

The Transcendence of State Violence & Christian Prayer

Abstract:

This paper will examine how state-sanctioned violence in East Timor was both assimilated and resisted by the local population, particularly during the violence of 1999 when the Timorese population voted for independence from Indonesia. The paper will explore how militias that perpetuated violence in East Timor assimilated some elements of the Timorese population to the Indonesian state and military. It will also examine how the resistance to state-sanctioned violence by the Timorese population drew on Christian faith, particularly through prayer. I will examine one instance of violence in 1999 in which prayer transformed a situation of violence where a militia threatened a massacre against the local population. This Indonesian-backed militia had rounded up a group of Timorese men in order to kill them. The militia did this in revenge for the Timorese rejection of the Indonesian state in the 1999 referendum vote, yet the lie that the Indonesian state gave for this violent action was that different Timorese factions were fighting each other. This “story” was mimetically fed by militia violence and was being told in order to convince the international community that the Timorese people required the Indonesian state to stop violence. Yet, the militia decided not to kill the group after a Roman Catholic priest intervened and prayed with the group. This kind of action in which the Church and Timorese resistance stood with the victims helped to undermine the Indonesian story of violence. While the false transcendence of violence attracted some elements of the Timorese population to the Indonesian state, the transcendence of prayer and faith (based around Christ) acted as a “mimetic circuit-breaker” to state violence that reminded the mob and the potential victims of their humanity before God in self-giving mimesis.

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