



Seeing through violence: a theological understanding of the relationship between East Timor and Australia 1941-1999, in the light of René Girard's mimetic theory

Thesis

Connelly, Susan Clare. (2017) *Seeing through violence: a theological understanding of the relationship between East Timor and Australia 1941-1999, in the light of René Girard's mimetic theory* [Thesis]. <https://doi.org/10.4226/66/5b21f776c554f>

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Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

ABSTRACT

The relationship between Australia and East Timor (Timor-Leste) from 1941 to 1999 is analysed in this dissertation. It focuses on the Australian-Japanese conflict in East Timor in World War II, the Indonesian invasion of East Timor in 1975, the Indonesian occupation of East Timor (1975-1999), and the Timorese independence process culminating in 1999. Various studies have explained the history of the Australian relationship with East Timor by examining the political forces that influenced the events. This dissertation applies the Christian anthropology of René Girard's mimetic theory to interpret those forces and provide a new historical and theological interpretation of the relationship. The dissertation shows that East Timor occupied the place of the scapegoated victim during the events discussed. It argues that there were particular crises - addressed by scapegoating East Timor - which arose from the Australian government's desire to ensure "security" through alliances with larger powers. Through this policy position, the well-being of the Timorese people was actively ignored in the pursuit of Australian safety and protection. In World War II the threat of the Japanese thrust southward impelled an Australian invasion of the then Portuguese Timor. Australia later complied with the Indonesian invasion Timor in 1975 and upheld the consequent 24-year occupation as part of a strategy to retain a positive relationship with Indonesia, and thus fortify Australian security. The relationship is analysed by using René Girard's mimetic theory. As a theologically-informed anthropology, mimetic theory culminates in an explanation of human society and relationships interpreted through Christ's life, death and resurrection. Three aspects of the theory are applied to the Australian-Timorese relationship: the scapegoat, texts of persecution, and conversion. Girard presents certain features of the scapegoat process applicable to this study: the existence of a social crisis; a crime which is believed to have caused the crisis; an entity (the victim) which is arbitrarily accused of the crime and which displays certain criteria common to scapegoats; and finally, the violence done to the victim that restores harmony and peace. In Girard's analysis, human stories or myths invariably contain some or all of these features in order to justify scapegoating violence. Girard claims that modern-day attempts to obscure the victimisation of the powerless perform the same functions as myths and he describes them as "texts of persecution". Official Australian documentary records of historical links with East Timor are demonstrated in the dissertation to be texts of persecution that evade responsibility for the Australian policies which contributed to the violence done to the Timorese people. In Girard's view, scapegoating as a completely effective basis for human culture has been undermined as a result of the biblical tradition, particularly the Christ-event. The Bible shows that the victim is not guilty of bringing threat to the group, but rather is innocent. In particular, Christ's identification with victims and his own death and resurrection reversed the efficacy of the scapegoating structure by demonstrating that it is a lie. Scapegoating victims is therefore a fundamentally unstable means of attaining social harmony. Girard describes the recognition of the lie of scapegoating as a "conversion". The conversion towards the victim East Timor which occurred in Australia in the late 1990s is argued in the dissertation as a moment of national recognition of the innocence of the victim. It resulted from the inspiring resistance of the Timorese to their oppression and culminated in overwhelming Australian support for Timorese claims to independence. The dissertation shows that claimed Australian traits (such as fairness and independence) did not characterise official Australian policies during the historical periods discussed. Instead, it was the courageous resistance of the Timorese people that exemplified prized Australian values. The dissertation thus allows considerations of fear, suffering, nonviolence, forgiveness and conversion to form a different yet comprehensive analysis of the relationship.

YEAR

2017

PUBLISHER

ACU Research Bank

DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER (DOI)<https://doi.org/10.4226/66/5b21f776c554f>**FINAL VERSION**[Seeing_through_violence__a_theological_understanding_of_the_relat.pdf](#)**PUBLICATION DATES**

01 Nov 2017

Permalink -

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East Timor is a small country in Southeast Asia. It comprises the eastern half of the island of Timor, the nearby islands of Atauro and Jaco. The first people s are thought to be descendant of Australoid and Melanesian peoples. The Portuguese... The border between Portuguese Timor and the Dutch East Indies was formally decided in 1859 with the Treaty of Lisbon. The definitive border was drawn by the Hague in 1916, and it remains the international boundary between the modern states of East Timor and Indonesia. Many local leaders saw independence as unrealistic, and were open to discussions with Jakarta over Portuguese Timor's incorporation into the Indonesian state. The United States had also expressed concerns over Portuguese Timor in the wake of the war in Vietnam. Using evolutionary theory, and ideas from archaeology and related disciplines, Hodder shows how the co-dependencies of humans and things are the hidden drivers of human progress. From the Back Cover. Using examples drawn from the early farming villages of the Middle East as well as from our daily lives in the modern world, Hodder shows how things can and do entrap humans and societies into the maintenance and sustaining of material worlds. The earliest agricultural innovations, the phenomena of population increase, settlement stability, domestication of plants and animals can all be seen as elaborations of a general process by which humans were drawn into the lives of things. It explores the relationship between people and thins and their multiple interrelationships. The Australia–East Timor spying scandal began in 2004 when the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS) clandestinely planted covert listening devices in a room adjacent to the East Timor (Timor-Leste) Prime Minister's Office at Dili, to obtain information in order to ensure Australia held the upper hand in negotiations with East Timor over the rich oil and gas fields in the Timor Gap. Even though the East Timor government was unaware of the espionage operation undertaken by Australia