Securitisation in World Politics: The Conflict on the Self-Determination of East Timor at the United Nations

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Abstract

With the Indonesian invasion in late 1975, the self-determination conflict in East Timor gained international attention. Against all attempts on the part of Indonesia to silence international debate on its incorporation of East Timor, the Timorese resistance, with the support of selected states, continued to draw attention to its thwarted efforts at self-determination until the 1990s. Conflicts on self-determination are often analysed either as part of the larger picture of international conflicts or as local territorial conflicts. Instead, we suggest a systems theoretical perspective and understand conflict as a social system, which is based on repeated communication at various levels at the same time. Our analysis shows how the self-determination conflict in East Timor was successfully constructed as a matter of world politics by both the securitising and desecuritising speech acts of the conflict actors. These strategic speech acts from this early phase of the conflict in world politics, on the lack of self-determination of the Timorese people and the unlawful occupation, would prove to be important for the conflict system and renewed critical reaction to the Indonesian occupation in the early 1990s at the UN, ultimately leading to its resolution.

Keywords: East Timor, Indonesia, self-determination, securitization, world politics

Introduction

In the early 1990s, the issue of self-determination for East Timor and Indonesia's occupation of the small country gained renewed attention, as a reaction to the massacre of unarmed protesters in Indonesian East Timor at the Santa Cruz Cemetery, Dili, in November 1991. Before Santa Cruz, the conflict and its history were considered as almost "hidden" from the global public (Taylor

1991). While NGOs had lobbied for more visibility of the issue of Indonesian violence in East Timor since the 1980s (Torelli 2020), the conflict had, for example, disappeared from the general debates of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in the 1980s. However, a closer look into the revived debates at the United Nations in the early 1990s reveals that the involved conflict actors (the Indonesian government, the Timorese resistance and its supporting states, and Portugal, as the former colonial power in Portuguese Timor until 1975) re-activated conflict vocabulary and references that had already been established in the mid- to late 1970s. The fact that the unlawful Indonesian occupation and the Timorese aspiration for decolonisation and self-determination had not vanished fully from all debates in the UN was the achievement of the Timorese resistance, its supporting states and even Portugal. As we will argue in this article, these actors successfully maintained the internationalisation of the conflict (which began in the mid-1970s) against the active attempts by Indonesia to silence the issue (Ramos-Horta 1987) with the help of security constructions, more precisely a process of securitisations (Stritzel 2011). In this paper, we want to reconstruct these attempts until the early 1990s, when the conflict entered a decade of international securitisations of human rights violations, new widespread attention for the situation in East Timor (Gunn 1997, Pateman 1998) and, finally, the willingness of the international community to intervene in 1999, leading to independence in 2002.

In the literature, conflicts over self-determination are often analysed either as part of the larger picture of international conflicts or as regional or local territorial conflicts. The conflict on self-determination in East Timor, known as Portuguese Timor at the time of its emergence in the mid-1970s, is no exception. After a failed decolonisation process under Portuguese rule and violence among various Timorese parties, Indonesia invaded the territory in December 1975. The resulting conflict has often been portrayed as influenced by logics of the Cold War (Hoffman 1977) or by the domestic dynamics of Indonesia (Tan 2015). The resulting gap in the literature between an international and a regional, domestic perspective on conflicts over self-determination causes two problems. First, it tends to ignore the agency of Timorese actors in the conflict, particularly on the international level. Although studies have shown that the Timorese resistance in exile was indeed quite active, these analyses are often disconnected from structures of international politics (Pinto / Jardine 1997, Fukuda 2000). Second, this split creates a "level problem" in conflict analysis, as studies tend to focus on either the international, the regional or the domestic level without considering the ties between them. In the Timorese case, it is striking for instance that the same conflict party, the Timorese resistance, operated in the occupied territory, influencing regional organisations like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and transnationally, mobilising a worldwide solidarity movement over nearly 25 years.

Moreover, conflict parties in self-determination conflicts are often actively engaged in internationalising the conflict and increasing international support. Thus, whether a self-determination conflict is an international conflict depends largely on the observation of "the international community".[1] Although a few studies examine how conflict parties actively involve international politics for their purpose, they normally do so by focusing exclusively on the parties' attempts to obtain international support, e.g., in lobbying for international intervention (Perritt 2010). In doing so, they largely neglect that such involvement also has an impact on the dynamics of the conflict itself, even if international actors decide not to directly intervene but to function merely as representatives of the global audience to which conflict communication is addressed.

This article addresses some of these shortcomings by providing a theoretical framework to account for the global dynamics of the Timorese-Indonesian conflict. Overall, the article aims to show how the conflict was constructed as significant for world politics by gaining the attention of a global audience and how this then affected the evolution of the conflict. For this purpose, we apply a systems theoretical perspective on conflict and understand it as a social system, which is based on repeated communication that stabilises mutual expectations of continual disagreement, e.g., about territorial claims (Luhmann 1995). Hence, conflicts over self-determination are both international and regional/local as the conflict occurs in only one social system, which can attract and involve conflict parties at all levels at the same time. Our aim is to show how different conflict actors positioned themselves during the conflict and how they were forced to react to the (re)positioning of others in the conflict system. We assume that from the moment the conflict was considered relevant for world politics, conflict parties exploited this "status" and tried to position themselves in front of a global audience and "the international community". This obviously shaped the conduct of the conflict and, to certain extent, made the conflict vulnerable to macro developments, such as the devaluation of certain narratives of the conflict parties.

After a brief review of the literature on the conflict, we will introduce our conceptual framework, which focuses on insights from systems theory – both on conflicts in general and on the construction of conflict in world politics in particular – and on pragmatic and historical securitisation studies (Stritzel 2011). Thereby, we examine how conflict communication in the Timorese struggle for self-determination attracted the attention of world politics and led to shifts in the internal dynamics of the conflict. We then present various speech acts of involved conflict actors on the "question of East Timor" in documents that circulated at the United Nations in the 1970s and 1980s. Our analysis shows

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1   The vague use of the term "international community" by political actors and literature has been rightfully criticised (Bliesemann de Guevara / Kühn 2011). Here, we introduce the use of the term by the conflict actors and consider this "community" mostly as a global (state) audience.

how the self-determination conflict in East Timor was successfully constructed as a matter of world politics by both securitising and desecuritising speech acts made by the conflict actors. From 1975 onwards, these speech acts constituted a conflict system beyond the actual conflict region. When violence in East Timor regained attention in world politics in the early 1990s, the speech acts from various actors at the UN repeated the established arguments from the early phase of the conflict, such as the lack of self-determination of the Timorese people and the unlawful occupation and invasion by Indonesia. This recourse shows how important the strategic communication in this early period proved to be for the conflict system and international reaction at a later point in time.

We demonstrate that a comprehensive understanding of self-determination conflicts cannot separate the international from the regional, domestic or local level, but that a conflict takes place at all these "levels" at the same time and in the same conflict system by actively involving actors and audiences of these "levels".

The conflict on East Timor: literature review

East Timor has received much scholarly attention since the referendum on independence in 1999, the subsequent violence and then international peacebuilding and state building (Chopra 2002, Fox / Babo-Soares 2003, Lemay-Hébert 2011). While some recent studies are re-discovering the conflict history (Kammen 2015, Leach 2017), even with a focus on the Timorese or Indonesian political discourse in the 1970s (McRae 2002, Hicks 2014), only a few studies revisit the failed decolonisation in the 1970s and 1980s as a fruitful case for empirical and theoretical reflections on international politics (Carey / Walsh 2010). The conflict in the 1970s and later was largely portrayed as heavily influenced by the logics of the Cold War, particularly regarding the strong relationship between Indonesia and the US and Australia (Hoffman 1977, Chomsky 1979, Sidell 1981). Furthermore, literature with an international focus seems to consider self-determination struggles as international per se, since they negotiate the conflict between contradictory norms in international law, i.e., the right to freely choose sovereignty and international political status with no interference (as laid out in Chapter I of the UN Charter) and the right to territorial integrity (Clark 1980). Up until the 1990s, we find several international law studies regarding the status and self-determination of East Timor (Elliott 1978, Simpson 1994) or the genocidal intensity of violence inflicted by Indonesia (Clark 1981, Taylor 1991).

Studies with a regional and domestic focus have analysed the political behaviour of Indonesia (Hoadley 1977), the internal dynamics in Indonesia that led to the invasion and later stabilised the occupation (Anderson 1993, Tan

2015), and the consequences of the "Indonesianisation of East Timor" (Lawless 1976, Weatherbee 1981), with a focus on violence (Franke 1981). This retrospective shows that literature in general understood the conflict of East Timor either as part of the larger picture of international conflicts or as regional or local territorial conflict and was more concerned with the interests of actors than the dynamics of the conflict over time – a gap we hope to fill with this article.

On a broader level, our article also speaks to literature concerned with discourse at the United Nations. For one, the UN is used by states as an arena for strategic behaviour. States engage with the UN to position themselves and change international policies in the longer run: in an analysis of Libya's strategy against the UN sanctions regime, Hurd concludes that "Libya sought to undermine the legitimacy of the sanctions regime by reinterpreting the norms of the Council and the international community" (Hurd 2008: 137). In his views, governments engage with the UN because the "legitimacy of the Council emerges as a power resource that is at one and the same time valuable to states but also vulnerable to disruption, reinterpretation, and delegitimization" (ibid.). As we will show, the actors in the Indonesian-Timorese conflict were heavily engaged in such strategic behaviour. However, these strategies of states are always formed by the structure and dominance of specific discourses at the UN. Dominant, shared understandings of political issues at the UN can shape state behaviour, whether on climate change and security (Detraz / Betsill 2009), stabilisation after conflict (Curran / Holtom 2015) or humanitarian intervention and state building (Walling 2013, Bonacker et. al. 2017).

We suggest an alternative perspective on the conflict of East Timor and its dynamics at the UN, integrating individual strategic behaviour and international dynamics in a framework based on systems theory, world politics and securitisation.

Conceptual framework

From a systems theoretical perspective, conflicts are complex and dynamic social processes characterised by repeated articulations of the incompatibility of subject positions (Diez et al. 2006: 565, Stetter et. al 2011: 445). Conflict parties constitute themselves by rejecting the communication of others, e.g., by refusing to agree on certain claims. Once established, a conflict system generates more or less stable expectations about future rejections, and conflict parties assume that opponents deny their claims (Luhmann 1995, Messmer 2007). Disagreement becomes the dominant mode of communication. An important implication of a systems theoretical understanding of conflict is that there is only one single conflict system in which conflict communication occurs.

A key assumption of the article is that conflicts may emerge as territorially bounded, but normally are embedded in a variety of different functional systems that operate globally. Although primary conflict parties directly fight each other in a given territory, a conflict system can depart from that by being debordered with the involvement of, for instance, international organisations. As Sienknecht (2018) has argued, the conflict parties, as well as secondary parties and international organisations, can contribute to a globalisation and debordering of the conflict system by stabilising communication structures on the global level. By successfully addressing international organisations the conflict system manages its connectivity to world politics. As we will see in the case of East Timor, debordering provides non-state actors with the opportunity to be included in world politics although they are excluded in domestic politics. At the same time, states can also make use of debordered conflict communication, e.g., by blaming conflict parties for adopting terrorist strategies. Furthermore, diaspora groups can involve other countries in a conflict system. In that regard, the Timorese-Indonesian conflict, although it occurred mainly in the occupied territory of East Timor, also involved neighbouring countries, regional organisations and states with huge Timorese diaspora communities, such as the Netherlands and Ireland.

Even in countries without a significant Timorese diaspora, such as Germany, the conflict was processed when human rights activists successfully politicised the Timor question, managing to get the German city of Weimar to declare Suharto, the president of Indonesia, as a persona non grata in 1995 (Buchsteiner 1995). This already indicates that the dynamics of the Timorese self-determination conflict became transformed in its globalisation through the involvement of world politics. Theoretically, this does not come as a surprise, as historically the legal principle of self-determination of nations was a key driver for the evolution of world politics as well as the emergence of international law (Albert 2016: 207). Thus, if a conflict system is observed by world politics as a self-determination conflict, it seems very likely that it will be considered as a matter for global political affairs.

Against that background, it can be shown how a conflict actually becomes debordered and constructed as a conflict in world politics. A potential way of gaining political attention is to raise security concerns and either ask for protection for a threatened referent object or for the justification of security policies. Merging the notion of conflict in systems theory with the securitisation framework, Diez et al. (2006) argued that securitisation can be understood as intensification of a conflict, in that incompatible subject positions perceive each other as threats to their own identity. As Stetter et al. (2011) have shown, securitisation theory shares some basic assumptions with systems theory, for instance that conflict is processed and constructed by communication. The securitising move, defined by the Copenhagen School (Buzan et al. 1998) as an attempt to

discursively portray a referent object as worthy of protection and at the same time as existentially threatened, can thus be seen as both embedded in a conflict system and continuing the conflict.

For our analysis of how the conflict system has evolved over a longer period and has been globalised by gaining the attention of world politics, we use second-generation, pragmatic securitisation frameworks, which build on the original Copenhagen School, but have transformed and developed it substantially (compare e.g., Balzacq 2005, 2011) and suggest a "radically processual understanding of producing security" (Stritzel 2011: 343). Instead of a universalist, static understanding of what securitisation as a speech act is in one specific situation (Buzan et al. 1998 / Vuori 2008), these perspectives underline both 1) the historical embeddedness of securitisation, and 2) the relational, strategic character of speech acts. For our understanding of the "deep historicity" of securitisation (Stritzel 2011: 250), studies should reconstruct "empirically how actors in the social field of security think, talk and practise security at a particular point in time. An indication of current meanings is thereby usually suggested by their relationship to past meanings/practices" (Stritzel 2011: 346). The meaning and practice of security are open for transformation, and "(c)hanges in the practices of security over time translate into changes in the meaning attached to security, which can in turn become temporarily stable and hegemonic before it becomes transformed again" (ibid.).

Regarding the strategic character, literature has shown how actors use securitising moves with very different intent and towards very different audiences, for example to raise an issue on the political agenda, legitimate future or past action, to claim control or to deter (Vuori 2008: 76). Securitisation is thereby always an operation of the political system (Albert / Buzan 2011) and a strategic practice in conflict communication, seeking to intensify the contention, but also to constantly involve political actors (Balzacq 2011). By securitising the conflict, conflict parties aim to mobilise immediate political support either by their followers or by secondary parties. However – and that constitutes the key relational aspect of securitisation – actors cannot control the effects of such strategic uses. Securitising (as well as desecuritising) moves can fail altogether, because they are ignored, or even lead to resistance and "counter-securitisation" (Stritzel / Chang 2015). In conflict communication, any "securitizing move becomes necessarily unstable and risky because the intended perlocutionary effect of, for example, persuading an audience to provide legitimacy for a speaker to deal with a perceived threat may actually result in delegitimation and loss of power for a speaker" (Stritzel 2011: 350). To summarise, securitisation is embedded in "complex transnational flows that involve multiple actors, multiple audiences and multiple transnational encounters in different discursive locales" (ibid.) – the particular role of securitisation for each conflict case has to be empirically reconstructed.

From these theoretical insights, we can draw a couple of conclusions for our empirical analysis. First, self-determination conflicts are not affairs of world politics per se but must involve world political communication and thus be constructed in a way that resonates with world politics. For our empirical analysis we assume that the United Nations, beyond other roles, functions as a symbolic representation of a global public, which means that if a conflict on self-determination attracts the attention of the UN and its different bodies, it is likely to be considered as a matter of world politics. Second, one way of linking a conflict system to world politics is to raise security concerns and direct them to a global audience. Whether this succeeds depends largely on whether communication is continued with reference to world politics. And third, if a conflict system is established, actors are forced to react to conflict communication, mostly in an antagonistic manner. They are aware of the constant observation by others, particularly by a global audience. This likely initiates shifts in the conflict dynamics. Furthermore, it keeps the conflict open to world political affairs.

For our empirical analysis, we analysed speech acts of selected actors in public UN documents, including resolution texts, letters distributed for members of UN bodies such as the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the General Assembly, answers to reporting requests of UN bodies and press releases from state missions to the UN. In addition, a few internal documents of the UN Secretariat, obtained in archival research at the UN archives in New York City, have been included to trace the conflict dynamics and the position of the Secretary-General. We have selected the colonial administrator Portugal, the invading state Indonesia, pro-Indonesian political parties, the Timorese resistance (FRETILIN), states that supported the resistance and the UN secretariat as speaking actors in the conflict system – all actors that were directly involved in the conflict communication in the mid-1970s. Of course, numerous actors have spoken on the conflict in the UN, and our choices are only a section of such voices.

However, much has been written on, for example, Australia's difficult role in the conflict (Hoffmann 1977, Burchill 2000), and our goal is not to give a complete, exhaustive analysis of speech acts and positions, but rather to explore with this example the specific function of security-related communication by directly involved actors in establishing a conflict system. The content analysis of nearly 40 selected documents was guided by the suggestion of the Copenhagen School and pragmatic frameworks, which we can use to study security by identifying and contextualising speech acts with a security-, threat- and danger-related vocabulary (Buzan et al. 1998, Stritzel 2011). It is important to note that all sources, because they were "fed" into the UN system, are original English texts or have been translated by the speaking actors into English. While we are con-

vinced that all actors involved communicated and translated very strategically and consciously in the United Nations, which is the primary international authority on questions of official self-determination, we do not want to imply that (de)securitisation strategies and discursive practices are the same in all communication of the conflict actors. We will briefly mention some of those differences for the case of Indonesia below. When considering texts of the UN itself (the Secretariat and the General Secretary), one must remember that as a potential "neutral" party, the speech acts are very different from those of the involved conflict parties.

Finally, our analysis represents one particular dimension of global communication – of course, there are more, such as the global Civil Society solidarity movements on Timor-Leste (Simpson 2004), which we have not focused upon here. In the following chapter, the initial internationalisation of the conflict, the conflict actors and early securitisations will be introduced, followed by an in-depth analysis of the securitisation of conflict communication.

The self-determination conflict of East Timor in world politics

Internationalisation of the conflict in Portuguese Timor in 1975

Despite the decision of the 4th Committee of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) to declare East Timor a "non-self-governing territory" in 1960 and thereby putting it on the agenda of decolonisation, the Salazar/Caetano government of Portugal defined East Timor as an "overseas province", not a colony, and refused any cooperation with the UN (Clark 1980: 3–5). Only the revolution in Portugal in April 1974 led to the acceptance of the need to start decolonisation. Therefore, even before 1975, the East Timor question had been internationalised to a certain, but still confined degree.

Shortly after the revolution in Portugal, several Timorese political parties "emerged in the Territory, each advocating at the time different alternatives for the future of Timor: the União Democrática Timorense (UDT) which supported the continuation of the Portuguese presence, […] the Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente (FRETILIN), […] which advocated complete independence of East Timor after a relatively brief transitional period and the Associação Popular Democrática de Timor (APODETI) which favoured integration with Indonesia" (UN DPA 1976: 8). External observers generally agreed that the emerging parties, including FRETILIN, did not embrace radical political programmes or ideology (ibid.: 10). Centrist UDT and leftist FRETELIN even managed to form an alliance in January 1975, coordinating the efforts towards independence and entering in negotiations with the Portuguese administration.

However, the UDT/FRETELIN coalition broke down in May, amid disputes over relations with Indonesia. In August 1975, fighting between UDT and FRETILIN broke out (after UDT attempted a coup), eventually resulting in a victory for FRETILIN in most parts of the territory in September.

As mentioned above, Portugal accepted its responsibility as the administrating authority of a non-self-governing territory and the need to initiate decolonisation in 1974. However, the new Portuguese government and the new administration in Dili both failed to maintain enough authority in their respective arenas to guide the process. Several initiatives had been started in 1975, e.g., decolonisation talks for the formation of a transitional government and diplomatic meetings with Indonesia in Rome. But the political parties could not be persuaded to comply, the Portuguese army in East Timor disintegrated, and the Governor eventually fled to the small island of Atáuro on 28 August 1975. Even after FRETILIN established control in autumn 1975 and "repeatedly declared that they wanted the Portuguese authorities to return to East Timor and resume the process of decolonization" (UN DPA 1976: 23), no agreement could be reached. On 28 November 1975, FRETILIN declared independence from Portugal as the "Democratic Republic of East Timor" (ibid.: 17–27). When the invasion of Indonesia followed, in December 1975, any de facto control by Portugal ended. However, Portugal remained the official Administering Power under Chapter XI of the UN Charter, a crucial factor in the decades to come (Simpson 1994: 324), because it allowed Portugal to repeatedly raise the issue of self-determination of East Timor towards international audiences.

Turning to Indonesia, at first sight the invasion of East Timor appears consistent with the project of Indonesian expansion. Just a couple of years before, West Irian, the former Netherlands New Guinea, had been incorporated into Indonesia with little concern for local resistance (Saltford 2003). But in fact, Indonesia had shown very little interest in East Timor before 1974 (UN DPA 1976: 41). In late 1974, the position of the Indonesian government changed and the Indonesian Foreign Minister Malik was quoted as "saying that there were only two choices opened to the Timorese: 'remain under the Portuguese or combine under Indonesia'" (ibid.: 48). The Indonesian government developed a strategy that allowed "President Suharto […] to successfully brand the new Fretilin Government as 'communist' when it came into power" (Hicks 2014: 197). FRETILIN was securitised as an existential threat for pro-Indonesian Timorese and even the whole region from early 1975 onwards: "an independent Timor would be open to influence by the great Communist powers and undermine regional security" (UN DPA 1976: 15–16). This threat perception and securitisation of "communism" is key to the understanding of the invasion. In the political ideology of the Indonesian "New Order", established amidst massive anti-communist violence in 1965/66, the fight against the communist threat was constitutive and "communists were not only villains in this tale, but also, more

importantly, the threat extraordinaire to the unity, security, and survival of the fragile and vulnerable collectivity that was Indonesia" (Tan 2015: 96).

With the invasion in December, we can identify a clear initial internationalisation of the conflict and conflict communication. The debates at the United Nations intensified and both the UNGA and the UNSC condemned the invasion and called upon Indonesia to withdraw from East Timor. While UNSC Resolution 384 (1975) from December was adopted unanimously, the second UNSC Resolution from April 1976 foreshadowed rifts in the UN on the question of East Timor – Japan and the United States abstained. From the very beginning, the UNGA resolutions offered a more divided picture. UNGA resolution 3485 from 12 December 1975, which "strongly deplores the military intervention of the armed forces of Indonesia in Portuguese Timor", was adopted by 72 votes to 10, with 43 abstentions. Important Asian states had voted with Indonesia against the resolution, inter alia India, Japan, Malaysia and the Philippines. Major powers such as France, the United Kingdom and the United States abstained.

The communication on the process of decolonisation in 1975 and the invasion of Indonesia in East Timor in December 1975 had firmly established the conflict system in world politics, with competing references to self-determination. The speech acts from the period up to the early 1990s show the overall strategic attempt of the main conflict actors at the United Nations to uphold or silence the conflict communication on East Timor at the UN, whether specific aspects or in general, plus the concrete use of (de)securitising and counter-securitising moves in these strategies.

Upholding or silencing the conflict communication on East Timor at the UN

The discursive strategy of Indonesian conflict communication focused on dismissing the conflict in East Timor as quickly as possible from international considerations. Being aware of the importance of "self-government" at the United Nations, Indonesia actively attempted to frame the issue as under control and resolved (Austin / Beaulieu-Brossard 2018). The government insisted that the integration of East Timor into Indonesia in late 1975 and early 1976 was an act of voluntary decolonisation and self-determination of the Timorese people and that the matter should thus no longer be discussed. In this move, which remained stable over the next decades, Indonesia referred to a specific series of events. First, the creation of a "Provisional Government" on 17 December 1975 by four pro-Indonesian parties in Dili, followed by a first meeting of a "Regional Popular Assembly" in Dili on 31 May 1976, which adopted a resolution requesting integration with Indonesia. Furthermore, the visit of a Timorese delegation and formal presentation of a petition requesting integra-

tion to President Suharto of Indonesia on 7 June 1976 and the visit of an Indonesian fact-finding mission to East Timor to ascertain the wishes of the people on 24 June. Finally, based on a favourable report of this fact-finding mission, the approval of a bill for the integration of East Timor into Indonesia by the Indonesian parliament in July 1976 (A/32/90 (1977); Clark 1980: 10).

In UN documents, Indonesia continued to repeat, until the 1990s, that the decolonisation had been accomplished, trying to counter the claim that East Timor was de facto still a non-self-governing territory under unlawful occupation.[2] As mentioned above, several Timorese parties eventually supported the integration into Indonesia: APODETI and UDT as well as KOTA (Klibur Oan Timor Aswain / Association of Timorese Hereos) and the Partido Trabalhista (Labour Party). For the purposes of this paper, we consider their speech acts only for the period of 1975 until mid-1976. Afterwards, Indonesia took over the primary role of speaker in the UN. After the invasion in December 1975, the pro-Indonesian Timorese parties communicated that the integration with Indonesia was de facto and irreversible and that a new, pro-Indonesian "provisional government" had taken territorial control of the country.[3]

As the official administrating authority of East Timor in the United Nations system, Portugal was deeply entangled in the conflict system, while no longer having any territorial control after 1975. Portuguese governments used their position and communicated on behalf of the Territory to the global public. As administrating authority, Portugal was asked to provide regular information on East Timor by the UNGA. While Portugal took a moderate stance towards Indonesia over time, the country never "left" the conflict system or agreed to dismiss the issue overall – also because the Timorese resistance repeatedly addressed Portugal. With Portugal taking a moderate stance towards Indonesia in the 1980s, other states carried the burden of keeping the communication on the conflict and Timorese resistance alive in the global public – namely Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and São Tomé and Príncipe, all former Portuguese colonies.

This support can be traced back to 1975, when they acknowledged the declaration of independence by FRETILIN, shortly before the Indonesian invasion (A/C.4/807 (1975)). Their key mechanism of support was the dissemination of the speech acts of FRETILIN and reports on the situation on the ground as part of official documents in the UNSC and UNGA. They gave important visibility to the issue in the 1980s, especially against the background of the above-mentioned successful silencing campaign of Indonesia regarding resolutions. The documents provided contained details on large-scale Indonesian military

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2   A/32/90 (1977); UN Archive, S-1043-0001-06, 1982-10-15_Letter by Indonesian Representative to Fourth Committee; S/16132 (1983); UN Archive, S-1043-0056-0006, 1990-08-07 Letter by Indonesian Representative to UN Special Committee on Colonial Independence.
3   UN Archive, S-0904-0039-01, 1975-12-07 Telegram by Timorese President to SG.

operations and killings (S/16083 (1983); S/16759 (1984)), FRETILIN counter-attacks (A/39/345 (1984)), the desperate situation of citizens due to hunger and Indonesian human rights violations (S/16819 (1984)), referring to Indonesian civil society sources as well.[4] These states supported the argument that self-determination of the Timorese people was still an open issue.

Throughout 1975, FRETILIN tried to globalise the issue of decolonisation at the United Nations with direct communication via letters to UN actors such as the Secretary-General or the President of the UNSC.[5] Tragically, only the invasion by Indonesia firmly established East Timor as a problem of world politics, but in consequence, FRETILIN had to react to the rapid integration into the larger country. FRETILIN tried to delegitimise this process by comparing it to other global issues, such as Israeli actions towards its Arab citizens or the South African Apartheid regime.[6] In their speech acts for international audiences, FRETILIN always tried to underline the international dimension of the occupation: "Indonesian's expansionist war against East Timor […] should be a warning to the tens of small and medium size States around the world, particularly in Africa and Latin America, that their existence is always threatened."[7] Not being a state, FRETILIN had a structural disadvantage in comparison with Indonesia in state-centred world politics. As mentioned above, the distribution of letters and statements in the UNSC and UNGA was carried out by supporting states trying to keep alive the argument that the question of Timorese self-determination remained unresolved.

Indonesia tried to silence speech acts from the Timorese resistance, which were transmitted by other states in the UN, by insisting that these speech acts were illegitimate. One example from a statement of the Indonesian representative from November 1983:

> I have the honour to refer to the letter of 7 October 1983 from the representatives of Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and Sao Tome and Principe containing a request to circulate a letter from a so-called representative of 'FRETILIN' […]. My Government regrets the circulation of that document and wishes to note that this is not the first instance of manipulation of United Nations procedures (S/16132 (1983)).

The votes in favour of resolutions to condemn Indonesia indeed dwindled over the years. Indonesia (defining itself as an anti-colonial state) invested massive diplomatic resources to counter its securitisation as occupying power of East Timor. While the UNGA adopted several additional resolutions after the inva-

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4   For example, Mozambique asked for the circulation of a report on East Timor by the Indonesian NGO "TAPOL" in the UNSC: S/17744 (1986).

5   UN Archive, S-0904-0039-01, 1975-12-04 Letter from Jose Ramos-Horta to Security Council President; UN Archive, S-0904-0039-02, 1975-09-05_Cable by FRETILIN to SC; UN Archive, S-0904-0039-02, 1975-10-09_Summary of Cables by Jose Ramos Horta to SG.

6   UN Archive, S-0904-0039-03, 1976-06-24_Cable by Mari Alkatiri.

7   UN Archive, S-0904-0039-05, 1977-10-29_Communication by FRETILIN.

sion,[8] they "became less damning because of intense Indonesian lobbying, the eventual result of which was East Timor's complete removal from the agenda after 1982" (Simpson 1994: 325). Following the UNGA resolution 37/30 (1982), the debate was remitted to "the somewhat lonely deliberations of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples" (Maley 2000: 25). It took until the 1990s for East Timor to "re-appear" in the debates of the prominent UN bodies as a problem of word politics.

The UN Secretariat and the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) were involved as the relevant public audience on the "Question of East Timor" from the beginning of the conflict in 1975. After the invasion, the UN tried to obtain more information on East Timor through a Special Representative of the UNSG. However, due to fighting on the ground and political blockades, Mr Winspeare Guicciardi concluded in June 1976 that the "actual situation in East Timor […] still cannot be assessed accurately" (S/12106 (1976)) and that "[h]is mission was a complete failure" (Carey / Walsh 2010: 352). The UN Archives reveal the many internal notes, letters and minutes at the UNSG in the 1980s, documenting the attempts to find diplomatic solutions to the conflict or more concretely, to support East Timorese citizens through humanitarian relief, for instance (A/39/361 (1984)) – which could be interpreted as a general process of desecuritising, even depoliticising.[9] In consequence, the UN-supported dialogue between Indonesia and Portugal touched upon the issues of status and the violent occupation, but in general avoided these topics (A/40/622 (1985)). Accordingly, FRETILIN criticised these attempts, which de facto acknowledged the occupation.[10]

Securitising, desecuritising and counter-securitising

Key securitising moves for the Indonesian domestic audiences, such as the term "communist threat", were not mentioned in the international arena – because in the UN system, with many communist governments present, political ideology was not necessarily a useful reference in conflicts. Instead, Indonesia referred to the protection of well-accepted referent objects in the international arena. One strategy was to securitise Portugal's inability to ensure a peaceful and orderly decolonisation. Indonesia's own activities had been necessary to fill the gap of an "impotent" (S/11937 (1976)) administrating authority that could not fulfil its obligation to the Timorese people, the UN charter and security in the region (A/31/42 (1975); A/32/90 (1977)). The "vacuum of authority" (S/11937

8   Resolutions UNGA3485 (XXX) of 12 December 1975; UNGA 31/53 of 1 December 1976; UNGA32/34 of 28 November 1977; UNGA 33/39 of 13 December 1978; UNGA 34/40 of 21 November 1979; UNGA 35/27 of 11 November 1980; UNGA 36/50 of 24 November 1981; and UNGA37/30 of 23 November 1982.
9   UN Archive, S-1043-0001-06, 1982-12-09 Resolution on Report "Question of East Timor".
10 UN Archive, S-1043-0006-06, 1984-08-28 Summary on "The Question of East Timor" in the Special Committee.

(1976)) led to terror, refugees and incursions of FRETILIN into Indonesian territory, threatening the security of Indonesia as a whole (A/31/42 (1975)).

Throughout 1975, while accepting the de jure role of Portugal as administrating authority,[11] the pro-Indonesian parties – in a manner similar to that of Indonesia – securitised Portugal's inability to lead the decolonisation process, even supporting the thesis that "communists" from Portugal had helped FRETILIN.[12] In the months that followed, the pro-Indonesian government insisted that the situation in East Timor had returned to normal (desecuritising move) and downplayed the role and capabilities of FRETILIN.[13] However, at the same time, the parties were forced to react to FRETILIN's speech acts in the international arena and portrayed FRETILIN as an extremely dangerous threat to the citizens of East Timor, referring to violence and high numbers of victims (S/12041 (1976)).

Portuguese references varied. After a rather clear judgement initially and references to the Indonesian occupation of East Timor and the ongoing "unlawful" situation in the 1970s (UNGA, A/32/73 (1977)), we can observe attempts to desecuritise the situation in the 1980s. In internal meetings at the United Nations, Portugal declared that an Indonesian withdrawal was off the table and unrealistic, but that Portugal had the "moral obligation" to assist East Timor and its aim towards self-government.[14] In 1982, Portugal sponsored UNGA resolution 37/30 (UNGA, A/RES/37/30 (1982)), which had a non-aggressive tone and was dialogue oriented. Despite early reluctance of the UN Secretary-General,[15] a diplomatic process between Indonesia and Portugal was initiated in the mid-1980s, but had no substantial outcome.

FRETILIN, having faced the invasion in late 1975 and defeat in the late 1970s, unsurprisingly stuck with a securitising strategy in the UN. Faced with massive violence in East Timor, FRETILIN strongly securitised Indonesia as "fascist" and "expansionist" and called out Indonesian actions as "extremely violent", "bloody" and "horrifying" in mid-1976.[16] In the mid-1980s, with the East Timor Question disappearing from the UNGA debates, the resistance tried to further securitise Indonesian military operations, countering Indonesian remarks of a normalisation in East Timor or only "sporadic fighting", by emphasising that their own offensive capabilities and some territorial control still existed and that fighting would continue (S/16083 (1983); S/16819 (1984)). While the

11 UN Archive, S-0904-0039-02, 1975-09-19_Telegram by President of KOTA to Portuguese President. UN Archive, S-0904-0039-02, 1975-09-20_Telegram by UDT to President of Portugal.

12 UN Archive, S-0904-0039-01, 1975-12-05 Joint Statement & Proclamation pro-Indonesian parties of Timor.

13 UN Archive, S-0303-0002-09, 1976-04-22_Press Conference East Timor Provisional Government.

14 UN Archive, S-0904-0091-05, 1981-06-04_Letter UNSG to Portuguese Foreign Minister & Notes on previous meetings.

15 UN Archive, S-0904-0091-05, 1981-06-04_Letter SG to Portuguese Foreign Minister & Notes on previous meetings.

16 UN Archive, S-0904-0039-03, 1976-07-06_Letter by Ramos-Horta to SG with Communiqué & Press Reports attached.

supporting states shared the securitising strategy overall, they also tried to dese-
curitise the conflict in the 1980s, insisting on political and diplomatic solutions:

> […] the Foreign Minister of Angola and the Prime Minister of Vanuatu expressed their
> conviction that representatives of the East Timorese people should be included in the
> process. The President of Mozambique referred specifically to FRETILIN in this regard.
> Sao Tomé and Princípé, on the other hand, clearly indicated that Indonesia and Portugal
> were the parties concerned but mentioned also FRETILIN's "armed resistance".[17]

Resecuritisation in the 1990s

In the mid-1980s, attempts to desecuritise the conflict in the UN were rather
successful. However, the remnants of securitising conflict communication gained
new prominence and influence with the violence in East Timor in the 1990s.
We see, for example, how Portugal was easily able to resecuritise the conflict:
with reports on Indonesian violence towards Timorese citizens re-emerging, the
Portuguese Parliament in 1990 again strongly securitised Indonesia and the ille-
gal annexation of 1975, "saluted" the Timorese resistance and asked for inter-
national action against Indonesia, comparable to international interventions
against the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.[18] Such a comparison documents the new
contextualisation of the East Timor question in world politics during the 1990s,
a decade characterised by interventionism and the securitisation of human rights
abuses, in striking contrast to the 1970s and 1980s. The states supporting the
resistance against Indonesia also resecuritised the conflict in this new macro
constellation. In a joint letter from the Heads of State of Angola, Cape Verde,
Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and Sao Tomé and Princípé from 10 March 1992,
transmitted by Cape Verde to the UNGA and addressed to the Secretary-General,
we find representative examples of these conflict references:

> […] the Heads of States condemned the Dili massacre and manifested their preoccupation
> for that abhorrent act, which violated the fundamental rights and liberty of the people
> of East Timor, whose territory is still being illegally occupied by Indonesia. The Heads
> of State deplored the relative passivity of the international community […] despite the
> fact that Indonesia is in violation of the fundamental principles of the Charter […]. The
> Heads of State expressed admiration for the determination shown by the heroic people
> of East Timor in intensifying their resistance by all means against the illegal occupation
> of their territory, in spite of the silence that surrounds their legitimate struggle.[19]

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17 UN Archive, S-1043-0020-02, 1985-10-25_Note by Under-SG to SG on question of East Timor.

18 UN Archive, S-1043-0056-0006, 1990-12-07_Letter to UNSG with resolution by Portuguese National
Assembly.

19 UN Archive, A/47/151, 8. April 1992. Letter dated 6 April 1992 from the Permanent Representative of
Cape Verde to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General.

Conclusion

As for other self-determination conflicts, such as the conflict between the Turkish state and the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (PKK; Sienknecht 2018), the conflict system between East Timor and Indonesia was debordered and gained world political significance. The failure of Portugal to successfully and peacefully de-colonise Portuguese Timor, and the invasion of Indonesia in December 1975, internationalised the self-determination conflict as a conflict system in front of global audiences, especially at the United Nations, as the primary organisation concerned with decolonisation in a global context. While initially in 1975 and 1976 the invasion was indeed considered as a security problem and illegitimate in key UN documents, Indonesia managed to successfully desecuritise the "question of East Timor" in the main bodies of the UN in the period until the 1980s, inter alia by strategies of delegitimation and silencing. However, by applying securitising and counter-securitising moves, the Timorese resistance and supporting states at the UN countered the hegemonic desecuritisation in conflict communication at the UN and, overall, upheld these references and vocabulary throughout the 1980s.

When violence in East Timor gained renewed global attention in the early 1990s, various actors could refer to the established arguments and securitising moves from the early phase, including the need for self-determination of the Timorese people, and the unlawful occupation and invasion of Indonesia.[20] While the communication at the UN had not led to an end of the occupation, this recourse shows how important the strategic communication in this early period proved to be for the conflict system and international reaction to it at a later point in time. However, it also shows that in its establishment as a conflict of significance for world politics instead of being territorial bounded, the conflict system remained vulnerable to shifts in world political communication. This had a decisive impact on the conflict. The difference in world politics of the 1990s, as compared to the 1970s and 1980s, was the shared perception that the human rights violations in connection with "illegitimate" territorial control and self-determination were a problem for the global public. In addition to its shifts in domestic politics, Indonesia came under pressure, as the resonance of its (de)securitising speech acts had dramatically decreased (Lloyd 2003).

Although several factors contributed to the dynamics of the conflict, world politics obviously played a crucial role in the conflict's fortunes. The conceptual and the empirical analysis demonstrate that a comprehensive understanding of self-determination conflicts such as that between East Timor and Indonesia cannot separate the international from the regional, domestic or local level,

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20 For example in the debate of the 4th Committee of the UNGA [A/AC.109/PV.1404 (1992)], in reports of the Secretary-General in reaction to the Santa Cruz massacre [E/CN.4/1993/49 (1993)], or in letters by Portugal [A/C.3/49/19 (1994)].

but that a conflict takes place at these "levels" at the same time and in the same conflict system by actively involving actors and audiences of these "levels". Thus, levels should not be understood in conflict analysis as independent units, but as part of communication structures, which emerge and often shift during a conflict. We have captured this dynamic with a relational, processual and historical securitisation framework (Stritzel 2011). Security, in that regard, is a communication feature that allows relevance to be created for politics in general and for world politics in particular if they are concerned with "primary institutions" (Buzan 2004: 161) of world politics such as sovereignty or self-determination. Hence, beyond (and in East Timor also long before) direct intervention, the United Nations plays a crucial role as it functions not only as a stable political address for conflict communication, but as a representation of a global public that the conflict actors would like to persuade (Werron 2015, Ketzmerick 2019: 155–194). The presence of such a public, as we have shown for the case of the Timorese-Indonesian conflict, and the imagination of its expectations change the way conflict actors communicate.

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