

Abstract

This research project examines two forms of militarized environments in East Timor/Timor-Leste from the period 1974 to 2011. Three contextual conditions were examined to identify independent variables that may facilitate sexual and gender-based violence in Timor-Leste, they are: the period of Indonesian military occupation from 1974 to 1999, traditional Timorese cultural practices, and the post-conflict setting from 1999 to 2011. Despite the ongoing practice in some sections of Timorese society of a number of traditional customs that infringe upon individual rights, it does not reflect the wider trend of society and they are subject to flexibility. However, it is found that the traditional Timorese justice system lacks transparency and the mechanisms to guarantee accountability of perpetrators. Timorese women have limited access to impartial justice processes as gender-based prejudice and biases often inform rulings made by council elders especially in cases of rape and domestic violence. In the context of the Indonesian military (ABRI/TNI), suppression and violence were its preferred methods to subdue political discontent and it relied heavily on force and terror to intimidate. The underlying forces driving the violence however stem from the military's insecurity as to how it came to power. Both men and women face major challenges in the post-conflict environment. For women, the threat of and exposure to violence silently perpetuates. For men, frustrations stemming from the loss of status and control have translated into various forms of violence. Unfortunately for Timorese women, their bodies have become the site of such violence.