

## Winter of East Timor's Patriarchs

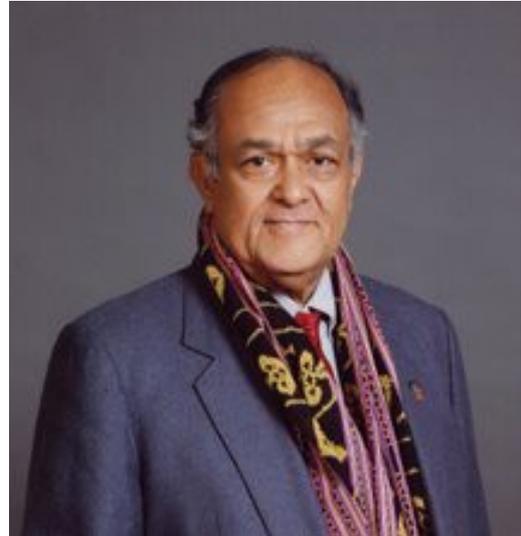
*The deaths this year of Xavier do Amaral and Joao Carrascalao have further thinned the ranks of independent East Timor's 1975 founding generation. The trend to romanticise East Timor's struggle should not obscure the ugly side of that struggle, which both men were part of, or the heights of moral courage both men rose to.*

Pat Walsh



*Xavier do Amaral, 2005.*

*On the wall is his striking portrait taken by Penny Tweedie just before he became President of East Timor in 1975.*



*Joao Carrascalao*

Following the elimination of Jose Ramos-Horta in the first round of East Timor's recent presidential elections, The Monthly magazine published a profile of the outgoing President entitled *Autumn of the Patriarch* by Peter Robb. For some others of Ramos-Horta's 1975 political generation, however, the inexorable wheel of the seasons has turned further ending in the winter of two of these patriarchs – Francisco Xavier do Amaral and Joao Viegas Carrascalao. Both men died within a short period of each other this year - Joao Carrascalao in Dili on 18 February at the age of 66, Xavier do Amaral, East Timor's founding president, in Dili on 6 March at the age of 74. Both were respective founding members of the two major parties established in 1974, the historic first in Timor's long history – Joao Carrascalao of the Timorese Democratic Union (UDT), Xavier do Amaral of the Timorese Social Democratic Association (ASDT); both were opponents in the 1975 civil war; both fell out seriously with Fretilin, were branded at various times as traitors to the nationalist cause and experienced exile; but both lived to reconcile, to enjoy East Timor's liberation and to contribute to the construction of the new state and were rightly mourned as patriots following their recent passing.

There is no time in this brief presentation to tell the life stories of both men or to critically assess their contributions to East Timor, though it is to be hoped that someone will do both. My purpose is rather to draw attention to some deeply painful aspects of their stories which were conspicuously played down in official tributes paid to the two men in Dili following their deaths, namely their respective roles in the extreme violence that characterised the early years of East Timor's struggle for independence. Reference to these difficult episodes may well have been omitted or softened out of a sense of respect. However, it is also arguable that sensitively addressing these challenging issues would have enhanced rather than diminished public understanding of both men and have been in keeping with the spirit of their public testimony to the CAVR truth commission in 2003 when both directly confronted their past responsibilities to the admiration of many. The inclination to air-brush history is certainly not unique to East

Timor. Indonesia has made the practice an art form. Australia is also adept as Michael Leunig recently suggested in a cartoon following Anzac Day in which he depicted a tombstone bearing the inscription: truth is the first casualty of war commemoration. However, a balanced account of the critical issues that faced East Timor at different points in the cycle of its own past winters and how these issues were handled would be instructive for Timor's ballooning young generation. It would also serve to counter an emerging trend to romanticise East Timor's struggle and to gloss over ugly facets of that experience that should not be forgotten even though East Timor was on the right side of history.

I had the privilege and pleasure of interviewing Xavier do Amaral with CAVR staff and of attending the CAVR public hearing in 2003 when he testified. The interview was conducted on the front verandah of his residence in Lecidere. Set back off the road and looking out towards Atauro and Indonesia over the deep Ombai-Wetar straits, which are ironically described as female because of the sea's passivity (though women might prefer because of its depth), Xavier's villa had a worn look a bit like its aging occupant. In his recent eulogy President Ramos-Horta referred to Xavier as a grandfather or avo in Tetun. That's true. Though short and stocky Xavier had the persona of a grandfather and he made me think of my own grandfather, Maurice, who was similarly built and benign. Xavier was also a political grandfather figure to the young revolutionaries in 1975. In his autobiography *Funu* Ramos-Horta says that the young leaders then in their 20s asked Xavier to serve as Timor's first President because he was older and had the gravitas that they lacked. Coming from liurai stock, Xavier also had the bearing of a country gentleman or squire and was treated deferentially by his devoted followers, a relationship which earned him a tongue-lashing from Nicolau Lobato when they split in 1977. Nevertheless I found Xavier easy to like and relate to and he enjoyed speaking in English in which he was very fluent. Our birthdays are the same, 3 December, and we share the name Francis Xavier (a confirmation name in my case) after the 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish saint who co-founded the Jesuits and is commemorated in the church calendar on 3 December. It is interesting to note in passing that St Francis Xavier had an aristocratic background, like Xavier, focussed his missionary activities in the Asian portion of the Portuguese empire, including the Moluccas (giving the Jesuits the platform that 4 centuries on contributed significantly to the political education of Xavier and his generation in East Timor), and was a Basque (a people still seeking self-determination in contemporary Spain).

Xavier told me that, following his early education in Soibada and Dare, he studied for seven years at the Jesuit-run seminary in Macau but fell under an official cloud when he gave expression to anti-colonialist views. As East Timor's Catholic church was part of the colonial structure and virtually an extension of the Portuguese Government at the time, his Portuguese Bishop took exception to these subversive sentiments and discouraged Xavier from proceeding to ordination. On his return to Dili from Macau, Xavier used his education to serve his community including setting up a school for Timorese not eligible to study in the colonial system. In his recent tribute, Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao chose to describe Xavier as a 'teacher'. The school was located at Xavier's home, near the Santa Cruz cemetery, and later became the base for the ASDT political party, the forerunner to Fretilin. In 1968 he married Lucia Osorio Soares, the sister of the founder of Apodeti, but later the two separated and he did not remarry.

At the conclusion of our interview I asked Xavier had he written his autobiography. He said he would love to but would need help. I approached Julie-Anne Ellis who took up the offer. Julie-Anne is now in Vietnam but told me recently by email that, although she did not finish the project, she interviewed Xavier in Dili, collected a lot of information, and thought he was a 'wonderful man'.

On another occasion, I sat beside Xavier at a meeting at Hotel Vila Verde in Dili. As the meeting went on, he appeared rather vacant so I took the opportunity to ask him what he thought about the photo of himself as Timor-Leste's first president that was on display in President Ramos-Horta's new Palacio Presidencial. (Though indicative of President Ramos-Horta's sensitivity, the photo is not a good quality reproduction). I slipped Xavier a note in English that read: 'Xavier do you like the photo of you the President has hung in Palacio Presidencial? CAVR has a very nice one of you from the 70s, would you like to see it?' He took

the note and meditated on it so long that I thought he was having trouble reading my handwriting. Slowly he picked up his pen, then with great deliberation he wrote in English: *'I would like to have the nice photo of me you have'*. How clever, I thought. No way was he going to be drawn into commenting on the President's taste. He may have slowed but he was as wily as ever. The 'nice photo' in question is a beautiful black and white portrait of the young Xavier taken in 1975 by the British photographer Penny Tweedie, also the author of a wonderful photographic series on Aboriginal Australia. CAVR purchased the Xavier portrait from Penny and has framed and archived it.

In December 2003, CAVR held a public hearing on internal conflict in East Timor 1974-1976. This hearing was one of CAVR's finest moments. The emotionally charged hearing was held at the CAVR national office which ironically had been used by Fretilin to gaoil their Timorese UDT opponents during the in-fighting that tore East Timor apart in August-September 1975. Xavier and all the living 1975 leaders - Jose Ramos-Horta, Mari Alkatiri, Joao Carrascalao, Mario Carrascalao, Domingos de Oliveira, Rogerio Lobato, Tomas Goncalves, plus Xanana Gusmao and the contemporary leaders of the historic parties, gave testimony at that hearing. The hearing also featured detailed and graphic testimonies of human rights violations by victims of violence committed by both UDT and Fretilin. The hearing was broadcast live on television and radio and covered extensively in the papers. This was the first time since that fateful time that the Timorese people had had an opportunity to hear a first hand account of what happened and why, to grasp its devastating effects on ordinary Timorese and, most importantly, to hear surviving Fretilin and UDT leaders take responsibility for their decisions.

Early in his testimony Xavier do Amaral reflected on why in 1974 he had rejected Apodeti's proposition that East Timor should integrate with Indonesia. His reasoning, he said, was that Timor should not go from one colonial rule to another. What he said offers some insight into both Xavier himself and East Timor and, to some extent, why East Timor today still looks to its resistance leaders and the winding up of the current UN mission. Xavier told CAVR: *'I was a servant from the time of my ancestors, 450 years a servant to white foreigners. Would I shift from being a servant to white foreigners to a servant for Indonesia. It seemed to me that our lives would just be as servants until we died. So I said: 'If all the people in the world are made by God with liberty, he gives them the right to liberty, the right to govern themselves, why should Timor be a slave forever?.... I knew that many Timorese people were uneducated, illiteracy was very high. But, why was it high? Not because Timorese are stupid, but because the colonialists never gave us opportunities to study'*.

The hearing then heard from Xavier on two life and death issues of profound moral and political challenge.

The first related to the fate of UDT prisoners taken captive by Fretilin during the civil war and what should be done with them particularly following the Indonesian invasion. Several things need to be kept in mind here: first, the circumstances of chaos, panic, fear and abandonment that gripped East Timor following the full scale Indonesian invasion by land, air and sea, and the scattering of Fretilin/Falintil forces and associated difficulties of communication, coordination and leadership; second, that the UDT had declared war on Fretilin in the name of anti-communism and was believed to have collaborated with Indonesia for the purpose of defeating Fretilin; third, that at the time Xavier do Amaral was the President of both Fretilin and the newly declared Democratic Republic of East Timor; and fourth that Xavier, at the time of this testimony, was acutely conscious that the issue of killings and violence on both sides during the civil war was, and remains, a deeply sensitive matter.

Listening to his testimony, given under oath, one could sense his agonising soul-searching as he sought to explain publically to the East Timorese people for the first time what had happened. First of all he freely acknowledged that executions of UDT by members of Fretilin had taken place. Second, he said, as did Mari Alkatiri in his testimony, that it was not Fretilin policy to kill prisoners and that there was no formal high level decision to order the executions. However, in explaining the extraordinary moral and logistical issues that he and other leaders faced, he acknowledged that he and other leaders did canvass the option of prisoner executions in their conversations. The dilemma, he explained to CAVR, was that to abandon

the prisoners would mean they would fall into Indonesian hands and endanger the resistance, but that to retain control of the prisoners would equally endanger the resistance because the prisoners were weak and slow moving and the Resistance had few medicines, food, and transport available to spare for them. Xavier implied that he accepted some responsibility for these crimes. He told CAVR: *'Therefore some of them took a decision to kill them, so that the enemy could not endanger us. Perhaps the opinion was commonly held, more or less commonly, by leaders at all the levels'*. Given his educational background and that the victims were fellow Timorese these acts surely weighed very heavily on this gentle man.

A similar life and death dilemma, this time of even greater magnitude, faced Xavier do Amaral a few months later. Worried by the challenge of supporting the civilians who had retreated to the mountains with the Resistance, Xavier told CAVR he raised the issue with Nicolau Lobato. Xavier said he told Nicolau: *'I think this problem is really serious. Firstly, we don't know when this war will end. Secondly, we cannot compare our forces to the Indonesian forces. Thirdly, (there is the matter of) our logistical preparations to provide food to the people. Fourthly, our wounded soldiers, women giving birth in the bush, orphans, people with broken arms and legs, and we have no medicine. What do we do about this?'* Xavier reported that Nicolau asked him what he thought should be done and he advised Nicolau that following a course of politicisation in the camps, the people should be sent down to surrender in order to save lives and to contribute to the war effort in a different way. He added that he had seen photos of life in Dili under Indonesia and could see that Indonesia would not arbitrarily kill all those who surrendered.

It soon became apparent that not everyone agreed with this view. Trust broke down and on 7 September 1977 Xavier was arrested. He was held for one and a half months, tortured, detained in a hole in the ground, maligned and tried. Others were arrested and testified against Xavier during their interrogation. He told CAVR how Alarico (Fernandes) said: *'Talk traitor. Talk traitor. Speak about what you did'* and after explaining Xavier added: *'In future history will say who is right... and who is wrong.'* Worse was to come. On 14 September 1977, Nicolau Lobato, then Prime Minister, made a long broadcast over Radio Maubere in which, on behalf of the Central Committee of Fretilin, he accused Xavier of 'high treason'. In a bitter diatribe 12 pages long, Nicolau trashed Xavier, exhausting his stock of political hate words in the process. Xavier he thundered was a saboteur, capitulationist, traitor, lackey of imperialism, counter-revolutionary, racist, obscuranist, feudalism and opportunist and also guilty of superstition, megalomania, and polygamy. He declared Xavier expelled from Fretilin and all positions of leadership. Interestingly, he also accused Xavier of advocating that the UN be asked to hold a referendum on self-determination. Nicolau categorically rejected this stating that it was inconsistent with the position taken by the Fretilin Central Committee when it proclaimed the unilateral independence of the Democratic State of East Timor on 28 November 1975.

In quoting this speech it is not my intention to belittle Nicolau Lobato. The episode invites reflection on the perils of blind radicalism and the wisdom of Xavier do Amaral's strategy, later successfully advocated by Xanana Gusmao. But the extreme, indeed epic, circumstances of the time, that need the genius of an Ernest Hemingway to capture, have also to be kept in mind. Anyone who has visited Dili will know that several of the main landmarks in the capital (the airport, principal city street and Presidential Palace) are named in honour of Nicolau Lobato and that he occupies the most honoured place in Timorese memory. For that reason, Timor-Leste has asked Indonesia to return his remains. My purpose is simply to demonstrate the sense of panic, indeed hysteria, that gripped the Resistance at that time faced as it was by seemingly insuperable odds, abandonment by the international community, the onset of disunity and doubt in the upper levels of leadership, and the very real prospect of death and annihilation. Xavier and thousands of other Timorese were casualties of this almost unimaginable situation, including Nicolau himself who was hunted down and killed by the Indonesian forces at the end of December 1978 just 12 months later.

What happened to Xavier? After trying to escape the Indonesian advance he surrendered and when the Indonesian military realised who he was he was effectively placed under Indonesian house arrest, though not gaoled or tried. In Bali he worked as a servant in the home of Dading Kalbuadi, the officer who commanded the Operation Seroja invasion of East Timor. There he

looked after the officer's 34 horses for 1000 rupiah a month. He refused a request by the Indonesian foreign Minister to testify to the UN in support of integration and then spent the rest of the war working as Kalbuadi's servant in Jakarta, painfully aware of his predicament that having been a servant to white Europeans he was now a servant to an Indonesian. Under the pressure of international condemnation following the Santa Cruz massacre in 1991, the Indonesian government brought Xavier to testify at the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva in 1992. I met him there on that occasion and recall both his and my discomfit and awkwardness.

Xavier told CAVR that he felt strongly for those who did bad things to him during the war. *'In my heart I forgive them fully'*. Asked by CAVR National Commissioner Jose Estevao, himself once a victim of Fretilin violence, to reflect on the relationship between forgiveness and justice for Timorese people, Xavier said: *'I think justice is heavy. We cannot stay in the past. If we want to make peace we need to make real, personal contact with each other... to educate our people... to forgive each other'*.

In the brief time left, it is impossible to do justice to the other patriarch who recently experienced his winter, Joao Viegas Carrascalao, but let me say something about his extraordinary testimony to the CAVR public hearing on internal conflict referred to above. Joao was a tall, imposing patrician figure of mixed Portuguese and Timorese liurai background, a member of East Timor's small elite, a leader of UDT, who was married to Jose Ramos-Horta's sister Rosa. During his many years in Australia he lived in Sydney and I caught up with him from time to time, as I did after independence in Dili.

On 11 August 1975, his birthday, he launched what he called the 11 August Movement that he said was intended to rid Timor of communism and forestall the Indonesian invasion. Sadly, his initiative quickly degenerated into a short but savage civil war between UDT and Fretilin and was used by sections of the community to settle old scores and Indonesia to justify military intervention. The civil war resulted in over 1000 deaths, detention, displacement, massacres, deprivation and destruction of property. It continues to resonate strongly amongst East Timorese today. I know Timorese who voted against Lu'Olo Guterres, the Fretilin presidential candidate, on April 16 this year because of what happened to their relatives in 1975-76.

Joao Carrascalao's testimony at the CAVR public hearing was therefore critical to complete the record, and, needless to say, very keenly anticipated. Aware of its sensitivity and concerned to ensure that the hearing did not backfire and ignite conflict, CAVR went to great pains to prepare the hearing. It drafted and discussed terms of reference with party officials and facilitated private meetings between key witnesses ahead of the big day. As the hearing drew closer, however, CAVR learned to its consternation that Joao had left for overseas without informing CAVR or giving a clear return date. His absence threatened to sabotage the hearing. Was he running away or worried about the public reaction? How could the hearing proceed if only the Fretilin side of the story was to be heard?

He was eventually located in Perth and President Xanana Gusmao spoke to him by phone and obtained his agreement to be in Dili for the hearing. My recollection is that Joao was not back in time for the start of the four-day hearing but to CAVR's great relief he did arrive for his scheduled testimony. This was the testimony everybody wanted to hear. The audience swelled to over 800 people and Dili slowed as those with radios and televisions stopped to tune in. It was worth the nerve-wracking wait. A wave of astonishment and emotion swept the audience as, three sentences into his statement, made under oath, Joao said: *'I want to begin by saying to you all that I did wrong against my community. All the UDT victims that Fretilin killed, it's my fault. All the Fretilin victims killed by UDT, it's my fault. Because I initiated the 11 August movement, and I accept full responsibility to establish the truth. If you look for who was to blame, you don't need to look far. I was at fault. I will carry the weight of this. It is important, friends, if you want to point the finger, only point it at me'*.

There is no time to reflect further on this remarkable gesture which speaks for itself anyway. Let me just add four quick points. First, the hearing ended in an emotional group hug by all the key witnesses, including between Xavier do Amaral, Mari Alkatiri and Joao Carrascalao. In his

account the Portuguese journalist Adelino Gomes wrote that he couldn't swear to it *'but it is possible that Mari's feet may not have reached the floor at that time; you could only see his profile squashed against Joao's large chest'*. Second, this facing of the truth, even if not complete as Xanana Gusmao observed at the time, was welcomed by the community and did not trigger any violence in word or deed. Third, the Post-CAVR Secretariat has published the record of that hearing in multiple languages to highlight the importance of practicing politics non-violently and it has also reproduced the photo of that extraordinary group hug to remind the community and political parties what heights East Timor is capable of. Fourth, as Hamish McDonald pointed out in the Sydney Morning Herald, Joao Carrascalao returned to East Timor after independence to help build the new nation that, although it has welcomed Cuban doctors, embraced many of his original aims including private enterprise, the protection of property rights and a continuing relationship with Portugal through language and in other ways.

In his account of the hearing, Adelino Gomes, Portugal's leading journalist on East Timor who was in the territory in 1975, wrote in Publico: *'the hearing was the most magnificent point, in human terms, that I had witnessed in the history of Timor-Leste'*. He went on to lament the lack of international media coverage observing that *'the whole world, once again, was distracted when the Timorese were giving it a lesson in humanity'*.

I cannot think of a more beautiful tribute to Joao Carrascalao and Xavier do Amaral than that - or reason for commemorating rather than bypassing that moment.

*This is an edited version of a talk given at the Friends of Aileu/METAC dinner held at the Hume Global Learning Centre in Melbourne, 4 May 2012.*

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