Timorese people themselves, poverty, historical underdevelopment, and material landscape without ever raising issues concerning the Indonesian military’s use of chemical weapons, particularly napalm or the deliberate destruction of large swaths of agricultural lands and food resources which were the major causes of famine. Indonesian and Western authorities often counterclaimed that East Timor has always been poor and had lived barely at subsistence levels, lacked infrastructure, and suffered from underdevelopment. These displacement strategies were informed by primordialist discourses that represented the Timorese people as ‘primitive’ and intrinsically inclined to conflict. East Timor was perceived by Indonesian and Western state representatives as an impossible nation: too small, primitive, lacking resources, poor, strife-ridden, and underpopulated.

In displacing blame onto impersonal, endemic forces and agentless factors in deflecting responsibility, Western state officials sought to manipulate public perception and minimize perceptions of Indonesia as a concrete target for moral outrage. In effect, the strategy was to downplay Indonesia’s responsibility in causing the famine, and therefore as culpable for death and suffering in East Timor.

Primordialism has often been invoked in foreign policies (Harvey, 2000), perceiving ethnic categories as an unchangeable historical force rather than contingent upon social, historical, and political processes. Because primordialism depicts ethnic differences as deep and irreconcilable, foreign policies informed by this ideology often suggest that ethnically heterogenous states will inevitably experience ethnic conflicts (Vanhanen, 1999:58). Indonesia and Western state representatives both employed primordial and colonial tropes to shift the blame for Timorese suffering onto the Timorese themselves. This strategy of deflecting responsibility by displacing blame served to legitimize Indonesia’s claim to political and territorial acquisition, often casting the Timorese people as prone to irreconcilable tribal and clan-based antagonisms, predisposed to violence; representations that were used by the Indonesian state to bolster its claims that withdrawal from the territory would descend the country into civil war. Such claims presuppose that without Indonesia, the territory of East Timor was inherently prone to civil war. Ideas about Timor’s ‘primitivism’ and non-viability as an independent nation continued to inform U.S. foreign policy in 1999. According to Joseph Nevins, “Paul Wolfowitz quickly responded, informing Albright and the other guests that independence for East Timor was simply not a realistic option employing language long utilized by Jakarta, and argued that East Timor would descend into civil war if Indonesia were to withdraw, leading to the same sort of chaos that unfolded in 1974” (Nevins, 2005:115). By invoking representations of ‘natural’ relentless ethnic conflict, Indonesia and Western state representatives could displace blame and justify intervention. Moreover, Western state representatives also framed Indonesia’s modernizing state building efforts as pulling East Timor out of its ‘historical backwardness.’ By portraying the Timorese as inclined to violence and instability, Western state officials could advance against claims to independence. The construction of the East Timorese as violent can be traced back to Portuguese colonial histories of East Timor. These colonial representations portrayed the Portuguese as heroic, courageous governors and military officers securing territory and bringing ‘civilization’ to a backward people in the name of progress, empire, and the Crown, often characterizing the Timorese people and their cultures as intrinsically prone to violence, and primitive. A very similar language was deployed by the Indonesian state to justify state-building and governmentality in East Timor and to displace blame for the disastrous consequences of a state-made famine, notwithstanding the everyday forms of resistance of the Timorese people (see Scott, 1985). Denial was facilitated by an orientalist imagery and neo-colonial mentality, portraying Indonesia as peaceful and the New Order as a protector against chaos and political instability, and as a benign modernizing force for East Timor. Cold War anticommunism was ideologically sustained by forms of modernization theory (Baber, 2001; Westad, 2005).

Indonesia and Western state officials also blamed the famine on the subsistence agricultural practices of the East Timorese and on drought, invoking a long-used discourse of Timorese backwardness and primitivism to attribute blame to endemic forces caused by longstanding historical conditions of territorial and geographical underdevelopment (also see Job, 2019). Moreover, Western state officials often referred to perpetual “intertribal warfare” between the Timorese as the source of conflict, in effect, blaming the Timorese for widespread famine and civil war, along with their so-called ‘primitive’ slash-and-burn agricultural practices. For example, the Canadian Director of the Asia Pacific South Relations Division H.G. Pardy, in response to accusations of operation extinction and genocide in East Timor, and charges of Canadian complicity, responded in the following way:

During the initial stages of the incorporation of East Timor into Indonesia 11 years ago, there was a heavy loss of life as is often the case when fundamental political change takes place in a short period of time. It cannot be ignored or justified. However, the fighting associated with the annexation of 1975 and 1976 was only partially responsible for those deaths. Because of the disruption of daily life and movements of thousands of people, most deaths during that period were attributable to starvation, disease, and exposure. East Timor is traditionally a good deficient area and malnutrition has always been endemic. The agricultural base is fragile and relies in large part on shifting slash and burn farming techniques, though there is some fixed farming in low land areas. Unlike most of Indonesia, the soil is poor as the substrata is limestone, there is a pronounced dry season for eight months of the year, and nighttime temperature in the highland areas, where many people fled for security, can be quite low (Pardy, 1987).

In the United States, Edward E. Masters displaced blame of the famine on Portuguese policies of neglect and the “slash-and-burn” subsistence agriculture of the indigenous Timorese:

Ambassador Masters, noting that he had spent many years in developing countries, said that East Timor, “suffering from years of neglect under the previous administration and the disruption of more recent fighting, is one of the poorest I have seen.” Mr. Masters defended the resettlement program, however, saying that the Indonesian authorities were moving the villages near much better land than the eroded fields the peasants had left behind as a result of their “slash-and-burn” agricultural practices” (Hovey, 1979).

Although Foreign Affairs Minister Joe Clark and Pardy partially acknowledged that deaths did occur because of Indonesia’s invasion and annexation of the territory, they often reinterpreted these facts to suit their interests, to deflect criticisms from Indonesia, and to absolve themselves of any responsibility. In reframing the causes of death and famine, they pointed to endemic forces that were beyond the governments control, such as starvation, malnutrition, and disease. This repertoire of denial reassigns the causes of suffering away from Indonesia to endemic, agentless forces (such as landscape and material environment) that are beyond the governments control. In 1992, Larry Dinger, in extoling the state-building efforts of Indonesia said that “in 1974, East Timor was plagued by endemic poverty, but starvation is extremely rare today.”[[16]](#footnote-16) Glenn Shortliffe also blamed East Timor’s material landscape for the humanitarian problem of displacement and famine, accounts that would reinforce Canadian support for the Indonesian regime and its policy of coerced integration:

East Timor is one of the most desolate areas I have seen in Southeast Asia … the soil is dry, sandy and infertile. The mountains are rugged, some of them are over 2,000 meters high and, from what we saw, seem incapable of retaining moisture without artificial assistance … from the air, East Timor appeared scored during the present dry season with great scars up to a mile or more wide which constitute the rivers during the rains … in the mountains, rather than jungle or even green foliage, there is a kind of uniform brown bush. Whilst maize and rice can be grown in some areas, productivity is low and absence of moisture is a constant problem. In all, it is a foreboding, dry, desolate area. Allowing for the major difference in overall climate, it reminded me of some of the more remote parts of the Canadian shield during the fall or spring, in terms of the ruggedness of the terrain.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Shortliffe visit provided a testimonial service to Indonesia, concluding that East Timor was “not self-sufficient in food,” despite the fact the invasions’ massive destruction of crops and animals,” framed the Timorese people as apolitical, and that “many, if not a majority of Timorese, live in rugged mountain areas connected only by footbaths.” The East Timorese fled to the mountains to evade into safety from a vicious, invading Indonesian state, in effect to escape capture by the state and violence (see Scott, 2010). He also provided figures on displacement and implied that no one had been killed in the invasion (Scharfe, 139-140). By portraying the Timorese as backward and undeveloped, not only did Canadian officials displace blame onto the victims, but by portraying the Timorese as “primitive,” were able to depict Indonesia as a positive, modernizing force liberating the Timorese from historical underdevelopment. The official Canadian line on East Timor was that, “External Affairs argued that the high death toll in East Timor was largely a result of starvation, disease and exposure due to mass relocations resulting from the abrupt departure of the Portuguese colonial administration, and not a result of systematic killing” (Briere and Gage, 1991). The U.S. State Department advanced similar strategies of displacing blame to deflect responsibility. Edward E. Masters, U.S. Ambassador to Indonesia, testified to the U.S. Congress about famine, claiming that there was “acute difficulties of poverty and malnutrition … I am a confident that the government of Indonesia, with help from abroad, is now on the path which will lead to a more prosperous and happy future for the people of East Timor” (Levey, 1980). Some state officials and the media in the West expressed a strong dislike for words like “famine” and “starvation,” preferring to sanitize their language with terms like “acute malnutrition.” For example, when asked to explain the horrifying conditions of tens of thousands of people in East Timor, “He [Masters] offered a list of factors in which the war was virtually a footnote. Among his reasons: “extreme backwardness,” “lack of infrastructure,” “prevailing poverty,” “slash and burn agriculture,” “erosion,” and “drought” (Kohen and Quance, 1980). Therefore, many foreign ministers and policymakers supported the Indonesian army despite massive, systematic human rights abuses and near-genocide. In 1978, Glen Shortliffe – Canadian ambassador – visited the country, and blamed landscape, climate, and historical undervelopment for famine and displacement, framing death and suffering, not as a result of Indonesian state violence, but as a “humanitarian problem.”

East Timor is one of the most desolate areas I have seen in Southeast Asia. It is very arid, totally mountainous, except for a wide valley in the west at Maliana and a plain in the far east at Los Paloe. The soil is dry, sandy, and infertile. The mountains are rugged, some of them are over 2,000 meters high and, from what we saw, seem incapable of retaining moisture without artificial assistance. Rivers are huge in the rainy season because the water runs right off the mountains. From the air, east Timor appeared scored during the present dry season with great scars up to a mile or more wide which constitute the rivers during the rains. One could see why guerrillas have been able to exist, even in small numbers, for three years in Timor in that the ruggedness of the terrain, absence of roads, and indeed absence of a volume of settlements makes it very difficult for the authorities to come to groups with guerillas or bandits. The flora is an extension of the flora of northern Australia and is very different from what is seen in most of Indonesia. In the mountains, rather than jungle or even green foliage, there is a kind of unform brown bush. Whilst maize and rice can be grown in some areas, productivity is low and absence of moisture is a constant problem, in all, it is a foreboding, dry, desolate area. Slowing for the major difference in overall climate, it reminded me of some of the more remote parts of the Canadian shield during the fall or spring, in terms of ruggedness of the terrain.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Peter Job (2018) has also highlighted how the Fraser government in Australia displaced blame onto historical poverty and the underdevelopment of the territory. In correspondences and communications between state officials, activists, and politicians sympathetic to the Timorese cause, we see that officials emphatically refused to use the term “genocide” or “human rights abuse” to describe mass murder in East Timor. Strategies for sanitizing language and evading responsibility exhibit disputes over the “definitionalism” of the problem (Charney, 2017), and strategies for deflecting responsibility.

**Rationalization**

Although Max Weber understood rationalization as a historical process of emancipation from tradition, he also saw this possibility as being undermined by an institutionalization of an instrumental, cost-benefit, purposive, and means-end rationality, often devoid of broader moral concerns, such as human rights. The language of rationalization serves to stall implementation of remedial recommendations advanced by human rights claims and organizations that promote justice and self-determination. With strategic denial, Western state officials restrict the application of specific terms to a narrow set of entities. Rationalization entails justification for unacceptable behavior and legitimation for the continuance of specific policy approaches.

Rationalization was advanced to both deflect responsibility and to sustain a policy of complicity. Other times, rationalization asserted that although something bad happened, it was beyond Western state control. Western state officials generally rationalized atrocities in two overarching ways: through cynical convenience, by invoking a utilitarian and politically expedient appeal to geopolitical necessity. Appeals to geopolitical necessity may invoke the language of self-defence, national security, or Cold War ideology. Rationalization ultimately constitutes what Cohen calls “implicatory denial.” Further, when the facts exposing human rights abuses of historical events were compellingly revealed, Western state officials adopted what can be understood as a form of resigned fatalism: rationalizations primarily concerned with blunting ameliorative actions on the human rights front.

States often take pre-emptive, calculated, and elaborate actions to deflect responsibility, conceal, and justify their involvement in supporting human rights abusing regimes. During the Indonesian invasion of East Timor seven journalists from Australia and Britain were murdered and an estimated of 60,000 and 100,000 Timorese were killed within six weeks. Prior to the invasion, the Indonesian military regime complained about basic security concerns regarding East Timor. With East Timor being geographically close to Indonesia’s borders, Indonesian officials warned of a political threat. Jakarta worried that an independent East Timor might invite communist diplomatic attention. In a meeting on December 6th, 1975, between President Ford, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, and General Suharto, expressed consternation that a Marxist-led Eastern Timor would become a bulwark for communist insurgencies and potential infiltrations throughout Indonesia. It is indisputable that following the Vietnamese communist triumph in Indochina there may have well been a general worry of communist influence and expansion into Southeast Asia, so the perceived security-based objections were a reality. However, Suharto’s rhetoric, prefiltered by the Cold War ideology, was also used to rationalize an expansionist Indonesian policy throughout the archipelago. However, Indonesia did in fact greatly exaggerate the links between Fretilin and communism, and the communist threat by “fabricating press reports claiming Chinese agents were orchestrating anti-Indonesian and pro-independence sentiment in East Timor, and that Beijing was providing Fretilin with arms and military preparation for a communist coup” (Storey, 2011:275). The threat of communism served more as a rationalization for Indonesia’s expansionist militarism, legitimizing the invasion, while also fulfilling the extractive imperialist interests of Western states.

There was also predictable complicity and rationalization for this war crime on the part of Western state representatives. It was acknowledged by Henry Kissinger to his staff. Kissinger was deeply concerned that public exposure would embarrass him, and potentially lead to his arrest given his guilt and extensive involvement in mass murder. Kissinger conveniently argued that using Cold War ideology and rhetoric and labelling East Timor and Fretilin as “communists” would provide a political cover if required to continue U.S. imperialist policies and the sale of arms to the Indonesian regime. Kissinger and his staff were aware that casting East Timor and Fretilin as communist – a Cold War folk devil – would potentially evoke strong, negative emotions in the public sphere. For instance, Kissinger’s rationalizations were primarily part and parcel of a pre-emptive defence, presupposing potential accusations. He sought to rationalize continuing the supply of American weapons to Indonesia by labelling the victim as the aggressor. Moreover, he emphasized that the “use of US-made arms could create problems,” adding that “it depends on

how we construe it; whether it is in self-defence or is a foreign operation” (Eaglburger, 1990). In other words, Kissinger’s concern was not that U.S. military weapons and equipment would be used offensively, and thus illegally, but whether the act would be interpreted as such. This was a process that Kissinger intended on manipulating, revealed months later when he asked his advisors whether “we can’t construe a communist government in the middle of Indonesia as self-defence?” (Eagleburger, 1990). If the supply and use of American weapons in Indonesia became known, Kissinger was ready to rationalize it as self-defence against the “communist government” in East Timor, while simultaneously presenting the issue as one of preserving American national security interests.

Assistant Secretary of State Kenneth M. Quinn recognized that there were human rights abuses in East Timor but characterized the Indonesian invasion as keeping East Timor out of “Marxist hands,” and portrayed Fretilin as well-armed and well-organized “insurgents,” further suggesting that the conflict emerged within East Timor. In a hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, Quinn claimed the following:

When the Marxist Fretilin (East Timor National Liberation Front) faction gained the ascendancy, Indonesia invaded to keep East Timor out of Marxist hands. Many innocent civilians were undoubtedly caught in the crossfire during the civil war and later, as the Indonesian Army attempted to crush the well-armed and well-organized Fretilin insurgents. As the insurgency continued into the 1980s, so did human rights violations, although at reduced rate … the choice was Marxist rule by Fretilin or action by Indonesia ( From Crisis in East Timor and U.S. Policy Toward Indonesia: Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, One Hundred-Second Congress, Second Session, February 27 and March 6, 1992, Volume 4. Pg. 82).

In 1992, a conference hosted by the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, a panel of scholars and journalists including Benedict Anderson, Noam Chomsky, Alex Nairn, and Amy Goodman presented on the human rights crisis in East Timor following the Santa Cruz massacre. At the conference, State Department official Larry Dinger detailed the United States government’s position, marking a sharp divergence from the statements of the other presenters, and disputing basic facts. Almost reiterating Quinn’s testimony word for word, Dinger said very little about Indonesian campaigns of systematic violence, especially during the invasion, citing civil war and the consequences of Portuguese rapid decolonization as the causes for death and suffering. Moreover, like Quinn, Dinger described Fretilin as a communist threat, labelling the party “Marxist”:

Lisbon decided to rapidly decolonize its overseas empire. This resulted in widespread chaos, civil conflict, and foreign intervention in Portugal’s former colonies. When the new Portuguese government in 1974 decided to decolonize, East Timor was completely unprepared for self-governance. For centuries of colonialism left East Timor with one high school, fewer than ten college graduates, and a literacy rate of under 10 percent …. A civil war erupted … Combatants were Fretilin which saw the immediate creation of an independent Marxist state … in the face of an imminent Fretilin military victory and the declaration of an independent Marxist state, Indonesia invaded in December of 1975, and indicated that it did so at the request of the East Timorese factions opposed to Fretilin. So, when the world turns its attention to East Timor in the mid-1970s, the choice was stark: Marxist Fretilin or Indonesia … Fretilin military action in East Timor amidst active communist insurgencies in most of Southeast Asia as the U.S. was departing from Vietnam and with memories of a communist threat to Indonesia still fresh.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Although Suharto and Western states, particularly the United States, perceived Fretilin as Marxist they “did not regard themselves as Marxists but as nationalists who believed they could draw on Marxism and adapt it to nationalist ends” (Kiernan,2004:206). These rationalizations, however, tend to reduce the problem to a simple binary choice, where there is no real decision at all, and that support for the invasion was presented to the public as necessary and therefore justified. The needed beliefs of Cold War ideology are reasserted and reinforced – that Fretilin “Marxist” insurgents are bent on violence, and liberation movements are to be viewed as radical and with suspicion, if not horror. Thus, this cynical and politically convenient rationalization legitimized US.-backed Indonesian military forces to invade East Timor, crush the “Marxist” terrorists, and restore peace, stability, and order.

Complicit Western states were often accused by human rights organizations of turning a blind eye to Indonesian excesses. Despite the compelling evidence that Western nations knew a great deal about through Amnesty International’s 1985 report on human rights abuses in East Timor, they repeatedly denied knowledge of abuses and rationalized their complicity in supporting the regime. Looking the ‘other way’ implies that states are aware of atrocities, but they choose to ignore them for convenience and political expedient reasons, because acknowledging them would fundamentally threaten their economic and geopolitical interests – a selective interventionism that objected vehemently to Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait because of strategic oil resources but fell collectively silent on East Timor. Constructive atrocities are knowingly evaded (Herman and Peterson, 2010). Willful blindness is often used as a cynical strategy to deflect responsibility, deradicalize and depoliticize the problem, and to normalize political legitimacy for occupation in the name of pragmatism, conciliation, and political rationality and expediency.

States complicit in human rights abuses may also retort to discrediting claims by concluding that nothing can ultimately be done. The language of inevitability and futility speaks more to the wishes of political elites to not do anything. It serves as a reactionary rationalization to diffuse political agendas and human rights claims demanding change, counterframing such calls as unavailing and ineffectual; structural circumstances and powerful historical forces are already “on the march” (Hirschmann, 1991:167; also see McCright and Dunlap, 2000; Webster, 2020; Ramos-Horta, 1987:143; Cobb and Ross, 1997). This “resigned fatalism” can be effectively understood as a “counterprognoses” strategy (Benford and Hunt, 2003:165) for legitimizing a policy of complicity on East Timor, and as a cynical, geopolitical justification for continuing profitable business relations with the Indonesia regime, voting against United Nations resolutions on self-determination, and continuing to undermine calls for ameliorative action. This counterframing question the reasonableness of movement prognoses. By describing the incorporation of East Timor into Indonesia as an “irreversible fact,” Western officials implied that they had no control or influence on Indonesia’s actions. This was most effectively captured by Aldrich who said that the United States refused to question the integration of East Timor into Indonesia because it was “an accomplished fact,” and that “such a policy would not serve our best interests in light of the importance of our relations with Indonesia” (Chomsky and Herman, 1979:161).

Western complicit states, as asserted time and time again by Timorese activists, bore equal responsibility for atrocities in East Timor, especially states that recognized the Indonesian annexation and who advanced the idea that integration of East Timor was irreversible. For example, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Bill Hayden, insisted the Cabinet to recognize Indonesia’s annexation of East Timor, arguing that a policy of self-determination was unviable and would be “certain to fail,” and thus futile, because Indonesia’s integration program was an “irreversible fact.” In 1992, Larry Dinger claimed that the massacre of Santa Cruz was an “aberration from the trend” and that the human rights situation was improving.

In response to accusations about Australia ‘trading blood for oil’ by Portuguese officials and whether it values human rights Australian foreign minister Senator Evans at a Joint Press Conference in 1992 said “the Indonesian annexation and acquisition of sovereignty over East Timor is irreversible – however, regrettable it may be, we think it was a matter of very great regret that Indonesia acted as it did in 1975, we believe it is irreversible so far as the attitude of the Indonesians are concerned … I regard it as wholly regrettable that the 1975 events took place, we’ve made that clear, but we regard it as wholly irreversible and believe that we can, as I said, bet assist the position of the East Timorese people by operating within that reality” (Rauschning, 1997).

Moreover, the irreversibility thesis continued to remain a rationalisation for Western state officials as they looked back on past events. With compelling evidence of the massacre reaching public attention, the State Department shifted tact. In response to the Santa Cruz massacre, Larry Dinger called it a “tragedy” and “indefensible,” underscoring that the State Department “condemned it and condemned it forcefully.”[[20]](#footnote-20) Moreover, the State Department called the Indonesian investigation into the massacre – its preliminary report – “a serious and responsible effort.” Western states began to justify continuing cooperative engagement with Indonesia, not a policy a retribution. According to Dinger:

It’s our judgement in the State Department that the basic facts remain the same in the post-Cold War world as they were in 1975-1976 – that Indonesia is in place, that it will not leave on its own, and that the world is not prepared to push it out, whether or not the United states is prepared to push it out. We also believe that its useful for many reasons, including our huma rights dialogue, to maintain a decent relationship with Indonesia. So, we have concluded that it would not be useful for us and for the Timorese, that if we pushed on this issue it would not change anything….In 1976, US policymakers decided to accept Indonesia incorporation of East Timor as an accomplished fact. They judged that nothing the United States and the world was prepared to do could change that fact. And US interest within Indonesia, including our human rights dialogue, were important and should continue. With such reality in mind, previous administrations, including the Ford, Carter, Bush and Reagan administration fashioned a policy which has been followed consistently on a bipartisan basis.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Moreover, ex-Australian Ambassador to Indonesia Richard Woollcott knew in advance about the Indonesian invasion yet responded that “assessing the situation as it was developing, I did come to the conclusion – as did other Ambassadors to Jakarta in 1975 – that Indonesian intervention was inevitable in these circumstances”[[22]](#footnote-22). Similarly, according to Henry Kissinger, “it happened in the year when Southeast Asia – Indochina had collapsed. It wasn’t a question of approval; it was a question of not being able to do anything about it.”[[23]](#footnote-23)

**Denial**

The most rudimentary form of avoiding, neutralizing, or suppressing moral dilemmas resulting from self-interested decision-making, the pursuit of commercial interests, instrumental goals, and geopolitical strategic priorities is to deny facts of atrocities. As a method of deflecting responsibility, the denial of fact does not actively seek to persuade or deceive audiences. It is not simply a conscious defence mobilized by perpetrators and complicit states through wilful ignorance and non-knowledge. Rather, ignorance and denial are strategic (Bovensipen, 2020). Moreover, it alone cannot be reduced to psychological strategies for suppressing feelings of guilt or shame, or distress. Instead, it is often structurally produced insofar as denial serves to preserve vital political-economic and geopolitical interests or the long-term foreign policies of successive governments.

Denial of fact is a common official repertoire for morally disengaging and deflecting responsibility when unexpected, threatening accusations of serious systemic misconduct arise. Denial of fact can take many patterns: downplaying severity, diverting attention by accusing human right activists of ideological motivation, lack of impartiality; discrediting moral advocates. Denial of fact, like the subsequent methods discussed, is effectively explained as a nexus between social psychology, political economy, and geopolitics. State actors are propelled to deny by system justification, namely common processes of bureaucracy, indifference, and self-interested, profit-driven *realpolitik* policies, aptly described as the banality geographic evils (Harvey, 2000), where systemic complicity with human rights abuses, and even genocide, can be actively erased from public consciousness in support of geopolitically important and profit-centered inter-state relations.

Denial constitutes efforts to discredit the objectivity, credibility, and reliability of those who dissent and report on human rights abuses.State officials may draw on the “shoot the messenger” repertoire (Seu, 2010, 2011) to undermine the source of human rights claims by casting doubt on the veracity of the allegations, trivializing the reports, the integrity and trustworthiness of campaigners, dissenters, and organisations themselves. As a counterframing strategy, delegitimizing the dissenters seeks to portray the messenger as selective, bias, gullible, a victim of manipulation, working from a hidden political agenda, or harboring an unscrupulously political or ideological interest, and therefore, not to be believed, and to be treated with extreme suspect.

Some Western state officials sought to neutralize the impact of publicity on what was an artificially produced famine by the Indonesian state. The Indonesian occupation of East Timor was marked by widespread and systematic human rights abuses designed to terrorize the population into compliance and the resistance into submission, including indiscriminate massacres from the first day of the invasion, torture, sexual violence, and extrajudicial detention. The Indonesian military tactic of “encirclement and annihilation” in the late 1970s ravaged food resources. The resettlement of civilians into transit camps led to an artificially produced famine that resulted in the widespread death of innocent civilians. Between 1977 and 1979, Indonesian encirclement intensified with the deliberate destruction of food resources in Fretilin-controlled areas. Indonesian forces, supported materially by U.S. weapons and aircrafts, sued biological and chemical weapons, such as napalm, that poisoned water and food supplies. The lack of food, shelter, and medical supplies, compounded by the disruption caused by the ruination of agriculture and restrictions imposed on mobility, caused widespread famine and the deaths of tens of thousands due to hunger and disease. This catastrophic situation was exacerbated by Indonesia’s refusal to permit access to international humanitarian agencies until 1979. The Indonesian state had grown increasingly worried about the publicity mounting around the famine issue in the West. Ultimately, state officials displaced blame for the causes of famine. As the conflict progressed, facts of atrocities surfaced, and support deepened, Western state officials began shifting repertoires focused on rationalizing support for invasion and occupation geopolitically, as necessary, therefore, absolving Western states of moral objection, firstly by harnessing the hegemonic command of anti-communism, and then adopting a form of resigned fatalism.

As a result of growing public pressure and reports surrounding the famine in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Indonesia organized state visits for Western state officials. In 1982, the Australian Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence conduced an inquiry that worried the Indonesian regime. State visits to Indonesia were used as a strategic basis for sustained and calculated attacks on the integrity of the head of the Catholic Church in East Timor, Monsignor da Costa Lopes, and affiliated human rights organizations. Mr. Gough Whitlam, for example, was particularly vocal in vilifying the Monsignor in the press and on Radio Australia as a “liar,” “malcontent,” “unscrupulous,” “mendacious,” false,” and perpetrating a “wicked act” (Walsh, 1982) by revealing information on the enormous suffering and violence in East Timor. Mr. Hastings, also blamed Lopes for the famine because of his alleged refusal of accepting food aid from Australia. Gough Whitlam, in his submission to the Senate Hearing, openly attacked Costa Lopes as plotting to attract publicity amidst declining news coverage of casualties in East Timor. According to Whitlam, “it was realized that hunger was the best way to attract publicity … I am driven to the conclusion that he and up to half of his clergy resent and lament the departure of the Portuguese.”[[24]](#footnote-24) In reference to a letter sent to Bishop John Gerry, Chairman of the Australian Catholic Relief by Lopes about famine on the island, Whitlam told the hearing that it was “naturally a matter of concern that this inaccurate letter was sent. My own construction of the situation is this: the publicity used to be directed and sought on the situation of East Timor on causalities. That situation lagged. Unfortunately, later year it was thought that hunger was the best way to catch publicity,” and that there would be “no way to check” (Mercury, 1982). Lopes allegations. Whitlam further told the hearing that there was no famine, that is, was a “web of lies,” even claiming that these were the very words of Lopes himself, and that the only thing that could threaten the islands food situation were “late rains, whirlwinds, or rate plagues”.[[25]](#footnote-25)

When asked about a specific report from Lopes that famine was expected in East Timor unless the country received extensive outside aid and that Indonesian presence and occupation was chiefly to blame for the famine in an interview with Richard Andrews of Radio Australia and broadcasted on ABC Radio “Frontline,” Whitlam responded by denying the existence of a famine and shooting the messenger:

I believe there is no threat of famine in East Timor. I believe that Mgr. Lopes didn’t tell the truth, and he know that he was not telling the truth. I had a couple of hours almost with him in Dili, and I went through with him the food position in East Timor. He wrote this letter to the Australian Catholic Bishops in November from Jakarta. Before he left Dili for Jakarta, he had discussed the situation with the international Red Cross representative … I believe that the Bishop is suffering a crisis of identity. He does not realize that the days of the Portuguese – under whom he received his education, under whom he was the Deputy, the member of parliament for Timor for some period in the National Assembly in Lisbon – that those days are past … they miss the Portuguese … and it upsets the Bishop and these clergy when they come to realize that Indonesia is now doing much more for the people of East Timor than the Portuguese ever did … I say he’s a liar. He is a mendacious and malicious correspondent.[[26]](#footnote-26)

When Jim Dunn was mentioned in the interview, Whitlam said:

Mr. Dunn got too close to Fretilin and ever since, he’s been carrying a torch, waving a flag for Fretilin. Now, if one wants to look at the situation now, Mr. Dunn is of no assistance at all. Nor of course is the Australian Council for Overseas aid – we call it ACFOA – it’s of no assistance either … but if you doubt what I say about it, ask the International Red Cross, ask the American Catholic Relief Services, ask the church superiors of the Monsignor. None of them back the Mgr. who is still in Dili, and hardly ever gets out of it, never goes out of it to speak… Don’t rely on Mr. Dunn, who was last there over six years ago, and is still a spokesman for Fretilin.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Human rights organizations and activists in the West became targets of attacks by Western state officials and sections of the media. Whitlam depicted the Australian Council for Overseas Aid as subject to a propaganda campaign: “the former Prime Minister, Mr. Gough Whitlam, yesterday accused the *Australian Council of Overseas Aid* of being “conned” by a propaganda campaign against Indonesia,” (Murry, 1982; Cadzow, 1982) and “playing politics.”” In Canada, Joe Clark attacked Elaine Briere and ETAN as biased, ideologically motivated, and exaggerating atrocities:

Your view of events in East Timor and Irian Jaya is based on outdated information, and material that is biased and exaggerated, which you appear to have accepted as objective and accurate … however, much of the balance of the material you enclosed from other sources consists in large part of information that is dated and exaggerated. This is regrettable, as I know that human rights groups and individuals in Canada have a sincere interest in areas such as East Timor … unfortunately, their collective credibility is sometimes damaged by those among them who accept without question the reports and views of Fretilin supporters which can reasonably be expected to be biased, and consequently, selectively interpret information to fit preconceived ideas and conclusions. In my view, this does a disservice to those groups who sincerely try to monitor progress and events (Clark, 1987).

The chief aim here is to depict such claims as biased, unreliable, and as part of a wider propaganda campaign, a counterrhetoric of insincerity (Ibarra and Kitsuse, 1993) that asserts that the claimants are motivated by a hidden political motive; as radicals who warp facts and exaggerate problems (also see Buell, 2003; Jacques, Dunlap, and Freeman, 2008). Moreover, statements like “We didn’t know, we didn’t see anything,” “it could not have happened without us knowing (or it could have happened without us knowing”), “if there was evidence, we would never allow that to happen” or “you cannot believe the source of your knowledge,” all exhibit attempts to feign ignorance, also used as a weapon of the powerful when confronted with discrediting reports that implicate them in crimes against humanity (Scott, 1985). For example, if we take another statement from Joe Clark, responding to New Democratic Svend Robinson:

You suggest that Canada’s “blatant support to Indonesian aggression involves our “participation in the annihilation of the East Timorese.” This is simply not true. Had there been current evidence of activities such as you suggest, Canada would immediately and strongly have denounced such actions as being abhorrent in themselves and contrary to those human rights principles held most dearly by Canadians (Clark, 1987).

Carmel Budiardjo, who helped to found *Tapol*, an organisation dedicated to informing the public about human rights abuses in Indonesia and East Timor, was also attacked by the Western media for her partisan communist affiliations and *Tapol’s* one-sidedness and disingenuity, particularly by Derek Davies, editor of the *Far Eastern Economic Review*:

Mrs. Burdiardjo is a lady with an interesting history …. She became an active member of the British Communist Party and various communist front organisations he said … Davies was prompted to write about Mrs. Budiardjo after Tapol had failed to give any recognition to the release of nearly all Indonesian political prisoners. Instead Tapol changed its purpose from being a defence of political prisoners’ organization to a political movement against the Indonesian government. Mrs. Budiardjo has used Tapol to attack the Indonesian government for what was really a generous offer, to grant full citizenship to 850,000 ethnic Chinese. She was critical of what she thought would be bureaucratic stumbling blocks and corruption that would hinder the programs quick implementation. Yes, these steps taken by Jakarta contrasted strongly with the policy of Vietnam which has expelled its Chinese population. As Davies said, it is remarkable that most such organisations as Tapol which to profess themselves concerned with human rights largely confine their targets to non-communist countries. The protests received about the sufferings of the people of China, especially during the Cultural Revolution, the pogroms in Kampuchea or the deliberate persecution of the ethnic Chinese by Vietnam inspire relatively little concern by such bodies; they are more interested in hammering even the relatively benign authoritarian regimes which do not commit such crimes in the name of socialism.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Together with delegitimizing the dissenters, state officials also denied and downplayed the severity of atrocities in a general sense – denials of injury (Sykes and Matza, 1957) where the accuser is seen as “blowing things out of proportion” (Cohen 2001:526). Others offered literal denials. Canadian Ambassador to Indonesia (1977-1979) Glenn Shortliffe asserted that “it is clear that the stories of naval bombardments, heavy artillery … are patently false”:

Your allegation that Indonesia “has a long and dreadful record of overall violations of human rights” is in my opinion a gross exaggeration of the situation. The facts simply do not bear you out. Likewise, you refer to a so called “operation extinction” and allege that it is “tantamount to genocide” (Clark, 1987).

British government and companies, who together demonstrated a concrete case of state-corporate complicity in state crime and human rights abuses, played a significant part in arming the Indonesian occupation. In defending the sale of Hawk fighter-bombers to the Indonesian military regime, foreign secretary in the Callaghan Labour government, David Owen, downplayed killings in East Timor:

…in 1977, with the East Timorese cut off from the world and fighting for their existence, David Owen, foreign secretary in the Callaghan Labour government, approved the sale of the first Hawk fighter-bombers to Indonesian dictatorship. Owen said that the reports of killings in East Timor had been ‘exaggerated’ and that the ‘most reliable’ figure was 10,000, and anyway, ‘the scale of the fighting had been reduced.’ As Own concluded the deal, a letter written by a Portuguese priest hiding in East Timor reached Lisbon, ‘The invaders,’ he wrote, ‘have intensified their attacks from land, sea, and air. The bombers do not stop all day. Hundreds die every day.’[[29]](#footnote-29)

**Conclusion**

Geopolitical rivalry and denial are not merely something that occurs in geographically distant states but also within the Western democratic sphere, as states contend with human rights claims emerging within their borders as part of a transnational ‘boomerang strategy’ of SMOs (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). Cold War geopolitical rivalries and ideologies organize the background of discursive opportunities available for repressive states and Western political leaders to appropriate and harness as part of strategic denial and deflections of accountability. Alleged national security concerns and geopolitical imperatives figure prominently into strategic denial. Western political leaders adopted various strategies for deflecting responsibility, obfuscating, neutralizing, and deceiving domestic and international audiences rather than adhering to their legal obligations under international law. Although Western states have long touted their commitments to human rights, they have often sidelined this agenda selectively in favor of other interests. Herman and Chomsky (2002; also see Herman and Peterson, 2011) argue that US officials engage in “atrocities management” by manufacturing propaganda that deflects accountability and public visibility away from US-approved violence, primarily onto its enemies. Atrocities can take various forms. ‘Nefarious’ enemies and their victims are seen as worthy of sympathy. However, when systematic state violence and human rights abuses are carried out by US state clients, such as Indonesia in East Timor from 1975-1999 or Indonesia’s mid-1960s pogrom against communists, they are regarded by US and Western allies as benign, and their victims are not worthy of condemnation and moral outrage.

State denial does not, however, emerge solely in the form of political cultures – as cultures of denial – or reducible to the individualist or social-psychological coping mechanisms and strategies, but as a result of primary geopolitical and state priorities. States often practice selective humanitarianism. In some instances, once human rights abuses are revealed to public attention, they may not be denied by states. However, this is historically contingent on strategic priorities within political and international contexts and geopolitical structures. In other circumstances where states deny and ignore atrocities, the political stakes for condemning atrocities may prove too high, and the victims are considered unworthy. In these cases, disclosure of human rights abuses may threaten cornerstone state policies, whether Cold War anticommunism, *realpolitik*, or profit-driven foreign policy, may undermine the creation of strategic markets, or embarrass political leaders and international allies, thereby undermining the legitimacy of Western state foreign policies. State organized denial are necessary strategies used to protect the legitimacy of Western-Indonesia relations.

Moreover, political leaders may deny human rights abuses as a strategy for avoiding their legal obligations under the UN Genocide Convention and international law. These converging strategic priorities and interests organize the repertoire structure of state-sponsored violence and state-mobilized denial. Broader political and international contexts mediate these strategies. The sediments of past foreign policy decisions and institutional patterns in which contingent geopolitical conditions and strategic priorities take on deterministic properties (Mahoney, 2000). Indeed, history matters (Sewell, 2005).Once a set of institutional patterns are contingently selected, policy leaders will reinforce processes and strategies of denial and increase the legitimation of their policy orientations. This institutional logic produces and reproduces, through successive governments, a path dependence and institutional conformity and continuity towards specific policy choices. However, ‘critical junctures’ like the Santa Cruz massacre, have contingent effects and timing, thereby creating the conditions of possibility for altering and innovating repertoires of denial over time. In other words, path dependency allows us to understand how state organizations and institutions become “locked in” to foreign policy decisions and stances as a result of structural properties such as geopolitical and strategic priorities and keystone state policies. When it comes to the sociology of denial, path dependency and historical institutionalism can help us understand why foreign policies do not change as much as we might expect, the challenges in poses to human rights campaigning, and stagnant political claims-making, as continuity results from calculated geopolitical and strategic interests, which helps to explain the considerable inertia that human rights activists for East Timor faced. Suharto’s anti-Communist pogrom produced contingent geopolitical conditions for Western interest in Indonesia. Strategies for deflecting responsibility, therefore, should also be understood as negative mechanisms that interfere with attempts to change foreign policies from human rights organizations and SMOs, in the maintenance of policy continuity. States deny because policy changes operate incrementally due to several constraints, namely the stickiness of institutional cultures of denial, vested economic and geopolitical interests, as well as bounded rationality of foreign policy decision-makers. Often, foreign policy changes that lead to a change in the denial repertoires of state officials is the result of structural, ‘punctuated’ changes in these conditions, but also accumulated pressure exerted through human rights mobilization (changes in public opinion, political antagonisms, and configuration of allies). These forces must be understood in confluence, as helping to determine the outcome of Timorese independence.

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Chapter 5

Conclusion

Social constructionists have highlighted, quite persuasively, that not every perceived injustice, problem, or grievance generates a social movement or collectively produced definitional activities (Spector and Kitsuse, 1977; Ibarra and Adorjan, 2018; Pawluch, 2019; Loseke, 2003; Best, 2017; Schneider, 2019). However, the second question is how, but also why, different movements emerge, accelerate, resonate, and how they are sustained over time (Horn, 2013:21-22). Recent scholarship in social movement research underscores that effective, successful, and viable mobilization does not follow a linear, predictable trajectory. For instance, constructionist social problem theorists have produced empirically sensitive “natural histories” of social problems case studies (Best, 2015; Akagawa, 2015). Constructionists have also cautioned about case-centricity and have advanced the idea of examining social problems construction and processes comparatively (Best, 2015; Adorjan, 2019).

Social constructionists’ social movement analysis has remained particularly fruitful for examining short-term, steady social problems construction, but often social movement mobilization is not linear. Rather, social movements, as the articles of this dissertation background, are contingent, expanding and diminishing in intensity primarily as a response to broader structural and contextual factors that either enable or constrain them, such as geopolitical shifts in international relations.

From the perspective of social movement theory, movement infrastructures emerge primarily as organizational structures or through political/discursive opportunities. On the one hand, a configuration of allies – trade unions, sympathetic NGOs, religious groups, politicians, academics, and intellectuals – constitute the organizational resources and strengths for transnational mobilization, at both a local, national, and international level. On the other hand, the United Nations and its system of legal discourses, human rights law, and institutions, can help to spur, generate, and reinforce human rights mobilization by providing the legal, political opportunity structures necessary for enabling human rights advocacy. According to Della Porta and Tarrow (2005:159), resources and opportunities “are perceived and constructed by activists.” Ultimately, objective structures, such as political opportunities or legal texts, are not in themselves enabling, but rather generate social movement action insofar as they are perceived as enabling by activist moral agents. Hence, the discursive and interpretive work of solidarity allies’ matter in the mobilization of human rights, its resonance and viability. Often, this work is discursively constructed – studied from social constructionist perspectives through various concepts like framing and discursive field.

Social movement frames are contingent. They could be constructed and mobilized in different ways. Changes in the political environment are sometimes (though not always) recognized by actors (Meyer and Gamson, 1996; Diani, 1996; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, 2001). All interpretations of political and discursive opportunities are subjectively (collectively) and strategically assessed by movement actors themselves, who must deliberate on a multitude of pieces of information stemming from the broader sociopolitical and cultural contexts in which their movement mobilizes. Opportunities are contingent on agents insofar as they must be recognized as such by movements for mobilization to emerge and contest power structures effectively. Initially the East Timorese resistance movement and Fretilin adopted close-Marxist tactics and ideologies, gradually adopting a national liberation model in line with previous decolonization movements in Africa. However, the Cold War climate rendered this framing of the movement increasingly ineffective. East Timor and solidarity activists adopted an anti-colonial, and human rights discourse of morality, especially after the Santa Cruz massacre, although human rights concerns and framings were deployed before the mass killing. There are lessons to be learned that concern the substantive chapters of the thesis, as well a conceptual and theoretical concerns that extend beyond it. Lessons can be learned in framing, social constructionism, frame diffusion and transnational movements, while at the same time emphasizing the importance of contingency, agency, and structure in understanding social movement mobilization and success.

**Lessons Learned in Framing**

Frame analysis focuses on the strategies organizations deploy to bridge different specific issues (Snow and Byrd, 2007). Frames are worldviews that structure, organize, and guide public behavior and shape the construction and perception of collective problems. The analysis of frames allows us to consider how collective actors are involved in public moral discourse, and the communicative strategies they use to persuade audiences to care about human rights issues.

Frame analysis focuses on the process of the attribution of meaning, which constructs diagnostic frames, addressing recognition of issues and identifying who or what is responsible; prognostic framing, offers solutions to rectify human rights issues, and motivational framing involves mobilizing actors to act on assumptions by appealing to logic, evidence, emotions, identity, and culture (Loseke, 2003; Snow and Benford, 1988, 2000). Often, diagnostic frames reduce the social complexity of issues to delineate a clear moral narrative (della Porta and Diani, 1999; Hagan, 2010). Framing often links human rights claims to broader discourses in the cultural and political environment, incorporating them within nationally sensitive and historically resonant worldviews, so that collective actors can justify their human rights claims in relation to common values and cultural themes. In this way, motivational frames and framing are deeply associated to justifications (Boltanski and Thevenot, 1999). They provide justifications to questions such as “why is the problem you are addressing important?” (Yla-Antilla and Luthakallio, 2016). Justifications and framing, therefore, adapts to features in the national, domestic public sphere, as they must resonate with historically embedded norms, cultural understandings, and narratives (Yla-Anttilla and Kukkone, 2014), which are historically contingent and used as repertoires (Lamont and Thevenot, 2000).

# Claims-makers should offer competing, counterhegemonic narratives that produce an emotional and moral resonance in targeted audiences, which is inextricably linked with constructing an “injustice frame” (Howard-Hassmann and Lombardo, 2007:29). According to Brysk (2013) a social movements communicative politics is crucial for fostering greater recognition and mobilization for human rights wrongs and abuses, and to help build the political will to address them. There is a communicative structure to the rhetoric of human rights. Firstly, human rights campaigns and movements often incorporate symbolic leaders to embody exceptional qualities and encourage international and national identification through a symbolic politics. Figures like Xanana Gusmão, José Ramos-Horta, and Bishop Belo were central to establishing the charismatic legitimacy of the liberation movement. National heroes, for instance, inspire and unify. National heroes become important for charismatic mobilization and are thoroughly imbued with what Bourdieu calls “symbolic power” (Bourdieu, 1989).

Further, human rights movements should adopt appropriate and resonant frames and compelling counterhegemonic narratives to create a sense of connection and solidarity with intended audiences and to personalize human rights abuses. Activists may accomplish this by bridging and recontextualizing human rights discourse into the history of particular nations and to national ideas and historical traditions. This often involves matching with receptive audiences.

Closely linked to framing is the notion of performances and the strategic use of testimonies that personalize the experience of victims and survivors. Moreover, human rights social movements often make strategic use of media. Representing a clear moral narrative also attracts audiences because of its apparent possibility of cutting through the complex and messy realities of the *realpolitik’s* of the hegemonic world order and the corruption of national, geopolitical interests, thus providing audiences with something that stands above politics into the realm of morality. They are also important for bridging the geographic remoteness and history of problems.

The figure of the victim or survivor, whose personal testimony of violence and suffering signifies the genre of huma rights reporting, comes to the fore in this part of the framing process. The plight of victims is tied directly to the absence of enforcement of human rights and international law, and to Western complicity. The imagery of these victims or survivors of genocide reiterates the diagnostic frames emphasis on the lack of legal order or the absence of its enforcement. Social movements identify and construct victims of a given injustice and convert their victimization into calls and rationales for action. This humanitarian mobilization frame is grounded on the assumption that knowing about suffering and abuses induces action (Wilson and Brown 2009) and is important for mobilizing empathy and sympathy for the cause.

The claims-making strategy of “personalizing victims” has been found to be particularly effective in motivating social movement participation and in generating political mobilization (Anspach and Draguljić, 2019; McEntire, Leiby, and Krain, 2015) and for encouraging audience members feelings of sympathy (Loseke, 2003). Whereas information politics (Keck and Sikkink, 1998) seeks to convey influence through empirical and factual credibility, communicative power operates through “introducing new and effective voices, frames, expertise, and performances of human rights claims that resonate with an audience due to bridging narratives and media campaigns” (Brysk 2017:77).

Often, claims-makers use provocative “grabber” to attract and demand public attention for justice (Best, 1987). Distinct frames like genocide and hidden holocaust legitimate intervention and carry moral authority. How one “frames” a problem is critical. According to Brysk (2013), because Darfur was framed as genocide, it attracted attention and support that it would not have gained otherwise (12).

Human rights testimonies are also crucial communicative channels through which moral claims are made and warranted. They use images, symbols, and accounts of individual experiences of suffering as a strategy to affectively engage and persuade their audiences of a cause’s moral worth. These performances accentuate the “injustice frame” by personalizing suffering. Testimony is grounded on the belief that pain and suffering is universal, that it crosses all state and cross-national boundaries (Scarry, 2020*).* The belief in the universality of pain, often the premise on which universal human rights is based, and its power as a strategy for generating solidarity is highlighted by researchers who have found that human rights abuses such as torture is the easiest issue to campaign around (Cohen, 1996). Testimony functions as a communicative medium through which identification with a suffering other can occur. Through our identification with survivors of genocide and human rights abuses, we become connected to their political and moral cause of self-determination and liberation from colonial occupation and oppression and can be mobilized into action. Therefore, personalizing testimonies are motivational frames (Loseke, 2003). Brysk (1995:577) writes that “a message can foment change by creating an alternative reality, transferring daily experience to a different realm in which it is valued and thus opening the recipient to consider a new social order.” In this way, testimonials of human rights abuses are performative: they make moral claims on audiences and cultivate potentials moral actors and mobilization in the international arena.

Indeed, we have underscored the importance of social constructionist perspective in understanding social movement mobilization. Materialist and structuralist accounts and models of social movements tend to downplay the importance of emotions, normative, symbolic, national and affective representations in mobilization (Goodwin and Jasper, 1999; Brysk, 1995), something that the framing perspective adds to our understanding of social movement mobilization, and in particular, to the discursive work of solidarity activists, especially as nationalism has become a fundamental principle of state power.

**Social structures and reality cannot be reduced merely to the aggregate of people’s beliefs, hopes, expectations, and definitions of reality. Social structures are not simply ‘in the mind.’ Even though our access to the social world is necessarily mediated through our understanding of these interpretive processes and linguistic categories, it does not entail that this is all that exists or can be known to exist. Karl Marx opined that reality is ontologically stratified and concealed from view (“all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and essences of things directly coincided” Capital, Vol III:817). Indeed, the social world and its structures operate in ways like the natural world, although there are some critical differences. Namely, the social world is built upon social relations and reproduced, altered by human activity (for instance, social practice, including labor), and destroyed by that very activity. Moreover, Marx examined, through an empirical, abstracted model, how the deep structures and mechanisms of the capitalist economy (and class domination) were manifested in certain institutional (for instance, the state) and ideational (ideology and discourse) phenomena, often resulting in a separation of the economic from the political domain (Poulantzas 2017:123- 141). Therefore, framing alone cannot account for movement success, especially** with forms of social constructionism that define reality in terms of a subjectivist philosophy of mind (Woolgar and Pawluch, 1985; Adorjan, 2019; Palwuch, 2019). **According to Kathy Charmaz, building on pragmatist philosophy and Marx’s statements in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* *of Louis Bonaparte* (1978), “this materialist view of action shreds the extreme individualism and solipsism given in radical constructivist views” (Puddephatt, 2006:12).**

Claims-making, within social constructionist framing approaches, has often been understood as extra-institutional practices; or simply using movements to assert agency and abandoning institutional, historical, and international contexts altogether. Framing choices and mobilization strategies are shaped in important ways by the institutional, national historical and international contexts in which they emerge, contexts which provide the repertoire of solutions, the resources, state and policy constraints, and the discursive categories of perception needed to make any line of action or “framing” appear meaningful and legitimate(Friedland and Alford 1991:251; also see Amenta and Zylan, 1991*).* Moreover, critical juncture and transformative events, play a significant role in the emergence and expansion of social movement networks (Hess and Martin, 2006), and therefore, eventful temporality – the idea that “sees the trajectory of social movements and the course of history as “determined by a succession of largely contingent events” (Sewell, 2005:83) – allows for radical contingency and the acceleration of social movement human rights frames and their resonance.

Historical institutional perspectives provide a compelling perspective for strengthening where social constructionist framing approaches has begun by tying social movement frames and mobilization success to the larger cultural terrain, institutional, historical, and broader international sphere of state-relations, geopolitical alliances, and the global political economy. Intersecting social structures and institutions (at both the national and international level) constrained and shaped the outcome of Timorese independence, which underscores a profoundly codetermined character, and the importance of historical contingency and path-dependency in understanding successful mobilization. According to Amenta and Zylan (1991:232), “state structures, actors, and policies shape movements through restraints and encouragement.” Because institutions tend toward stability, explaining institutional changes and policies often requires causal claims that are extra-institutional (Clemens and Cook, 1999). Therefore, crises, the collective agency and activities of social actors, the collapse and emergence of new states, geopolitical alliances, and reconfigurations, provide multi-causal explanations for change and social movement success (Amenta and Ramsey, 2010). The most important insight of recent research in social movement theory comes from the idea that the political impact of social movements is conditional and contingent on the “presence of facilitating external factors pertaining to their social and political environment” (Guigui, 2008:1588).

Critical junctures can transform the orientation of state structures, institutions, policies, reinvigorate the international community, and change and accelerate mobilization trajectories and the diffusion and adoption of human rights discourse. Critical junctures such as the 1997 Financial Crisis altered the strategic position of global state powers in the West, whereas contingent events like Santa Cruz generated significant collective action. Transformative events are ‘turning points’ in a social movement that dramatically increase or decrease mobilization (McAdam and Sewell, 2001; Hess and Martin, 2006). Transformative events and critical junctures trigger actions, spark international outrage and debates, lead to the emergence of transnational network formations, and develop solidarity in action (Della Porta, 2008:30-32). For instance, the French Revolution (1789-1799) was a ‘critical juncture’ that punctuated the equilibrium of an international order based on monarchical authority and laid the groundwork for republicanism in domestic and international politics; a contingent moment that structured path-dependent legacies. Moreover, the end of the Cold War was a critical juncture that punctuated the emergence of a new democratic, liberal, and humanitarian world order at the geopolitical level.

Therefore, long-term, protracted social movements are more liable to proceed in accordance with a logic of “punctuated equilibrium” (also see Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Koopmans, 2005) where long periods of protracted, often ineffective, and unrecognized struggle and periods of quietude are followed by intense, and often turbulent and rapid social change and social problem recognition. Niles Eldredge and Stephen Jay Gould (1972; Gould, 2009) advanced the theory based on the observation of variations of long periods of great stability in the fossil record with short periods of radical change in a great number of ancient species becoming extinct and news ones emerging. According to Koopmans (2004:32), “whatever its value in biology, the historical record of waves of contention and revolution suggests that human politics does make leaps and that political change is indeed often concentrated in relatively short periods of radical transformation.” Periods of quietude alternate with periods of accelerated mobilization. The years of Revolution, such as 1948, 1917, or 1989 are but the most punctuated instances of this phenomenon. More temporally protracted instances are the post-World War II decolonization movements, of which East Timor must be understood within.

**Lessons Learned about Frame Diffusion and Transnational Movements**

The framing literature has effectively investigated how larger cultural contexts, political opportunities, collective identities, and interactions with other agents in the movement field matter in determining social movement framing (Snow et al. 2014). Moreover, these studies have uncovered how broader cultural themes (Loseke, 2003; Benford and Snow, 2000) in the broader context or opportunities shape the frames and trajectories pursued by actors. However, this thesis seeks to fill in two important gaps in the literature. According to Snow et al. (2014), “next steps in research in this area might include discerning more contingent conditions that influence framing” (35). Moreover, they have underscored the importance of understanding cross-national diffusion processes. Frame diffusion and cross-fertilization across time and space warrants our attention (Snow and Benford, 1999; Snow et al. 2014; Stobaugh and Snow, 2010), especially attention to how human rights discourses is adopted and integrated within national contexts. This allows researchers to understand how master frames are grappled through the diversity of national discourses and raises important questions regarding the building and mobilizing of transnational solidarity (Hewitt, 2011).

Despite variations in social movement framing, particularly motivational framing, solidarity activists developed increasingly similar tactics. Keck and Sikkink’s (1998) boomerang model can aid us in understanding of norm and frame diffusion in human rights advocacy operates (see Figure 1). Transnational solidarity networks and mobilizations target the nation-state's domestic and foreign policies employing boomerang tactics to exert increasing pressure on states to address human rights justly. Indeed, boomerang tactics were even more necessary, considering that although existing international law provided a structure of discursive and legal political opportunities (Security Council resolutions and human rights law), these structures for mobilization were consistently obstructed by the diplomatic activities of Western states in their support of the Indonesian regime at the United Nations.

A diagram of a basic method

Description automatically generated

(Figure 1): Boomerang Model[[30]](#footnote-30)

The complexity of effects concerning social movement diffusion has led scholars to theorize the process as driven predominantly by a move towards a shared world society (Meyer et al., 1997) and boomerang effects facilitated by human rights advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). As previously noted, the Timorese independence movement operated on three fundamental fronts (Cabral and Martin-Jones, 2008; Webster, 2013), with the chief aim of ending the silence imposed by the territory’s status as a closed military zone.

The resistance movement began through guerilla warfare, moving to a clandestine front, then to transnational culture of activism. In Xanana Gusmão often repeated slogan, to resist was to win. So long as the Timorese people resisted, the vitality of the struggle lived on. This diplomatic, transnational front became integrated within global civil society networks (Katz, 2007). The aim would be to appeal to an international audience (the United Nations and Decolonization Committees) and national audiences where solidarity activists resided. Frame diffusion worked as follows: solidarity activists took East Timor’s message of resistance, independence, and human rights, shaping it to appeal to each national audience activists were domestically bound to. Solidarity activists, primarily because of their long-distance and inability to directly change domestic Indonesian policy towards East Timor, relied primarily on changing their own states' foreign policies to exert pressure on Indonesia to change its policy. The goal was to exert internal pressure on Western states, like the United States, Canada, and Australia to coerce Indonesia in the “boomerang effect.” The diplomatic effort and global solidarity movement would mobilize messages of support from overseas, creating networks between the guerilla, clandestine, and diplomatic fronts.

The conflict in East Timor could have been framed, and in fact, did initially frame their movement goals as a project of national liberation, in line with previous decolonization movements. However, a radical shift occurred in the late 1980s, a convergence between the resistance movement and global solidarity allies, adopting a cosmopolitan human rights discourse. The deployment of this discourse become more radical following the collapse of communism, where their solidarity allies promulgated by Timorese activists, mobilized on a transnational basis, and opted for a human rights-based model of self-determination and sociopolitical change.

The Santa Cruz massacre reinforced human rights as the dominant discourse in the global solidarity movement. Timorese diplomats began to embrace human rights cosmopolitan discourse as part of the identity of resistance. José Ramos-Horta declared that “human rights transcend boundaries and prevail over state sovereignty.” In the early 1990s, Southeast Asian resistance movements against authoritarian military regimes began to embrace human rights effectively. This is, by no means, a coincidence. Following the fall of the Soviet Union and the geopolitical triumph of the West, a liberal international order that promoted human rights and democracy emerged, effectively embodied in Clinton’s principle of “democratic enlargement.” This created a conducive set of political opportunities for the movement on the diplomatic and transnational front to exploit. Timorese independence resistance leaders, previously focused on a nationalist-centered movement of self-determination, altered their dynamic and saw the possibility of independence in persuading the international community to cease supporting Indonesia. Timorese independence resistance and human rights solidarity networks in the West emerged and converged using a cosmopolitan, common language. Because Timorese activists faced widespread state repression and state violence and therefore were silenced by their state, they sought to converge movement tactics with civil society allies in the West. A boomerang effect emerged overseas; Western solidarity allies began to exert pressure on their states and international bodies (such as the UN, primarily through the Decolonization Committee), which pressured their domestic state. The boomerang effect, indeed, was present in East Timor. Timorese and foreign supporters gradually developed common, converging languages centered primarily on human rights while coalescing around particular cultural themes and discourses central to Western national contexts. These social movement framing strategies disrupted Indonesia’s overseas support as solidarity activists built cross-movement allies between civil society organizations, many of which had supported the Indonesian regime, such as Canadian universities. This led to increasing international pressure.

East Timor emerged as an international human rights issue in the 1990s, especially following the Santa Cruz massacre. At the same time, debates emerged surrounding the nature of human rights. Indonesia, China, Malaysia, Singapore, and other Southeast Asian authoritarian regimes, opposed Western-rooted human rights values, asserting an “Asian values” perspective on human rights, primarily as a strategy to rhetorically neutralize increasing criticism and unsettle the universalist meaning of human rights abuses committed by these regimes. The Asian values perspective downplayed individual rights and support for collective, undemocratic state power. Timorese activists and diplomats, active in transnational non-state solidarity networks, mobilized a cosmopolitan discourse of universal human rights to reinforce their claims to the right to self-determination (Horta, 1997).

Non-democratic nations ruled through military dictatorships or totalitarian states often advance counterclaims against human rights as imperialistic or as undermining national community or the state collective. For instance, the Indonesian regime constantly sought to promote human rights with Asian values, to protect its Pancasila state ideology and deflect criticism from the West, contending that Western human rights discourse was not applicable to the Indonesian context. Asian authoritarian states put forward an Asian conception of human rights that did not include the rights of individuals. Equally, the Western understanding of human rights includes little more than the rights of individuals. Nevertheless, human rights are universal and indivisible. In this way, cultural relativism does a disservice to oppressed minorities and to the Timorese as a prescriptive philosophy because Indonesia could claim that it was defending itself from Western cultural imperialism and preserving its own Asian values. This means that they continue doing what they were doing in East Timor without challenge. In other words, cultural relativism, and Asian values, as asserted against universal human rights discourse, can help to legitimize repressive state policies and violence through various conceptual and discursive counterstrategies. The language of relativism through the defense of “Asian values” by the Indonesian state to rationalize and justify its policies. Others have argued that “Asian values” and the promotion of cultural relativism is doublespeak for suppressing human rights and fundamental freedoms (Yu Ying-shih, 2005). According to José Ramos-Horta in his 1996 Nobel Peace Prize speech: “The peoples of Burma, Thailand, the Philippines, South Korea, and the democracy movement in China and Indonesia are telling the rest of the world that democracy and human rights are not an invention of the West. The thousands who died in the streets of Manila, Bangkok, Jakarta, Rangoon, Beijing, did not die for a so-called “Asian Value” that denies the people of Asia the basic and fundamental freedoms enjoyed in Europe, Latin America and in an increasing number of countries in Africa.”[[31]](#footnote-31)

Framing processes and the development of social movement framing strategies emerge and are enveloped within discursive fields (Steinberg, 1999) and discursive opportunity structures, both of which help to facilitate, shape, or constrain framing efforts (Ferree, 2003; Ferree et al., 2002; Koopmans and Statham 1999; McCammon et al., 2007). The Clinton administration’s foreign policy discourse of “democratic enlargement” and their support for the emerging human rights regime, helped to generate the structure of opportunities for global civil society human rights mobilization. For example, although human rights organizations helped to precipitate the Eastern revolutions of 1989 their role has been ignored in “mainstream political discourse” (Meyer, 1994). Kaldor (2013) considers the emergence of “cosmopolitan law” – the connection between humanitarian and human rights law – as an enabling discursive structure and opportunity for effective mobilization and frame resonance. Moreover, Fries (2004) understands human rights as the “underpinning of civil society law.” Although Western states began to aggressively promote human rights in the post-Cold War international context, the language of human rights could be seen as existing during the post-World War II context. The U.S. governments human rights sensibilities emerged through charges of racism often levelled against them by Cold War enemies, before the emergence of a transnational culture of human rights, as potential shaming from Cold War adversaries produced a structural opportunity for activists to latch onto and mobilize with as the superpowers geopolitical rivalry for influence in the developing world, particularly in the West, was shaped by obligations since the Second World War to adhere to human rights standards in order to establish their moral status as world leaders.

The emergence of a global international liberal and human rights regime rests on the activities of global civil society. Moreover, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of geopolitical rivalry dramatically changed the prospects for challenging movements across the globe. The end of the Cold War altered opportunities for solidarity organizations within and outside East Timor. In the case of East Timor, the end of the Cold War removed the geopolitical rationales for supporting the Suharto regime, which dominated Western state justifications for supporting the Indonesian invasion and occupation. Therefore, it altered the international context in ways that made their human rights claims more resonant, urgent, and potentially receptive. Ultimately, the end of the Cold War was instigated by a deliberate strategy for “building new sources of authority, constraining state policies, eroding state authority” (Meyer, 1994:137), and most importantly, for building transnational networks rooted predominantly on self-determination, and that human rights organizations consciously mobilized this strategy to take advantage of the opportunities Western state made available. Hence, contingent social and political disruptions that alter the international geopolitical context may lead to the emergence of new social movement organizations, but also radically altering the organization and framing of existing movements, or more specifically, enabling and reinforcing their human rights claims. Although solidarity organizations assiduously campaigned on human rights, the end of the Cold War provided a more receptive and conducive international context, as Western states began to adopt rhetoric that coincided with the emergence of a new international liberal order which could be used as strategic discourses in the solidarity movements accountability politics.

Nevertheless, neither can the protracted, liberal struggle and will of actors (their conscious deliberations and framing strategies) be seen as more determinative. Instead, a series of contingencies and likely outright accidents contributed to the final result (see Glassman, 2003), leading to a punctuated, sudden step-like function moment of change. But this sudden act of mobilization only occurred because of an existing social movement culture, facilitating political and discursive opportunities, and effective social movement framing centered on a human rights discourse.

It is plausible that changes in these contingent factors (Santa Cruz was completely hidden from public consciousness and there wasn’t an existing transnational network to pick up on this evidence) would have prevented independence, and the Timorese could well have continued to live under colonial occupation or have turned into a West Papua as today. In fact, these two countries demonstrate completely opposite trajectories. At another critical level, however, framing, and discursive fields (Steinberg, 1999) do not emerge in a vacuum. Political and discursive opportunity structures, and social movement framing, are historically contingent, a theme that cuts through all the papers of this sandwich thesis.

The sociological literature on political and discursive opportunity structures stresses the contingency of the social world, cultural processes, social movement mobilization, and movement frames depending on the assemblage of perceived opportunities existing at a given time or concrete historical moment. The existence and salience of discursive and political opportunity structures are highly contingent. According to Tarrow (1996:41), “rather than focus on some supposedly universal cause of collective action, writers in this tradition examine political structures as incentives to the formation of social movements” (also see McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, 2003). In social movement theory, political opportunity approaches seek to explain “social movements’ actions as rational courses followed in the light of perceived options, possibilities and barriers present in political contexts. Different, generally rather table and institutionalized, aspects of a political context are understood to contribute to how far a decision-making space is ‘open’ or ‘closed’ to movements” (Della Porta and Parks, 2018). Given the overdetermined nature of generative mechanisms and the institutional, national, historical, and cultural contextual differences and agencies that may converge, we should expect social movement processes and movement frames to demonstrate an increasing degree of contingency, variation, and path dependence to shape a given outcome. There is no precise way of predicting in advance how these iterative processes will unravel and what social forces will prove to be most decisive, despite the existence of copious facilitating antecedent causes. Indeed, contingency and indeterminacy in turning significant or insignificant events into an impetus for transformative social change should not be underestimated. For movements that experience inertia-like progression or lack momentum, the contingency of insignificant events may be the necessary catalysts for more widespread political mobilization. Social transformation and policy changes are contingent upon successfully manipulating, exploiting, or pressuring states to act around favorable existing external factors. Moreover, discursive opportunities and cultural repertoires (humanitarian, religious, national and historical) are historically contingent (Lamont, 2019; Lamont and Thevenot, 2000). In summary, the sociological theoretical constructs of contingency and opportunity are fundamental to understanding the courses of framing action on the part of social movements. Without the existence of contingent opportunities, East Timor may have become fully engulfed by Indonesian colonialism.

**Contingency, Agency, and Structure: Why They Matter for Understanding the East Timorese Global Solidarity and Liberation Movement**

The early 1990s provided the movement with important opportunities for reinvigorated mobilization and the expansion of transnational solidarity networks. Until this point, the movement experienced tremendous inertia, predominantly constrained by Western Cold War path-dependent policies of realpolitik. Three important conjunctural moments help to expand and facilitate the resonance and receptiveness of the solidarity movements social movement agenda, framing, and mobilization of human rights within national borders and through international bodies. These conjunctural moments, events, and historical forces helped to codetermine renewed interest in the issue of east Timor.

Eventful protests and demonstrations in themselves can be moments of “intensified agency and transformed relations” (Della Porta et al., 2020; Della Porta, 2004, 2014). But at the same time, the emergence of transnational advocacy networks in response to crucial turning points, was also codetermined by critical junctures (Collier and Collier, 1991) such as the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the transition from a binary international order to one where transnational network could emerge and tap into the dynamics of globalization. The latter indicates that junctures are critical when they unpick the constraining features of structures, allowing for agency and contingency to shape divergences from past state policies, such as *realpolitik* and *anticommunism*, shaping movement mobilization and viability, trajectories, frame resonance, and the transformation of structures and policies.

The understanding of social movements must therefore be understood, in this case, as both a tug and pull of both structure and agency, where episodes during a movement’s trajectory are influenced more prominently by one or the other, creating inflection points for political and discursive opportunities, and the level of mobilization, and the likelihood human rights frames resonate with States and the international community. Theoretical sociological analysis of the East Timorese global solidarity movement should be sensitive to both agency and structure, particularly for understanding the navigation of collective agencies in a structured context. the dislodgement of various structural cleavages was important for enabling opportunities and the ultimate success of the movement. Turning points, contingent events, and critical junctures capture the interaction of structure and agency in ways that dislodge, unwrap, and open up new opportunities and pathways for movement mobilization. Indeed, conceptually, agency has been understood as the creativity and available choice menus or decision-making capacities that motivate collective actors to break from structural constraints (Emirbayer and Mische, 1988). Contingent events allowed solidarity groups to cross-nationally appropriate existing discursive opportunities. The Santa Cruz massacre and the end of the Cold War, as critical junctures, acted as catalysts for claims-making, opening windows of attention and opportunity to the Timorese human rights issue as well as fueling hope for change and inflected transnational mobilization around East Timor’s right to self-determination. The Timorese liberation movement, with the support of solidarity activists, through resistance and protest, also created critical turning points, as with Santa Cruz, which transformed public understandings of East Timor’s human rights issue, bringing a forgotten problem to mainstream attention.

*Shift in Geopolitical Context: End of Cold War and the Collapse of Communism*. The post-Cold War climate offered expanding international political opportunities for the nationalist movement in East Timor and its solidarity allies, particularly in their capacity to mobilize a discourse of human rights more effectively. The United States was engaged in a geopolitical rivalry during the Cold War with the Soviet Union. The United States clung to a Cold War mentality that established power blocs and instigated conflict, confrontation, and political instabilities. Moreover, because of the ideology of anti-communism, the US was more likely to support military dictatorships if they served to contain the spread of communism. After 1989 the geopolitical competition against communism, which had heavily influenced Western foreign policy toward Indonesia for 40 years, became increasingly harder to justify. Without the geopolitical logic and the ideology of anti-communism, there was no longer a rationalizing imperative to extend support to Indonesia, and therefore no reasons not to extend their concerns for human rights to all nations in the Southeast Asia region and globally, such as in Burma and with Aung San Suu Kyi. This change in the geopolitical order acted as an unexpected, contingent, and strategic political opportunity structure for those committed to advancing human rights to press their governments to match rhetoric and discourse with concrete policy action (see Torelli and Drago, 2023; see Meyer, 1994 for a more theoretical perspective; political opportunities after the cold war). The collapse of the Soviet Union, therefore, downplayed the strategic geopolitical importance of the Suharto regime as a bastion of anti-communism and therefore removed the imperative to support the rights-abusing regime. Moreover, the Suharto regime faced a domestic “legitimacy crisis” (Habermas, 1975). The regime faced internal political instabilities with emerging problems within civil society, such as the emergence of pro-democracy movements in Indonesia, rebellions in the Ache province, and continued fierce resistance in East Timor.

With Santa Cruz mobilizing international moral outrage, East Timor was thus predominantly framed as a human rights issue and its cause of justice portrayed as a peaceful struggle towards self-determination. With compelling evidence of systematic human rights abuses inside East Timor, the movement was also reinforced by an enabling international context and structures of perceived political opportunities. This geopolitical context was radically changing attitudes toward human rights following the end of the Cold War. This gave further political legitimacy to the moment and timing, meaning that political officials were more likely to support the cause, and they did cut back on military assistance and training to Indonesia (see Lundry, 2022). After 1989 the geopolitical competition against communism, which had heavily influenced Western foreign policy toward Indonesia for 40 years, became increasingly harder to justify. Without the geopolitical logic and the ideology of anticommunism, there was no longer a rationalizing imperative to extend their support to Indonesia, and therefore reasons not to extend their concerns for human rights to all nations in the Southeast Asia region, and globally (Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar). This change in the geopolitical order acted as an unexpected, contingent, and strategic political opportunity structure for those committed to advancing human rights to press their governments to match rhetoric and discourse with concrete foreign policy action. In effect, this new context and change in the geopolitical relations between states generated a strategic field to effectively advance what Keck and Sikkink (1998) call “accountability politics.” Nevertheless, Western states did continue to sustain economic relations with Indonesia (see Webster, 2020). Therefore, although politically Western states began to embrace human rights, what needed to be challenged was their political-economic interests. Therefore, geo-economics would come to play a more pivotal role than geopolitics following the dissolution of the communist bloc. Among solidarity activists, political economy always drove foreign policy.

*The Santa Cruz Massacre*. For many commentators, the Santa Cruz massacre was perceived as the “critical turning point in East Timor’s path to independence” (Robinson, 2009:66l; if you leave us 66; Kohen, 1999; Hess and Martin, 2006). Indonesian policies relating to the ban on foreign journalists was lifted which allowed activists to cautiously enter, witness, record, and capture violence in the territory, especially the massacre. When the recorded violence was released in the West, Indonesia’s “woeful human rights record was back in the international spotlight,” putting the issue of East Timor “firmly back on the international agenda” (Kingsbury, 2013:61). Santa Cruz reawakened the international community and the event marked a turning point and had the power to mobilize transnational outrage: the reality of occupation and human rights abuses could no longer be ignored by the international community. Because of this conjunctural moment, international activism and solidarity was reinvigorated.

As a critical juncture, the massacre was the ‘transformative event’ in the East Timorese liberation movement that was spurred by resistance, intensified agency, and led to the emergence and expansion transnational solidarity network. Events can become “turning points in structural change, concentrated moments of political and cultural creativity when the logic of historical development is reconfigured by human action but by no means abolished” (McAdam and Sewell, 2001:102). In other words, events spurred by agential resistance have transformative consequences in so far as they “transform structures largely by constituting and empowering new groups of actors or by re-empowering existing groups in new ways” (Sewell, 1996). Some demonstration events set into motion social and political processes that “are inherently contingent, discontinuous and open ended” (Sewell 1996). Moreover, transformative events can carry strong symbolic impact.

Santa Cruz empowered solidarity groups and Timorese activists who had tremendous difficulty bringing attention to the East Timor issue. Protest, and therefore, forms of collective agency, events can generate critical junctures (Della Porta, 2020), which in turn effects structures, and emergent agencies. The Timorese demonstration event at Santa Cruz triggered a critical juncture. Feelings of solidarity were generated, unprecedented transnational organizational networks emerged and consolidated, and public outrage at the massacre developed. With the expansion of transnational advocacy networks internationally, and a widespread network of activists, post-Santa Cruz, the human rights frame diffusion was incorporated within nationally bounded contexts to package claims in historically and nationally resonant ways. While structural and historical forces constrain and condition the path Western states took, the particular, contingent choices made during the event in Dili shaped the reawakening of the international community to the plight of East Timor, and transformed Western state structures, policies, choices, and pressure on Indonesia. Agency happens during events. The contingent choices actors make establish new ‘rules of the game,’ new fields for understanding the issue, emerging forms of recognition and resonance, and the next period of movement expansion and acceleration.

Contingency and agency are inextricably linked. As Sewell contends, eventful temporality allows for radical contingency. These represent important turning points, a “transformative event is a crucial turning point for a social movement that dramatically increases or decreases the level of mobilization” (Hess and Martin, 2006:249). Critical junctures are also characterized by conditions under which social unrest is triggered, producing a ‘moral shock,’ which in turn, directs networked action and a need to respond to the event (Jasper, 1997), which led to incremental path-dependent changes like freezing arm sales, condemning Indonesia, and pressuring Indonesia to do an internal investigation on the massacre. Moreover, the massacre refocused international attention and falsified the perception that Timor desired integration, and that Indonesia was benign in Timorese development. Western media also began acknowledging human rights abuses and Indonesia’s illegal occupation, transnational solidarity movement strengthened, and state policies began to change. But Santa Cruz was not the critical turning point, as there were no calls for intervention and external state interests still supported Indonesia. Moreover, ASEAN states continued to support Indonesia’s East Timor policy. Maintaining relations with Indonesia at the time remained crucial to their strategic interests.

*Emergence of International Human Rights Regime and World Society****.***Changes in international relations and the geopolitical competition would lead to the emergence of a new liberal order centered on the values of democracy and human rights, which provided solidarity groups with an unprecedented international context and new structure of political/discursive opportunities to mobilize more effectively for the realization of Timorese human rights and self-determination, and have their claims resonate more strongly with national audiences, communities, and international bodies. In the United States, the Clinton administration coined the phrase “democratic enlargement” to summarize its foreign policy goals: to promote democracy and free trade and to contain regimes that were a fundamental threat to these values. In fact, Jean Chretien and the Liberal party advocated a set of similar ‘Canadian values,’ however emphasizing more Canada’s historical legacy of peacemaking and humanitarianism. These national identity and foreign policy discourses would be used by solidarity groups as a discursive tactic for moral accountability. Clinton foreign policy goals of democratic enlargement however was not merely empty rhetoric, although it was certainly inconsistent rhetoric and the selective application and pursuit of these ideals. The American state (along with other major Western states) have long constructed and advanced their foreign policy goals with the interests of capital in mind. That is, democratic enlargement – “enlargement – enlargement of the world’s free community of market democracies” – or more broadly the “Clinton Doctrine,” was more than simply promoting democracy. Undoubtedly, given the U.S.’s national and international image as a cornerstone of democracy, charges of inconsistency and double standards have frequently attended US efforts at democracy promotion. Indeed, despite the rhetorical positions of many US Presidents, democracy promotion has been far from consistent, and has never been the singular driving force behind US foreign policy, but rather a strategic – albeit strategic component in the broader picture. Despite the sometimes disingenuous and inconsistent nature of US foreign policy, the notion of strategy of ‘democratic enlargement’ offered a political context for mobilizing for East Timor’s democratic right to self-determination. Moreover, official statements and reports made public by policymakers could then be used against states in pressuring them to deliver on promises, ideologies, and foreign policies in what Keck and Sikkink (1998) refer to as “accountability politics” in the mobilization of moral shame.

In 1991, the United States led the largest miliary alliance since World War II against Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. This coalition of states and social forces did not include the Soviet Union, evidently. Clinton, in his first term, provided billions in aid to the new democracies in Eastern Europe and Yeltsin’s Russia to stimulate economic reform and to increase the country’s GDP. Russian state properties had been privatized, and trade between the United States and Russia drastically increased. The new liberal world order, following the collapse of the Soviet Republics, led primarily by the United States, was based on the principles of liberalism and multilateralism. One prominent feature of the new, liberal world order was the emergence of humanitarianism. This is not to say that humanitarianism did not exist prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* was adopted in 1948, and the universality of rights was affirmed from day one. But what happened after the end of the Cold War was that these values and principles began to be adopted and promoted more aggressively.

States began to redefine the geopolitical order primarily in terms of subordinating state sovereignty to the norms of universal human rights. Moreover, these standards coincided and became increasingly used as policy justifications for international economic liberalization policies. American global hegemony, following the collapse of the Eastern bloc, assented, and entrenched itself as the new world order. International institutions and economic practices came to be embedded in liberal discourse and the broader free-market capitalist dynamics.

World society theory holds that states tend to be oriented toward “the nature and value of such matters as citizen and human rights, the natural world and its scientific investigation, socioeconomic development, and education” (Meyer et al. 1997:148). Modern values and models have become diffuse globally, and at the same time so have Western state and market structures. After the end of the Cold War, the world entered in a new era of international relations (Buzan, 2004). States began to focus more on human rights and democracy. With globalization, an “organic solidarity” (Durkheim, 2018) emerged between states, primarily through market trade, and state structure interdependencies. Normatively, the states constituting a world society cemented a solidarity focused on human rights, human security, and the protection of individuals). World society became defined predominantly as a universalist cosmopolitanism (Buzan, 2004:7-8, 477), focusing on shared values and norms of a human community, as chiefly promoted through human rights laws, for example, and the notion that “shared norms and values at the individual level, but transcending the state.”

For example, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the termination of the Cold War, along with Canadian emphasis ‘human security’ following Lloyd Axworthy’s appointment as Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1997 brought increased Canadian focus on human rights abuses in East Timor, calling for a “lasting political solution with respect to East Timor” following a 1998 meeting with Timorese diasporic activist José Ramos-Horta (please see Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), Canada. “Freedom from Fear: Canada’s Foreign Policy for Human Security.” 2000, http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca). Canadian foreign policy sought to preserve Canada’s economic relations with Indonesia while simultaneously balancing the issue of human rights in the Timorese territory.

The liberal international consensus and promotion of human rights discourse was not merely manufactured by states however, but with the aid and facilitation of social forces within global civil society (as part of their ongoing social and humanitarian struggles) – other organizations like ETAN still struggling to raise the issue of Timor as an equivalent human rights issue deserving of equal attention under international law – but by global civil society and NGOs. This emerging consensus was far from being hegemonic and in continual negotiation and construction. Nevertheless, this provided the global solidarity network with a renewed terrain and a structure of political and discursive opportunities upon which to make effective public human rights claims.

Moreover, the 1993 election of Liberal Prime Minister Jean Chretien facilitated a gradual change in Canadian policy in favour of a ”human rights dialogue” with Indonesia and eventually self-determination. East Timor’s liberation was not arrived at by Western states good will and benediction, and far from it. It was a political and diplomatic accomplishment of the combined efforts and strategies of Timorese activists, operating within and supported by a global civil society network of citizen activists. In keeping with the changing dynamics of geopolitical competition between states (the United States and the Soviet Union) the end of the Cold War opened a space for the emergence of an international historic bloc that leaned more towards liberalism, humanitarianism, and global dynamics of capitalism.

It is not to say that Cold War politics completely undermined the progress of human rights or slowed it down (Wotipka and Tsutsui, 2008) but that following its end, new political opportunities expanded on the democratic and human rights front. The end of the Cold War and globalization ushered in new forms of authority, constraining state policies, and building transnational networks based on self-determination, democracy, and human rights. Human rights activists exploited these emerging political opportunities to strategically take advantage of opportunities that states made available.

However, the diffusion and acceleration of claims within these historically contingent events depends simultaneously on pre-existing, strong cultural framing and a powerful social movement culture and collective agencies that is transnationally dispersed and integrated. Strategic choices depend on various mechanisms. Firstly, expanding political and discursive opportunities is the foundational processes that generate the acceleration of mobilization. Moreover, the diffusion of frames and claims can further propel mobilization and help to build convergences across sociopolitical allies. Agency and structure are often interpenetrating. That is, depending on the choices made by actors at specific critical junctures, they can either propel the social force of mobilization or hamper it. Moreover, social movements emerge when political and discursive opportunities open for social agents who usually lack them (Tarrow, 1994). Social movements, especially transnational advocacy networks, prove more effective in frame diffusion when they build solidarities around shared meaning and international norms, such as human rights discourse that allow them to converge effectively around common purposes and sustain collective action across an extended period of time. Transnational networks of solidarity have harnessed collective action at the global level (Keck and Sikkink 1998) by converging the diffusion of their frames and claims around rights talk.

The element of political indeterminacy in social action, movements, and behaviour makes contingency inseparable from human history. The crucial role played by some actors is fundamental: through their actions, failures, lapses, or absences, these individuals shape historical developments. In other words, contingent occurrences may depend on the vagaries of human will (Sewell, 2005). If social systems are open, it means that there is a degree of unpredictability within their structures. Applied specifically to social science research on social movements, historical contingency is in many ways related to agency. It means chance, accident, but most importantly, opportunity existing within particular social and discursive fields, and that help to inform, shape, and facilitate the strategies social movement actors seek to develop. Therefore, contingency is not only related to agency, but also to structure. Contingency is chance and tweaked in structure, not leading agents to act in ways that are neither well-ordered nor completely free.

With emphasis on the contingency of discursive and political opportunity structures and historical events, this research has demonstrated that the Timorese global solidarity movement emerged as a transnational movement supporting Timorese Indigenous national sovereignty and human rights. East Timor reminds us of historical contingency’s significance (also see Glassman, 2003) in social movement human rights mobilization (Torelli and Drago, 2023). The articles within this sandwich thesis also underscore the dynamics of structural power, such as changes in the geopolitical context, the dramatic proliferation of the human rights movement and transnational solidarity networks for East Timor, and the unequal balance of power between the configuration of allies (academics/intellectuals, trade unions, solidarity and social justice groups, politicians), which emerged from the political claims-making of the solidarity movement, and the social forces of geopolitics, imperialism, and Indonesian colonial militarism. The Santa Cruz massacre in 1991 was an important conjuncture, partially because it happened to be captured on videotape and made public to the outside world. Because Western states systematically ignored, downplayed, and denied the facts of Indonesian human rights abuses in East Timor, primarily because of preserving their (geo)political-economic interests, before 1991, shocking and graphic images of military state violence were increasingly difficult to obtain.

While critical junctures can take on many forms, the historically contingent critical juncture of most significant impact and relevance was the collapse of communism in 1989-1991, which overlapped with the Santa Cruz Massacre in 1991 to strongly impact a change in the trajectory of human rights mobilization and state practices of denial and deflection. For instance, the Santa Cruz massacre was contingent on the peaceful pro-independence protests which was an act of collective agency and Timorese resistance. The Timorese fiercely resisted the Indonesian occupation. Therefore, agency can spur repression, but repression can “backfire” (Hess and Martin, 2006), leading to transformations in state structures, policies, the emergence and increase of mobilization, and the international validation of human rights issues.

Historical institutionalists contend that many outcomes are possible, highlighting how timing and path dependence affect institutions, shape movement behavior, antagonistic responses, and foreign policies. Small events, or even flukes, can have long-term consequences. A critical juncture sets in motion events that are difficult to reverse because of the institutional logic related to path dependency.

           In the late 1990s and specific critical junctural circumstances, the pattern of behavior changed. In response to growing public outrage, the US and other Western allies cut military ties with Indonesia and threatened to suspend economic aid, especially in reaction to Santa Cruz. Moreover, the world had moved on. The Cold War context of the earlier period of invasion and occupation was replaced by a post-communist international climate that emphasised democracy and human rights. In this sense, there was an element of path dependency in the eventual settlement of 1999 and self-determination. As Pierson (2000) suggests, “patterns of timing and sequence matter” (251), large and long-term consequences result from contingent events.

           Although Indonesian authorities sought to downplay the severity of the Santa Cruz massacre and shift blame for the violence to those who had been its victims – depicting the peaceful demonstration as a violent riot – growing opposition from international Timorese allies compelled Western states to condemn Indonesia and with compelling documentary evidence, compelled such states to shift tack The strong reaction to the Santa Cruz massacre stemmed from the growing power of transnational activism through the 1980s. Changes in the international political environment set in motion by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, signaled the beginning of a period in which most Western states began to aggressively declare their unconditional support for the universality of human rights and democratic enlargement. The choices to declare support for human rights would establish a path-dependent trajectory for human rights frame resonance and accountability politics.

The viability and responsiveness to the movements political mobilization depend on a unique confluence of such contingencies at the precise, strategic moments when the international credibility of human rights claims was at its height, such as in the post-Cold War international context. Although this thesis is grounded and inductive, it cannot make determinative causal claims. Nevertheless, historically, it can conceptualize and identify events or structures potentially responsible for shaping the direction of the movement’s effectiveness and framing outcomes. Firstly, it is important to underscore, that as this thesis has shown, human rights frames offer significant and strategic resources for social movements to hold states accountable to promises and principle made in existing international laws or declaration.

This thesis has also identified the role historical relations, geopolitical positioning, and national contexts play in shaping framing strategies, emphasizing the role discursive contexts in frame resonance and highlighting the complex interplay between human rights, national identity, and foreign policy discourses. Recontextualizing international, universalist conceptions of human rights, social movements and solidarity activists can generate or incorporate key national concerns and meanings that the global discourse, produce resonant rights frames, or compel states to act in ways commensurate with their publicly affirmed values and principles, as a strategy of accountability politics (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). The international discourse of human rights provides actors with perceived political opportunities to advance their claims. The human rights regime, cultivated and expanded more aggressively following the end of the Cold War, its institutions, and norms, are a political opportunity structure for transnational solidarity organizations part of global civil society networks. East Timor could have framed, and in fact, did initially frame their movement goals as a project of national liberation, vanguard by revolutionary guerillas. However, a radical shift occurred in the 1980s, and even more radically after the fall of the Soviet Union, where their solidarity allies and global civil society networks promulgated by Timorese activists, operated on a transnational basis, and promoted a human rights-based model of self-determination and socio-political change. The visibility, viability, and successful outcome of the movement rested infrastructurally on this primary, radical shift, from a national liberation model to a human rights-based model of political claims-making, where Timorese activists and solidarity organizations shifted from a nationally bounded liberation struggle to cosmopolitan activism that tapped into international legal concerns and morality, as well as linking these international concerns to local, national Western contexts.

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4. Please see the following document: <https://nautilus.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/David-Scott-and-Richard-Tanter-‘The-East-Timor-Campaign-in-Australia-23-March-1978.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
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