The Paradox of ASEAN Centrality: *Timor-Leste Betwixt and Between*

Edited by

**Paulo Castro Seixas, Nuno Canas Mendes
and Nadine Lobner**

BRILL

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Cover illustration: Photo by Paulo Castro Seixas (2008). Ceramic pot from Sanggar Matan (Workshop of Light) Dili – Timor-Leste.

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Foreword

Timor-Leste's Foreign Policy and ASEAN

Michael Leach and Sally Percival-Wood

Since the restoration of Timor-Leste's independence in 2002, accession to ASEAN has been the central preoccupation of Timor-Leste's foreign policy. Despite seemingly perpetual delays in accession, and the entrenched opposition of some ASEAN members, this position unites Timor-Leste's political parties, and rarely a note of dissent is heard. This fact alone makes it one of the fundaments of foreign policy. Others include a general policy of "friends to all", and, some would argue, a policy of balancing relationships between their two powerful neighbors to prevent the dominance of either one; and offsetting those bilateral relations with historical relationships with Portugal, and other countries like China (Leach & Percival-Wood, 2014).

Indonesia remains the great sponsor of the ambition of ASEAN, and for this reason alone it is unlikely to be questioned by political elites in Timor-Leste; as it forms part of guarantee of good relations with their former occupier. Civil society is another matter altogether, however, and many critical perspectives on the advantages and disadvantages of accession have been noted by Timorese NGOs, such as Lao Hamutuk (2013), who have expressed concerns that ASEAN membership would impose costly obligations and increase Timor-Leste's already substantial import dependence (REF) further flooding its markets with cheap goods from ASEAN countries. Others have noted that the expectation of benefits are too high and will likely be restricted to elites (Kammen, 2013). Notably too, other members of ASEAN seem rather less enthusiastic about Timor-Leste's accession; with Singapore foremost among them. Confident predictions of accessions by certain dates have come and gone many times.

In engaging with these issues and debates, this book represents a timely contribution to the literature, offering a wealth of insights into the many questions raised by Timor-Leste's relationship with ASEAN. Its deep engagement with these issues is welcomed. The centrality of ASEAN accession is undoubtable: the paradox lies partly in the fact that this orientation to ASEAN was not always so, nor perhaps as inevitable as it now appears.

1   Projections of a Future Foreign Policy

During the Indonesian occupation, East Timorese nationalists strategically prioritized relations with Melanesia and the Pacific over ties with Southeast Asia, and thus projected a regional alignment with the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), rather than ASEAN (Leach 2017, pp. 114–115). At the same time, the East Timorese resistance movement openly projected a future alignment with Portuguese language nations, under the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa – CPLP). Throughout the Indonesian occupation, these emphases on the close cultural ties with Melanesia, and historical associations with the Lusophone world were strategic in nature: highlighting the ways Timor-Leste represented a distinct political community from Indonesia at large.

   At this time, Timor-Leste's Melanesian affinities were politically expressed through solidarity with West Papua and an oft-repeated desire to join the South Pacific Forum rather than ASEAN upon independence. This position was in part attributable to the active support of Vanuatu's Prime Minister Walter Lini, the only member of the non-aligned group of nations to support its struggle for independence – in stark contrast to ASEAN states' active distancing of East Timor. Refused entry to ASEAN's most influential countries, Ramos-Horta argued in 1999 that East Timor had "more in common culturally and historically with the South Pacific than with Indonesia and the rest of South-East Asia" although it was clearly geographically part of the latter region (Leach and Percival-Wood, 2014). The CNRT (National Council of Timorese Resistance) conference in Peniche, Portugal, in 1998 spoke of "active neutrality" and establishing relations with ASEAN, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, and the Pacific Islands Forum, though the PIF was still at this point considered the "priority". Nevertheless, while Timor-Leste became a Special Observer of the PIF in 2002, it has not gained full membership.

2   ASEAN and the Indonesian Occupation

From Australia's perspective, the issue of Portuguese Timor began in April 1974 – the same month and year that Australia formally became ASEAN's first Dialogue Partner – when the "Carnation Revolution" brought about an end to Portugal's 50 years of dictatorship under Salazar's Novo Estado regime (Leach & Percival-Wood, 2014, p. 68).

   Just as Australia covertly resiled from its lip-service to East Timorese self-determination, there was little support for East Timor among ASEAN nations. In 1976, Singapore had abstained in a UN Security Council motion on East

Timor, only to immediately encounter threats of sanctions from Indonesia including the closure of airspace. No further diplomatic support or even neutrality was forthcoming from ASEAN nations thereafter, until 1999. Most importantly, ASEAN's exclusive reliance on a consensus model and central principle of non-interference made it ill-suited as a mechanism to resolve any regional conflicts involving member states.

In 1994 the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) was created with the primary objectives: "1) to foster constructive dialogue and consultation on political and security issues of common interest and concern; and 2) to make significant contributions to efforts towards confidence-building and preventive diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region". East Timor was completely ignored in both regards. Indeed, in the same year, the Philippines tried to ban a conference on East Timor in Manila and blacklisted José Ramos-Horta, who was also banned from entering Bangkok in 1995. In 1996 he was again banned from entry to Kuala Lumpur to attend another conference on East Timor. In 1999, Singapore's prime minister Goh Chok Tong said that East Timor was not ASEAN's problem. Rather it was an international issue to be dealt with by the United Nations (Leach & Percival-Wood, 2014, p. 72).

As early as 1986, East Timorese students in Jakarta used the ASEAN-EEC (now ASEAN-EU) Ministerial Meeting as an opportunity to highlight the occupation by seeking asylum in the Dutch embassy: an event which would become a regular feature of clandestine student activities through the 1990s. Events with greater impact would follow. In 1992, with international condemnation of the Santa Cruz massacre at its peak, a substantial aid agreement between the European Community and ASEAN worth US$5 billion was vetoed by Portugal at the eleventh hour, citing the "unacceptable violation of human rights in East Timor". Pressure mounted for UN-sponsored talks on East Timor, involving Portugal, Indonesia and East Timorese representatives.

As Geoffrey Gunn (2006, p. 92) notes, changes were also occurring within the ASEAN landscape itself. The increased growth of civil society organizations by the 1990s offered new challenges to the state-centric and authoritarian mode of "ASEAN-style political management" and the East Timorese student movement formed productive relations with the rising Indonesian democracy movement throughout the 1990s.

Nonetheless, these changes did little to affect ASEAN's operations, and the regional body would play no meaningful role in the resolution of the East Timor crisis prior to the referendum in 1999. ASEAN's sacrosanct pact on non-interference prohibited any external intervention on human rights grounds, a principle that filtered through to the ARF, which sat on its hands on the issue of East Timor.

At this point, given the regional tensions surrounding Australia's leadership of INTERFET and general concerns over Western intervention in Southeast Asian problems, the participation of ASEAN states was considered essential. Among the 17 nations that joined INTERFET, Thailand made the largest ASEAN member contribution as deputy leader of the mission deploying 1,580 personnel – the Philippines contributed 600, and Singapore sent a medical company (Leach & Percival-Wood, 2014, p. 73).

3   The Restoration of Independence

Following the restoration of independence in 2002, ASEAN membership quickly moved to the center of Timor-Leste's foreign policy priorities. The political and geostrategic benefits were recognized immediately after independence, signaling a pragmatic shift to a pro-ASEAN stance and Timor-Leste was recognized as an observer nation to ASEAN in 2002. Above all, good relations with its former occupier Indonesia became a central strategic priority. ASEAN accession remains the priority goal of East Timorese foreign policy, a position that is at its core more easily explained by geostrategic than economic considerations.

Though now secondary to the priority goal of ASEAN accession, Timor-Leste's participation in Pacific regional fora and engagement with the emerging states of Melanesia facing shared development challenges and continued to grow. Such engagement included participation in new organizations that implicitly challenge Australian and New Zealand dominance of the region, such as the Melanesian Spearhead Group, and more overtly, the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF) sponsored by Fijian prime minister Voreqe Bainimarama. These involvements could yet see Timor-Leste grow into its once-promised role as "bridge state" between the Melanesian and Southeast Asian worlds, contributing actively to inter-regional engagement while diversifying Timor-Leste's opportunities for regional partnerships.

After Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão attended the inaugural PIDF meeting in Nadi, the Timor-Leste government donated US$250,000 in a show of support. The approach of the PIDF accorded strongly with that of the G-7+ – "a group of fragile states in transition toward development and still affected by conflict" – as it promoted country-led development strategies appropriate to national contexts. In March 2014, the G7+ announced the "Dili Consensus" emphasizing the need for new forms of south-south cooperation. In the same year, Timor-Leste's commitment to the CPLP was affirmed when it assumed the two-year presidency (2014–16) of the group (comprising eight members and three observer states). The CPLP provides access to diplomatic networks

and development cooperation with historically linked countries in Europe, Latin America, and Africa.

4   Turning toward ASEAN

Concerted efforts have been made since July 2005, when Timor-Leste became a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum. In 2007 Timor-Leste signed ASEAN's Treaty on Amity and Co-operation and officially applied for ASEAN membership in March 2011. The then-president José Ramos-Horta was particularly positive about Timor-Leste's prospects in becoming ASEAN's eleventh member:

> Timor-Leste is ready to join ASEAN this or next year. We concede we have many weaknesses and shortcomings. But ASEAN could admit Timor-Leste now and give us a five-to-ten-year transition period, during which we would expand efforts to catch up to the more advanced ASEAN members. This would make sense, in line with past ASEAN practice in relation to other members and in line with the European Union practice in admitting new members and supporting them until they are able to live up fully to their obligations.

Ramos-Horta cited public support from ASEAN members Malaysia, Thailand, Brunei, the Philippines, Cambodia, and Myanmar – Singapore was notably absent. The backing of Indonesia is critical to the realization of Timor-Leste's ASEAN aspirations and it has become the main advocate; while other ASEAN members suspect that Timor-Leste's membership would represent a double vote for Indonesia. Meeting the accession requirements became a whole-of-government focus for Timor-Leste, and to that end it created a dedicated secretary of state for ASEAN affairs in the early 2010s. By the end of 2021, however, the regional body was yet to approve Timor-Leste's accession, citing lack of readiness in several key areas. Singapore in particular was believed to regard Timor-Leste as likely to be a substantial economic burden to the regional organization.

5   Timor-Leste's Foreign Policy

In terms of bilateral relations, Timor-Leste's historically dominant relationships with Australia and Indonesia, Indonesia continue to loom large. Since independence, Timor-Leste has strived to balance relations with both to prevent any overwhelming influence of one and to maximize the strategic

leverage that can be gained from each. Within this pattern the importance of not antagonizing the former occupier Indonesia is recognized, and the enormous significance of Australian bilateral assistance is acknowledged. For its part, Portugal is major donor and continues to provide bilateral assistance in a key area, including police and teacher training. This relationship with Portugal – and with other Lusophone countries through the CPLP – is a critical one which helps offset Timor-Leste's reliance on its two giant neighbors.

As well as being the strongest advocate for ASEAN membership, Indonesia is Timor-Leste's largest trading partner. This is, however, overwhelmingly skewed in favor of Indonesian exports of essential and consumer goods, which account for 39 percent of Timor-Leste's imports.[1] Despite minor tensions over small unresolved stretches of their land border, Indonesia's role as the key supporter and sponsor of Timor-Leste's accession to ASEAN signals the health of this critical relationship.

Relations between Australia and Timor-Leste appear to be back on track following the March 2018 treaty which created permanent maritime boundaries between the two states for the first time. Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison's visit to Dili in late August 2019 saw notes exchanged marking the formal ratification by both parliaments. This signified the end of a key stumbling block that saw ministerial visits cease for nearly five years.

Although Australia is supportive of Timor-Leste's accession to ASEAN, this has been interpreted as largely a means for limiting China's potential influence: membership of the regional bloc will tend to moderate China's sway in Timor-Leste, and further encourage ASEAN to take responsibility if the security situation were ever to deteriorate in Timor-Leste, as it did during the 2006 political-military crisis. The risks from Canberra's perspective may include Timor-Leste coming under greater influence of Jakarta in regional decision making – an assessment which may also have been a factor for other ASEAN states in Timor-Leste's relatively slow accession process. Any such fears are likely to be exaggerated, given Dili's clear pattern of using a range of relationships to minimize the dominance of any single player (Leach & Percival-Wood, 2014, p. 82).

China plays a far smaller aid role, though its exercise of "soft power" through the donation of major government buildings makes it a notable and growing presence. Fears of China's involvement exaggerate its current aid and investment footprint, which remains modest compared to aid from Australia, the European Union, Japan and the former colonial power Portugal. But as with the Pacific nations, there is no doubt that China now provides leverage to smaller states like Timor-Leste.

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1 https://oec.world/en/profile/country/tls.

6   Conclusion: ASEAN Centrality in Context

While its enthusiastic commitment to joining ASEAN has become the *sine qua non* of East Timorese foreign policy, it is also true that Dili continues to balance this engagement with important multilateral commitments to the CPLP, to the Pacific region and the G7+ group of fragile states; and an even more critical suite of bilateral relations with Indonesia, Australia, Portugal, China, the United States and others. Indeed, Timor-Leste's independent foreign policy has now accumulated close to twenty years without achieving the ambition of ASEAN accession. Nonetheless, observers of Timor-Leste's politics will notice no dimming in the ardour for ASEAN accession among Dili's political elites. In November 2022, as this book was being finalised, ASEAN finally agreed "in-principle" to admit Timor-Leste as a member, though subject to meeting certain "milestones" which would be assessed by member states (ASEAN 2022). The question, then, is when the regional organisation will permit Timor-Leste's full accession, what are the factors likely to play into that decision, and what are the internal factors within Timor-Leste that will contribute to government readiness, or to the ongoing debates within civil society over the merits of the policy. In bringing all these issues into new light, and extending the examination of these ongoing debates, this book warrants our close attention.

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Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Paulo Castro Seixas, Nuno Canas Mendes and Nadine Lobner

> The world and its regions amidst major international challenges in the face of our constantly and rapidly changing world

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ASEAN, understood as one of the core regions of our planet, is undergoing several changes in economic, political and sociocultural terms, far beyond its borders. Bilateral and multilateral rivalries arise, through which ASEAN's centrality seems to be 'under threat'. As this issue is far more complex than the former economic-political discourses have seen, we understand the need to contribute to the debate on geostrategic power games from an interdisciplinary perspective. Hence, we propose to raise a set of questions:

– What does globalization and its extensive influence mean for regions and centralities in geopolitical and sociocultural contexts?
– How should ASEAN be looked at in an era of ponderous planetary challenges, how does it position itself in the international context and how should it be approached in order to understand its regional significance?
– Are local-global relations a significant area of debate and how might this contribute to understanding regional positioning in an international setting?

In a world that seems to consist of the competitive motto of 'harder, better, faster, stronger',[1] we have to reconsider centralities and their interwoven dimensions from a multitude of perspectives. We understand that the subject of ASEAN, as a regional construct from 1967 responding to post-WW2 conflicts, is far from exhausted in scientific discourses when considering the crossroads of politics and international relations on one side and sociology and anthropology on the other. As there is a lack of in-depth interdisciplinary analyses on the complexity of ASEAN as one of the main global players, our aim is to contribute to understanding its relevance for the international community within a micro-macro interpretation realm through a case study: Timor-Leste on the grouping's threshold.

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1 Daft Punk Single, 2001.

Through three years of extensive research on the complex relationship between the small country and the regional grouping, we found a variety of interwoven dimensions which, as we propose, help to understand the role and positioning of ASEAN within the international context. Our research strongly reinforces the interaction between bottom-up and top-down approaches for understanding the intricacy of (regional-international) centrality in times of intense global interactions. Through this new attempt to understand ASEAN's role (with Timor-Leste as a case study), we aim to contribute to the discourse on the compounding and intermingling of supposedly 'fixed' regions which ultimately need to be seen and understood as spaces beyond solid borders. Hence, this book is based on multi-sited research (qualitative fieldwork, archival research, the ethnographic exploration of the internet through netnographic approaches and document analysis) in order to primarily understand ASEAN's centrality through the eyes of a small island state, Timor-Leste, in a continuous process of negotiating the quest for geostrategic relationships and disputing powers.

Considering Timor-Leste's longstanding (and still ongoing) attempts to gain membership of the regional grouping, our analyses focus on the greater issues prevailing: how does this process show the role of the grouping in a global context, what greater power dynamics are involved and how can this arena of several meaning systems be understood? Is ASEAN's centrality a paradox? Is the case study of Timor-Leste a relevant one in order to highlight this paradox? This area will be tackled from the following points of view in this book:

1)   ASEAN's centrality as a paradox
2)   The relevance of Timor-Leste as a case study
3)   Timor-Leste as an epitome of the strengths and weaknesses of the region
4)   The building of international regions
5)   Covid-19 as a new challenge for geostrategic positioning

This research is a result of the EU H2020 project 'Competing Regional Integration in Southeast Asia', which has started in July 2018. Our primary quest within this larger research framework was the dynamics behind Timor-Leste's longstanding (and still ongoing) attempts to gain membership of ASEAN, which was officially submitted in 2011, yet unofficially dates back to 1975. In order to gather data on this complex research, we took a parallel approach to 1) ethnography on the internet, through which we analyzed online media which precisely tackles the relationship between Timor-Leste and ASEAN, and 2) fieldwork in Timor-Leste through interviews (30) with three focus groups (politicians, entrepreneurs and young academics). Through this parallel data collection, a first kick-off paper evolved, discussing the online newspaper

narrative of Timor-Leste's readiness to join the grouping (Seixas, Mendes & Lobner, 2019).

Following this, we analyzed our field data and used, first of all, a triangulation-analysis, which tackles 1) the political analysis, 2) an analysis on decision-making processes and 3) a sociological-anthropological analysis. As our process of research showed that the relationship between Timor-Leste and ASEAN was far more complex, we had the opportunity to broaden our framework and look at this issue from a broader perspective: a local-global analysis in order to understand the case of ASEAN and Timor-Leste in the area of building international regions. Finally, having arrived at 2020, the obvious relevance of a new perspective emerged: regional(/international) centrality construction and negotiation in a pandemic context. Hence, our initial question on ASEAN's centrality turned out to need more in-depth analysis from several directions. Our work is aimed at being strongly interdisciplinary, as we come from three different, yet closely interwoven, disciplines: international relations, political science, and anthropology. Even though our work is far from exhaustive, it should contribute to filling the existing gap in scientific literature when it comes to the growing relevance of understanding our future yet to come through the building of international regions.

Regarding gaps in literature, ASEAN's centrality has previously been determined mainly through the lens of international relations and therefore its geostrategic positioning in the world context. The societal and political area has been tackled in a rather weak to absent manner, meaning that literature on this subject is very poor. In fact, the first academic paper on this topic was written by Maria Ortuoste in 2011: Timor-Leste and ASEAN: Shaping Region and State in Southeast Asia, *Asian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 19, Issue 1, pp. 1–24. The second was a chapter of a book by the same author, published in The Routledge Handbook of Contemporary East Timor, edited by Andrew MacMillan and Michael Leach, "Timor-Leste and ASEAN: From Enmity to Amity, Exclusion to Semi-Inclusion", 2019. In both cases, the author highlights the unpreparedness of Timor-Leste and the opaqueness of bureaucratic politics as well as the tyranny of the consensus decision-making process as the main reasons for the delays to admission.

Our book adds a new layer to Ortuoste's approach: it links the political framework and a chronology of the facts to a sociological perspective, providing information on the perceptions of Timor-Leste's elite (politicians, entrepreneurs and youth) on the advantages and disadvantages of becoming a member state. It further links relevant theoretical references from Sociology and Anthropology to Political Science and International Relations: Imagined

Communities and Analytic Eclecticism, Clash of Egos and Standards of Civilization, Ecumene, translocality, amity/kinship and cultural translations. Furthermore, we are considering that Timor-Leste is a country 'in the making' within an international region 'in the making', aiming to explore how this constitutes an issue in the debate on ASEAN's centrality concept.

Within these dimensions we believe social structures are of great relevance when it comes to the building (and impact) of (international) regions, which is why we pinpoint ASEAN's centrality through a micro/macro-analysis in a continuous interaction process between bottom-up and top-down constructions. Considering that perspectives from 'below' (civil society) are in a constant mode of building (and re-configuring) greater identity dynamics, our collection of analyses offers an interdisciplinary understanding of a multitude of interwoven structures, which is an approach that had not been undertaken previously.

Understanding that ASEAN is at the core of global players, we also look at this issue through its relations and ties to other (relevant) stakeholders such as China, the European Union, the United States and the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP). Finally, we look at the issue of centrality construction through the complex dynamics arising from the current Covid-19 pandemic context, where we pinpoint the rise of economic nationalisms and global interdependences. Regional rivalries are growing, considering the fact that the world is in a 'de-globalization' mode. Hence, how this affects centrality in the world at large will be demonstrated by looking at Timor-Leste as a relevant case study from different angles.

As the book consists of a set of chapters which are a complementary production of three years of research (2018–2021), its methodology is often crosscutting. Because this research is an output of CRISEA (Competing Regional Integration in Southeast Asia), the data we used have been collected since the beginning of the project. Our first approach was archival research, document analysis and netnography for retrieving data on the internet. With these first steps towards coming to grips with the universe of interrelations, we built on an analysis of online media (newspapers) discussing the relationship between ASEAN and Timor-Leste through a narrative of the small country's 'readiness' (Seixas, Mendes & Lobner, 2019). Parallel to this first output, we proceeded with fieldwork in Timor-Leste in 2018. During this fieldwork, which took place from August to October of the same year, we conducted 30 interviews with three focus groups: 1) political actors, 2) entrepreneurs, 3) young academics/university students.[2] We used a semi-structured approach to ask these focus

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2 The interviews remain anonymous, but we used abbreviations for each group: PA/Political Actors, CS/Civil Society Representatives, Y/Youth and numbered them accordingly.

groups questions on the issue of Timor-Leste's membership of and relationship with ASEAN, out of which several new dimensions arose. As we undertook an in-depth content analysis of our data, on which we aimed primarily to base two papers, first, the political dimension of this scientific complexity, second, the sociological dimension, we soon realized that there are several other interwoven dimensions. Through these new insights and opportunities for interpretations beyond our preset framework, we established another set of papers, which enabled us to finally establish a book consisting of eight different, yet interconnected, chapters.

Chapter One describes main steps of the organization through its 40 years of history, from its creation in 1967 up to the present. By this, we depict the international relations' context in which the main decisions and institutional developments were taken. It also focuses on ASEAN's constraints and potentialities, giving special attention to the most challenging, and the most delicate, issue of security for the organization.

Chapter Two copes with the main facts on political influences since Timor-Leste's struggle for independence (Indonesian occupation). Internal (political circumstances in Timor-Leste) and external (ASEAN's position) turning points as discontents are the core of the chronological analysis of this section. We present how far this case demonstrates certain duties of the organization and its action principles, including the "ASEAN Way". A list of arguments, such as technical and political ones are being contextualized. Finally, we conclude on the importance of Timor-Leste as a challenge to a reflection on ASEAN's economic and political objectives.

Chapter Three is based on document analysis and online media archival data, ASEAN Civil Society Organization reports and journal entries. In this chapter, we have created ten flowcharts with the methodological approach of management and decision-making, through which we aimed to contribute to understanding opinions, on the one hand, and 'hard facts' on the other about the relationship between the small country and the region. We use flowcharts as a representation aid for political challenges in regional-international inclusion and exclusion dynamics, which build upon the complexity of new multilateral platforms that influence political audiences through particular opinion-makers (both bureaucrats and political actors).

Chapter Four deeply engages with the conceptual framework of anthropology as cultural translation, by which we display Timor-Leste as a pertinent ground of action in the realm of different 'Otherings', with their respective imaginations. Ecumenic ambitions of the country will be presented in its political dimension in times of globalization, and the quest of 'New Overseas Younger Sibling(s)'.

In Chapter Five, we present three Timorese sociopolitical clusters: political actors, entrepreneurs and youth, with their statements and opinions on the country's membership delay, as well as the question of ASEAN as a central regional actor.

In Chapter Five we present our sociological-anthropological analysis, mainly based on data from the field. This chapter provides a deeper insight into how our three focus groups regarded the issue of Timor-Leste's membership of ASEAN, which enabled us to grasp this context from a new perspective. For this interpretation approach, we collected statements and opinions on the membership delay, as well as ASEAN's quest as a central regional actor. We explored which core figures are in the forefront when it comes to the preparation process for becoming a member state of the regional grouping and how this may influence decision-making processes in terms of ASEAN's inclusion-exclusion dynamics.

Chapter Six is closely related to a master's dissertation and continuing PhD project which evolved within our CRISEA research framework (Lobner, 2020). This chapter is an anthropological essay aimed at contributing to the building of international regions, while focusing on the case of ASEAN and Timor-Leste through a bottom-up/top-down analysis. The methodological approach of this chapter was, firstly, in-depth archival research in the anthropological library and, secondly, the application of the data collected in the field through CRISEA in 2018. It is an attempt to construct a productive dialogue between anthropology and international relations, with the proposal of the need for interdisciplinary analyses on interwoven micro-macro dimensions for understanding the world at large from an 'international regions' context.

Chapter Seven, draws on an analysis of the context of the most recent outbreaks of the Covid-19 pandemic. We discuss centralities in Southeast Asia, using Timor-Leste as a case study, where we analyze two linguistic narratives in the forefront: the western language narrative and the Chinese language narrative. This chapter is based on the most recent literature review on the centrality rivalry between ASEAN and China, pinpointed through the position of Timor-Leste as a 'middleman'.

Finally, the Postscript provides a brief exploration of the political dynamics of the ASEAN membership procedure, expanding and rethinking the universe of ongoing debates through a political science perspective on Timor-Leste's readiness to join ASEAN – displayed as a socially constructed region.

PART 1

*Political Process, Internal-External
Constellations and Meta-Analysis*

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CHAPTER 1

ASEAN in the Making: Centralities and Peripheries

Paulo Castro Seixas, Nuno Canas Mendes and Nadine Lobner

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has undoubtedly been a "main actor" in East Asia, not only for its economic relevance but also for its institutional structure. ASEAN is the only one in this part of the world allowing a group of countries to act as regional actors. However, the cohesion and cooperation needed to develop a more prominent role for ASEAN in international relations are still limited by post-colonial mechanisms. This has been a constraint when facing very serious problems, such as 1997's financial crisis, or terrorism. The organization's consensus and non-interference approach has been considered a paralyzing method for a group of countries forming a gigantic market, full of potential, despite their very heterogeneous levels of development.

This chapter will describe the main steps of the organization through its 40 years of history, from its creation in 1967 up to the present. The chapter will depict the international relations' context in which the main decisions and institutional developments were taken. It will also focus on ASEAN's constraints and potentialities, giving special attention to the most challenging, and the most delicate, issue of security for the organization.

1   Introduction

It is difficult to find coherence in the regional classification of 'Southeast Asia', imposed by colonialism, and felt by the 'native' as both strange and imposed from the outside. In order to give structure to a desired unity for the colonized people, a classification was imposed over a variety of ethnic groups, cultures, religions, political systems, thereafter used for nationalist purposes. Within this regional classification, it would be hard to find affinities or common elements to support a Southeast Asian identity. The exceptions are a rice culture, water as a channel of communication, Chinese communities overseas, and a mobilizing antagonism caused by foreign colonization. Southeast Asia itself, as a region, was, and remains, a mirage. In the nineties, rhetoric for Asian values tried to diffuse a cohesive image for the whole region. However, the 1997 to 1998 financial crisis ruined all the efforts by Singapore and Malaysian authoritarian

rulers whose purpose was rather to reinforce their power internally than to build an identity for the region.

In the post-colonial *scenario*, the concept was fed by the binomial security-development, having the strength of the sovereignty paradigm in individual nation-building processes as a common pattern. This particular feature originated in the pacific coexistence principles of non-intervention, and will be very important in the future as one of the main sources of the "ASEAN way". One cannot forget that during the Cold War period, the region was crucial for the United States in the fight against continental communist expansion. This was the environment in which the Organization of Southeast Asian Nations was created.

ASEAN was founded in 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. The Organization has been pursuing three inter-connected goals, all of them reinforcing sovereignty: softening intra-ASEAN tensions (a kind of "non-aggression" pact); reducing foreign actors' influence; and promoting socioeconomic development (Marine, 2005). Vietnam's reunification in 1975 gave the political leaders of ASEAN's countries the will to reinforce the organization's anti-communist posture. In 1976, the various heads of government met at the Bali Conference, to approve a Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. The document postulates the principles for member-states' behavior within the group, proposing pacific resolution of conflicts and the respect for sovereignty and independence. The intention was to build a platform for stability, balancing the asymmetric development and different political regimes.

The end of the Cold War and the Cambodia conflict (1991) stressed the need to re-evaluate ASEAN's role, which became more oriented to a deepening of economic integration. In the nineties, economic growth was qualified as the "Asian miracle". This was the spirit of the ASEAN Free Trade Area project (AFTA), defined in 1992. It was also in this context that Vietnam (1995), Myanmar (1997), Laos (1997) and, finally, Cambodia (1999) joined the organization, introducing a complex disparity in development levels.

The 1997 financial crisis was a severe test to the solidity of the organization's development and affected the Indonesian most promising leadership. The needed cohesion was absent, and the solutions were found within the States, which remained the central actors in appealing to international aid, downsizing the organization and its institutional capacity for facing common challenges.

The political implications of this crisis led to the fall of Suharto, Indonesia's head of State, followed by the Timor-Leste crisis, in which a common response to a common problem was not found. This attitude underlined the worries, even within ASEAN member-states, caused by a particular type of auto-limited socialization. ASEAN would be severely tested again in the aftermath of Bali's

terrorist bombing in 2002, and, finally, when new issues with serious health and extended security implications emerged: Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), and the 2004's tsunami. All these factors questioned the organization's principles and capacities, showing a number of shortcomings.

One of the main features is ASEAN's traditional consensus attitude. It is very hard to build a consensus in such a complex and varied region. All the decisions are based on the logic of a minimum common denominator, but, even so, they are not restricted. The security issue also has, since the nineties, a very important place on the organization's agenda, articulating economic regionalism with the tensions and threats affecting member-states. The respect for sovereignty and non-intervention resulted in institutional procedural flexibility, with some paralyzing effects.

The last decade (since the 1997's financial crisis) brought ASEAN's nature and future into discussion, particularly regarding its communitarian orientation (defined in the Bali-Concord II declaration [2003]) and the dialogue with the nearby great powers (ASEAN + 3, ASEAN + 1). Meanwhile, the preference for bilateralism and strong auto-focused national interests are still heavy obstacles to giving common answers to common problems. However, as a diplomatic tool, ASEAN is an organization to manage reliable relations and to soften divergences. Further institutionalization, through a charter of principles, could be a step forward (as was convened in the Cebu Summit, in January 2007, the consensus being that a decision-making process should be changed in order to achieve the suitable coherence within the organization).

2   Security Issues

When ASEAN was created, its main goal was to forge cooperation among the member states on non-sensitive economic issues. When security became a part of ASEAN's agenda, in 1992, it was seen as a response to a changing strategic world *scenario*, not really as an effort to "foster intramural security cooperation" (Sukma, 2006).

In fact, during the Cold War, the United States was the security umbrella for the region, especially through bilateral agreements. Multilaterally the results were not very successful: China as well as the Soviet Union matched points in French Indochina. The SEATO treaty, formed during the Cold War, ended in 1977, after the American defeat in Vietnam. The only structure that lasted is the Five Power Defense Arrangement, whose mission was to guarantee the security of the Malacca Strait. It was signed in 1971 by the United Kingdom, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand.

During its first decade, ASEAN tried to present a proposal for a "peace zone", but its member states were divided regarding what they perceived as a foreign threat. Indonesia and Malaysia, for instance, were much more frightened by China than by Russia. Since the beginning of the Sino American *détente*, the United States' allies – Thailand and the Philippines – started re-evaluating their vision of China. As far as economic aspects were concerned, the progress was limited. Japan's economic growth increased the prosperity of some ASEAN states (Singapore and Malaysia). The oil shocks in the seventies have favored regional producers, namely Indonesia and Brunei.

Security and conflict prevention were not absent from the leaders' worries, having in mind the regional neutralization through the creation of a zone of peace, freedom, and neutrality (Zopfan, 1971). Some of the ASEAN states feared a few of their fellows' hegemonic tendencies and preferred defensive cooperation with extra-regional states. Because of that, the United States' presence was desired. Otherwise, ASEAN embraced a set of principles – the 'ASEAN Way' – that openly subsumed a policy of conflict prevention and conflict resolution. The same method of flexibility contributed to a solution found at internal or international levels, but not regionally. This contained some post-colonial conflicts, as well as the great Asian powers: China, India and Japan.

Post-Cold War ASEAN was then integrated into a broader security structure. That's why the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), created in 1993, became important as a network for dialogue in the Pacific area. Including external countries such as China or the United States,[1] ARF has been a forum for dialogue, consultation, mediation and negotiation, a "talking shop" implementing confidence-building measures and preventive diplomacy (Cameron, 2005). Using two-track diplomacy, ARF has a limited role, being a meeting point where a very heterogeneous group of countries discuss security issues in a fluid and informal style, preferring to reach a consensus or negotiating bilaterally. Quoting Yeo (2006), "it lacks institutional structure and cohesion among members to respond effectively to regional security concerns and challenges (…) ARF needs to move from an exchange of views to problem solving and concrete cooperation".

However, ASEAN, despite the constraints pointed out above, gave a sense of cohesion to the Southeast Asia region, and prevented conflicts, as well as inter-state crises. For example, ASEAN worked to prevent territorial disputes due to divergences among its members, and also demonstrated its diplomatic commitment to the Cambodian peace process (Dosch, 2004). Another

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1 The external members are USA, EU, Japan, Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea, Timor-Leste, Papua-New Guinea, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada.

important achievement by the organization was the idea of cooperative security, including conventional military security and, more recently, the fight against terrorism. However, the introduction of a security community, which was due to commence in 2015, is still vague. It is clear that this project reflects a certain discomfort from Indonesia and Malaysia because of the growing intrusion in security by the USA, China and even Japan, Australia, and India.

3 Classic Threats

The probability of armed conflicts occurring between Southeast Asian countries is not high, although the territorial and maritime disputes continue to be the source of potential tensions. There is a boundary dispute between Myanmar and Thailand. With regard to maritime disputes, the most noticeable one is that of the South China Sea between China and Vietnam regarding Paracel, and another involving six states – China, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei – claiming their rights to the Spratly archipelago. These countries are interested in energy resources from Spratly, such as natural gas and oil, as well as fish, and, therefore, are committed to avoiding any friction in the area. This agreement was promoted by ASEAN and was established by the Manila Declaration in 1992. China ignored this commitment and approved a law claiming a U-shaped territorial sea that covered almost all the South China Sea. Beijing has proposed a joint exploration but has refused multilateral negotiations. However, the United States' growing military presence since 2001 prompted China to start a new deal with ASEAN but the progress is disappointing (Mendes, 2020). In October 2007, the opposition to the Myanmar military regime became a source of instability, but the resolution of the crisis is reported to be in the hands of China and India, leaving ASEAN a limited role.

4 New Threats

ASEAN also has had to face a number of new threats and risks: environmental degradation (e.g., pollution, massive deforestation), trans-national crime (human, arms, and drug trafficking, piracy, smuggling), migrations, pandemic diseases (SARS, avian flu) or natural catastrophes. The main concern is obviously terrorism.

Since September 11, and the Bali bombing attacks in 2002, the need and willingness emerged to coordinate the fight against terrorist organizations inspired by Islamic extremists. According to a report from the United States

Congress, 37% of the biggest terrorist actions happened in Southeast Asia and 15% of Al-Qaeda's militants found shelter in the region (Heiduk & Möller, 2004). Islamic groups (some of them linked to Al-Qaeda) have very different natures and goals: Jemaah Islamiah, Abu Sayyaf and Kumpulan Mujahideen Malaysia (KMM) are considered terrorist groups. Other groups associate Islam with autonomous or separatist goals, such as Moro Liberation Front or the Islamic Moro Liberation Front in the Philippines; the Aceh Independence Movement and the Mindanao Islamic Liberation Front, in Indonesia; Patani National Liberation Front or Patani Liberation United Organization, in southern Thailand. These groups have wide popular support, effective political programs, and tend to limit violence to military targets. They are connected to Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Yemen, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Para-military Islamic inspired groups must also be considered, such as Laskar Jihad in Indonesia.

Trying to face this phenomenon, ASEAN approved several declarations in their annual summits, appealing for a joint action to fight terrorism. ASEAN has also defined strategic plans for this coherent dossier and reinforced the inter-governmental cooperation and intelligence services. The fact that some of ASEAN states are very fragile and economically disruptive, as well as separatists (Aceh, Papua), tends to create a climate of instability in the region. Furthermore, all the new threats pointed out above tend to create dependence on the United States, and there are also calls for growing assistance from China and Australia.

5   Foreign Powers in ASEAN

5.1   *The United States' Shadow*
With deep roots in Southeast Asia since World War II, the United States' shadow is overwhelming, not only in security, but also in the economic field. The superpower has established a network of bilateral military alliances with the Philippines and Thailand, and even with Singapore. After September 11, the United States reinforced their security assistance and launched the 'Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative' in order to create free trade agreements between the USA and each ASEAN country. Although China is increasingly becoming an important competitor, ASEAN provides a very relevant role for the USA (and also for India) to avoid hegemonic Chinese presence, especially in economic matters.

5.2   *The China Economic Connection*
ASEAN's member states have varying feelings about China. Traditionally, Thailand and Singapore regard China with less apprehension than those with

maritime disputes over the China South Sea. Since the end of the nineties, Chinese diplomacy has been deepening economic and political relations with several countries in the region. This new orientation was at its most relevant in 2002 with the signing of the cooperation agreement between China and ASEAN, which defined the creation of a free trade area for 2010. Noteworthy, is also the strategic partnership for peace and security in 2002, for pacific settlement of disputes in the China South Sea. Furthermore, China is a member of ARF and is very enthusiastic about the ASEAN + 3 initiative. Boisseau du Rocher pointed out in 2006 that this initiative would, by 2010, form the greatest free trade area in Eastern Asia, with 1.8 billion people and a GDP of 2,000 billion US dollars (Boisseau du Rocher, 2006).

One of the greatest and most recent achievements of this link is the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, signed in November 2020 (eight years after the beginning of negotiations). This Partnership creates the world's largest free-trade agreement for ASEAN, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand (DW, 2020).

5.3   *The European Link*

Europe has a significant relationship with ASEAN through ASEM dialogue and ARF membership, and also through bilateral and multilateral trade agreements. Europe is indeed ASEAN's third trade partner and its second export market. Economies oriented towards exportation and a huge market above 500 million people stresses the importance of this part of the world. EU-ASEAN trade represents 5.8% of the total amount of EU exchanges, and 14% of ASEAN exchanges (Niquet, 2007). The project of a free trade region between the two is becoming a reality.

In the eighties, the EEC, as it was known then, established a cooperation agreement with ASEAN – the oldest inter-regional connection in the world (Neves, 2004) – even if the Timor-Leste and Burma issues were a relevant political shadow in this relationship. In addition to this, the 1997 to 1998 financial crisis was a major challenge to the deepening of the dialogue, especially in a context of a stronger China and EU influence in the region. Both are dominant in the area, in economic and security fields, and ASEAN is trying to strengthen the relationship with Europe as a means to reach a more balanced consortium with foreign partners.

Historically, this relationship was established when China did not have diplomatic or trade channels with Europe, so ASEAN was a channel to the Far East, and a way to promote commercial exchange. In fact, various trade agreements were convened. During the nineties, the biggest decisions were made, including security issues, through the creation of ARF, where the EU has a seat,

or by the setting up of a structure of permanent contact with a broader geographical area, ASEM. It is also a noticeable feature that ASEAN – a project of regionalism – has always imitated a European model, although with a different and peculiar style, named the *ASEAN Way*.

Dialogue has been fruitful in areas such as transportation, sanitary risks, environmental and energetic issues, technical, and scientific cooperation; it is also generally accepted that European discourse, on preventing conflicts and integration progresses, is taken into account (Niquet, 2006). Ache's example is perhaps the best to show the success of an integrated solution to which the EU contributed substantially.

The EU has several bilateral framework agreements (political, trade, investment) with Vietnam and Singapore and is negotiating one with Indonesia and Malaysia. In June 2015 the EU adopted a new strategy for ASEAN in 2017, a plan of action (2018–2022), and in 2019, at the EU-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, decided to upgrade the relationship proposing the establishment of a strategic partnership, which came into force in 2020. The prevalence of a bilateral approach to this dialogue is noteworthy. Through the opening of a new chapter and becoming strategic partners, there is a wide range of opportunities to deepen the links between the EU and ASEAN (European External Action Service, 2020).

6   ASEAN's Constraints

There are a number of constraints not favoring the emergence of a Eurasian world order focused on soft power, which are listed below:

– Integration cannot be regarded in terms of economy or trade only, and implies other relevant issues, such as security, justice, or culture (including human rights). A "holistic perspective" is needed (Neves, 2004). The Asian side is still not predisposed to accept this reality, even if certain concepts have been put forward, such as "comprehensive security" or the Bali-Concord II project, in which the constitution of a security community is included. This raises a new dimension when integrated in the global fight against terrorism and other types of new threats (pandemics, natural catastrophes, piracy, arms smuggling …). This kind of phenomena has strong manifestations in the region.

– The United States reinforced their military presence in Southeast Asia and are thinking of a more prominent role for APEC as well as a more active presence in ASEAN; ASEAN is unable to continue without this protection and uses it to balance China's expansion.

– Prevailing institutional deficits and asymmetries explain a weak inter-regionalism and are preventing a more efficient regional integration process. ASEAN has, above all, been a sum of *nation* and *state-building* projects, with strong roots in the sovereignty paradigm inherited from peaceful coexistence principles. The importance accorded by Europe to governance and human rights questions has been a severe limitation to a deeper relationship.
– Although ASEAN is a major actor in defining Asia's regionalism, its role has essentially been that of bridging the perennial divisions. In this sense, as an institution, it does not reflect a real political weight.

7   Bali Concord II and the Charter

The proposal to form the three communities going back to the Bali Concord II Declaration (2003) was enshrined in the preamble to the Charter, adopted at the 2007 Summit in Singapore, which coded the rules and commitments of the member states. In 1997, celebrating the 30th anniversary of the organization's founding, the document *ASEAN Vision 2020* was adopted and defined "a shared vision of ASEAN as the concert of the nations of Southeast Asia", an idea that evolved, during the 9th ASEAN Summit in 2003, with the specific objective of creating an ASEAN Community. The objective was shaped by the aforementioned Bali Concord II Declaration consisting of three principles: Political and Security Community, Economic Community, and Sociocultural Community. The three pillars were not mutually exclusive, but were closely linked to create the conditions for a stable region, expected to start in 2020. However, during the 12th Summit in Cebu, Philippines (2007), it was decided to bring forward the start-up of the project to 2015 in an attempt to strengthen ASEAN's centrality and its role in the Asia-Pacific region. The creation of an ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) would transform the region through a more competitive base, with a common market and production, and a fair economic development, as well as being fully embedded in the global economy. This integration process emphasized the creation, as early as 1992, of a common customs tariff for the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), through which members sought to reduce or eliminate duties to facilitate trade and increase regional competitiveness. With a unique strategic location, 620 million inhabitants, abundant natural resources, and a youth workforce, the AEC could potentiate all these favorable factors (despite development asymmetries).

There were several problematic issues when the AEC commenced operations at the end of 2015. From the outset, the countries involved (Brunei, Cambodia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore,

Thailand and Vietnam) had to act on an open market of around 600 million consumers with a production capable of competing with the largest economies in the world (combined, these countries are in seventh place among the greatest in the world, coupled with an increase in international trade that has tripled in the last ten years).

A trilogy of pillars of intervention stands out: in the area of politics and security, changes in security issues are expected (piracy, transnational organized crime, natural disasters). There are fewer in traditional, sensitive areas such as sovereignty and territorial integrity, without significant changes to *the ASEAN Way*, despite the approximation and deepening of dialogue. In the economic pillar, and via AEC, the most significant changes were expected, namely a reduction of barriers to trade in goods, services, and capital, and the increase in their share in world industry. It was also expected to encourage local companies to ex-market their businesses and export outside the countries of the ASEAN community, thus becoming a kind of new 'factory in the world'. This will mean modernizing the equipment and empowering its workforce, as well as infrastructure, meaning the idea of combining low labor costs with enhanced industrial capacity. The expansion of markets would lead to a dynamic of granting facilities to foreign investment, thereby abolishing protectionist practices. In international trade, customs and non-tariff trade are expected to be eliminated, and a single market will be created with the ongoing liberalization of economies. As for the sociocultural pillar, the purpose is to promote a greater contact between peoples and cultures, in order to create a greater dialogue and knowledge of the specificities of each and every one, envisioning a regional identity, a task that, of course, will be difficult to put into practice. There were some fears that a very ambitious timetable and some ill-planned initiatives could jeopardize the results.

7.1   *State of the Situation in 2015*

In 2015, the *ratio* of trade in GDP was one of the highest among developing regions (about 130%). Intra-regional trade has expanded, as well as extra-regional trade, which is why economic performance has been so good over the past three decades; trade agreements on goods, services, and investment protection have contributed to this, despite the persistence of protectionist practices (such as various safeguard measures, including licenses, regulations, health, and safety fees and regulations).

In 2007, at its thirteenth summit, the AEC project was approved by ASEAN leaders as an 'action plan', establishing a unique market and production base, a competitive economic region, competitive economic development, as well as being fully integrated into the global economy. In the pursuit of these goals,

the objective was the free movement of goods, with the elimination of rights and non-tariff barriers, trade facilitation, customs integration, and removal of technical barriers to trade. In fact, there was a significant reduction in customs duties (with 70% of products without duties and a minimum percentage above 10% with duties); increased trade in manufactured and agricultural goods, as well as trade in services (although there are several barriers to liberalization in this sector); progress in investment and capital flows with the signing of the Investment Comprehensive Agreement (2012) and approval of *the National Single Window* (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand). It also envisaged the free movement of services (air transport, e-ASEAN, health, tourism, and logistics), investment, capital, qualified personnel, and a competitiveness policy. In the wake of the targets set and ensuring integration into the world economy, ASEAN has maintained intense activity leading to the signing of free trade agreements (which it has done with six dialogue partners, namely Australia, the People's Republic of China, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and New Zealand), and negotiations for the Comprehensive Regional Economic Partnership between ASEAN and its dialogue partners were launched in 2012.

7.2   *Economic Challenges*

The difficulties to be overcome were essentially related to the persistence of barriers to trade, translated into non-tariff measures, and the application of mode 4 (professional services). At present, bilateral and regional instruments regulating trade in services are insufficient, requiring regulatory efforts. Nontariff measures have increased in ASEAN's largest economies since the beginning of the global financial crisis. From 2009 to 2013, a total of 186 non-tariff measures were implemented, most of them by the largest economies: seventy-five by Indonesia, thirty-nine by Vietnam, twenty-seven by Thailand, sixteen by Malaysia, and fifteen by Singapore.

Trade in services has also been cross bordered by a number of restrictions imposed in several member states, with the exception of Singapore. ASEAN's middle-income economies – Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand – have 'closed' to mode 4 (professional services), with sensitive topics such as legal protection for migrant workers. Indeed, in 2007 ASEAN adopted the "Declaration on *the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers*", and the debate has resulted in tension between the states that send, in favor of the agreement, and those that receive, preferring to keep the deregulation.

One of the basic problems of ASEAN, which also arose with the horizon of 'enlargement' during the 1990s, is the asymmetries of the economies of the

member states and, consequently, the need to reconcile interests that are not convergent, and which also show a pressing need to deepen cooperation. From this point of view, the need to increase intra-regional flows from both markets and mobility of people, goods, and knowledge seems particularly strong. Deep down, this is the philosophy of the community. But this philosophy is financially demanding, as it involves high-rise investments over the next two decades (estimated to be billions of dollars annually by 2022), with energy and transport accounting for about 63% of the needs, and, according to Goldman-Sachs' 2013 estimate, with Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand representing a total investment of US$523 billion (Balboa & Wignaraja, 2014).

7.3   *Expected Incompleteness*

The start-up of the AEC project was crucial to the transformation of ASEAN into one of the most dynamic economic regions in the developing world. There are doubts that persist and are rooted in the nature of the actors and the project itself: it is legitimate to question whether the timetable set was realistic and whether the above-mentioned pillars could actually be reached by December 2015, during the Malay presidency.

The skepticism is great, but the breadth of the objectives is not insignificant. Thus, among the work expected to be completed is the lifting of the needs and objectives that can be achieved and, on the basis of this, the outlining of subsequent measures in 2020, namely, in the reduction of regional areas (third pillar, infrastructure financing) and in the reduction of restrictions on trade in services and non-tariff measures (first pillar). Institutional strengthening will also be important through the action of the Secretariat, strengthening its budget and technical capabilities to set in motion the AEC agenda.

The expected incompleteness of a *small-step praxis, has*, in *the ASEAN way*, an additional value: the progress of 'socialization', described above, shows that the AEC is an achievement and an important agenda despite some constraints. Centrality in ASEAN is a controversial matter, bearing in mind the 'ASEAN way', member states' attitudes, and institutional evolution: it is hard to define what is central and what can be put aside.

8   Final Considerations

Socialization processes and normative production in ASEAN still present nuances resulting not only from the differences among its member states but also from the full respect to sovereignty and consensus decision-making. The

shadow of American security is again essential (after a downsizing in the nineties), particularly in the fight against terrorism. Southeast Asia was considered the 'second front' by the American administration.

Being such a heterogeneous region, with very weak countries, some of them potentially "failed-states", as well as a succession of complex facts, certainly made it hard for ASEAN to fulfill its goals. There is an urgent need to strengthen regional cooperation in order to make the group relevant in international relations as well as a significant regional player. Benedict Anderson's *imagined communities*' concept could be applied to the ASEAN project.

The financial crisis of 1997 to 1998, followed by, firstly, the Timor-Leste crisis,[2] and secondly, the terrorist threat, placed ASEAN under stress and denounced its institutional weakness and the lack of effective cooperation. In fact, all the evolution of this organization has shown that the multilateral approach is limited by the 'ASEAN Way' and its usual low level of formality and intrusiveness. In these circumstances, it is extremely difficult to define common answers to common challenges and problems. Cooperation is still seen as a potential danger to sovereignty, and one cannot avoid feeling that the integration project is attractive in a way, but sometimes lacks substance and credibility.

Nevertheless, ASEAN is a group of countries with economic strength, representing one third of the world's population, with an estimated GDP of 9.3 trillion dollars. Export-oriented economies allied in a market above the 620 million consumers mark this part of the world as strategically important. It should be noted that ASEAN is the only regional integration project with some degree of institutionalization (especially since the financial crisis). Despite the constraints pointed out above, there is a group dynamic which contributes strongly to the whole as being a major partner for the rest of the world, not far from East Asian's great powers: China, India and Japan.

In this context, Timor-Leste, which presented a candidacy to the organization in 2011, seems to remain an eternal 'peripheral' issue. The controversial application and its discontents will be explored in the next chapters of this book.

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2   None of the ASEAN countries was able to lead the United Nations mission of peace enforcement. This is mainly explained by its resistance to breaking the non-interference principle. Even during Indonesia's political transition to democracy, the intervention in Timor-Leste was seen as rather embarrassing.

9   Post Scriptum: Covid Crisis

When described, ASEAN countries tended to adopt a 'hedging' position regarding the confluence of Chinese and American interests in the region. Despite the opposition between political cycles in the USA, from Obama's 'pivot' to Asia, to Trump's 'America First' and trade dispute with China, or Xi Jinping's launching of a Maritime Silk Road towards Southeast Asia, what is to be underlined in this section is one of the greatest challenges to ASEAN. The Covid-19 pandemic and its structural effects are to be studied in the near future and, meanwhile, 'a lot of water will flow under the bridge'. Any judgment or conclusion is by nature 'preliminary' and 'provisional'. Several interrogations are to be answered: is this crisis another test of "rhetoric" for what can be considered a limited cooperation shaped by the *ASEAN way* (individual and differentiated responses, and the antagonism of some member states – e.g. Vietnam – in response to the problems of others – Indonesia)? Will the pandemic and the need for concerted action in, during, and after, entail significant changes in the organization's modus operandi? Information sharing and coordinated legislation is difficult. To what extent is it possible for Southeast Asia to continue its hedging strategy in the face of geopolitical trends already designed and now added to the hyper-realism enhanced by the pandemic?

What seems to be crystal clear is that ASEAN's unwise weakness in responding to common problems is back on the table, despite a wide range of meetings and final statements on the importance of "collectively responding" to the pandemic outbreak and the need to "strengthen coordination of national and regional efforts". What will be the practical results? All indications are that increased confidence in China will lead to a – if not decisive – change in the balance of power of the region and therefore greater room to influence ASEAN and its Member-States. Another issue to be raised is to understand to what extent does the individual reaction of states have an impact on a new 'hierarchy' of powers within ASEAN? It is still to be found out to what extent the citizens of the Member States trust or consider ASEAN an emergency resource entity, and whether the political and economic project remains very elite-centered.

Despite China's centrality, one can also consider if Japan, as a medium, credible, and peaceful power, can add its influence in the region through aid and investment, or will it remain doomed to be a soft power exporter? Nevertheless, the main concern is obviously the impact of the pandemic on the deceleration of integration. The environment of multilateral 'dialogue' has been praised in contrast to the trend towards isolationism, although the difficulty is, above all, in coordination, legislation, and information sharing.

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Timor-Leste's Membership of ASEAN: The Political Process and Its Discontents

Paulo Castro Seixas, Nuno Canas Mendes and Nadine Lobner

1 Introduction

Timor-Leste, one of the newest nations of the 21st century, has officially been aiming to gain membership of the regional grouping of ASEAN since 2011. There are several assumptions as to why the country has not yet been granted access to the organization. Far from there being any end in sight, there is not even a clear statement from ASEAN representatives on why Timor-Leste has not been admitted so far. With this research, we aim to shed light on this case through analyzing the chronology of the candidacy to ASEAN in its historical and political context. Regarding the aspirations for membership, we will present the core facts on political influences since Timor-Leste's fight for independence during the Indonesian occupation. Internal (political circumstances in Timor-Leste) and external (ASEAN's position) turning points as discontents will be the nucleus of our work. Concerning our approach to this chronological analysis, the following topics emerge as inevitable for our discussion: we will elaborate on the importance of Timor-Leste's candidacy to ASEAN and ask to what extent the country's application could compromise or affect the organization's evolution, given the widely known technical and political reservations of some of its members. Furthermore, we will show how far this case can highlight certain duties of the organization and its action principles, including the "ASEAN Way". We will contextualize a list of arguments, such as technical (economic weakness, the need for human resources, legislative adaptation, etc.) and political ones (hidden agendas, confluence of foreign interests, such as Chinese, American, Australian, Indonesian, etc.). Finally, we conclude on the importance of Timor-Leste as a challenge to a reflection on ASEAN's economic and political objectives. Our proposal is that Timor-Leste's candidacy underlines the external question of ASEAN's accommodation of differences and internal cohesion as a group, demonstrating a set of challenges for the regional dynamics.

This work is structured in four main sections: firstly, we present a chronological framework of the relationship between Timor-Leste and ASEAN, which

is structured in internal and external discrepancies. Following on from this, we present the role of ASEAN as a central regional actor and its potential impact on the small country. Finally, we draw our conclusions and interpretations through the theoretical framework of international relations as analytic eclecticism and foreign policy hybridism of Timor-Leste.

2   Multilayered Constellations of Membership Aspiration

Timor-Leste's relationship with ASEAN is marked by several turning points. Although the small country has been officially advancing its membership of the grouping since 2011, we have found several indicators of Timor-Leste's aspirations to join ASEAN since 1975, the year of independence from Portuguese colonization.

   In order to make sense of this complex domain, we will present constellations of events which we believe play a relevant role in the ongoing admission procedure. These constellations contain important internal and external events which seem to have common ground, starting with Timor-Leste's initial attempts to join the grouping and continuing up to the present day, as well as ASEAN's responses to these. We will provide a detailed analysis of the political challenges this procedure implies and embed it into a geopolitical debate on regional power dynamics. This will be done through an examination of the discontents in the forefront followed by the discontents behind the scenes.

2.1   *Constellation 1: Legitimation of Independence through Alliances (1975, 1998, 2002)*
Due to the country's critical past, Timor-Leste is marked by several internal challenges in the political and economic context. In the following steps, we will demonstrate the constellation of legitimizing the country's independence, starting at the end of Portuguese colonization in 1975 until it finally gained its freedom from Indonesian occupation in 2002. We propose that this constellation plays a relevant role in light of the desire to become part of ASEAN, regarding the potential benefits of officially being part of one of the world's largest regions. These benefits are directed towards the regional (and along the same lines, international) support for advancing improvements in several sectors (human development, healthcare, economy) and being acknowledged as a valid partner in the international trade market.
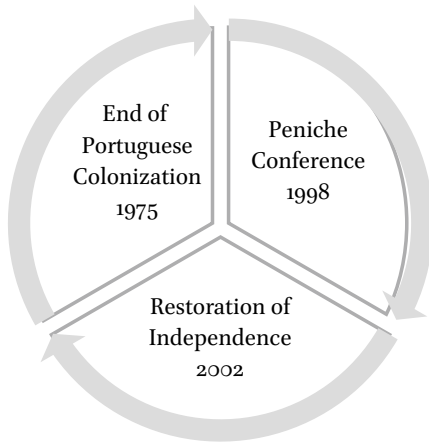
2.1.1   1975: End of Portuguese Colonization

In 1975, Timor-Leste became independent for the first time since the beginning of Portuguese colonization. In this rather short moment of independence, the small country's state actors already had their own ideas on how to advance partnership and diplomatic relations for establishing a strong base for transregional and international exchange and connection (Interview PA4, September 2018). As we undertook qualitative fieldwork in Timor-Leste, precisely in order to understand the very early steps in the country's membership aspirations, the state actor category of our interview subjects disclosed a very relevant point in the chronological context: Timor-Leste's state leaders first expressed their ambition to join ASEAN in 1975 through the unilateral declaration of independence after the Portuguese left the country (Interview PA2, September 2018).

As Timor-Leste was soon after, in the very same year, faced with another period of foreign occupation, this time by Indonesia's military force, the matter of ASEAN disappeared from the frontline, with Timor-Leste having been claimed as a province of its occupiers through the forceful invasion (Leach, 2017). As things stood under the leadership of their new 'leaders', their aspirations to membership of ASEAN soon lost relevance and attention. Nevertheless, some sources claim that Timor-Leste was inevitably part of ASEAN while it was forcefully occupied by Indonesia (1975–2002) (Wuryandari, 2011), an issue that soon disappeared from ongoing discourses, considering that ASEAN never supported Timor-Leste's independence due to its fear of the growing communism in the region as a result of the Cold War era (Hooi, 2019).

2.1.2   1998: Conference of the National Council for Timorese Resistance,
          Peniche, CNRM Becomes CNRT

Following the chronology of Timor-Leste's quest to become a member of
the grouping, the country's representatives emphasized their aim to join the
grouping again in 1998 at the Peniche Conference of the National Council
for Timorese Resistance (Interview PA2, September 2018). This conference is
understood as the very first marker in building ties with ASEAN in an expected
post-independence context. Due to Timor-Leste's claim for freedom in 1998,
the small country decided to strengthen its ties to several global players. The
conference was settled in a document named *Magna Carta*, which outlined the
constitutional orientations of the future independent state with agreements
on national unity. 1998 is also significant due to other relevant action taken
by Timor-Leste. As the country was moving closer freedom from Indonesian
forces, Timor-Leste's aim was to establish and strengthen its links to the global
realm. Because this was a turning point of core relevance for the small coun-
try, its apparent links to a variety of global actors also became an obstacle to
its future aspirations of joining ASEAN (e.g.: CPLP, SPF, APEC), which opens
up the complex relations between the region and Timor-Leste (Neves, 2017;
Interview CS2, October 2018; Interview PA1, September 2018; Interview CS4,
September 2018).

2.1.3   2002: Restoration of Independence

When Timor-Lest finally won its freedom from the Indonesian occupation,
José Ramos-Horta expressed the country's goal of officially applying for the
membership in 2001 (first election in the country), which was denied by the
grouping. In the earliest days of Timor-Leste's independence, starting in 2002,
ASEAN's concerns were drawn towards the country's weak political and eco-
nomic foundation, its lack of human resources and financial issues (Neves,
2017).

2.2   *Constellation 2: Multiple Strategic Relationships* (*2001, 2002, 2005*)

Constellation 2 looks at the timeframe of 2001, 2002 and 2005, which reveals
Timor-Leste's multiple strategic relationships, which we have outlined as the
core turning points of the country's desire to belong to different global play-
ers at the same time. Considering arguments from both the online media
(Seixas, Mendes & Lobner, 2019) and CRISEA interviews (2018), this is seen as
one of the main objections by ASEAN to admitting Timor-Leste, considering
the country's 'multiple strategic relationships' in a global context (CPLP, APF,
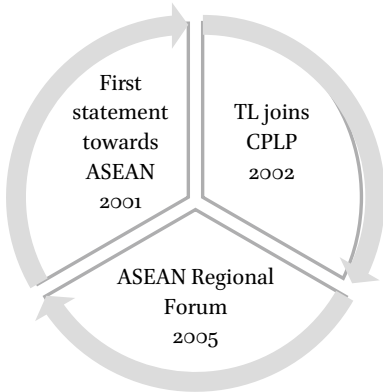China, Commonwealth). Because these arguments are of great relevance for

FIGURE 2.2
Multiple strategic relationships

understanding the complex relationship between Timor-Leste and ASEAN, we will make a more in-depth analysis of these facts in a later section. What we want to demonstrate through this constellation is that Timor-Leste has had a mixed bag of partnerships since the early days of its independence, understanding that as one of the newest nations of the 21st century it had to strengthen its bilateral and multilateral relations on a global scale. Nevertheless, as our data reveal, these multiple links are at the root of objections from ASEAN, concern about a variety of disadvantages arises (Neves, 2017).

2.2.1   2001: First Official Statement from Timor-Leste on Its Goal of Membership

José Ramos-Horta, spokesman for the Timorese resistance during the Indonesian occupation (1975–1999) and former president (2007–2012), first expressed the country's wish to become the 11th member state of ASEAN in 2001. From this point onwards, the application was officially set in motion and the ties between Timor-Leste and ASEAN began to strengthen (Interview CS5, October 2018; Interview PA3, September 2018).

2.2.2   2002: Joining the CPLP

In 2002, Timor-Leste became an official member of the transregional organization, the CPLP (Community of Portuguese Language Countries). This is closely related to the country's links to its former Portuguese colonizers, who withdrew in 1975. Several connecting indicators remained in Timor-Leste after decolonization, such as language, cultural aspects, political and religious patterns. These links have remained, not least because of the contrast between the Portuguese presence in the country and the brutal Indonesian occupation

that followed (Neves, 2017). As Portugal is often portrayed as a brother rather than an enemy, joining CPLP was just another facility for strengthening the relationship between both parties (Interview CS5, October 2018; Interview PA1, September 2018).

2.2.3   2005: ASEAN Regional Forum

In 2005, Timor-Leste officially joined the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which was meant to smooth its path towards the membership. Its membership of the ARF showed that ASEAN was willing to share its knowledge and structures with the small country in order to slowly enable participation and preparation for full membership. This was the first official move by ASEAN to start including Timor-Leste on its agenda (Hooi, 2019).

2.3   *Constellation 3: Clash of Egos (2006, 2007, 2010)*

In Constellation 3, we highlight the events which took place inside the country and that influenced the approach to ASEAN, with certain key figures in the forefront operating with very divergent strategies. Starting with the political crisis of 2006, we go on to explore the triangle mandate between José Ramos-Horta, Xanana Gusmão and Zacarias da Costa (President, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, 2007–2012). Another relevant indicator regarding the procedure for admission to ASEAN is the 'Xanana intervention' in 2010, which might have held back the admission in the first place, as can be seen from the field data (Interview PA2, September 2018; Interview CS4, October 2018).
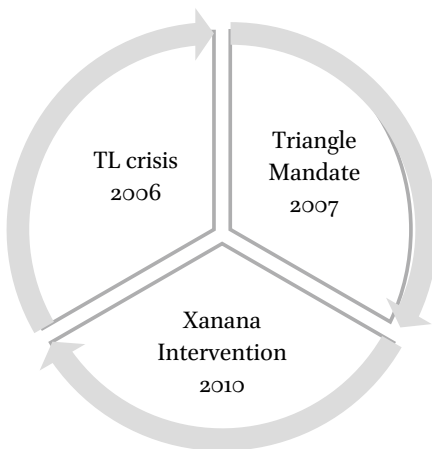

FIGURE 2.3
Clash of egos

2.3.1   2006 Crisis

In 2006, Timor-Leste was marked by a profound political crisis which took on civil war-like patterns, overwhelmingly shattering the country's peace and stability (Doug & Habib, 2010). As the small country was in the very early stages of independence, state formation and sovereign political self-positioning, a variety of internal controversies and disputes between its leaders remained unresolved (Interview CS3, October 2018; Interview CS6, October 2018). Continuous government shifts and ongoing negotiations resulted in a clash in the 2006 election, which heavily influenced the country's further stability, recognition and political consent. As this collapse influenced Timor-Leste's reputation abroad, it comes as no surprise that ASEAN put the country's stability and readiness for joining the grouping under harsh criticism. As we understand this as a relevant turning point in Timor-Leste's relationship with ASEAN (and the world), we propose that it had a profound impact on the membership procedure at that time.

The 2006 crisis seems to be an ever-present shadow in the context of the candidacy of Timor-Leste in terms of political instability (Interview PA4, 2018). This also strongly impacted the political situation and the period afterwards, as well as the ensuing political triangle mandate of 2007. The crisis itself represents a clash of egos, as a result of a variety of conflicting and contradictory interests throughout this period.

2.3.2   2007–2012: Triangle Mandate

In the 2007–2012 period, there was a relevant triangle mandate between José Ramos-Horta (former president), Xanana Gusmão (former prime minister) and Zacarias da Costa (former minister of foreign affairs). This triangle had a major influence on the ASEAN application process between 2007 and 2012. As our data show, a clash of interests between these three figures was in the forefront of political discourses (closely analyzed in Chapter 3 of this book). As we later refer to this issue as a Clash of Egos, we need only take a brief look at what this may mean to the ASEAN membership procedure: as there has been a lack of consistency and common strategies among the country's leaders, the membership was not approached as a shared interest. Moreover, the dispute between 'big men' within a patronage and clientelism system has been in the foreground (Aspinall, Scambary, Hicken & Weiss, 2018). This means that none of the political leaders of Timor-Leste was establishing a joint strategy to become a member of ASEAN. Rather, each one was driving their own dynamics or remaining in the spotlight, as was very clearly seen at the inauguration of the IDN (national defense institute) in 2007, where Xanana Gusmão, as the former

prime minister, spoke of Timor-Leste's unpreparedness for joining the group-ing, contrary to what had been agreed between José Ramos-Horta, Xanana Gusmão and Zacarias da Costa. As this scenario demonstrated instability and uncertainty in Timor-Leste about ASEAN, the grouping raised its concerns on the readiness and willingness of the country to join. This was replied to with uproar by Gusmão's colleagues of that time, considering that his move had not been expected through former preparations (Interview PA2, September 2018; Interview CS3, October 2018). Nevertheless, shortly after Xanana's negative speech at this conference (Timor-Leste government, 2012), he traveled through Timor-Leste and expressed his personal aspirations towards join the grouping. As this set of events led us to interpret in Chapter 3, there was a clear strategy or self-positioning in a big man society context.

Each individual was following their own path in the admission procedure without proper cooperation with the others. Therefore, by following the inter-nal political inconsistencies towards the membership, we can understand this period as having had a major influence on the first official application that was made, still during this period (2011). In light of such significant internal inconsistencies, the concerns of ASEAN about the readiness of Timor-Leste were reinforced, bearing in mind that the country's own leaders were appar-ently unable to establish a common ground (Neves, 2017; Interview CS6, October 2018; Interview PA1, September 2018; Interview PA2, October 2018).

2.3.3   2010: Xanana Intervention (Inauguration of the IDN)

This clash is clearly related to the 2006 crisis when Mari Alkatiri was forced to resign his political position. Xanana Gusmão was happy as long as he could maintain final decision-making power, which he used to have under the national unity government (Kingsbury, 2017). Following this political strug-gle and recent discontent in terms of electoral processes – the 'clash of egos' (Kingsbury, 2017) – objections by ASEAN to admitting Timor-Leste were rein-forced. Considering these internal disputes which were predominant in the period of the triangle mandate between Gusmão, Ramos-Horta and Costa, an interview extract from our empirical data clearly demonstrates this argument:

> But as I said, going back to Timor – and let's call things by their name […] – I remember that at one of the meetings with the Prime Minister, Xanana Gusmão, he is reputed to have said – I believe it was in a national defense program or something – would have said even in front of ambas-sadors who believed in Timor, that Timor was not prepared and should wait a few years and not come immediately. This was a shock. I remem-ber that after I left, I immediately spoke to the President of the Republic,

> Ramos-Horta and I told him that I cannot ask myself something that not everyone believes. And I know he also spoke in very harsh terms about the fact that we were not well-coordinated. (Interview CS3, October 2018).[1]

In this interview extract, one of our respondents referred to the internal political discontents within the afore mentioned triangle of interests regarding the ASEAN membership process (due to which the frontrunner, Gusmão, did not back the submission of the candidacy). The interview content reveals the dissatisfaction about Gusmão's comments on the country's readiness to join the grouping at that time. This clash leads to the interpretation that internal discontents in the country are part of the reason for Timor-Leste's exclusion from the grouping (further analysis in Chapter 3 of this book).

2.4   *Constellation 4: ASEAN – a Stop-start Process*

In Constellation 4, we look at the sequence of events that occurred regarding ASEAN in the context of Timor-Leste's membership application, which first took place officially in 2011. The Constellation 4 period stretches specifically from 2007 to 2016. Throughout this section, we posit that, for Timor-Leste, ASEAN membership is a stop-start process, a 'now you see me, now you don't game', for both the regional grouping and the small country itself. In the course of our data analysis, this sort of game became clear to us, which is why we will analyze this in further steps, trying to uncover the rationale and the reasons behind it. This section will be divided into two parts for a clearer understanding of the events, influences and strategies behind it.

2.4.1   Timor-Leste: Formal Requirements Addressed without Real Engagement (2011, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2019)

As we understand that there is clear ambivalence towards the admission procedure in the forefront, both from ASEAN and Timor-Leste, we will look more closely at our qualitative data from the field. Based on interviews that we undertook in Timor-Leste, several events came to light which reinforce an ambivalent approach to the grouping by the small country's leaders (lack of substance and engagement). Here, we directly link to Constellations 2 and 3, where we have outlined the interpretation of multiple strategic relationships and a clash of egos. Constellation 4 serves to understand our interpretation of a game between Timor-Leste and ASEAN with several tactics and strategies on both sides, as we are presenting the 'hard facts' first. We ask if this can be

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1   The interview content was originally presented in Portuguese and was translated into English by the authors for an international audience.
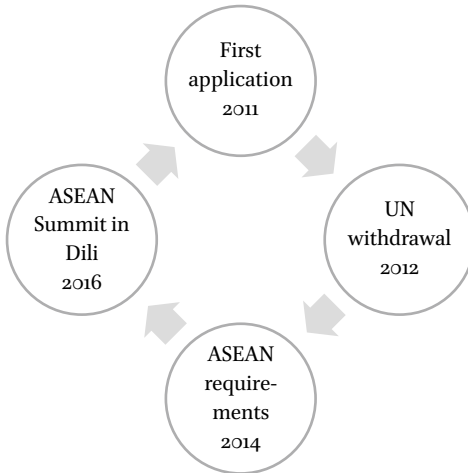
FIGURE 2.4
Formal requirements, no engagement

understood as a reason for not officially committing to Timor-Leste, while also perhaps being an invisible partner in this game.

2.4.1.1   *2011: First Official Application*
In 2011, the first official membership application was submitted by Timor-Leste, while Indonesia – its greatest supporter (as represented in the media) – was chairing ASEAN (ASEAN Secretariat News, 2012; Interview CS2, October 2018; Interview PA6, September 2018; Interview Y, December 2018). The admission was delayed due to several outstanding principles and requirements, which determined that Timor-Leste was not yet ready to join the grouping.

2.4.1.2   *2012: Full Withdrawal of the United Nations*
With respect to the many improvements in the country in the following years, 2012 can be seen as a milestone in Timor-Leste's development as an independent nation. It was the year of the United Nations Security Council agenda and, as a result of continuous stability and peace, the full withdrawal of the UN from Timor-Leste (ASEAN Secretariat News, 2012).

2.4.1.3   *2014: Fulfillment of Official ASEAN Requirements*
2014 is another important reference for internal country achievements. Timor-Leste had officially made all the outstanding preparations which were required to become a member of the regional grouping, such as the establishment of embassies in all ten ASEAN member states, being located in the geographical area of Southeast Asia, the ability and willingness to carry out the

obligations, official commitment to the grouping, the agreement to be bound by the ASEAN charter, attending ASEAN ministerial meetings (and summits), participating as an observer at ASEAN meetings, acceding to all (bureaucratic) treaties and agreements of the grouping, the contribution of one million dollars to the ASEAN Development Fund as a "membership fee", etc. (Strating, 2017; Hananto, 2017; Aquino, 2017; Jacque, 2017; Ortuoste, 2019). There are a number of documents attesting to the current status of these preparations by Timor-Leste, which differ greatly from the preparations that were made by Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam when they joined the grouping in the 1990s (Pinheiro, 2014; Wright, 2017).

2.4.1.4   *2016: ASEAN Summit in Dili*

Following this, in 2016, the ASEAN summit was held in Dili, due to concerns about doing so in Laos (Chair of ASEAN, 2016). Due to major instability, conflict and the generally precarious situation in Laos, the meeting could not be held there.

2.4.1.5   *2019: Security Pillar Assessment by ASEAN Fact-finding Mission*

The Sixth Meeting of the ASEAN Coordinating Council Working Group (6th ACCWG) held in Jakarta on 5th of December 2017 recommended that each of the ASEAN pillars should form a fact-finding mission team. Following this recommendation, a questionnaire was prepared by Timor Leste's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to assist the fact-finding mission team from the APSC pillar to assess the readiness of Timor-Leste to become a member of ASEAN. The questionnaire was divided into five sections, which were related to: a) APSC political cooperation requirements; b) APSC security cooperation activities; c) External relations issues; d) Human rights initiatives; and e) Legal cooperation. The year before, Timor-Leste's Council of Ministers had established an Inter-Ministerial Technical Working Group for ASEAN Accession, which included the creation of a Directorate-General for ASEAN Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation to "coordinate and lead the accession process" and "focal points" in the other ministries. A technical plan was defined with two main criteria: 1) The Timor-Leste ASEAN Mobilization Plan (TLAMP) which is a guide to ASEAN agreements that Timor-Leste will be party to and 2) The Critical Elements for Accession (CEA) in order to implement 'critical' ASEAN agreements.

The assessment took place between September 2–4, 2019. Meanwhile, at the ASEAN Summit in Bangkok (November 2–4, 2019), Timor-Leste's Ambassador to Thailand mentioned and praised the fact that the first assessment had

been carried out under the Thai Presidency of ASEAN.[2] Chindawongse, the Director-General in charge, stated that the assessment of the social and economic pillars should take place in 2020 and after that a further assessment of the candidacy would be carried out, without any giving any clear guarantees (ASEAN Summit, 2020).

At the 9th ASEAN Coordinating Council Working Group Meeting (March 5, 2020), chaired by the Vietnamese Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, it was stated that Vietnam and ASEAN "would continuously support and share experience with Timor-Leste in preparation for its admission to the bloc, as well as assessing the country's capability and readiness"[3] (ASEAN.org, 2020). Considering that the economic and sociocultural pillars have still not been assessed and bearing the Covid-19 pandemic context in mind, it seems that the issue will be eternalized.

2.4.2   ASEAN as a Game Changer (1990s/2007, 2014, 2015)

As we have tried to demonstrate throughout the previous sections, ASEAN has gone through several turning points up to the present day on the subject of Timor-Leste membership, which we will, in this section, try to understand through the grouping's strategies within this 'game'.

When ASEAN was founded in 1967 (by Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines), the Bangkok Declaration announced the geographical location of member states within the SEA region as the core condition for joining the grouping. ASEAN is often portrayed as a former elite counter-revolution project during the cold war (Jones, 2010). The grouping's policy of non-interference shows certain ambivalent structures and has been amply discussed by various actors, which we will elaborate on in the following pages.

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2   Chairman's Statement at the 35th Summit, https://www.asean2019.go.th/en/news/chair
    mans-statement-of-the-35th-asean-summit-bangkok-nonthaburi-3-november-2019
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    the successful convening of the APSC Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) to Timor-Leste from
    September 3–5, 2019, and encouraged the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and ASEAN
    Sociocultural Community (ASCC) Pillar to expeditiously conduct their respective FFMs. We
    also noted Timor-Leste's strong political will to become a member of ASEAN and reaffirmed
    our commitment to continue supporting Timor-Leste's development through capacity build-
    ing assistance, at the bilateral and regional levels".
3   See https://www.asean2020.vn/xem-chi-tiet1/-/asset_publisher/ynfWm23dDfpd/content
    /viet-nam-asean-support-timor-leste-in-membership-application, accessed on April 30, 2020.
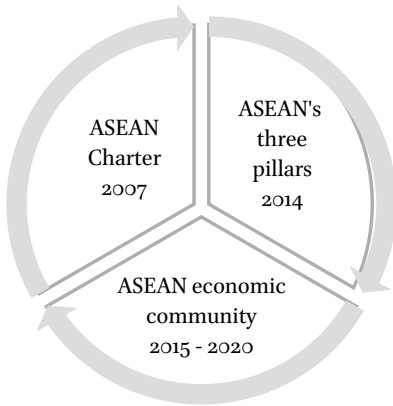
FIGURE 2.5
ASEAN as a game changer

2.4.2.1   ASEAN *Charter* (2007)

The first indicator of this constellation is the establishment of the ASEAN Charter in 2007, which established new requirements for joining the grouping. The official framework of the charter includes being located in the region recognized geographically as Southeast Asia, acceptance of the new member by all ASEAN states, the commitment to be bound by and to respect the principles of the charter and the ability and willingness to assume all the responsibilities inherent to the obligations of being a member (ASEAN charter, 2007). As mentioned earlier, these requirements are in sharp contrast with the admission of CLMV in the 1990s, which was achieved a few weeks after the application and in much worse condition than Timor-Leste (Hooi, 2019). The inclusion of CLMV, however, is often represented through another strong narrative: the aim of ASEAN to become a stronger counter to the rapid geopolitical and economic growth of China (Leviter, 2010; Chin, 2017; Tobin, 2019; Ortuoste, 2019).

2.4.2.2   Three ASEAN *Pillars* (2014)

Furthermore, ASEAN added new layers to Timor-Leste's bid, which include the establishment of three pillars: the sociocultural, political and economic dimensions, which every member state has to fulfill. This was added at a late stage of the country's application, in 2014 to be more precise, which can be seen as another external turning point in the regional grouping. Unlike the admission of CLMV in the 1990s, ASEAN is facing the pressures of the regional economic agenda, which may be understood as a reference to the different treatment of Timor-Leste's membership bid. The inclusion of CLMV is often portrayed as a strategy against China's influence in the SEA region (Egberink & Van der Putten, 2011; Ortuoste, 2019; Tobin, 2019). Finally, the small country would be the first country to accede to the ASEAN Charter, if admitted.

Moreover, as outlined above, the inclusion of the CLMV is broadly seen as a strategy against China's influence on the SEA region (Ortuoste, 2019; Tobin, 2019).

2.4.2.3   *2015–2020: ASEAN Economic Community*
Following this turning point and the implementation of new conditions, the ASEAN economic community was set up with a roadmap. This roadmap guided the aim of achieving the economic integration of ASEAN 2015–2020. Due to this new vision of the grouping, Singapore expressed concerns about approving Timor-Leste as the 11th member state due to the fear of 'unraveling' ASEAN's economic objectives (Mohan & Tsai, 2011). The ASEAN plan for 2015–2020 raised several concerns about the possible hindrance of such regional economic plans by Timor-Leste's inclusion (given the country's low profile in economic terms and its possible dependence on foreign aid) (Southgate, 2015).

As this chronological representation is aimed at demonstrating, the issue of Timor-Leste's membership is marked by several internal and external inconsistencies and 'silent disputes'. For a more in-depth understanding of these problems, in further steps we will build on a theoretical international relation framework for embracing the final discussion.

3   Analytic Eclecticism and Timor-Leste's Foreign Policy Hybridism

Following this representation of chronological 'hard facts' on the relationship between Timor-Leste and ASEAN from the outset (1975), we will now delve into this issue using an analytical interpretation approach, trying to grasp the greater 'invisible' complexities in a cross-cut.

Concerning this realm of interwoven dimensions, Sil and Katzenstein (2010) made a very interesting proposal, in fact a method of combining several interpretations 'beyond paradigms' which they called the *analytic eclecticism*, regarding the adequacy of IR theories about integration in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, Rebecca Strating (2019) underlines the importance of the variations in historical, geopolitical and institutional contexts for understanding the foreign policy options and modulations "necessary for understanding Timor-Leste's efforts to secure the state". A comprehensive understanding of these options is only possible through analytic eclecticism, which pragmatically offers a broader theoretical framework for a multidimensional dynamic.

As we have tried to demonstrate through the chronological facts in the previous section, the admission of Timor-Leste stresses the discussion of the difference between geographical and political limits in Southeast Asia. In a way,

the compromise solution would be to choose realist constructivism: a small state with an aspirational foreign policy, trying to reinforce an identity where multiple partnerships and the pressure from neighbors are a reality that is difficult to summarize (Barkin, 2003). Hard socialization in which the identity is being forged by this realistic game played by the global players involved and the still prevalent sovereignty standard of ASEAN (Sahin, 2014). A foreign policy is a way of establishing boundaries through interaction: in this sense, the state-building process has been conducted with the idea of balancing powerful Indonesia and Australia through integration into broader spaces (ASEAN and CPLP). In this scenario, and without a positive reaction to the candidacy from ASEAN, China appears as a redemptive power, providing aid and trade (Timor-Leste joined the Belt and Road Initiative through an agreement between the governments of the two countries and a member of the Asian Infrastructure Bank and Macao Forum).[4]

The cohesion of ASEAN is challenged by internal and external dynamics whose effects regarding integration seem to exclude the admission of a small and fragile country like Timor-Leste from its priority agenda. The region itself can be understood as a composite union or a sum of differences (with Singapore, for instance, as the naysayer). This set of differences does not separate the game of global players within the region and the difficulties of integrating a new country (Timor-Leste), whose 'unpreparedness' is, apparently, perceived as a threat to the whole region and a disintegrative centrifugal force.

Lee Kuan Yew made a point in his *Memoirs* that should be remembered: both Australia and Singapore agree on the fact that the US military presence is 'vital for maintaining the balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region and good for security and stability, without which the rapid economic growth of the region would not have taken place' (Lee, 2000, p. 387). Almost 20 years after, the statement is nevertheless still valid, bearing in mind the Chinese global and regional assertiveness and its competition with the US. Furthermore, as can be plainly seen in the discussions of recent years, Indonesia is not willing to choose a side.

In this sense, regionalism can be a mediator in the strategic conflict between the US and China, but the conditions for admitting a peripheral and 'hybrid' country have not yet been met. As we stated in this article, hybridity is a mark of Timor-Leste's foreign policy. Socialization has its limits, identities are being processed and theoretical eclecticism seems to fit the "ASEAN way".

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4 The Memorandum of Understanding on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) signed between the two countries in 2017 confirmed this orientation through the usual key words: "cooperation in connectivity building".

Timor-Leste's candidacy has not challenged the basic principles of the organization so far.

3.1   *ASEAN and Its Discontents*

As is clear throughout the chronological contextualization of Timor-Leste's admission procedure, ASEAN's inclusion-exclusion criteria are under a lot of discussion. And, as is widely referred to in online media (Seixas, Mendes & Lobner, 2019), the country has been meeting all the official obligations of ASEAN since 2014. Not only is the small state part of the geographical region of Southeast Asia, it also shares its cultural heritage, has established embassies in all the ASEAN countries, built the necessary infrastructure to host ASEAN summits, has a diplomatic presence at general meetings and continues to adapt according to the requirements of the grouping. Delegates and leaders of the country regularly attend internships and training courses with the ASEAN Secretariat. Human rights, freedom for citizens and following the principles of democracy are just a few of the indicators that Timor-Leste is already achieving, and, in some way, are "threatening" the average standards (Arifuddin, 2019; Thai PBS World, 2019).

ASEAN's focus on economic growth can only be understood as a neoliberal approach in which workers are being exploited, protection is lacking and the social dimension within regional integration dynamics is non-existent. This reveals the structures of the 'ASEAN-way': the grouping's leaders seem to be in negotiation with elite-centered parties only, followed by a particular strategy of development undertaken by big business partners who perpetuate control over the region's resources (Jones, 2009; Collins, 2016; Civil Society Report Manila, 2016; Dorman & Olsen, 2019).

Hence, our data plainly show that there are mixed feelings regarding the candidacy. It is clear that the ASEAN sense of consistency is marked by the famous "ASEAN way" procedure, which is seen as a guarantee of sovereignty but also as a constraint. There is a visible intra-ASEAN divergence among member countries (Dorman & Olsen, 2019). The regional grouping is facing new challenges and should perhaps reconsider previous membership admissions when adhering to the obligations of the official charter. On an intra-ASEAN scale, there are further ongoing mixed responses from the member states regarding the admission of Timor-Leste, with a lack of internal regional transparency (Seixas, Mendes & Lobner, 2019). Supposed opponents of the membership (such as Singapore) focus on the fragile financial sector in the country and its possible instability, which can both be considered as weak arguments when compared to the situation in Myanmar, Cambodia or Laos, for example. Timor-Leste does not have any financial debt with other countries, it does

show a capacity for solving political problems (2017 and 2018 elections) while also applying the rule of law since its first application in 2011 and has the ability to contribute to the region with its experiences in peace, democratic structures and stability (CSO Report, 2016; Chongkittavorn, 2019).

3.2   *Broadening the Analysis: A Clash of Interests between Global Players?*

Being a small island state, it is most convenient for Timor-Leste to expand its ties and relations through all possible bilateral and multilateral platforms. As Timor-Leste already belongs to the G7+, the possibility of the country belonging to every other political relevant grouping remains high. A certain ambiguity comes into play when considering the influence of other global players in the region and their relations with the small country. The political process in its various dimensions, political challenges and the geopolitical context regarding global players such as the USA, China, Australia, CPLP (and others) has to be considered in its influence and impact on the inclusion of Timor-Leste by ASEAN as a crossroads situation of regional integration dynamics (Arifuddin, 2019; Hooi, 2019; Ortuoste, 2019). This argument as often arises as an advantage as a disadvantage: Timor-Leste 'playing' in several arenas (Interview CS4, October 2018; Interview Y, December 2018; Interview PA2, September 2018; Tobin, 2019).

3.3   *ASEAN Economic Priority Goals and Singapore's Opposition*

Internally, ASEAN seems to be in competition with the European market. Singapore, with its strong commitment to economic growth in terms of trade and market, is a core argument regarding the main interests and priorities of ASEAN (economic growth, elite-centered, big business partners). One of ASEAN's greatest goals seems to be free trade agreements for pushing its economy forward (Hui & Junio, 2015). Singapore is part of the core forces and influences within the region, with a number of import and export operations.

Following several narratives from Timorese state actors (CRISEA interviews 2018), Singapore's obvious concerns regarding Timor-Leste's lack of human resources and economic weaknesses were frequently referred to. So far, Singapore has not yet given the 'green light' for Timor-Leste to join the grouping, which is essential to admission (consensus of all ASEAN member states) (Interview PA4, September 2018; ASEAN Charter; Chongkittavorn, 2019). Language too remains a problem (Interview Y3, December 2018; Interview CS2, October 2018). Regionally, there is not very much support for Portuguese having been chosen as one of the official languages by the Timorese people, which is seen as a lack of commitment to the grouping,

following arguments from Singaporean state actors. The Portuguese language links Timor-Leste more to CPLP than to ASEAN – which seems to be an obstacle for the small country. Democratic structures in Timor-Leste are still seen as a threat to somewhat undemocratic structures in the SEA region, with its military/authoritarian regimes. Through its strong former Portuguese influence, Timor-Leste is very European-oriented, which results in a significant difference in internal structures/values when compared to countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand (Thun, 2018). Singapore only seems to be interested in economic growth and therefore Timor-Leste could be seen as a threat, due to its low profile in economic terms (Pandiyan, 2019). Finally, we continue by asking: Is Timor-Leste not 'Asian' enough to join the grouping?

4   Final Considerations: The Quest for "ASEAN Centrality"

The process for Timor-Leste's admission to ASEAN, as described above, highlights the complex issue of the grouping's centrality construction. This word – 'centrality' – as it was used for the first time in the ASEAN Charter, entered the grouping's lexicon and seems to point to ASEAN's "need to play a central role in multinational frameworks in the Asia-Pacific region" (Acharya, 2017). This buzzword has been used as a resource to underline ASEAN's driving force in the region. Deepening integration levels and involving external partners to strengthen cohesion and results has been the goal, despite the "taboo" issues, a category Timor-Leste's candidacy seems to fall under. In addition to this, other dynamics such as the BRI or the Indo-Pacific region are increasingly "central". This seems to be a turning point in the debate which asks if centrality is an *empty vessel* (Natalegawa, 2018) or if ASEAN is controlling its future in terms of new members, agenda setting and outcomes. The fact that ASEAN is keeping Timor-Leste in this kind of limbo seems to open the door to "foreign powers" which are becoming protagonists, namely China (Ortuoste, 2019) whose influence in and partnership with Timor-Leste is growing (Branco, 2019). In these circumstances, it seems that other centralities are coming to the fore and that the need to match politically sensitive topics with objective criteria for "enlargement" is delaying a decision and adding to the artificiality of the grouping's cohesion and consistency regarding the candidacy. This attitude seems to be an exaggerated reaction to Timor-Leste's "weaknesses" and an indicator for a set of sectoral reasons, such as political concerns, hidden agendas, economic inequality, which are a significant threat to "ASEAN centrality". We have focused closely on this issue through the internal turning points of Timor-Leste, where the lack of a strategy on ASEAN membership came to the

fore. As the small country has been positioned on ASEAN's threshold since 1975, the 'limbo' referred to above is marked by a set of interwoven complexities which continue to influence the final admission procedure.

We must therefore continue to analyze the fact that ASEAN is politically postponing a decision which, culturally, cannot be answered with a 'no'. In fact, both technical and political arguments demonstrating the fragile candidacy of Timor-Leste can also be used as a delaying tactic, which can be interpreted as the 'ASEAN way'. The unpreparedness regarding human resources and infrastructure or economic development, as well as the legal framework, are still strong arguments for postponing a decision and persuading the main opponents to maintain the status quo.

In addition to this, ASEAN has individual voices and, seemingly, a core speaker – Singapore – which express not only 'general' doubts but also strong political opposition. This position contrasts with the 'friendly' posture of other countries, e.g. Indonesia and the Philippines, which adopted a benevolent attitude towards the integration. Of course, the strategic layer can offer a plausible explanation for Singapore's position: Singapore's alliance with the US and Australia and Chinese assertiveness in the region in the context of increased Sino-American tensions can be interpreted as a way of pressuring Timor-Leste to remain in the uncertainty of an alignment, especially in the context of the growing Chinese influence in the country.

Finally, we propose that the limits of the 'ASEAN Way' are not being tested, as it is a very common practice in several international organizations (the European Union included) to make unanimous decision on the admission of a new member state. The 'ASEAN way' has to be seen as a decision-making method which does not admit different positions regarding the cultural perception of the radical nature of the word 'no' and therefore, official exclusion, which would shed a negative light on the region. This would finally reveal that ASEAN is not willing to grow in terms of member states or diversity. It can be considered that Timor-Leste does not fit into the 'Asian profile' due to its European influences, its democratic system and human rights records.

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ASEAN and Timor-Leste: An Analysis of Decision-Making Dynamics

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1 Introduction

Timor-Leste made its first official application for membership of the ASEAN regional grouping in 2011. The application process is still ongoing and remains an unresolved case. There are several (ambivalent) facts and opinions around the admission and the repeatedly prolonged delay. This situation needs to be reviewed by the academic area, which wants to discover the reasons behind this process. Therefore, we have prepared an ordinal, open list with the possible reasons represented by data we collected. International institutionalism, or multilateralism, creates a framework of governance which greatly influences decision-making processes. Firstly, we propose that a second level communication is at stake and, secondly, latent cultural variables in the forefront. These latent variables, which support our text, emerged from in-depth discussions on the data, which highlight details of fieldwork and suggestions from literature.

We intend to pinpoint the elements of the process, for which we use a particular representation aid: flowcharts. Our aim is to provide an overview of the information circulating on this topic, whilst using management and decision-making methodologies to analyze it. We will present each set of opinions and facts on this case (found in our data), with a final flowchart as an aid for representing the political challenge and its mechanisms. Nevertheless, our conclusions cannot be taken as a static answer to the admission process, given the broad mixture of opinions and facts. It rather has to be understood as a contribution to looking at both strengths and weaknesses in the final admission to ASEAN, as well as the specificities of decision-making in a governance context. International organizations such as ASEAN or the EU, for example, are at the root of the transition from government (the pyramidal national paradigm) to governance (a polycentric transnational paradigm) (Hooghe & Marks, 2003).

Various (trans- and international) statements about why Timor-Leste is still not a member of ASEAN are circulating in several discourses. There are obvious inter-relational structures on a global scale regarding the process of admitting

Timor-Leste to ASEAN, which means clear involvement and influence from a variety of stakeholders with certain interests in the small country (political, strategic, economic and sociocultural). We intend to pinpoint mechanisms regarding the delay and to detect numerous levels or tiers on which the case of Timor-Leste's membership of ASEAN is based. This article relies on documents (online media, official reports, newspapers) which present statements from spokespersons of the 10 ASEAN member states, as well as Timor-Leste's civil society, political leaders, ambassadors and diplomats and lastly, interview content from fieldwork.

There is a general trend considered in online news media, which highlights the readiness of Timor-Leste to join the grouping (Seixas, Mendes & Lobner, 2019). The same trend can be seen in the data we gathered for this article, even though, as mentioned above, the issue of decision-making processes seems to be at stake, revealing the complexities of the governance patterns highlighted by this case. These complexities will be depicted and represented in flow-charts, as management aid and political science research tools. Through this, we achieved a sort of meta-analysis, showing that at least two levels of communication can be found when political decisions are at stake, as well as variables which have not been pinpointed in previous analyses.

Our data uncovered a similar two-step flow in decision-making as it was expressed through the theory of 'two-step flow communication' by Lazarsfeld & Henry (1968). The two-step flow theory precisely tackles the dimension of media and opinion makers. As is the case in our analysis, the audience that has to ultimately decide on the final admission is the governments of the current ten ASEAN member states, by consensus, which creates a problem of governance. It comes as no surprise that this audience is influenced by a few opinion makers/leaders of opinions, such as ministers of foreign affairs, their delegates, bureaucrats, etc. Thus, the positions of these delegates are a key element in the final decision. Within this two-step flow model, our data open up latent variables. A latent structure and its variables are considered in structuralism (from Carl Jung and including linguistics, anthropology and psychology) as well as by Foucault, regarding the long history of institutions and decision-making (Foucault, 1969). Recent articles try to tackle latent variables (for instance, emotions) beyond the regular decision-making models (bureaucratic, rational) in order to further elaborate on them (Damasio, 1994; Volz & Hertwig, 2016). However, there are other relevant variables apart from personal latent ones, such as emotions, which have to be taken into account within a new realm of decision-making processes in transnational multilateral platforms. Local Knowledge (LK), as well as institutional and civilizational patterns (Elias, 1978; Geertz, 1983; Fidler, 2001; Linklater, 2003 & 2016) can be

expected to occur in such a framework of polycentric governance, as Hooghe and Marks state (2003).

This framework is relevant for enveloping the meta-analysis we have undertaken. We used the meta-analysis in order to propose latent variables to make sense of the decision-making processes which go beyond the explicit available data. Hence, by using flowcharts as representations, we specifically want to tackle their complexities.

Methodologically speaking, we considered it relevant to separate the facts on the admission procedure from the opinions, categorizing these into two sections of the paper. We are tackling both a management technology policy and a research technique, specifically a representation aid or a decision-making support tool. A flowchart is a graphical representation of a problem-solving process, which gives a step-by-step procedure for a particular decision-making process through which the complexities of decision-making come to the fore (Goodin & Tilly, 2006). They gained in relevance in industry (mechanical engineering) in the early 20th century and were also used in the 1940s in the development of computer programs, as well as by Procter and Gamble for management procedures. Furthermore, flowcharts have recently come to be seen as 'helpful representations of political processes' in political science research (Goodin & Tilly, 2006, p. 19).

This chapter can be looked at as a form of storytelling in the case of Timor-Leste and ASEAN, for which we use precisely this 'contextual device' (flowcharts) in order to make sense of it: "Thus, one important element of getting context right consists of identifying, describing, and explaining the operation of explanatory stories" (Goodin & Tilly, 2006, p. 20). Flowcharts are graphical depictions of certain processes in order to understand top-down decision-making with every possible outcome of events represented. The next sections will present our data and will be followed by a discussion, including flowcharts.

2   Rationalities of the Admission Process

The process of Timor-Leste's admission to ASEAN is determined by a set of explicit arguments which support the rationality of the decision-making. Our research question is if there may be other latent variables beyond which support unrevealed rationalities. When talking about the existing rationality of the admission procedure, we refer precisely to the official requirements as well as a number of arguments which have been represented in existing documents since 2011 (Seixas, Mendes & Lobner, 2019).

However, we believe that there are other complexities in the forefront of the admission procedure, through which several diverging opinions and factors come into play. Therefore, we will take this variety into account when discussing the decision-making processes in greater detail.

Several sources provide a wide diversity of statements on the case of Timor-Leste, which we will analyze step by step in the following sections. Within this chapter, we will refer to some of the core statements we extracted from our previous online news media analysis for a deeper insight into how the admission procedure is seen by the public. Through this media analysis, we have discovered a common ground in the arguments in favor of the admission procedure. We have concluded that there is a generally held opinion among the public that Timor-Leste is ready to join the grouping, even though there is a certain ambivalence at stake. Therefore, we believe it is relevant to pinpoint this issue from the decision-making perspective.

According to the media, Timor-Leste is meeting all the requirements for ASEAN membership (The Economist, 2016; Strating, 2017; Hananto, 2017; Aquino, 2017; Jacque, 2017; Ortuoste, 2019; etc.). Not only is the small state part of the geographical region of Southeast Asia (as required by the ASEAN Charter), it also shares a cultural heritage, has established embassies in all the ASEAN countries (pursuant to the requirements), built the infrastructure to host ASEAN summits, has a diplomatic presence at general meetings and continues to adapt according to the requirements of the grouping (The Economist, 2016; Kupang, 2017). Delegates and leaders of the country regularly attend internships and trainings with the ASEAN Secretariat, which shows Timor-Leste's strong commitment to joining the grouping.

Several spokespersons and stakeholders argue that if the regional grouping fails to admit the country, it will show itself as being incapable of solving regional problems (ASEAN CSO Report, 2017). The case of Timor-Leste's membership of ASEAN is often seen as a unique regional problem and therefore seems barely to be understood in a broader international context. The small nation might appear to some to be an individual (unessential) case, but it must be looked at through its influential connection with several global players in a wider context.

In the next step, we will present the 10 categories which combine the data that we have gathered. We divided the categories into two sections: first, the facts, second, the opinions (also based on facts). Therefore, in the next section we will consider each of these facts and opinions in a precise analysis of the decision-making processes.

TABLE 3.1   List of categories

i.	Requirements met
ii.	Democracy and human rights
iii.	High freedom ranking
iv.	Poverty and low development
v.	Bilateral relations with China
vi.	Social and political instability
vii.	Economic burden for ASEAN
viii.	Singapore as opponent
ix.	Australia's interests
x.	CMLV as paradigm

TABLE 3.2   Facts on the admission procedure

i.	Requirements met
ii.	Democracy and human rights
iii.	High freedom ranking
iv.	Poverty and low development
v.	Bilateral relations with China

2.1   *Facts on the Admission Procedure*

In this section, we will provide a representation of the first five categories, which look at the facts about the admission procedure. As mentioned above, each category will be represented by a flowchart showing the decision-making process in the procedure for Timor-Leste to gain admittance to ASEAN.

2.1.1   Requirements Met

It is frequently argued (Hooi, 2017; Kupang, 2017; Ortuoste, 2019) that the country's alleged opponents (such as Singapore and Laos) say that the delays in Timor-Leste's admission is because of requirements of the ASEAN Charter that have not been met, with the following broad criteria:

– Location in the recognized geographical region of Southeast Asia
– Recognition by all ASEAN member states
– Agreement to be bound by the ASEAN Charter
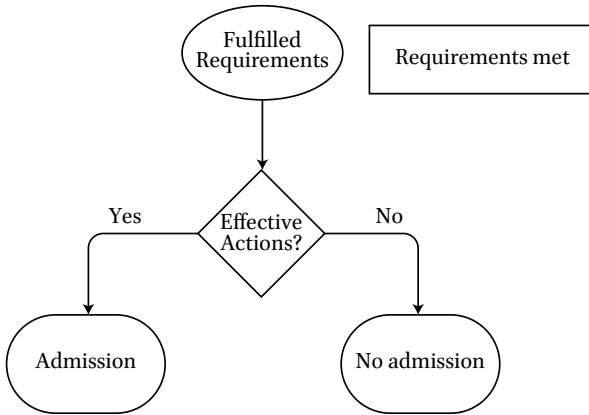– Ability and willingness to carry out the obligations of membership

FIGURE 3.1 Fulfilled Requirements

The ASEAN Charter covers membership obligations such as: attending ASEAN meetings and summits, participating as an observer at ASEAN meetings, acceding to all the treaties and agreements of ASEAN, preparation and improvement of capacities to meet the requirements of the ASEAN Free Trade Area (and ASEAN's collective free trade agreements with Dialogue Partners), establishing embassies in all ASEAN members, the contribution of USD 1 million to the ASEAN development fund, the commitment to attend all ASEAN meetings (as well as duties of hosting and chairing ASEAN meetings), participation in regional projects in the different sectors of cooperation and the contribution of an equal share to the annual operating budget of the ASEAN Secretariat (Yusof Ishak Institute, 2017; Siapno, 2014). Even though all of these requirements seem to have been addressed and met by Timor-Leste, the question remains if this process represents 'effective actions', or if it is intended to be a formal reply only (Interview PA1, September 2018).

2.1.2   Democracy and Human Rights
Based on this evidence, ASEAN shows a certain indecisiveness when it comes to regional issues (Hooi, 2017; Chin, 2018; Figueiredo, 2018). There seems to be a general intra-ASEAN conflict over its member countries. The regional grouping is facing new challenges, which impose a review of previous membership admissions, according to the obligations of the official charter (Jacque, 2017; ASEAN CSO Report, 2016.; Government of Timor-Leste, 2019). On an intra-ASEAN scale, there are further ongoing mixed responses from the member states regarding the admission of Timor-Leste. Laos and Singapore seem to show the strongest reservations about Timor-Leste's membership, even though these countries
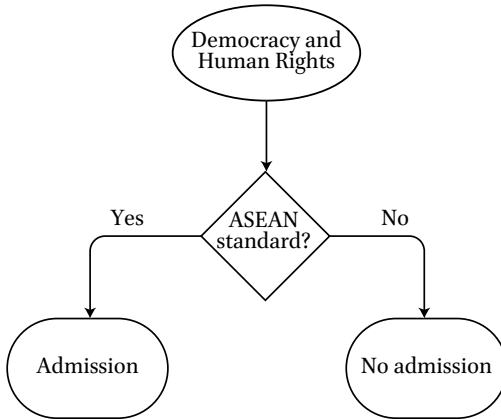
FIGURE 3.2   Democracy and Human Rights

do not make this statement official (ASEAN CSO Report, 2017; Strating, 2017; Thun, 2018). The evidence we have collected shows that the economic instability of Timor-Leste cannot be the only concern of its opponents. Therefore, Timor-Leste's strong *commitment to democracy* and *adherence to human rights* could be seen as a threat to a region which is clearly lacking in the implementation of these concepts and is marked by authoritarian/military regimes, which make the small country an 'outsider' within the grouping: "In Southeast Asia, being democratic can lose you friends". (Talesco, 2016; Interview PA3, September 2018; Hägerdal & Berlie, 2018, p. 102). Our data show even more evidence of such concerns among other member states: within ASEAN, there seems to be a shared mindset that Timor-Leste is not Asian enough, "In Asia, but not Asia" (Zuericher Zeitung, 2008). This may be understood through the extensive foreign influences and cooperation in/with Timor-Leste, such as from Portugal (and therefore the link to Europe/ CPLP), the UN, China, etc. (Interview PA5, September 2018). Furthermore, underlining the argument of Timor-Leste not being Asian enough, Singapore is concerned about the country's choice of Portuguese as its official language instead of English (which can be considered to be the official ASEAN language) (Interview CS2, October 2018). This leads back to the assumption that Timor-Leste is more closely linked to a European identity rather than being loyal to Southeast Asian values. As our data reveal, the grouping is apprehensive of a possible lack of commitment from Timor-Leste (Interview CS3, October 2018). Therefore, stakeholders emphasize that the Timorese political system is seen by several members of the region as closer to Portuguese/European standards, which leads to a rejection of internal structures/values in the context of the grouping's member

states (when compared to authoritarian political systems such as Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand) (Thun, 2018). Related to this, human rights, freedom for citizens and following the principles of democracy are just a few of the indicators where Timor-Leste is the forerunner. This leads to the assumption that beyond democracy and human rights, we can consider '*not being "Asian" enough*' to be a latent variable.

2.1.3   High Freedom Ranking

Curiously, in the 2018 Freedom in the World ranking (Freedom House, 2018), Timor-Leste is in a leading position in comparison with all ASEAN member states. The number of countries designated as Free currently stands at 88, representing 45 percent of the world's 195 countries and more than 2.9 billion people – or 39 percent of the global population. Timor-Leste's status improved from Partly Free to Free in 2018 due to fair elections and a peaceful transfer of power which enabled new parties and candidates to enter the political system (Freedom House, 2018).

TABLE 3.3   Freedom in the world ranking

Freedom in the World Report 2018	Political Rights	Civil Liberties	Freedom Rating	Aggregate Score	Freedom Status
Cambodia	6	5	5.5	28	Not Free
Laos	7	6	6.5	12	Not Free
Vietnam	7	5	6.0	20	Not Free
Thailand	6	5	5.5	31	Not Free
Brunei	6	5	5.5	28	Not Free
Myanmar	5	5	5.0	31	Partly Free
Singapore	4	4	4.0	52	Partly Free
Malaysia	4	4	4.0	45	Partly Free
Indonesia	2	4	3.0	64	Partly Free
Philippines	3	3	3.0	62	Partly Free
Timor-Leste	2	3	2.5	69	Free

Political Rights, Civil Liberties: **Aggregate Score:**
1 = most free   0 = least free
7 = least free   100 = most free

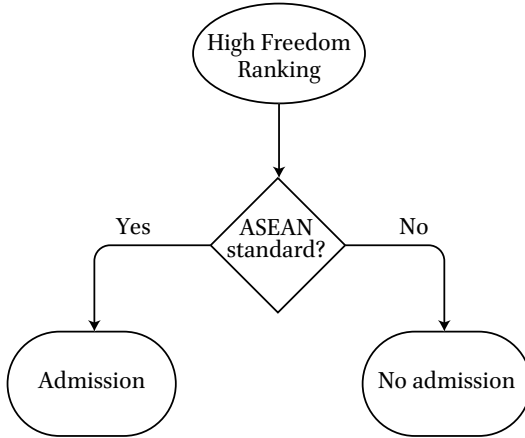SOURCE: HTTPS://FREEDOMHOUSE.ORG/REGIONS/ASIA-PACIFIC

FIGURE 3.3 High Freedom Ranking

Table 3.1, 'Freedom in the World Ranking' shows all the ASEAN member states, including Timor-Leste, and their current freedom status. This table, which was taken from the Freedom House scores, shows that Timor-Leste is the only country in the region with the freedom status of 'Free'.

Regarding the influence of International Organizations and NGOs (and the UN influence in particular) in terms of achieving a certain freedom status, it must be noted that in connection with the decision at the ASEAN Summit to postpone the application process for Timor-Leste to become part of the grouping, Civil Society Organizations in the region challenged the government of Timor-Leste and all ASEAN member states to review previous consultations with Timor-Leste society and prioritize its membership.

We may ask if freedom represents an ASEAN standard. In fact, stronger solidarity among the people of ASEAN beyond nationalities and identities in defense of human rights and equality should be one of the main priorities for the regional grouping (Patel, 2017; Kupang, 2017; ASEAN CSO Report, 2017).

2.1.4   Bilateral Relations with China

The ASEAN border problem must not be disregarded; Timor-Leste's membership is like a flashpoint between regional forces such as ASEAN and China (Chongkttavorn, 2011; Chin, 2017; Tobin, 2019; Ortuoste, 2019). Various international opinions show that the admittance of Timor-Leste to the regional grouping would strengthen ASEAN by making it a larger counterweight to Chinese dominance, not just in Southeast Asia but in an international context (Chin, 2017; Tobin, 2019; Ortuoste, 2019). Therefore, it is said that if ASEAN does not intensify its political and economic ties with Timor-Leste, China and India

will grow in terms of being an economic counter to the potential influence of the grouping itself (Ortuoste, 2019). This is feared by a number of members of ASEAN, which is why several nations (such as Indonesia and Thailand) support the acceptance of the membership with stronger enforcement (Chin, 2017; Sani, 2018). On the subject of Indonesia's impact regarding this case, it is important to note that the nation is a staunch supporter of statements against the Chinese and Indian forces in the Southeast Asian region, which leads us to a discussion of economic competition. Indonesia's support for Timor-Leste is seen as self-seeking interest in terms of investment opportunities and security from various perspectives. Financial profits from Timor-Leste's oil and gas reserves play a crucial role in this discussion (Strating, 2017). Here, a bridge can be built to the discussion of the connection between Timor-Leste and China. China, seen as a potentially dominant non-ASEAN actor in the region, has had a strong presence in the small country in recent years. Also maintaining a strong presence in nations of the CPLP (Community of Portuguese Language Countries) and through its relationship with the Portuguese-speaking community, not least through Macau (and its colonial past), China appears to be aiming to maintain and enhance the economic area, as well as its advantages in Timor-Leste (Tobin, 2019). It is no surprise that there is a long-term interest in economic development and the expansion of the trade market. Another common argument is that China itself staunchly supports Timor-Leste's development so that it can join ASEAN, deriving from its own interests in the membership (being more present in the ASEAN region). This could make China something of a Trojan horse in the region through Timor-Leste. In order to prevent greater Chinese influence, various spokespersons say that becoming a counterweight to China was one of the main reasons why ASEAN enlarged the grouping with the CLMV (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam) in the 1990s, which we will elaborate further on in later sections (Ortuoste, 2019).

It should be assumed that faced with China's influence in the Southeast Asia area, ASEAN cannot afford to lose its own impact, dominance and power over the region (Hutt, 2016). Singapore, as one of the biggest opponents to Timor-Leste's membership (Strating, 2017; Bangkok Post, 2017; Ortuoste, 2019), must be seen as one of the main antagonists, with obvious concerns about the impact of the Chinese force and Singapore's ties with the United States. At the time of its establishment as a regional organization in 1967, ASEAN received strong support from the United States to become an ally in the fight against communism (Jones, 2012, p. 96; Berlie, 2018, p. 84). Furthermore, regarding the delay of Timor-Leste's membership due to the bilateral context with China, it is essential to compare this to the case of Myanmar later on. It should be noted that Myanmar gained membership in the 1990s (CLMV); the country was
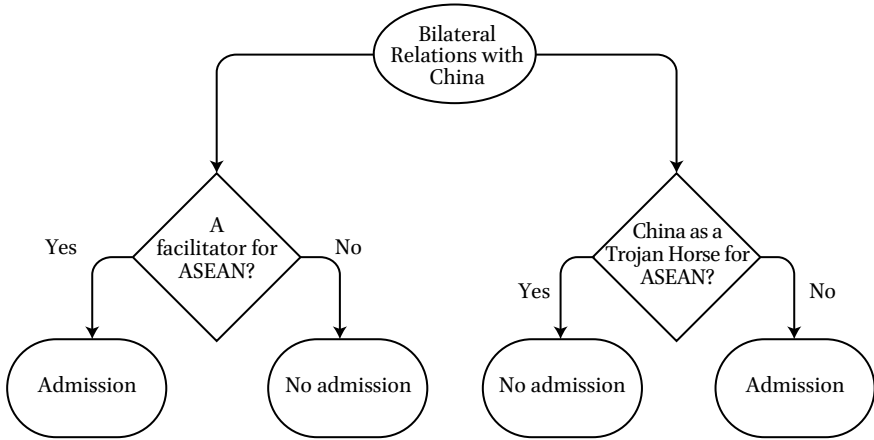
FIGURE 3.4 Bilateral Relations with China

accepted within one week of its first application without the need for any further preparation time/meeting requirements (Hooi, 2017). Following international fears of the rise of communism it can be assumed that the main reason for admitting Myanmar was to maintain pressure on China (Chongkittavorn, 2011; Jones, 2012) and to manage and subdue its influence on Southeast Asia. At that time, China clearly increased its investment in Timor-Leste (development aid was tripled, skyscrapers designed by Chinese architects were financed as gifts to the country, the country's infrastructure expanded) (Hutt, 2018; Hunt, 2019). As mentioned before, because of Beijing's diplomatic network in the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP), various members of ASEAN are concerned about China having the strength and power to influence Timor-Leste's society and market.

On the contrary, stakeholders say that Timor-Leste could act as a facilitator between China and ASEAN, as an intermediary force in terms of conflict management. In this regard, the various cooperation agreements Timor-Leste has with other organizations on an international scale are also referred to, with the justification that it is necessary to build bridges and to enable progressive dialogue structures (Interview PA2, September 2018).

2.1.5   Poverty and Low Development

According to the United Nations Human Development Report (2018), Timor-Leste is one of the poorest nations worldwide with some of the worst indicators in healthcare, education and human resources and is ranked at 132 (out of 151). Statistics show characteristics such as 50% child malnutrition under the age of 5, 60% of women who have experienced domestic violence and 50%

of people in a vulnerable employment situation. Furthermore, the country's ranking fell from 130 to 132 in two years (2016–2018) (Human Development Report, 2018). Half of the adult population is illiterate, nearly 37% live under the international poverty line (USD 1.25 per day) and food shortages are a daily reality. One of the key challenges faced by Timor-Leste is improving services in the education, public healthcare, nutrition and social protection sectors (Hanion, 2012). Furthermore, it is argued that there is still a lack of infrastructure for connecting communities to markets and that support for economic development to accomplish a non-oil economy is more than necessary. Furthermore, it is argued that overdependence on foreign aid is gradually becoming one of the main challenges (Lotova, 2016; McDonald, 2017, Hooi, 2017; Hunt, 2019). On the contrary, former president Ramos-Horta (2019) said that Timor-Leste had moved well ahead in human development and peacebuilding measures, (National Human Development Report, 2018; Ramos-Horta, 2019). According to this statement, there was robust growth in the economy, the government offered remarkable improvements and transparency, there was backing for an anti-corruption commission and the state offered humanitarian assistance to countries in need. However, ASEAN continues to claim (albeit unofficially) that Timor-Leste does not have the human capacity or economic resources to join. In addition, security issues and its excessive dependence on oil (90%) are considered as reasons for the delay (Strating, 2017; Dupont, 2017). As fieldwork interviews revealed, there is ambivalence in play: Timor-Leste is ready to join the grouping, but there is a great need for regional support (Interview PA5, September 2018; Interview Y2, December 2018). It seems that the latent variable in the forefront is the role of ASEAN itself.
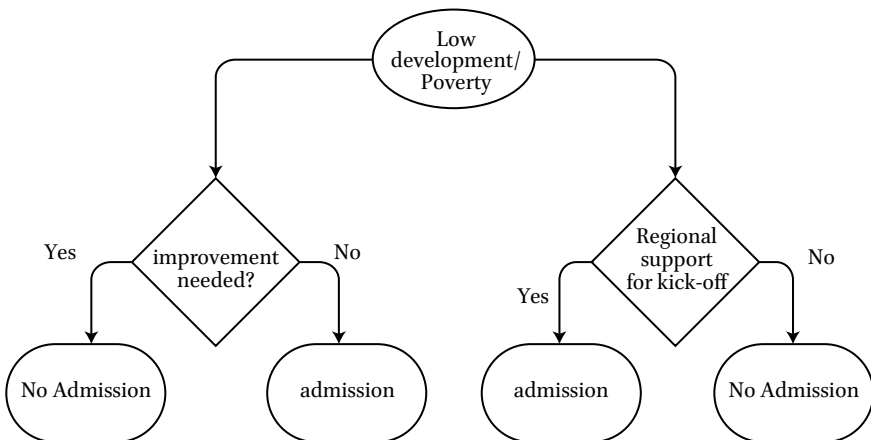

FIGURE 3.5   Low development/Poverty

As these five flowcharts (Figs 3.1–5) show, the issue can be simplified as follows: first, all requirements have been met. Second, Timor-Leste is officially an excellent advocate of democracy and human rights. On a second level, the question of whether this applies to the ASEAN standards could be asked. Third, the same situation is at issue with freedom. Fourth, the fact of poverty and low human development in Timor-Leste is an issue. Hence, the second level of this political decision rests on autonomous improvement by the small country or, conversely, regional support. Lastly, in terms of Timor-Leste's bilateral relations with China, this fact could also be looked at as a double bind: it could be either a problem or an opportunity for ASEAN.

As these data show, facts are not enough. Political decisions are always perspectives on facts, creating a second level of communication. Furthermore, it seems that such decisions are open to becoming double binds. In the following step, we will outline the five opinions which we extracted from our data, each one again ending with a flowchart.

2.2   *Opinions on the Admission Procedure*

In the following five categories – and their flowcharts – we try to tackle the opinions on the admission procedure which arose from our data. When looking at opinions as such, it is not as simple matter of categorizing them as a 'yes' for admission, or a plain 'no'. Several paths have to be considered, which will be discussed in more detail afterwards. However, to clarify our method, we have included questions in the opinion flowcharts in order to provide the necessary material to later discuss the cases.

2.2.1   Social and Political (in)stability

Timor-Leste officially gained independence in 2002. The small state has been making remarkable progress in terms of democracy and political stability. Regardless of this, there is constant concern about a potential 'failed state' among the ASEAN members. There is broad criticism of the lack of political and economic stability within the country (McDonald, 2017). Throughout

TABLE 3.4   Facts on the admission procedure

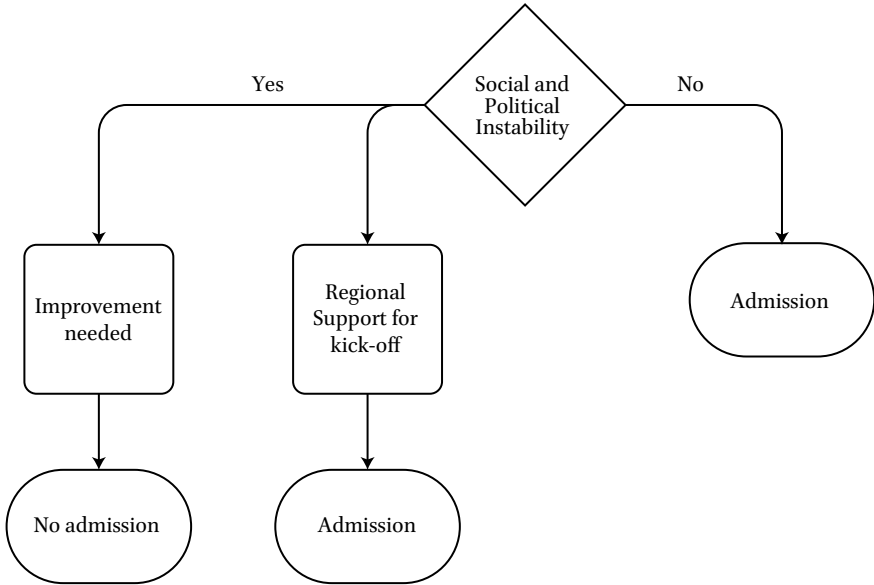| vi.	Social and political instability
vii.	Economic burden for ASEAN
viii.	Singapore as opponent
ix.	Australia's interests
x.	CMLV as a paradigm

FIGURE 3.6   Social and Political Instability

Timor-Leste's history of violence and foreign exploitation, and rather new sovereign status, certain stakeholders may fear ASEAN's growth being dragged down by virtue of this, that the country would pull growth in ASEAN and its current members down. The concerns about the economic issues such as independence from the oil revenue which is bound to stop sooner or later are used on an international scale to criticize the Timorese government. This is broadly seen as justification for the further ongoing delay. ASEAN consistently continues to argue that Timor-Leste does not yet have the necessary capacity to join the grouping. Poverty is still a major problem, unemployment remains high and the quality of education and healthcare is not noticeably improving, as human development reports show (Human Development Report, 2018). Rural areas have so far not (remarkably) been included in the distribution of resources and economically benefiting activities. The development of the domestic economy and investment in the country's people, according to several statements, must be improved (Guterres, 2019). Some of them outline the need for a policy change within the country to enable faster and more efficient domestic development. Furthermore, the stability of the Timorese leadership is still questioned by various observers. It is argued that with no stable government, there are fewer chances of gaining membership of ASEAN (Guterres, 2019; Strating, 2017). This calls into question the role ASEAN may play in this situation.

2.2.2   Economic Burden for ASEAN

Another frequent argument by Timor-Leste's opponents (Singapore) as to why the admission should be further delayed is that the small country is unable to meet the conditions of the regional grouping in terms of economic stability (Williams, 2015; Lotova, 2016; Maierbrugger, 2017). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, being one of the poorest countries worldwide with a critical past, the opponent's concerns may be about the possibility of ASEAN being held back in its growth and improvement. Financial aid for ASEAN countries and the share of the investment capacity would have to be reorganized, which is clear from arguments on the possible burden of Timor-Leste's economy on ASEAN (Haan, 2019). Also, it is said that the country's government has focused mainly on oil and has expanded this infrastructure in Dili rather than the social, educational and healthcare sectors (Interview Y3, December 2018). Opponents such as Singapore seem to argue that Timor-Leste shows a lack of capacity to host ASEAN meetings and is too dependent on foreign aid (the stability of the country's government remains in doubt) (Hutt, 2018; Haan, 2019; Hunt, 2019). This leads to the issue of potential profits for ASEAN through the admission of Timor-Leste. As a result of this, Myanmar made the official statement that Timor-Leste has a number of shortcomings which make its membership impossible (because it could overburden ASEAN, according to the data previously outlined). Could ASEAN provide the support Timor-Leste needs for economic improvement?
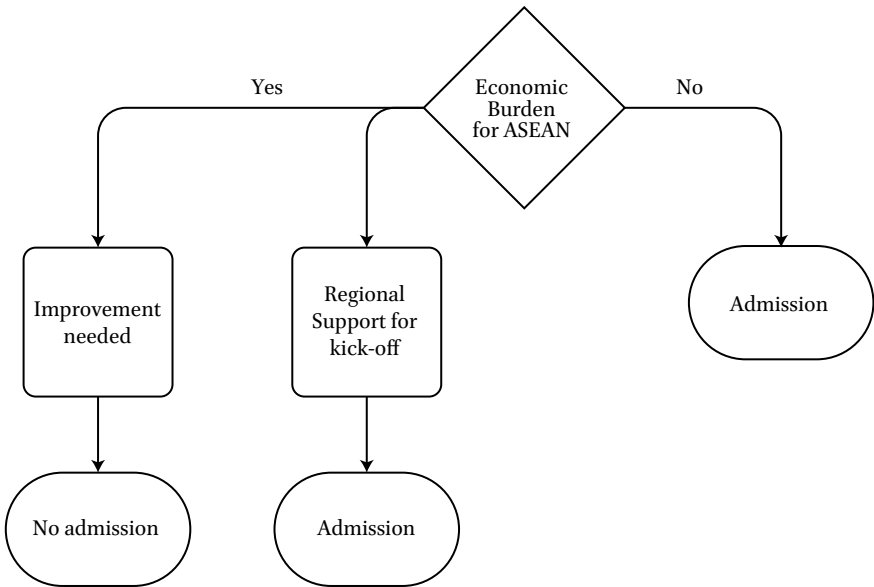

FIGURE 3.7   Economic Burden for ASEAN

2.2.3   Singapore as an Opponent?

Singapore is the most strident opponent to Timor-Leste's membership (Ortuoste, 2019). However, on the other side of the coin, the officially announced fear is described as groundless. Singapore's concerns seem to encompass the burden for ASEAN in political, financial and social terms (Ortuoste, 2019). The country's representatives believe that Timor-Leste will hinder ASEAN's further progress within the economic community, given its financial situation and alleged political instability. Furthermore, the official concerns also include the fear of a divide in ASEAN's progress in development matters, therefore, seen as an economic burden (Bangkok Post, 2019).

From another perspective, several representatives say that such concerns come exclusively from non-democratic countries and claim that Singapore's government itself has a lack of democratic structures (Maierbrugger, 2017). Singapore is ASEAN's wealthiest member, which leads us to the assumption that greed enters the picture when it comes to a possible division of financial resources. The bilateral relationship between Singapore and the United States was described as very strong by Obama at the ASEAN Summit in 2015 (ASEAN CSO Report, 2016). Regarding the strength of these ties, it should be considered that the concerns of Singapore are not just on a regional scale, but on an international one. As mentioned earlier: if Timor-Leste becomes part of ASEAN, there is a high likelihood of Chinese influence in the region, which would constitute a problem in terms of the unofficial (but obvious) weight of authority from the United States as one of the biggest antagonists to China, with further growing bilateral conflict, announced as a possible 'new cold war' (Kaplan, 2019). Representatives of Singapore seem to believe that Timor-Leste, after all, is not ready to absorb the challenges and complexities of ASEAN membership (Strating, 2017). This is demonstrated through the argument of a lack of human resources for economic integration and its substantial dependence on oil and gas revenue. Another common argument to justify Singapore's opinion is the human development index, which shows that 40% of Timor-Leste's population lives in poverty and healthcare and education indicators are among the worst in the region (as outlined above). Singapore points to careful consideration of support for Timor-Leste's admission to ASEAN (Bangkok Post, 2017). Another of Singapore's concerns seems to be the lack of commitment to ASEAN because of the strong ties to other organizations such as the CPLP, which leads back to the connection with China and, therefore, not being 'Asian enough' (Thun, 2018; Interview PA4, September 2018). The less grounded arguments include Timor-Leste being geographically seen as too far away from the ASEAN region (Bangkok Post, 2017; Strating, 2017). Nevertheless, it has to be considered that the expansion of the grouping would be a way to strengthen democratic structures and openness among its members.
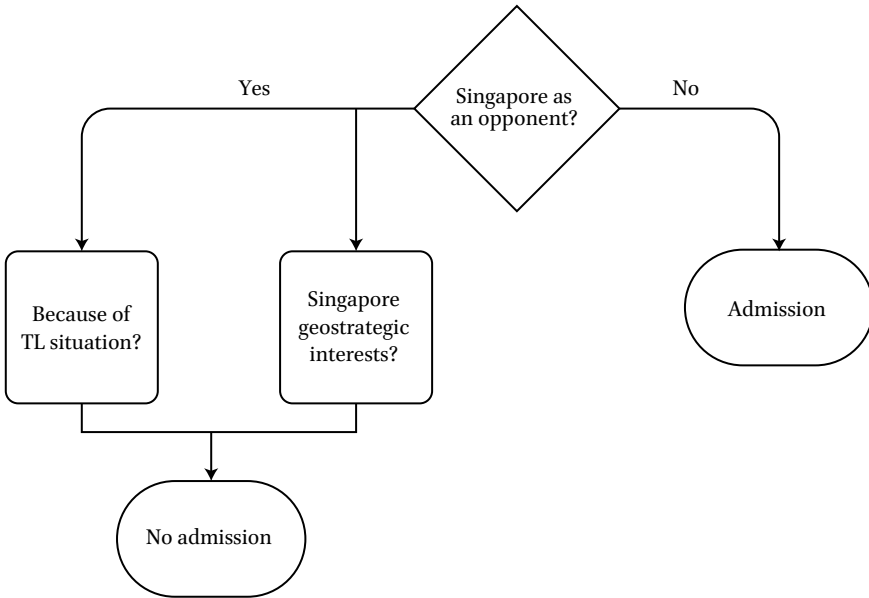
FIGURE 3.8 Singapore as an opponent

2.2.4   Australia's Interests

Australia as one of the largest negotiators with Timor-Leste on an economic scale (regarding its oil and gas revenue) could influence the membership procedure in several ways (Frost, 2013; Strating, 2017; Beetson, 2019). Apart from its strong presence in Timor-Leste throughout its critical past, Australia must be seen as a party that is strongly interested in the country's resources. Offering help after the independence in 2002 (in terms of language courses, volunteers in various sectors and bilateral, diplomatic dialogues) tends to give the impression of a very genuine act of support (Interview PA6, September 2018). According to this argument, these actions evolved from strategic measures: if Australia generously offered help in rebuilding the country, Timor-Leste might respond with fewer defenses in an agreement on the maritime boundary (Strating, 2017). Therefore, it must be said that these efforts in keeping an Australian presence in Timor-Leste are not primarily out of selfless dedication, but more with an interest in benefiting in terms of the oilfield in the Asia-Pacific region. The negotiations on the Greater Sunshine oilfield officially took place from March 2002 until 2019 and took on wider dimensions and caused more disagreements than were probably expected when the country regained its independence (McDonald, 2017; Strating, 2017; Beetson, 2019).

With the prospect of offering aid in order to reach a rapid agreement in favor of Australia, frustrations grew when Timor-Leste proved to be more persistent in its negotiations than expected. During this time, there was a strong
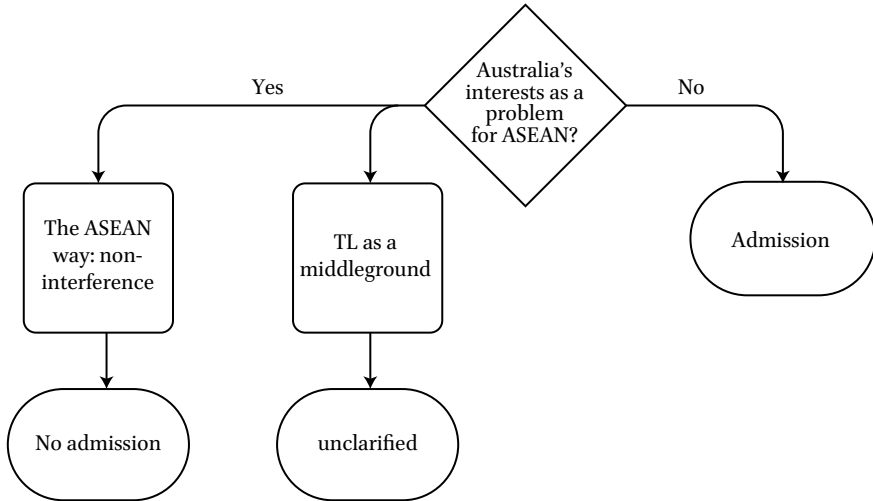
FIGURE 3.9 Australia's interests

presence of Australian spies in Timor-Leste for gathering internal country information about the procedure of a potential agreement on the pipeline (Interview PA6, September 2018; MacGrath, 2017). This leads us back to the broader interests involved in this case: if Timor-Leste seems to be in a constant conflictual negotiation with Australia, the interests of China and the United States become another dimension of influence. The disputes between China and the United States might be seen in relation to ASEAN and Australia (both as cooperation partners of the United States) (Tobin, 2019; Beetson, 2019). Therefore, admitting Timor-Leste to ASEAN could mean making a statement against Australia and opening the doors for China. Timorese spokespersons, on the other hand, plead for a productive dialogue to build bridges between these regional forces, which could be called a multiple strategic relationship. The need for building bridges and the construction of a stable, diplomatic relationship seems to be in the foreground (Interview PA2, September 2018; Interview PA4, September 2018). Therefore, Timor-Leste's representatives see the country itself as a potential facilitator between regional organizations (ASEAN, CPLP, and Asia-Pacific-Forum) (Interview PA2, September 2018).

2.2.5   The CLMV as a Paradigm?
Regarding the 2007 ASEAN Charter, Timor-Leste is the first potential member state which has to follow the new rules. This contrasts with the last admission in the 1990s (CLMV) when there were barely any obligations for joining the

grouping. Moreover, the admission came about rather quickly, in a timeframe of only a few weeks. Although, there is awareness of following the new rules (three pillars: sociocultural, economic and political), CLMV (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam) example continuously comes to the fore (Almuttaqi, 2015; Ortuoste, 2019; Myanmar Times, 2017; Pandiyan, 2019). Besides the comparisons which address candidacy procedures in the 1990s and currently, CLMV appear to be seen as a grouping within ASEAN with its own interests, playing a rather important role in the candidacy of Timor-Leste.

In terms of historical comparisons, one of the main assumptions of the swift admission of CLMV in the 1990s has to do with ASEAN's concerns regarding China's increasing influence and power in the Southeast Asian region. Therefore, it is said that the frictionless admission took place in order to make it a larger counterweight to China (Tobin, 2019). Looking at more recent tensions around the admission procedure, we can point to the fact that CLMV seem to be concerned about sharing the financial aid of the grouping with a new member that has a number of shortcomings in terms of the country's budget for economic and social development. Also, some of the concerns voiced indicate fear of ASEAN's current development status being affected (Southgate, 2015).

Referring once again to the current admission procedure for Timor-Leste, some interviews reveal that the fact that ASEAN, as a regional organization, also has to make adaptions and improvements should not be disregarded. Therefore, we must keep in mind that there cannot (or should not) be a mere superficial comparison with the cases in the 1990s and the former application procedures (Interview Y, October 2018). Thus, it seems that ambivalence is indeed in play.

Regarding the evolution of CLMV within ASEAN, several spokespersons say that these countries were much slower in terms of growth compared to Timor-Leste and that they were given time to develop, which makes the admission procedure unequal (Almuttaqi, 2015). In these discussions, the relationship between Myanmar and Timor-Leste seems to prevail. Looking more closely at this, little diplomatic solidarity has been noticeable between these two countries, following serious criticism of Timor-Leste's former president Ramos-Horta for being in the forefront against the military leaders of Myanmar (Mizzima, 2015). It has to be noted that one of the main principles of the ASEAN charter refers to regional peace and stability, which Myanmar does not seem to be fulfilling (Kupang, 2017; Jacque, 2017; Medcom, 2019). This leads to mixed messages coming from ASEAN: Myanmar's unofficial alliance with Singapore's opinion about the probability of Timor-Leste burdening the economic
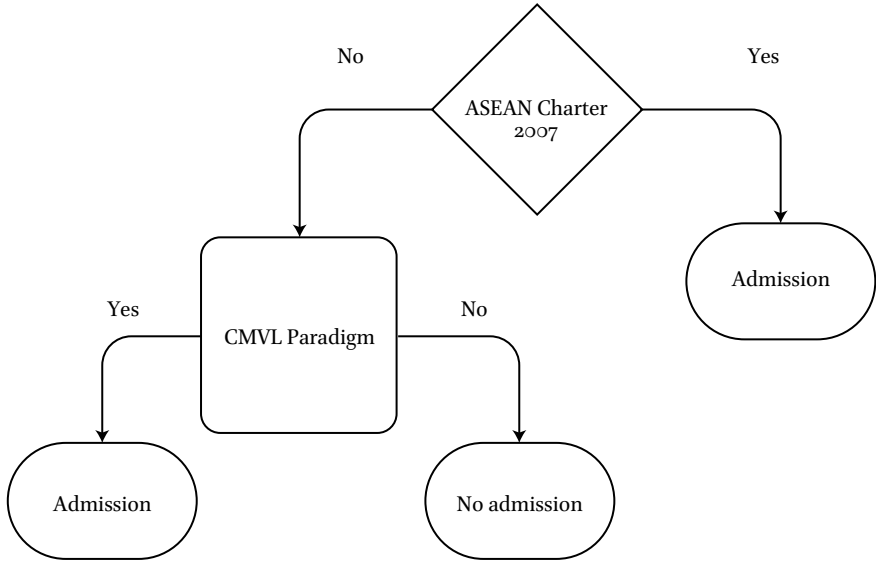
FIGURE 3.10   ASEAN Charter 2007

community in its growth, while Timor-Leste is coompleting all the grouping's requirements (Hananto, 2017; Medcom, 2019; Ortuoste, 2019; Haan, 2019).

Talking about the contrast between them in terms of political structures, Timor-Leste has consistently shown its commitment to democracy and dialogue; Myanmar, on the other hand, is drifting in a longstanding political and economic crisis, which is consistent with CSO concerns on human rights abuses and non-interference by ASEAN (ASEAN CSO report 2016, 2017).

In light of this, Myanmar currently has an undemocratic status, while Timor-Leste has an official democratic government (Hunt, 2018; The Economist, 2018; Windraskinasih & Afrinasyah, 2018). In strategic matters, the two countries have a great deal in common: they have a lot to offer in terms of natural resources (oil and gas reserves), which greatly increased (among others) their ties with China, as well as its strong presence in those countries (Hutt, 2018).

As the previous five flowcharts (Figs 3.6–10) on opinions reveal, the first one pinpoints Timor-Leste's social and political instability. Instead of being a simple decision on this issue, there are conditions in the foreground which open up to different outcomes (autonomous improvement vs. regional support). The same occurs with the second case, which is the economic burden the admission of Timor-Leste could imply for the region. Third, regarding Singapore as an opponent, two conditions seem to be at stake: i. Singapore's geostrategic interests and ii. Timor-Leste's current situation as a problem. Fourth, in the case of Australia's interests, its geostrategic position has to be taken into account. Similar to other cases, there seem to be two conditions in the foreground: first,

understanding Timor-Leste as 'being held hostage' by Australia's interests, second, as being the middle ground between several players. Lastly, CLMV are seen as a latent variable in terms of ASEAN membership, which also imposes two conditions: when applying the new ASEAN charter, CLMV always come to the forefront as an example of the last admission.

In conclusion, the flowcharts revealed rather clearly the concurrence of other variables for a final outcome. This way, the complexities of decision-making were brought to the foreground, rejecting a linear understanding of the processes at stake. As visible in the sections of the facts, there are always conditions which represent or create different perspectives and problematize decision-making.

3   Final Considerations

Following the above outline of the data in this research, we presented ten flowcharts using five facts and five opinions. Our aim was to elaborate on the complexities of decision-making within a multilateral governance framework, bringing latent variables to the fore. As we have seen throughout the text, beyond the facts presented, there is always a challenging decision at stake. Instead of discussing if Timor-Leste should be admitted to ASEAN or not, we showed that it is clearly a political decision. We tried to understand the difficulties of the decision-making processes, which was the main objective of using flowcharts in order to unravel the complexity behind this case. The outcome of this research line is a meta-analysis, in which a second level of communication (middle ground actors and variables) has to be taken into consideration.

Following this, what can we say from looking at the flowcharts? Can these bring more clarity to the case of Timor-Leste's membership of ASEAN? Finally, what are the contributions to a better understanding of multilateral governance complexities? As seen throughout the text, the majority of flowcharts, although divided into facts and opinions, represent perspectives on the facts. Therefore, the flowcharts show that a second level of communication is always given. Hence, this process uncovers the relevance of a thorough, in-depth analysis of decision-making, addressing each of the issues both Timor-Leste and ASEAN are facing. We tried to understand the mechanisms involved in each issue and where the decision-making is located in such a stream. This, indeed, has not been an easy task and is open to further discussion. What our data revealed, however, is that decision-making is not a clear, straightforward process in several cases. Hence, we believe that there are latent variables in play within the second level of communication, which bring the complexities of governance within a multilateral international organization to the fore:

- Effective actions
- Not Asian enough/ASEAN standards
- China as a Trojan horse
- ASEAN way/Timor-Leste as a middle ground
- Singapore geostrategic interests
- Regional support/improvement needed
- CLMV as a paradigm

Besides and beyond the explicit procedures for the acceptance of a new member state in ASEAN, as is the case with Timor-Leste, this middle ground has to be taken into account. Thus, our proposal in this text is that the rationality of the candidacy procedure is made more complex by such a middle ground in the form of a second level of communication.

Therefore, in order to understand the decision-making of governance in multilateral platforms, we propose that a meta-analysis is required, involving both middle ground actors and latent variables, which have been presented throughout the text.

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PART 2

*Neighbors and Kin, Big Men and Brothers,
and the Ecumene at Large*

∴

Is There an Endless Search for New (Overseas) Younger Brother(s)? Timor-Leste and Its Ecumenic Ambitions

Paulo Castro Seixas, Nuno Canas Mendes and Nadine Lobner

1   Introduction

The problematic rivalry between (or among) the siblings (2, 3 or 7, where 7 means several) is a common narrative in the myths of Indonesia and New Guinea (Seixas, 2010). Siblings should be considered as lineages or lineages-to-be that have the same origin or … have had the same origin imposed in a certain moment in time. In a 'status' society, lineages develop through the attachment of new members: women and their offspring, slaves, subordinates, or adopted members … and, eventually, by including other families or lineages as a whole. This latter possibility requires a duality, even a diarchy that establishes the 'older' and the 'younger' siblings. It is possible to imagine (through an inference from the present-day rituals like weddings, metaphors of that relation), that this diarchy is not a simple one but rather a complex net of duties and rights, which establish, in some cases, the dominance of a side, and, in other cases, the inversion of that dominance.

In terms of social structure, the diarchy that divides power and authority, relating to the secular and sacred, also overlays the siblings' duality. Furthermore, the language itself, which is based on a genealogy of lexical parallel structures, crosscuts those different dualities. Rituals (particularly weddings and funerals) are often embedded in a kind of 'war of words' ritual language (Van Engelenhoven, 2008). This war of words performs those dualities, which reflect the open-ended negotiation process of those diarchies. Even war ('funu' in Timor-Leste) is, in many cases, conceived as a ritual war: in a sense, a way to get to terms with the dualities as part of a unitary imagination: for instance, by trying to turn the 'Other' into a young sibling from the same origin.

We need to raise a set of questions: could it be that all the discourses addressing the 'Other', even the political ones that, in Timor-Leste, have the State as their origin, are still part of, or resonate with, the 'war of words' of the ritual language? Are political discourses today conceivable as a metaphor for the rivalry of siblings in the myth of origin? And what may they represent? Could it be

the times immemorial cultural conflict problem of everything between tradition and modernity, as, in the case of Timor-Leste, between the old siblings/the ones of the land, and the young siblings/the newcomers/the ones from the sea? Are political discourses a way to solve the problem of how the 'Other' from overseas is transformed (or not) into a 'young siblings' from the same origin? Can the new 'young siblings' who emerge in a globalization context like China, ASEAN, CPLP, Pacific Forum, or the Commonwealth, be included within this framework? If so, could it be that Timor-Leste is now continuing its endless search for what we refer to as a 'New Overseas Younger Sibling'? Could it be that some countries, or even international regions, are imagined as possible Younger Siblings?

For elaborating further on this research, we consider that translation, and, particularly, cultural translation, is a conceptualization that should be brought to the fore. This research proposal depends on a culture in which the past is understandable as layers that become part of the present: diachrony turns into synchrony and patterns of translating the past into the present are always there as 'charter myths': as the proper ways to do things. Therefore, in the next section, we will focus on culture of translation, and culture as translation, as the core tradition in Timor-Leste, in order to understand how past stories emerge in present-day politics.

This chapter has four sections: first, we will present the conceptual framework of anthropology as cultural translation. Thereafter, we will demonstrate the case study of Timor-Leste as a pertinent ground of action. Followed by this, we will scan the story of the several 'Otherings' over time, and their relationship with unitary imaginations. In the last section, we present the ecumenic ambition of Timor-Leste through its political role in times of globalization, as a quest for 'New Overseas Younger Sibling(s)'.

2   Anthropology as Cultural Translation

Following Derrida, to conceive culture as translation, and the world as cultures in continuous translation, is, probably, the only way of overcoming the two human curses: imperialism and continuous war through cultural clashes. The paradigm of Culture as Translation rejects the unilateral translation of the Others, turning the dialogic into the root itself of the paradigm. It implies that the breaches of culture are for internal and external interpretation but, more than that, the quest for elements and cultural complexities in each culture reflects these breaches, once it is assumed that culture is a translation dynamic conceived as the core of Human Culture. Culture as Translation is also a form of vigorous struggling for a 'Politics of Peace and Hope', in new geopolitics of 'Dialogue and Alliance of Cultures and Civilizations'. Therefore, social sciences

(and particularly Anthropology and Sociology) have a new loci, neither the analysis of mere differences, nor the study of similarities but, instead, the focus is on relativity by translation. In other words, Social Sciences are meant to describe the problematic of conviviality as structure and cultural translation as the dynamic of societies and cultures (Seixas, 2010).

The idea of Translation has already a non-underestimated tradition in Anthropology, more evident in interpretative and post-modern trends. Anthropological science and its translating cultural regimes were, in fact, conceived through these trends, as in the center of western politics (Said, 1978; Clifford, 1997). Translation, both as problem and tool, is at the core of anthropological thinking since the linguistic turn in Anthropology, when culture became a network of shared signs and meanings. Since then, Anthropology has become a process of writing cultural dynamics, and the anthropologists themselves mainly writers (Geertz, 1989; Clifford & Marcus, 1986). In fact, throughout the last decades, the scattering of anthropological thinking in cultural studies, feminist and gender studies, as well as race, and post-colonial studies, are evidence both of the relevance of the political problem of translation, and of different perspectives, and perspectives towards perspectives, as methodology – in short, multiple translation, in cultural analysis.

Translation is core to definitions of culture. It is an open process, understandable as 'diasporas and counter-diasporas' (Hall, 2003), as 'Multi-sited narratives' (Marcus, 1995), as 'Travel' (Clifford, 1992 & 1997), as 'contact zones' (Pratt, 1991), as 'disjunctures and conjunctures' (Appadurai, 2004), etc. As a result, identity is also increasingly becoming understandable as 'frontier' and 'in-betweenness' (Hall, 2003), as 'mediation' and 'hybridism' (Bhabha, 1994), as cultural brokerage (Hannerz, 1996), in which individuals and groups see themselves as in between at least two conflicting as well as ambiguous sets of values. This leads to a model of, as well as a model for, culture defined through 'third space' (Lefebvre, 1974) or 'other space' or heterotopy (Foucault, 1986): as a 'bridge space' (Del Valle, 1997), as 'third cultures' (Featherstone, 1999), as 'syncretism' (Cannevacci, 1996), as 'cosmopolitanism' (Hannerz, 1996), etc.

Translation is thus, for many reasons, a 'metaphor of contemporary times' (Ribeiro, 2005) and Anthropology is part of the problem in the translated wor(l)ds (Ingold, 1994) we construct over time, being necessary to focus on the meanings of 'Cultural Translation' (Asad, 1986; Jordan, 2002).

3   Timor-Leste: Culture of/as Translation

Firstly, we have to question what cultural translation is. In a simple way, we may say this research states that it is worth looking for translations (construction of relativities), rather than looking for what the differences are from one

culture to another (construction of singularities) or what is common to several cultures (construction of similarities). Therefore, instead of attaining to a particular singularity in writing cultures, Anthropology should rather have an ecumenic gaze (focusing on an inhabited realm of differences and cultural exchanges), and look for anthropological structures or structures of difference (the otherings and its dynamics), which are the basis of any cultural process. In another text, five theoretical perspectives on cultural translation were presented: Anthropological, the Cultural Studies, the Translations Studies, the Cognitive Studies and, finally, a tradition of Culture as Translation (Seixas, 2010).

Cultural translation is communication. This means locating something in common between two or among several persons/families/lineages. Once it becomes impossible to find something in common without a mediation (a medium and a message), communication is always intermediation and negotiation. Thus, cultural translation is intermediation. This means inserting someone/something as a third part between two, or among several persons/families/lineages, to introduce a different form of a kind of flowing. It means that usually a 'translation artifact' is needed (Seixas, 2011a & 2011b). This 'translation artifact' role may be played by several empirical elements (a stone, an animal, a cloth, oral and written discourses, and so forth), which symbolize a bridge and a compromise between parts, for unity. The third part is the cultural focus of the 'translations artifact' and what it represents (meanings about gestures, movement, elements, language, architecture, international agreements or any semiotic complex), and this is complexified throughout time being itself in translation, constantly adding new meanings to old topologies of culture (Seixas, 2011a).

The main general presupposition of this chapter is that cultural diversity and unity in Timor-Leste could be understandable through the central idea of translation: Translation as core heritage in Timor-Leste (Seixas, 2007, 2007a, 2010). Main references to this analysis are, firstly, James Fox's school and its focus on Dualism in Southeast Asia. Sherman Forman, Brigitte Clamagirand, Elizabeth Traube, Dionisio Babo Soares, Andrew MacWilliam, Tom Therik and other disciples of Fox are main references for this proposal. Furthermore, the idea of translation concerning Timor-Leste, in one way or another, appears in texts of other authors such as Henri and Maria Olimpia Campagnolo, Aone Engelenhoven, Daniel Simião and Paulo Castro Seixas. Below, we highlight the existence of a grammar translation method, and characterize some of the structures of translation built on ethnographic arguments. Hence, in the next section we will focus on specific 'anthropological structures' or 'structures of difference' in Timor-Leste.

TABLE 4.1   Translation in a linguistic sense

Macro level:	Micro level:
– Auto and hetero ethnic classifications – Auto and hetero territorial mapping and classification – Different Language Status	– Grammatical Convergence in multilinguist contexts – Social language performance

Translation is central in an ethnolinguistic sense, either on an inter-ethnic, or an intra-ethnic scale. In the macro-scale, the 32 ethnolinguistic groups in Timor-Leste relate to one another through auto- and hetero-classifications, which has in itself a pertinent cultural significance. On another scale – district; ethnic; clanic; knua – language is also important, as well as an ethnographic map of territorial and kinship processual classification. Different language status (ritual language; common intra-ethnic language; vehicular inter-ethnic language; national language; commercial language; modernity language; international language ...), grammatical convergence in multilinguistic social contexts, and social language performances (depending on social situational variables) are very important aspects.

Diglossia, Lexical Parallelism, Multilinguism, Sprachbund, Language Status and Performances are central aspects to this concern, but all these aspects must be related to territorial references, social relations, and cultural norms and ideologies.

Translation is central, in a social sense, both in an intra-ethnic, and on an inter-ethnic scale. Van Wouden, followed by James Fox, focused his attention on the pertinence of alliance processes in Southeast Asia as central social rituals through which different societies could be compared. A central issue is the existence of an extensive dual social classification, which is comparable in different societies. On a macro-level analysis, several dualities may be considered: a) the mountain (foho), vs. plain lands (tetuk) where towns/civilizations are grounded; b) the East (sunrise lands) where people are near to the sacred icon, vs. the West (loromonu – sunset lands) where people are near to the sacred land (Ramelau); c) South side (taci-feto – female-sea), and north side (taci-mane – male sea), as central identifications. Regarding a micro-level analysis, the following needs to be taken into consideration as central identifications: a) life-cycle rituals from birth until death (from earth and back); b) marriage-alliance rituals (understood as the most important by Van Wouden), and mortuary rituals (understood as the most important by Forman); c) wife-giver and wife-taker clans; d) the feminine and the masculine half of

TABLE 4.2   Translation in a social sense

Macro level:	Micro level:
– Mountain (foho) vs. plain lands (tetuk)/towns/civilization – East (sunrise lands), vs. West (loromonu – sunset lands); – South side (taci-feto – female-sea) and north side (Taci-mane – male sea)	– Life-cycle rituals, from birth till dead (from earth and back); – Marriage-alliance rituals and mortuary rituals – Wife-givers and wife-taker clans – feminine and masculine part of the clan; women and men; brothers and elders

the clan; e) women and men; f) siblings (manus/manas) and elders (katuas). Thus, life-cycle, kinship, kingship, and territorial positions and over-positions are understandable through a complementary dualism, balancing power and authority, secular and sacred poles, which are central aspects of concern.

Translation is central in a strict cultural sense, both in an intra-ethnic and on an inter-ethnic scale. Forman referred to that exchange as symbolic, ideological, and pragmatic for the idiom of life, a core issue for the understanding of culture in Timor-Leste. On a macro level, there are a number of 'universes of meaning' which seem to crosscut Timor-Leste's cultures, and through which people are able to understand themselves and others. These 'structures of translation' are in the form of myths: understanding the relation between Earth and Sky; the earth-as-the-world (raiklaran) and its partition; the crocodile (avô) travel; the center (laran; hun) of the land; and the elder and younger siblings and their significative travel. There are a number of myths on a micro-scale such as the origin of each clan; the stories about the clan land (rai); what is said (and what cannot be said) in each life-cycle rite (birth, marriage, death); and what the sacred officiants' (matandók) say in particular rituals (e.g. illness or situations of crime). These myths are also 'universes of meaning' which enable each person to be socially engaged, and have the power for social and cultural translation, although not everyone has the authority to perform the translation itself. Therefore, remembering and forgetting, spoken and unspoken wor(l)ds, day-by-day rumors and sacred myths, are all central aspects.

Staging translation as a main hypothesis, language, territory, social relations and cultural ideologies are connected in a kind of prismatic cultural configuration. At the same time, this enhances several distinct potential belongings, which are competences/possibilities to understand (and to be engaged with) a) a particular clan; b) alliances between clans; c) ethnolinguistic groups;

TABLE 4.3   Translations in a strict cultural sense

Macro level:	Micro level:
– Earth and Sky relation myths; – the earth-as-the-world (raiklaran) and – its partition myths; – the crocodile (avô) travel myth; – the center (laran; hun) of the land myths; – the elder and young brother	– each clan origin myth; – the stories about the clan land (rai); – what is said (and what can not be said) in each life-cycle rite (birth, marriage, dead); – what the sacred officiants (matandók) say in particular rituals

d) social contexts (e.g. districts) with several ethnolinguistic groups; e) nation or nationalism; and so forth. Nevertheless, the feature of 'traditional'/oral Timorese culture contextualizes all these cross-cultural and historical translations in a specific way, hence the coming of 'modernity'/written-urban culture has presented critical challenges. Continuity and change and all consequent hybridisms are known outputs of the colonial contact but became more complex in a post-colonial context. Modernity in Timor-Leste produced, firstly, a core urban brokerage area (Manatuto-Dili) with the Timorese elite trained in the Soibada College (Manatuto) and engaged in colonial Portuguese administration and army (in Dili); secondly, political parties such as Fretilin, and afterwards, an army of its own – Falintil. Then, in the 1999 referendum, the massacre and the international intervention brought Timor-Leste to the global brokerage arena, which may be interpreted as an intermezzo of the cultural translations as traditional-oral Timorese processes. Nevertheless, since 2002, all these ancestral structures of translation became again fully active, and modernity(ies) – the colonial times; the Fretilin/Falintil; the UN transitional period; the several counter-diasporas – interpreted each other and became interpreted through those ancestral structures. The crisis of 2006 was the peak of this trend. It can be understood as clashes among differences, which interpreted each other, meaning that the core problems (besides oil and other foreign interests) are the structures and the grammatic of translation itself (Seixas, 2007a). There were too many modernities and, at the same time, tradition(s) still was the language of the majority. Funu (war) also has been a translation dispositive which both precedes and accompanies words themselves. Violence is not bad in itself and needs to be interpreted as a way of restructuring the grammatical structures of translation by the effect of these prismatic traditions and clash of modernities.

Anthropological research should be understood as a useful tool to clarify the complexities referred to previously, as well as the prismatic war between the 'traditional' majority and the 'modern' minorities. We propose that anthropological research could bring words for a lost in translation time and this could enhance new translation possibilities, both in a diachronic and in a synchronic axis.

Translation is central in a diachronic sense. Historical oral translation processes, since the Wehali empire and Luca kingdom (Tetum), Dili and Manatuto (Portuguese) including other post-colonial attempts at creating a rai-klaran (Aileu through Maubere denomination and Manatuto through Kafir denomination) (Seixas, 2006a), represent very important quests for an origin, a center, a source (hun), which explains life itself and legitimates social and cultural order. Since the 1970s, this historical oral order has been challenged by several modernities. The modern bureaucratic written State order (with its ideological counter-diasporic differences) does not explain life, and doesn't have to, having a completely different way of conceiving social and cultural order. Also, although the modern messengers are a minority and conceive themselves as democratic, they seem to forget (or at least to underestimate) the way of thinking of the majority. Consequently, the time gap of the transition (1999–2002) was expected to be compensated for by the 'Timorisation of the independence time', yet, this hasn't been the case. The modern order did not fulfill the 'translation processes', and the links between ancestral contexts and Dili as the new capital have been made instead throughout families and their networks. There is a quest for these diachronic translation processes, to which this chapter responds anthropologically.

The synchronic of translation in traditional oral cultures depends on the interpretation of the diachronic sense. For instance, if a man wants to marry a woman and there is no known relation between both clans, it is necessary that the katuas (elders) evoke memory in order to see if there is any obstacle (meaning if there was a murder that included persons from both clans). Therefore, diachronic translation precedes synchronic translation in the oral traditional order, although this doesn't happen in the modern state bureaucratic order. The invention or discovery of a middle ground is required to create situations for the encounter of the synchronic opposites, and there should be an ancestral reference to legitimate prospective action. Encounters between elders and youngers, between the feminine and masculine of a clan, between wife-giver and wife-taker clans, between ethnolinguistic groups, between regions; all are of central importance to reactivate translation processes. For anthropologically understanding these processes in fieldwork, we should be able to promote

some of those encounters because translations are more than structures, they are performative social and cultural actions.

In order to understand how state politics is part of a synchronic translation process, which includes elements of a diachronic one, a proposed history of identity and difference in Timor-Leste should be presented, supported by bibliographic research, as well as oral history collected through fieldwork. In the following section we will present the several 'Otherings' and how they were the basis for the unitary imaginations in Timor-Leste history.

4   History of Timor-Leste as a Search for Younger Siblings: The 'Otherings', Unitary Imaginations, and the Ecumenic Ambition

A culture is always a 'structure of difference' or an 'anthropological structure' (Seixas, 2008). This means that there is always a distinction between 'us' and 'them' to be found. Although there may be several 'Others' and thus several structures of difference as a kind of 'cultural formation',[1] it is expected that in each era, a particular structure of difference is highlighted.

The Timorese 'Otherings', the anthropological structures, which present the distinction between 'us' and 'them', were built because of Timor-Leste being the center of a confluence of different cultural regions as well as a consequence of centuries of colonization. We state that the cultural memory of all these anthropological structures is active in present times, and that translation plays a central role in these processes enhancing a plurality of meanings. An anthropological history of the 'Otherings' in Timor-Leste is needed for exploring generative important meanings, which support the socio-ideological framework of present times. Anyway, we need to consider that Timor-Leste was colonized at least four times. The presence of relevant 'Others' resulted in generative consequences in the present sociocultural and political-institutional framework, meaning that each clash created some particular 'Othering/s'.

Timor-Leste was (and still is) in between two cultural regions: On the one hand, taken at large as Asia and the Pacific, and in a more regional sense, Indonesia and Melanesia; and, on the other, in a Timorese sense, Austronesian ethnolinguistic groups and Papuas ethnolinguistic groups. This 'in-betweenness' of the island of Timor was already referred to, both in historical terms (Wallace, 2015), and in present times, as a 'Clash of Civilizations' (Gunn, 2001). Besides,

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1   We use 'cultural formation' whilst considering the Marxist concept of social formation, meaning the complex of several modes of production. Although, a particular one is highlighted.

in this in-betweenness, China was, and still is, of great importance to that particular region, and, in a certain moment of history, perhaps, so was the Mongol empire. With the coming of Europeans to the region as a long trend situation, Europe became, in a way, the third cultural region to be taken into consideration in a generative narrative of present times in Timor-Leste. Furthermore, both Europeans (Portuguese), and Africans came to Timor-Leste complexifying the cultural exchange of the inhabited space (the ecumene): Timor-Leste was therefore always a kind of global window.

Although Timor-Leste may be considered as fragments of differences emphasized by the plurality of ethnolinguistic realities (around 32 languages and dialects), over time there were several attempts at unity in reaction to 'Otherings'. In more recent times, these attempts have the Nation as a referent. A nation, following western dogma, is an "invention of [modern] tradition" (Hobsbawn, 1990) based on "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1992). Timor-Leste is a country where territorial integrity is fragile. It became a colony in 1914 and only at the end of the colonial period, did the idea of a nation seem real, when a generation of Timorese began school education, and were able to "imagine" Timor as a nation (Taylor, 1999). For others, the idea of a nation developed when the first group of Timorese was enlisted in the Portuguese Armed Forces. This perception was reinforced when FRETILIN deserted in October 1975 (Gunn, 2001, p. 22). Furthermore, Timor-Leste was only able to "imagine" itself as a nation after the Indonesian invasion, and could not see itself as involved in it (Anderson, 1993). Timor-Leste was colonized for only sixty or seventy of the 400 years of Portuguese occupation. It was a fragile colonialism in which the colonial administration coexisted with a pluralism of local cultures (Thomaz, 2000, p. 34). In this scenario, it is still possible to follow the trail of inventions of tradition through imagined communities related to a history of nations. This enables us to follow the different attempts to create a territorial integrity, or the (re)production of ethnicities during colonial and neocolonial periods. Indeed, the "convergences and divergences" (Campagnolo, 1992), resulting from those imagined ethnicities, and also from the 'nation' that goes on being imagined, configure the current challenge for the entry into the 21st Century.

Although, on the one hand, it is possible to trace the imagined ethnicities and the imagined genesis of the nation as oral memory, and, on the other hand, as written memory of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the main question in the construction of the Timorese Nation and State probably is not exactly whether East Timor is a Nation, but what types of Nation and State are (want to be and can be) created in East Timor. A nation can be created having as its basis an abstraction, supported by a "hegemony", legitimated by the power of state administrative organs. In this way, the myth of the nation

is (re)produced without a concrete historical density – part of the work that was carried on by the UN, particularly from 2000 to 2002 (Seixas, 2003). Yet, a nation can also be created by accepting plural societies and assuming its almost immemorial historical density, which is, obviously, a greater challenge. This important choice, which does not exclude the "or and also" possibility, may be understood as a kind of historical "ritual process" (Turner, 1974), or a "broadening ritual dispositive" (Augé, 1994). Following the post-colonial history of Timor-Leste will reveal the arguments for understanding the chosen path. By analyzing the results of the fieldwork that has already been done, a clear balance between these two positions can be demonstrated:

Timorese consciously grasp the invention of the new Nation's tradition (the origin is generally said to be 1974–75), and the imagined community of the "Timor Oan" (the offspring of Timor). This current expression replaces "Maubere People" ("Povo Maubere" in Portuguese), which stopped being used in the postcolonial period. Althouth, the strength of a divided dimension (which is not verbally expressed, but is definitely prevalent both in actions and languages) remains, even, as a sort of "Nativism" (Parry, 1994), or a "return to rituals" strategy.

The Timorese Nation may be considered both through its invented tradition processes and its imagined communities, and through the Timorese divisions/ethnicities with its own invented traditions and imagined communities. These two processes, concomitant with the current post-colonial period, are crossed by "universes of meaning", such as the colonialist memory, the resistance memory, the transnational modernization, the diaspora experience, the quasi-nativism, the economical neocolonialism, postcolonial deconstructivism; in a constant temporal serendipity between constructing/inventing the future and looking to/supported by the past. The main argument that follows is that there were five great attempts of unitary imagination over Timor, whereas an ethnic dichotomy (beyond plural ethnic imagination) was always present, having resisted the defeat of unitary imaginations. In all cases, the relation between outsiders and insiders is at stake.

These inside-outside relations are evident in traditional myths (like the myth of the center or laran or hun or rai-klaran – previously analyzed by Fox; the myth of the Crocodile, and the myth of the older and the younger sibling – referred by Traube, Hohe and Gomes) that cross-cut Timorese society from East to West. These myths are not just stories, but frame the social and political thinking which serves to create perspectives and to take positions and support decisions in present times as 'charter myths'. These three stories are well known in many areas of Timor-Leste, although a thorough analysis of the areas where the story is known as well as its variants is still to be done. All of these stories

reveal the problem of the relation between insiders and outsiders as well as its possible outcomes. Following, we will briefly present the three stories.

The world (rai-klaran) is, also, the "middle-of-the-earth" or the "center-of-the-earth" (rai + klaran), and is always in motion, depending on the scale we are using: the clan, the village, the country or even the planet. And, depending on who we are, where we are, and what the symbolic referent is, a translation itinerary is constituted. The idea that Timor (the entire island) is identified with center-earth and with the planet itself derives from a legend that says that the first island was like a large, round, full moon. Over time, pieces of this moon were separated and gave rise to the other nations of the world, while what remained was the current island: Timor. Because Timor can be understood as "the mother-of-all-nations" or the center-of-the-earth, it always allows for an interpretation in relation to any contact that Timor-Leste has with the outside. Such a contact is always understood as the return of a "younger sibling", obviously implying an acceptance of the "older sibling" (Seixas, 2006, pp. 465–466).

A crocodile who dreams of growing up is trapped in scalding sand, almost dying: in 'undifferentiation'. A child appears and helps it, putting it back into the swamp. Reciprocity takes place through the exchange of dreams when the crocodile offers to take the boy on a journey over the sea, as this was the boy's great dream. We know from the first two sentences of the myth that the crocodile that lived in the swamp dreams of growing to 'have a phenomenal size', the dream of full 'undifferentiation'. Thus, the ritual journey that is processed is full of signs of tension: the undifferentiation of the 'wild' and 'cannibal' that the crocodile represents constantly threatens the possibility of human existence, and, therefore, of culture and peace that the boy represents. It is well known that the dreams of the boy and of the crocodile are different; and yet, both agree to make the journey. It is thus an agreement and a reciprocity filled with tension between the new (the boy) and the old (the crocodile), between the human possibility and the cannibal savagery, between the culture/the difference and the undifferentiation. In fact, the myth refers to a long journey in which the little boy accepts riding the crocodile on the water, an obvious metaphor for a fragile human existence, at the beginning of culture (boy) on the dual undifferentiation (in the beginning, the crocodile is like the shadow of the first undifferentiation of the flood or of the swamp, and in the end, of water). The crocodile dominates the first undifferentiation but the boy is still dependent on the crocodile – at least until its death. In the myth, basically, the crocodile, old and fragile, desists from eating the child who is on its back, preferring to die. The crocodile becomes a founding sacrifice because its body is transformed into the island that is Timor, enabling the child's existence and the continuation of his dream as a possibility for a social and cultural stable

construction. This myth says a lot about the ecumenic ambition of Timor (the old crocodile) and about the continuous tension between the youngsters who come from the sea and the elders who are from the land: the former may always be merged into the latter or, eventually, if they survive the journey, live off them ... (see Seixas, 2007; 2010).

There is another extremely important myth among the Mambai registered by Elizabeth Traube (1997), among the Kemaq by Tanja Hohe (2000), among the Fataluco by Azevedo Gomes (1972), and also noted in the field by one of us (Seixas, 2010). At first there were the "siblings", in numbers of two (Mambai), three (Kemaq) or seven sons and seven daughters (Fataluku), and the division between the oldest sibling and the youngest is established. This seems only to take on specific physical features in Mambai's version, once the youngest is dipped into white water that leaves him clean, while the oldest is dipped into dark water, becoming neither white nor clean. However, in all three versions of the myth, siblings are distinguished by receiving specific objects. In the Mambai myth, Father Sky granted the oldest the sacred stone and trunk as elements that validate authority over the cosmos, while he gave the pen and the book to the youngest, as representatives of European identity. In the case of the Kemaq version, a sword and a crowbar are given to the two oldest, while the youngest, in contrast, received a pen and paper to write. In the Fataluku's version the ancestor gives machetes to each of his six oldest children, and to the youngest one a pen to write, representing a symbol of wisdom. In another version, the ancestor gives everyone a pen and paper, which the six older ones throw away, and only the youngest keeps. In the second part of this myth, the youngest sibling embarks on a trip overseas. In the Mambai version, the youngest sibling steals the objects not specified other than the ancestor placed them in the 'home of origin'. Finally, the youngest sibling crossed the waters of the sea to go to the land of Portugal. In the Kemaq version, the reference is vague, but Hohe considers it as similar behavior. In the Fataluku version, the ancestor commands the youngest sibling: "Look, get a boat and go and learn, and study the world beyond. When you become wise, return to rule us. Meanwhile we stay and cultivate the land, worshiping the tei and defending the brothers-in-law". (Gomes, 1972, p. 49).

There is a difference here that is established between the land/inland and the sea/coast, and also between the east-west axis and the north-south axis. In this second stage of the myth, the societies of those who stay (land/inland, east-west axis) suffer from instability, with fights among the oldest siblings and with no respect for authority. However, instability is evident only in the Kemaq and Mambai versions, while in the Fataluku versions, there is a silence.

Finally, there is a third stage: in the Mambai version, it is the oldest sibling who makes a 'long and arduous' journey overseas to bring back the youngest sibling from Portugal; in the Kemaq version the youngest sibling, understood as the Portuguese, then returns after having departed from his origin, to establish a relationship with the oldest siblings; in Fataluku's version, only "Benjamin gathered all the science in the world and returned to rule". (Seixas, 2007, 2010). Resonances of these three myths will be clarified by the following presentation of the four 'Otherings' through which we conceive a short history of Timor-Leste.

4.1   1st Othering (*Malay*)

Timor was Papuan/Melanesian before passing through a 'civilizational shock' supposedly taking place between Papuan/Melanesian and Malay/Indonesian from the year 3000 BC to the year 1000 BC. It is possible that in the division Firaku-Kaladi (a regional-ethnic division within Timor-Leste), the term 'malae' (meaning foreigner, derived from 'Malay'), and the name of the island itself (Timor from Timur, which means East) are reminiscent of this civilizational shock;[2] and also of the Malay/Indonesian relevance, eventually a dominant presence.

Ambiguously, 'Malae' or 'Malai' is the name by which any foreigner is referred to in Timor-Leste. At any one time, the name could have been synonymous with Lord (or even king), Mister, or Bapa, or could be 'just foreigner'. The clan, which considers itself to be the first in Timor-Leste, 'Tutuala ratu', also calls itself 'Malai ratu', meaning 'Lord/king of the foreigners' or 'Lord/king of the lords/kings'. In fact, 'malae' is also the name given to Timorese people who have come 'from the outside', 'from the sea', in relation to the 'ones who stayed', the 'ones from the land', and also to 'mestizos' (in 'malae-china', 'malae-zapão', etc.). For instance, some ethnolinguistic groups carry the name 'malae' as a surname, and the Tetum group considered themselves, at least in a certain period,

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2   Jill Jolliffe narrates an actual story, that takes place in the Irian Jaya or Western Papua location where Indonesian occupants confronted the local Melanesian population: "an Indonesian military commandant asks an OPM (Free Papua Movement) guerilla, on the western edge of Papua New Guinea, what is the difference between the Indonesian and the Papuans from New Guinea. The guerilla promptly answered: – 'Something you will never understand this!' and pulled out a frizzy hair". (Jolliffe, 1989, p. 14). Gunn sets the hypothesis that Timor might have been the stage for a civilizational shock as characterized by Samuel Huntington, in which Malay and Melanesian (along with others) were in face-to-face encounters. Considering the Malayan influence zone and the Melanesian influence zone, Timor was indeed in the frontiers, having its eastern territory dominated by Papuan and Melanesian languages. According to Gunn, such contact led Timor to the construction of "creole identities". If such remark is true, it will also be true that the Malayan-Melanesian issue left traces in Timor.

TABLE 4.4   Universes of meanings – Malae

'From the sea'	Malae as Malay vs autoctonous	Malae as Malay vs Papuas
Tetum people were malae	**Malae**	Mestizo
Lords, kings	Malae as 'Mister' or 'Bapa' vs Timorese	Any Foreigner

as 'malae' or 'malae metan' (black foreigners) in relation to the Portuguese, who were 'malae mutin' (white foreigners). Therefore, 'Malae' is a complex noun that is used both to identify the Other, and to show how a cultural memory of a former clash of cultures between Asia and Pacific regions, Indonesia and Melanesia, malays and papuas, still influences present distinctions locally and nationally. We may assert that this was the 'first' colonization because it seems that it was the first one not to produce a 'generalized Other'. Instead, a 'generalized-expecting Other' was produced: the 'malae', as well as a sense of identity.

What is certain is that the island of Timor was a place of abundant cultural encounters, and that the scattered local challenge would be to create agreements between foreigners/strangers and grounded clans. If we are able to make any inferences from the pragmatics of 'malae', it seems that there were 'malaes' who were just foreigners and 'malaes' who made their own way to become partisans, eventually even lords. The processes that make one or another outcome possible are not accessible to us. Even so, the three stories – of the world as a scattered moon, the crocodile and the boy, and the siblings, give us some clues about the possibilities.

4.2   2nd Othering (*Firaku and Kaladi*)

It is as Province of Belos that the first imagined precolonial territorial unity is known, in opposition to the Province of Servião in Western Timor. The Belu, Belun or Belos 'Empire', with an administrative center in Béhali or Wehale, tried to subjugate the other ethnic groups by inserting the datos (noble) Belos and the Tetum language as main domination instruments. However, this was not completely successful. Before the 'Portuguese time' (as Timorese refer to it), there was a Belo-Tetum colonization with its center in Wehali-wehiku. Tetum people from Viqueque and Luca (important references to Tetum colonization

in the east part of the island) refer to themselves as 'people from the plain' (tetuk means plain), in opposition to the ones from the mountain (Macassai and Mambai peoples). It is possible that Tetum people used local classifications (usually with a positive or at least neutral intention) in order to identify mountain people, yet applied with negative implications. Firaku (Macassai) and Kaladi (Mambai) are the negative classifications for the 'mountain people', basically referring to them as culturally retarded, non-civilized people. Since there is no negative classification for the Tetum people, and both negative ones concern 'mountain people', which refers to the biggest ethnolinguistic groups (Macassai and Mambai), we conclude that it was the Tetum people themselves who created these classifications.

Although there is almost a total lack of reference to such terms in the bibliography about Timor prior to the year 2000, there can be found a reference in the Tetum Language Manual for East Timor by Geoffrey Hull, under "Firaku, Eastern East Timorese" and "Kaladi, Western East Timorese" (2000, pp. 68–74). In the Tetum-Portuguese Dictionary (Portuguese-Tetum Dictionary 2000) by Luís Costa, such terms have the following meanings: "Firaku: adj. Born in the region of the mountains of the Eastern and Northeastern parts of the island"; "ema firaku: inhabitant of this region"; "Kaladi: n. Born in the Timorese mountains". Therefore, both Firaku and Kaladi could only mean "the person who was born in the mountains"!

A bibliographic review of all the material that has been written about Timor in recent years, and even key works on Timorese History or Anthropology, reveals few references to these terms, turning these representations and their historical, sociocultural, and political effectiveness into an enigma of the (re)construction of the Timorese Nation and State. In post-colonial literature about Timor-Leste (and before the crisis of 2006 when these classifications became quite well known), only a few references could be located, that addressed this dichotomy. In 2004, Seixas had researched this scientific issue; nevertheless, since it had been published in Portuguese, its distribution was limited. Before that, it was only mentioned in texts written by Timorese, Australian, Indonesian, and American researchers. In January 2000, an Australian foreign reporter became acquainted with the Timorese East-West division, and interpreted it inaccurately as a division of urban gangs composed of youngsters from the East and West Side of Dili.[3] In contrast, in 2000, the

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3 "Battered society on the brink" was the headline of The Sydney Morning Herald on January 20, 2000. It said: "Tensions are rising as the rebuilding of East Timor begins, Conor O'Clery writes from Dili". In the body of the text: "Dili has two youth gangs, the Firaco on the east side and the Kaladi on the west. Before liberation, Indonesian repression and a night curfew

TABLE 4.5   Universe of meanings – Firaku and Kaladi

From the hun.	Mountain people vs. Tetuk (plains) people	Firaku and Kaladi vs Tetum as civilized.
Indigenous nouns	**Firaku and Kaladi**	Tetum people were 'malae'
	Tetum were Lords, even kings as 'Belos' and afterwards as 'Portuguese' representatives	Makassai and Mambai peoples as inferiors

anthropologist James Fox reported that "on the streets of Dili, among local East Timorese, there is a popular distinction made between talkative Easterners (Firaku) and more taciturn Westerners (Kaladi)" (Fox, 2000, p. 22). Fox also added that the ethnolinguistic group Mambai is the model found as the basis for the Kaladi stereotype. This same ethnolinguistic group was also the model for the term 'Maubere'.

In November of 2001, Fox (2001, p. 7) referred to the first FDTL battalion, whose recruitment had finished in January of that year, as being predominantly Firaku. This fact was noticed specifically by the Kaladi, Timorese from the western districts. The relation Firaku-Kaladi and its political pertinence were explored in other studies on East Timor. Anthony Smith from The Southeast Asian Studies of Singapore states: "The East Timorese themselves are often divided into two subgroups: the eastern Firaku account for around 30% of the population, while the western Kaladi form 50%", and he also added: "Independence support in Indonesian times was stronger in the Firaku regions" (Smith, 2002); Dwight King from the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Northern Illinois University, having analyzed the elections for the Constituent Assembly of 2001 and the presidential elections of 2002, found "three political cleavages, one generational and two regional – one that divides the eastern from the western region, and one that distinguishes the central

kept rivalry in check. Now the youths chase around on motorcycles. 'What city in the world doesn't have gang fights?' a UN worker said. 'You could even call it normal. But if there's no work soon, it could get out of hand'". (In http://www.asia-pacific-action.org/southeast asia/indonesia/netnews/2000/and03_v4.htm#East%20Timorese%20demonstrate).

mountain region from the rest of the country", (King, 2002), a reference that may be considered indirect but pertinent.

Summing up, we could say that Firaku and Kaladi were shadowed as 'Otherings' for a long time, particularly by Portuguese and Timor-Timur (Indonesian) 'Otherings'. The postcolonial re-emergence of this dichotomy grew in intensity until the crisis of 2006 when it bloomed in all its resonances. Considering that Timorese people built their own identity in relation to Malae as the constructed generalized-expecting Other, in the second colonization (by the Tetum-Belo), the Timorese identity was shadowed by a dichotomization. Through this process the Firaku and Kaladi (indistinctively autochthonous or not) were turned into the 'Other'.

4.3   3rd Othering (*Portuguese*)

In the twentieth century, up until the thirties, Portugal was concerned with imagining a 'Timor da Insulíndia'; and, from the thirties to the seventies, a 'Portuguese Timor'; whereas, during the period the country ruled this territory, the (re)production of an ethnic dichotomy Firaku-Kaladi became stronger. Portuguese colonial imagination finishes in 1974 with the episode on the 25th of April and the decolonization process.

There is a universe of meanings in translation that envelopes the Portuguese in Timor-Leste. Portuguese people may be considered as just malae (foreigners), or malae with status (as lords or even kings that come from the outside), eventually as malae mutin connected to status with some locals (e.g. Tetum people as malae metan). In a deep lulik (sacred) way, Portuguese people may be considered Timorese siblings, returning from the other side of the world, closing a big circle of temporality, initiated by the fragmentation of Timor island as a big moon (a middle ground: raiklaran), which was supposedly the origin of all nations. Therefore, Portuguese people may be seen as the younger brother who left, the younger brother who is returning, just a brother from outside, or, eventually, just a foreigner.

Differences between kingships were used by the Portuguese, while, at the same time, these kingships used the Portuguese ruling or order to gain power. Internal divisions within Timor-Leste with its origin in past 'Otherings' (Firaku and Kaladi classificatory) became, in the cultural memory, of Portuguese origin, built from Portuguese expressions ('vira-cu' – 'turning the back' and 'calado' – 'quiet') which, by a translation to Tetum, became Firaku and Kaladi. This story is not convincing since both words existed before the Portuguese time. Firaku has been a Makassai word (Makassai is from the Papua language), meaning 'we are comrades', 'we, the friends'; and Kaladi has been a Malay word (Keladi) meaning 'Yam'. Therefore, translation eventually happened the other way around: local nouns were translated into Portuguese, identifying Portuguese

TABLE 4.6   Universe of meanings – Portuguese

There was a Young Brother who left	Timor is 'raiklaran'. Portugal was Timorese	Tetum people were 'malae metan'
Portuguese as the returnee young brother	**Portuguese**	Portuguese were/are 'malae mutin'
Outside brothers	Portuguese were Lords, even kings	Just malae

expressions with the negative meaning, which was already ascribed to those particular people. It seems that Portuguese and Tetum people created a colonial 'Othering' working consensus, and, if it is true that there is no evidence of a war pattern between East and West, it is also true that Portuguese rulers in the 'pacification war' used East people against the West revolution led by D. Boaventura.

The interpretation of the Portuguese presence in Timor-Leste as a process that was supposed to occur leading to a unitary outcome, is a narrative that is still available in postcolonial times. Seixas transcribed a fieldwork conversation in 2000 with the Liurai (chief) of Luro (Los Palos) where he put the question that continues to be important for Timorese identity: "Why did the Portuguese come to Timor? They already had Madeira, the Azores, then Cape Verde, Guinea, Angola; they then passed the Cape of Good Hope and reached India. So why did they still want to go as far as Timor? It wasn't to explore. It was to coordinate us and join the kingdoms into one nation. It was between the kingdom of Portugal and the kingdom of Belos, to coordinate Timor". (Seixas, 2002).

4.4   4th Othering: Timor-Timur

Still in 1974, a new unitary imagination, "Maubere People", arises, created by FRETILIN. Within the resistance, the following idea was constantly repeated: 'from taci-feto to taci-mane, from Lorosae to Loromono, One only People, One only Nation' (from the female-sea to the male-seas, from the sun-rising to the sunset, One only People, One only Nation). For many Timorese, Loromono was synonymous with the 'great door of invasion' and of 'collaborationism'; while, in contrast, Lorosae was synonymous with 'real warriors' and 'resistants'. Simultaneously, and in contradiction with this quite disseminated background assumption, the expression used from the resistant nation, 'Maubere People', coined by Ramos Horta, had its origin in Loromono (Aileu, Ermera and Maubisse). Eventually the creation of this new unitary attempt had no

relation whatsoever with the Firaku-Kaladi dichotomy. Maubere had a very precise colonial meaning: it was used by the Portuguese to refer to the poorest of the poor; the Timorese 'pé descalço' (barefoot). Curiously, although the noun, Maubere, emerges as a critic to Portuguese colonialism, it was raised against Timor-Timur, the 27th province of Indonesia, into which Timor-Leste was transformed.

Anyway, the Maubere classification eventually created a renovation of the dichotomy Firaku-Kaladi, now understandable as Firaku-Maubere, which was connected, in a rather complex way, with Democracy vs. Communism (Mauberism). Nevertheless, this dichotomy was partly hidden because, on the one hand, Maubere had somehow been turned into a national emblem ('Maubere People') in the struggle facing a common enemy; and, on the other, Aileu was, in many traditional narratives, the Center-of-the-Earth (Rai-Klaran) or the belly of the crocodile. For others, it was even the origin of the world (hun) giving a certain legitimacy to a nationalist narrative. Anyway, it was not before CNRM (Conselho Nacional da Resistência Maubere) turned to CNRT (Conselho Nacional da Resistência Timorense), changing the 'Maubere' to 'Timorese', that all the several Timorese parties accepted belonging to that particular structure.

In the following year, 1975, from the Indonesian invasion on, a fourth 'Othering' appeared, which designated Timor as the 27th Indonesian Province – "Timor-Timur" or "Tim-Tim". The Maubere unitary imagination ended in 1998 (with the transmutation of CNRM into CNRT); the Timor-Timur ended in 1999 with the referendum. During this period, the dichotomic relation Firaku-Kaladi was kept, even under the name of Firaku-Maubere, hidden by the predominant Resistant-Collaborationist relation. From the year 2000 on, with the "timorization" of the country (which culminated with the exit of UNMISET on the 20th of May, 2004), the relation Firaku-Kaladi has emerged again. In the postcolonial threshold in which Timor lies, the past became the present, and the present is future under construction. As a consequence, negotiation on both imaginations (ethnic and unitary), were ongoing, opening up to plural national imaginations.

TABLE 4.7   Universe of meanings – Maubere

First man, old brother	Firaku and Kaladi	Just kaladi
From the hun	**Maubere**	nationalism
	Maubere people	communism

4.5   *5th Othering* (*UN*)

Through the UNTAET period, all the complexities of the Timorese past were oversimplified as the struggle of the Maubere People against Indonesians, and, although there was the knowledge of divisions within Timorese, those divisions were basically related to independence or autonomy. These were thought to be as old as the political parties themselves and, consequently, the referendum and independence should put an end to those problems. The creole elite who came from abroad (Portugal, Mozambique), as well as a supposed transitional period, were eventually the main reasons why the past of divisions were hidden from the foreigners. The majority of the cooperants ('expats'), even when they were there for some years, never heard about lorosae and loromono. Resistance conflicts, outsiders (returnees) versus the ones who stayed, as well as gender divisions were much more visible. The creole elite had difficulties (and perhaps still have) in understanding the possibilities enhanced by cultural memory for the production of the pasts, and created the idea that Timor-Leste was on its path towards Modernity.

This idea was well accepted by the UN as well as by Portugal and Australia. The common Timorese citizens had no idea about the problems as were too immersed in them, but they did know that translation of the past created an open field of possibilities. With the UN presence, a fifth unitary imagination emerged: the 'Timor Oan' (offspring of Timor). There is a resonance in this latter expression regarding the three stories referred to in the last section: it resonates with the counter-diaspora of the island of Timor fragments, and it resonates with the young boy who survives until the death of the 'granpa' crocodile; it resonates with the presence, at last, of the younger sibling!

5   Final Considerations

There is a key aspect that comes from ethnographic research in the transforming of the 'Other' into a 'sibling': the 'Other' has to recognize the older sibling as, indeed, a 'sibling' in order to be accepted. Thus, the 'Other' needs to present him/herself as a 'sibling' wanting to belong and to create a 'bridge'. Wealth is measured by the relevance of the offspring/descending, the women within the group, and by the influence of a family in other families in which the geographic scope also plays a relevant role. Nations through the gaze of primordialism perspectives are nothing but big families. Even the planet may be nothing but a big family. As a consequence, the sentence does not apply only to traditional contexts, but, instead, to the whole world: the agreements

between nations and states and even the multilateral relations in international relations may be seen as a way for adopting new families within a particular sphere of influence.

Conceiving the world as a context – and if we consider that focusing on translation is crucial in globalization times – then it is necessary to highlight the role of states and cities as brokerage devices. As Hannerz refers, when flows, boundaries, and hybrids become keywords, diffusionism is on stage again, although through other metaphors (Hannerz, 1996). Urban studies, based on the world system theory, revealed the importance of some particular world cities as centers of economic and financial flows. Although this economic-financial model is a basis for a network of cities, we acknowledge that other variables also play their roles and design specific global networks (e.g., tourism and cultural circuits; global heritage, and so forth). With the managing of imagination, economy management models gave place to flows in an urban archipelago in permanent and more constructivist change. It seems that cities are considered, one way or another, main stages where the several agencies become involved in a complex interconnectedness and brokerage work, most of the times without a proper awareness of its own role and complexities. Yet, a story is still to be made on how the peripheries of the world consider their own cities as brokerage devices within the global realm.

Cities were always translation centers, yet, probably, not in so elastic a way as in the current era of globalization. Things tend to be more complex when it is required from a particular city, in a particular moment of history, to play a role of multiple brokerages concerning several inside-outside relations. That's what happens to Dili, the capital of Timor-Leste:

i.   to do the brokerage between traditional lineage communities and a national society. This is done through a few 'Dili families' that create a bridge between the 'foho' (Mountain) understood as the 'trunk'/ 'old sibling' and their partisans in the capital, understood as the 'branches'/'young siblings' which are conceived as representants near 'Governu'.

ii. to do the brokerage between a national society in the making and other national societies and global demands. The referred 'Dili Families' play the role of the 'older sibling' (struggling among themselves) to have political influence and even to gain a status of overseas influence. This is done by the competition of a tiny group for being the ones who create bridges with the exterior, eventually searching for other nations/international regions to play the role of the 'younger siblings'.

In this sense, Dili is somehow a city where everything comes together. Dili became the center for three modernization processes in which it was required that Timor-Leste changed from a lineage/tribal society to a state society; from

a rural society to an urban one; and from a local/national society to a transnational one. Dili is a particularly good expression of the time-space compression: in a very short period of time, past became present, and the local became global. The new Ecumene is the global inhabited world, and the potential new younger siblings are, potentially, all the nations and international regions that relate with Timor-Leste.

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ASEAN and Timor-Leste: A Discourse on Centrality, Sociopolitical Negotiations and Relationships

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1   Introduction

Timor-Leste and ASEAN: what might seem like an idiosyncratic issue of admitting new member states to the region needs to be understood through greater dynamics in the forefront. Considering the fact that the small nation has been trying to become the 11th member state of ASEAN since 2011, with no end in sight, we raise the question of how this could cause friction in the grouping's centrality and identity construction. This is of relevance when bearing in mind that Timor-Leste, as a very recent and small nation state, is still in a fragile position in the game between several global actors (ASEAN, China, EU, Australia, US) and could act as a strategic middle ground between them (considering economic and political interests). Taking this into account, we put ASEAN's centrality into perspective, contemplating the impact of the grouping's relationship to Timor-Leste through the continuing membership procedure. In the same way, our research aims to contribute to understanding ASEAN's centrality construction through the eyes of Timor-Leste's societal and political cluster.

This issue will be represented through our three Timorese sociopolitical clusters, where we carried out qualitative research in 2018 (political actors, entrepreneurs and youth). We collected statements and opinions on the membership delay as well as ASEAN's quest as a central regional actor. We explored the core figures that are in the forefront when it comes to the process of preparation for becoming a member state of the regional grouping and how this could influence decision-making processes in terms of ASEAN's inclusion-exclusion dynamics. We asked what exactly such a process means for a regional identity and how this could be coordinated through the sociopolitical mechanisms of a small nation on the 'threshold' of entering ASEAN.

Regarding this research avenue, ASEAN's centrality has been previously discussed from the perspective of international relations and politics in terms of regional networks and interconnected stakeholders, as well as from an economic perspective (e.g. He, 2006; Frost, 2013; Caballero-Anthony, 2014; Croissant, 2016) and its leadership role and dynamics within the region (Lee,

2010; Acharya, 2017; Nishimura, Ambashi & Iwasaki, 2019). Even though ASEAN's centrality has been touched on in previous studies throughout the Timor-Leste membership process (Wuryandari, 2011; Chongkittavorn, 2019; Seixas, Mendes & Lobner, 2019), there is still a gap in the literature when it comes to the grouping's quest for centrality seen through the sociopolitical realm of the small country. Considering that in this research we have approached the issue outlined from the internal perspective of the small nation, its relationship with ASEAN is of great relevance for the greater context. Bearing in mind that the country has been applying for membership since 2011, its position within the region and its role in the grouping's centrality appear to be irrelevant or even non-existent. Previously, the membership issue has been mainly discussed in online media (e.g.: Pinheiro, 2014; Chongkittavorn, 2019; Arifuddin, 2019; Ortuoste, 2019; Strating, 2019), as well as through scientific analyses, in an attempt to discover why the delay has been so long (Wuryandari, 2011; Siapno, 2014; Seixas, Mendes & Lobner, 2019). When looking at the discussions of recent years, which mainly explore the membership procedure on the surface,[1] we propose opening then up and delving into the 'hidden agenda'. In this process, our approach is to understand if there actually is ASEAN centrality for Timor-Leste and, if there is, how it is displayed through the country's sociopolitical context. Therefore, with the consolidation of the relationship between Timor-Leste and ASEAN, we aim to explore dynamics which have not been tackled in previous studies: internal country perspectives and internal strategies towards ASEAN membership, as previous literature mainly tackles international perspectives (Seixas, Mendes & Lobner, 2019). Therefore, our attempt is to explore what the actual relationship is between Timor-Leste and ASEAN. Is ASEAN considered a core issue for the small country, and how can this centrality be demonstrated within different groups in Timor-Leste?

Certainly, the role of the small country and its agenda are also relevant issues for the region. These questions of Timor-Leste's role for ASEAN remain unanswered, bringing a new line of investigation to light. Our aim is to explore this issue from Timor-Leste's internal realm. Within this, we look closely at the country's sociopolitical dynamics to understand if there is ASEAN centrality for the small country or if the grouping is only another 'tool' for increasing hierarchical power relations within Timor-Leste. As media and previous research

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1 Discussions which mainly tackle the obvious and official structures without considering the 'hidden' agenda. This is by no means meant to discredit these discussions or their relevance. Our argument is that after these (important) established frameworks and research of recent years, the hidden details must be delved into in order to contribute to the understanding of the greater dynamics involved.

show, there is a great deal of narrative about the country's readiness to join the grouping (Seixas, Mendes & Lobner, 2019). Yet, there is no end in sight in terms of the final application. Therefore, in course of the fieldwork, we looked at this issue from another angle: how ASEAN's centrality can be shown.

Considering our data, ASEAN's centrality is ambivalent for Timor-Leste. ASEAN occurs as a support narrative within a Clash of Egos in an exclusively political arena, namely, a clientelist and patronage politics system. Through the lens of Timor-Leste, ASEAN does not seem like a priority, although it could be an opportunity. Consistent with the Clash of Egos that we have reached through our interpretation, the data reveals a narcissism of minor differences, multiple strategic relationships and lastly, a lack of capabilities in the new nation state to compete in the regional (and international) market. We reached the conclusion that there is an ambivalence of centrality which is shown in a polylogue by different groups, while Timor-Leste already plays the role of a phantom member. We tackle this issue through the theoretical interpretation of a scattered polylogue between local society patterns and the modern nation state, through which a new knowledge realm comes to the fore through our respondents' perceptions: understanding if there is ASEAN centrality by analyzing Timor-Leste's sociopolitical clusters.

This chapter is structured into three main sections. In the first one, the theoretical framework and the methodology are presented. The second section focuses on an outline of our findings and a brief discussion, which consists of three subsections with a portrayal and analysis of the main arguments of each sociopolitical cluster (clash of egos, internal/external ambivalences, lack of capabilities). Lastly, the data is discussed and put into the perspective of a scattered polylogue (Kristeva, 1977; Chen, 2010) where certain theoretical hybrid structures (house societies, modern nations and international lineages, clanic and state structures, clientelism and patronage and inside-outside relations) will be applied to understand leading dynamics in the discourse of Timor-Leste's sociopolitical realm with regard to ASEAN's centrality.

1.1   *Research Design: A Polylogue of Sociopolitical Clusters*

The aim of this article is to contribute to the debate on ASEAN's centrality as seen through the case study on Timor-Leste. During the course of this research, we tried to make sense of this political and societal realm by pinpointing different (cultural) organizational patterns in the context of interwoven cultural dimensions (elites vs. citizens, individualism vs. collectivism, hierarchical distance vs. control of uncertainty) (Hofstede, 2001). Bearing in mind that several different voices and dynamics are in the forefront, this context will be demonstrated through a polylogue of social clusters (Kristeva, 1977; Chen, 2010).

This allows us to understand the construction of areas of meaningful cultural exchange within the framework of regional organizations, emphasizing that understanding several perspectives in interaction on a (transregional) common ground contributes to understanding the building of centrality. More precisely, this text contributes to showing how an international centrality is accommodated within national coping strategies and presented as such.

When taking into account that Timor-Leste's state structure is a very recent one that is primarily based on the core idea of house societies, concepts such as 'big man' (Sahlins, 1963) and 'patronage and clientelism' continue – amongst others – to be of prime importance for our analysis. A 'Big Man' is an individual with a lot of influence (within a sociopolitical context), specifically within Melanesian and Polynesian contexts. Obtaining authority on various levels, individuals who hold such positions within a society continuously need to 'prove' their strength, wisdom and power amongst other 'big men'. The big man has large groups of clan followers, who he provides with protection and economic support, through which, in return, the followers must provide the individual with loyalty (Sahlins, 1963). 'Big Man' structures are a relevant political tool within 'patronage and clientelism' social organizations, as we understand to be the case in the context of Timor-Leste (Berenschrot & Aspinall, 2018; Aspinall, Hicken, Scambary, & Weiss 2018; Scambary, 2019).

One of the main questions we raise is how house societies adapt in a global context through regional integration dynamics. This is analyzed through our case study in an arena of (international) regions such as ASEAN, pinpointing how Timor-Leste's society is coping with this quest. Timor-Leste has to be understood through its very recent nation state-building and through this, its fragile position in the 'game' of several global players, which opens the door to analyzing ASEAN's centrality role for the small country.

We are dealing with the case of a postcolonial society with specific conflicts and ambivalences, where a cultural translation between dynamics needs to take place (Seixas, 2010, pp. 11–19). Through analyzing voices from the field, strategic societal and political constructions come to the fore: clientelism and patronage (Berenschrot & Aspinall, 2018; Aspinall, Hicken, Scambary, & Weiss, 2018) in the crosscut between clanic societies and the state society (Silva & Simão, 2012) and a narcissism of minor differences (Freud, 1930; Simmel, 1955; Blok, 1998; Harrison, 2006) for understanding the clash between urban organizational societies and house societies (Sousa, 2010). Considering Timor-Leste's state structure as a very recent one and deeply marked by the interaction of tradition and modernity, an interplay between the nation, social organizations and culture is a relevant domain, which we will represent through the interaction of our three sociopolitical clusters. Considering internal and external

ambivalences as a major influence on the interaction between the region and the small country, a polarization of interests between the state and the citizens seems to be in the forefront – power distance (Hofstede, 2001) in the context of a narcissism of minor differences (Freud, 1930; Simmel, 1955; Blok, 1998; Harrison, 2006).

Hence, when looking more closely at what we will pinpoint through clientelism and patronage dynamics, Timor-Leste's sociopolitical arena opens up to an ambivalence between 'opportunity' and 'opportunism'. Timor-Leste's priority seems to be internal negotiations on hierarchy and power within a big man social organization.

1.2 *Methodology*

In order to gather the data necessary to answer our research question, we undertook qualitative research (Creswell, 2002) using an interpretivist approach. This means that we used methods which allowed us to collect empirical information on our research question, interviewing three focus groups in Timor-Leste.

Our first approach was the definition of the research question relevant to the matter of interest. The preliminary question we raised was on the relationship between Timor-Leste and ASEAN regarding its membership application. Having undertaken bibliographical research and netnography on this matter firsthand, we went into the field with the information we had already gathered through literature (Seixas, Mendes & Lobner, 2019). While this was ongoing, we focused our research on understanding if an ASEAN centrality exists and, if so, asking *how it is manifested through Timor-Leste's sociopolitical realm.* Considering this research question, we defined sociopolitical clusters which respond to the candidacy issue between Timor-Leste and ASEAN. As we interviewed state actors, civil society representatives and young people, we had 30 research participants altogether, based on the same interview guide. Considering that our focus groups come from different background, the interviews were adjusted slightly to their context. Hence, we approached each group through a predesigned cluster of interview questions on Timor-Leste's position regarding the regional grouping, considering that its membership application has been officially ongoing since 2011. The semi-structured, open-ended, face-to-face interviews we conducted in the field were based on:

i)   the chronological timeframe of the membership application
ii)   the political circumstances, and
iii)   the economic conditions/impact

A fourth category emerged from these three categories:

iv)   the sociopolitical setting of the relationship between ASEAN and Timor-Leste.

After we gathered the data (the interviews were conducted in Portuguese, Tetum and English, adjusted to each interviewee in order to obtain information that was as authentic as possible), the material was professionally transcribed and translated into either Portuguese or English. This process of transcribing and translating the interviews was followed by extensive content analysis. During the course of this content analysis, we ended up with 35 categories which answered our interview questions. This led to our data interpretation, resulting in one core argument for each category, as well as the use of the 'social situations' approach (Gluckman, 1940; Geertz, 1973).

Before going into the field, we had to define a number of interviewees we wanted to approach. Bearing in mind that empirical generalizations of great scientific complexity cannot be made, a 'non-probabilistic sampling strategy is most appropriate' (Hamill, 2017, p. 1), which is what we undertook. We dealt inductively with how each (predefined) cluster interprets the issues that questions were asked about (regarding ASEAN and the Timor-Leste candidacy), leading to the formulation of our hypotheses, which we explored through the application of certain concepts, and from which our final interpretation of the primary problem was developed.

2   Findings and Discussion

When speaking of Timor-Leste's membership of the regional grouping, ASEAN, we have to consider several interwoven complexities. There has been much debate on this issue in recent years, particularly exploring the possible reasons for the delay. Scientists, journalists, media actors, politicians and other stakeholders are, broadly speaking, tackling the country's supposed readiness to join the grouping. In a previous paper, we analyzed this mainstream narrative of readiness that is prevalent in online media (Seixas, Mendes, Lobner, 2019).

Our curiosity about this subject increased, considering the large number of questions remaining unanswered. One of the main concerns is why Timor-Leste is still not a member of ASEAN, considering that it is seen as well-prepared with no official opponents to its admission (Ortuoste, 2019; Chongkittavorn, 2019; Strating, 2019). Hence, there is a need to ask what blind spot has been missed in scientific discourses in recent years, and where new approaches have to go further.

Next, we contextualized the country's internal and external discrepancies regarding the admission in the form of sociological constructions behind public opinion. We questioned the political structures of the country whilst focusing on the admission procedure since its first official attempts to join the

grouping. During this time, we pinpointed this realm through the framework of clientelism and patronage patterns within a big man society. Furthermore, we interpreted the relationship between ASEAN and Timor-Leste through a narcissism of minor differences and, as a result of this, a 'schismogenesis' in which two or more parties of interest react to each other and then react to each other's reactions in turn, through which escalating patterns evolve (Bateson, 1958). Interfacing with such internal structures and general political inconsistencies, external ambiguities and uncertainties take on great relevance in this debate. These arguments evolved out of our content analysis of the 35 categories that we obtained through the interviews. Below, we have listed the 35 categories:

ASEAN – Ambiguities – Togetherness – Delay – Capabilities – Human Resources – Politics – Economy – Neighbors – Chronology – Opponents – Burden – Uncertainty – Internal – External – Middleman – Free Trade – Identity
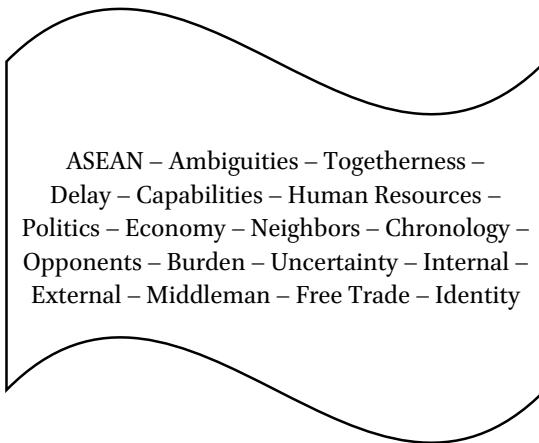
FIGURE 5.1   Category list
            SOURCE: ELABORATION OF THE AUTHORS

Out of these 35 categories, we identified 3 core statements (aggregated categories) for each cluster. Even though we created a separate interpretation section for each group, it is of relevance to state that the data are often cross-cutting and linked, as highlighted in the core of the article.

To enable a better understanding of our content analysis as referred to in the methodological approach above, we have outlined in **Table 5.1** what we took as the main findings. For each cluster, we created a column with two indicators used for reinforcing the category:[2]

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2   The information was originally given in Portuguese and Tetum and was translated by the authors into English for an international audience.

TABLE 5.1   Categories of the agents' main statements

Focus Groups	Categories (Findings)	Indicators
1. State Actors	a. Clash of Egos	Exclusive political issue, no national consensus
2. Civil Society Representatives	b. Multiple strategic relationships	Internal/external ambivalences; Lack of interaction/negotiation
3. Young People	c. Capabilities deficit	Timor-Leste not ready yet; Economic disadvantages when joining the grouping

As our findings reveal, the state actors mainly consider internal political inconsistencies, which we interpret as a clash of egos. Civil society representatives disclose multiple strategic relationships with Timor-Leste. Lastly, the younger generation of academics referred to a capability deficit, pinpointing that economically speaking, Timor-Leste is not prepared enough for competing in the broader market of the region. We analyzed each sociopolitical cluster from their perspectives, through which we created the 35 categories presented above (and aggregated main arguments). The interviews with the clusters revealed various overlapping details around the circumstances of the admission procedure, which led to our interpretation of the data. Although there seems to be no straightforward answer to why the delay is still ongoing, it was a trigger for our fieldwork, which brought several ambiguities, inconsistencies and uncertainties to the fore. We questioned existing suppositions on this case as a way of perhaps coming closer to exploring the actual matters/issues which are going on behind the scenes.

As interpreted mainly through the interview data from the state actor cluster, the country's membership seems to depend on an internal clash of egos. We contextualize this interpretation of a clash of egos through the external theoretical concepts of a big man society (Sahlins, 1963) and a narcissism of minor differences (Elias, 2008; Bourdieu, 1964; Blok, 1998), which will be the subject of more in-depth analysis in the main body of the text. Furthermore, we understand the fragmentation of house societies to be predominant, taking particular social situations as evidence. The issue of a clash of egos in a house society and modern nation state context is explored through the avenue of patronage and clientelism structures, understanding a polarization of interests between the state and its citizens (Hofstede, 2001) – a collision/coalition

between tradition and modernity. This is consistent with the second cluster, civil society representatives, which we interpreted through a multiple strategic relationship. In the last section, we focus on the main argument of the third cluster (young academics), which refers to a capability deficit when it comes to joining the grouping. This is combined with the internal fear in the country of an economic loss for Timor-Leste when joining the grouping, considering its insufficient preparedness in terms of human resources.

We propose looking at these interpretations in the context of a postcolonial society which is continuously negotiating its position within the regional (and global) setting, at the crossroads between tradition and modernity. In the next sections, we elaborate on the (empirical and theoretical) conceptual framework outlined above to make sense of the complexity we are faced with.

Considering this outline, we will present our interpretation as follows: firstly, we analyze the core argument of the state actors, the clash of egos, then, we analyze the civil society representatives from the perspective of a multiple strategic relationship, followed by young people, with the interpretation of a capability deficit. In conclusion, the data presented will be discussed through the debate on ASEAN's centrality and how this may be seen through Timor-Leste's societal and political realm.

2.1   *A Clash of Egos*

In the first category, we focus on the arguments used by the interviewees which mainly look at ASEAN integration as an exclusively political issue with the absence of a national consensus within Timor-Leste. This, as we understand it, is the result of a clash of egos. We propose that this line of argument can be more clearly understood through the theoretical 'big man' concept (Sahlins, 1963) within a 'patronage and clientelism' society (Berenschrot & Aspinall, 2018, Aspinall, Hicken, Scambary, & Weiss 2018). This we pinpoint through Timor-Leste's membership procedure as a form of power performance and negotiation between a few individuals at the crossroads of tradition and modernity. In these terms, we can first take a specific interview extract into consideration:

> Hopefully, our leaders, our Timorese leaders, will first pay attention to solving all the problems we have 'at home', otherwise it won't be in a position to join ASEAN.
>
>   Interview PA3, September 2018

Following this empirical reference to internal disputes and our interview data in general, we put the ASEAN admission procedure into the context of an

exclusively political issue. Due to the inconsistency of political strategies and the lack of cooperation between Timor-Leste's leaders, a clash of egos comes to the fore. Our respondents point to a crucial absence of a general national movement in Timor-Leste in favor of the membership. ASEAN – as a regional grouping – is little known in Timor-Leste's society. It seems to be a discourse for the elite only, disregarding the distribution of information throughout local communities/rural areas, disabling the participation of the core of the population. Therefore, due to such internal political inconsistencies, the data show that the respondents are very ambivalent about the readiness of their country to join the grouping.

> I am absolutely certain that it depends on politics … and particularly on politicians. We need to be part of ASEAN! We are only informing and warning politicians, without a clear response from our government.
>> Interview PA7, September 2018

Even though there have been various attempts in the past to spread awareness, there is still criticism inside the country. First, there seems to be a lack of knowledge distribution within Timor-Leste in regard to ASEAN. Concerning this issue, the membership seems to continue being a debate primarily amongst the elite of the country.

> Our ASEAN divisions have always had a lot of community awareness programs. But – under my observation – there has never been a national movement towards preparing for the membership, which would include traveling to the very remote areas to disseminate information in order to let people know what we need to do and need to be.
>> Interview PA2, December 2018

Using these interview extracts as indicators, our findings consistently demonstrate a persistent lack of communication and interaction, not just between the leaders themselves, but also between the leaders and the country's citizens. Local awareness about the Southeast Asian region seems to be absent, not to mention ASEAN itself as a grouping.

> And so, I think that some kind of a communication would help. And also, we ourselves also have to be more active as well and not just at political level but at a technical level, we should demonstrate that we could engage in a constructive and productive way.
>> Interview PA2, September 2018

Timorese intellectuals aren't concentrated enough. They go for other things first, so they will never know when the actual ASEAN admission will take place. So, my personal message to the ASEAN members is that they would have to give us a final date for us to be ready by. So that our leaders have a deadline, that they can push our resources forward, prepare our economy in terms of security and finally get ready for the admission.
> Interview PA4, September 2018

According to the interviews, there will be no predominant national focus on ASEAN as long as there is no final date or application guide. Looking more closely at this case, we can see an almost apathetic approach towards ASEAN by the country's leaders. Not much effort has been put into constructively engaging and working with ASEAN, which is why there has been an apparent insufficiency of endeavor towards becoming the 11th member in recent years.

In these terms, frequent reference is made to the need for better preparation to achieve consistency in decision-making processes and the creation of a national (political) consensus. Once more, there is a division between the people responsible (political leaders) regarding a conjoint strategy. This was understood earlier by political actors outside the country (within the ASEAN region) and could be disadvantageous to the approval of Timor-Leste's membership. Hence, if the country's leaders are unable to start pulling in the same direction in terms of the admission procedure, its sovereignty will remain in question regionally:

After all, we no longer understand what Timor-Leste wants. You're gone, now the new minister [Xanana Gusmão] has come and says that Timor isn't ready, that Timor has to prepare better.
> Interview PA5, September 2018

[…] for me I say that our leaders here in Timor will have to have the courage to say that we have to end these conflicts. We need to end these things based on politics.
> Interview PA3, September 2018

[…] And ASEAN said: "You still have problems between you, within your country, you must pay attention to your country in order to be able to make your country walk, before being with us".
> Interview PA2, September 2018
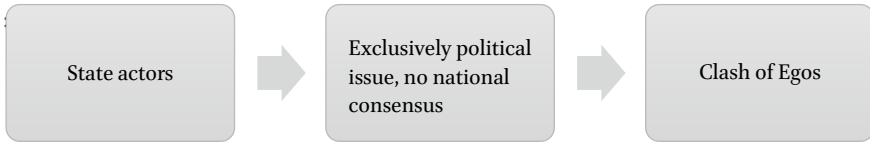
FIGURE 5.2 Lack of joint strategy

These extracts are relevant indicators for understanding that firstly, ASEAN seems to be aware of Timor-Leste's internal political inconsistencies (clash of egos) and secondly, the reference to a specific social situation which seems to have influenced the greater context in the long term. 'Social situations', as they can be referred to from an anthropological perspective (Gluckman, 1940; Geertz, 1973), serve for an interpretative reading of a broader context. When considering the interplay of certain key political actors in Timor-Leste and how they approach(ed) the ASEAN candidacy, the timeframe between 2007–2012 is of core relevance for this debate. Understanding that this issue is specifically based on the relationship between three political actors (big men, individuals of high influence for the entire society, a position which has to be continuously reconfigured) in the country, we interpreted a triangular social situation:
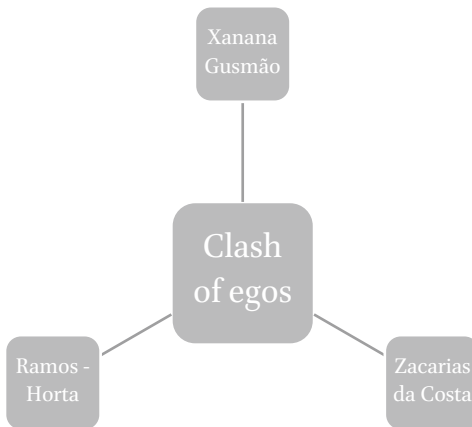
FIGURE 5.3 Triangular social situation

In this triangular social situation, the collision of the diverging interests is represented: the former prime minister, Xanana Gusmão, former president, José Ramos-Horta, and the former foreign minister, Zacarias da Costa. Through our interviews with Timorese State actors, it first came to light that a certain 'Xanana Strategy' had had a strong impact in regard to ASEAN membership,

clearly coming to the fore at the inauguration of the IDN (national defense institute) in 2012 (GoT, 2012). This specific moment refers to a relevant social situation (Gluckman, 1940; Geertz, 1973), which reveals one of several meanings of ASEAN for Timor-Leste's political arena: the possibility of a personal role within the international political context as a way to facilitate internal patronage which enables a clientele and, therefore, increases internal political influence. Before we elaborate further on the social situation of the conference per se, we need to take a closer look at what exactly is meant by 'patronage' and 'clientele'.

As has been analyzed in previous research by Aspinall, Hicken, Weiss and Scambary (2018), Timor-Leste may be understood through a patronage and clientelism society structure, as it continuously negotiates its political position between tradition and modernity. As discussed by James Scambary (2019) through case studies on electoral processes within the country, politics is mainly based on the direct interaction of a certain individual (leader, big man) with a community in the form of direct support (financial, material or emotional). In return, the leading figure expects support in the form of votes and loyalty.

Therefore, we can say that the 'patron' (big man) benefits from his 'clientele', a relationship between entities of unequal status in a reciprocal exchange, often of material goods, with moral obligations. Timor-Leste, a country which has had a long history of exploitation and violence, has a strong resistance movement which evolved during the long struggle against their Indonesian occupiers. Understanding that certain actors played a leading role as former guerillas or diplomats, fighting to win back the country's independence (with Xanana Gusmão and José Ramos-Horta in the forefront), loyalty towards these leaders should come as no great surprise. Even though Xanana, for instance, is widely feared within the country, his personal link to its people's freedom seems to be stronger. Hence, as extensively discussed in previous research (Aspinall, Hicken, Scambary, & Weiss, 2018; Scambary, 2019), this realm should not be overlooked when internal clashes are involved.

Understanding such a clash of certain individuals in the forefront of the political constitution of the country, the IDN conference referred to above represents a very important state moment in which several important political actors and diplomats from all over ASEAN were present. What happened, precisely, was that Xanana, the then Prime Minister, wanted to make his personal position within the country clear – as the big man reinforcing patronage society dynamics. It hardly comes as a surprise that Xanana (one of the most famous actors in the independence war of Timor-Leste and beyond) wants to steadily prove his personal leadership capacity so as not to lose his status

amongst other political actors (as is the case with regard to the interplay with Ramos-Horta, Timor-Leste's former president).

When looking more closely at the social situation of the conference for the inauguration of the IDN, Xanana had to make his position clear: presenting the case of ASEAN idiosyncratically, he unexpectedly placed himself in a counter position to the foreign affairs department, which had been the most relevant actor in terms of the membership procedure. Therefore, Xanana announced the country's unreadiness for joining the grouping to the conference audience, which seems to have been a crucial moment for Timor-Leste's ASEAN membership. The primary intention at the conference was to promote Timor-Leste's readiness to join the grouping, which, after Xanana's 'intervention', was closely examined by the ministry of foreign affairs and ASEAN leaders. This unforeseen situation was clearly a cold shower for the country, especially for the planned strategy of the former president, Ramos-Horta, and the former foreign minister, Zacarias da Costa. This demonstrates that Xanana (as big man) positioned his own status and leadership capacity as more relevant to the people than the country's joining the regional grouping, maintaining his power and strength in the eyes of the people.

Considering the fact that after this occasion, Xanana personally went to the rural areas of Timor-Leste advocating ASEAN membership and disseminating information to the people, this shows that another interest is in play – the promotion of his own position as the big man who leads the people beyond the official state structures, to appear as the essential force for reaching a certain goal through the togetherness of the country (under his implicit big man leadership) – the logic of patronage and clientelism social dynamics.

> This matter stands at the crossroads between tradition and modernity, bearing in mind that Xanana is performing on an international scale through the representation of 'traditional' Timor to a global audience. Understanding that Xanana used his own action plan for establishing a link to ASEAN, it is clear that his main interest was to lead this relevant matter himself as the country's 'big man' and remain in the (international and local) spotlight. "It seemed to me that it was more the President of the Republic at the time, Ramos-Horta, and […], who were pulling on this topic". But Xanana was not very focused on the membership. He was not very favorable towards it, although, as we have seen – two or three years later he made an effort, with Roberto [Soares[3]].
>
> Interview PA1, September 2018

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3   Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, 2015–2017.

This interview extract demonstrates that due to the first official steps towards joining the grouping, Xanana – as Prime Minister by that time – had not been effectively supporting this attempt, only some years later engaging in actions in favor of the grouping.

It is relevant to state that Timor-Leste's application for membership of ASEAN was officially submitted for the first time in 2011. It must also be noted that in 2005, Timor-Leste became part of the ARF (ASEAN Regional Forum) and signed the Treaty on Amity and Cooperation in 2007. In 2007, the time of the aforementioned (key) political actors began: José Ramos-Horta held the position of the country's president, Xanana Gusmão became the prime minister and Zacarias da Costa was the foreign minister. The membership application was submitted during this period (in 2011), which is why we consider this timeframe as highly relevant for the discussion of the efforts made towards becoming part of the grouping.

This paradox of leadership reveals another perception of the political disunity in terms of decision-making processes in a patronage/clientelism style. Considering such structures as prevailing, individuals in the leadership (in this case of the elites) use different voices in order to create power capital for themselves. The empirical data (as represented above) reveal that the leaders gave divergent instructions regarding the strategy towards the membership, which resulted in a 'silent' political conflict (visible in the internal context). The absence of a national consensus (as a consequence of divergent individual strategic interests) in respect of ASEAN may be a core reason for the setbacks to the admission procedure in recent years. Therefore, as our respondents reveal, ASEAN had been a priority in the past, but was not approached correctly due to what we outline as a Clash of Egos. There is a generally shared perception that the membership is a chance which the country might have missed due to such internal political inconsistencies. Therefore, we consider the absence of interactions and cooperation to be a result of conflicting individual political interests, such as are predominant in patronage and clientelism social structures led by big men (Sahlins, 1963).

When using the concept of 'big man', we are speaking precisely of an expression/ideal type which was first used to describe hierarchical political positions through which chiefdom persists and is being constructed (Sahlins, 1963, pp. 285–290). In this context, certain groups (lineages) are held together by leaders who previously competed for power within the wider social structure of the group. This position is not a continuous, irrevocable one. Furthermore, it has to be achieved and proved through the ambition of the currently recognized leading figure. The position of a Big Man is highly influential for the structure of the society and the individual inheriting it possesses certain rights over the society, understood as the holder of wisdom, strength and general

force over the group (Sahlins, 1963). The leader always stands under challenge and in competition with other potential big men. It is one of the leaders' tasks to balance the society he is ruling over, as well as the redistribution and reciprocity of resources with other groups. It is not a formal system and therefore not covered by law. It can also be seen as a social construction or even a contract, on a political level, which is a relevant link to the social organization through patronage and clientelism structures (Berenschrot & Aspinall, 2018; Aspinall, Hicken, Scambary, & Weiss, 2018).

As our empirical data shows, the approach to ASEAN, rather than being a clearly defined process, has been one of confusion:

> I already told our Indonesian friends. I told them, but very informally, like talking to friends: Ah, 'Many of us are no longer so enthusiastic about joining ASEAN. So, that's no big deal! There are so many problems'.
> Interview PA6, September 2018

Whilst not following the same strategic line of preparing the country for ASEAN (as a result of the clash of egos), personal differences between the leaders remain in the fore. When looking at the case of Timor-Leste's leaders in the first period of submitting the application for membership of ASEAN (specifically, the timeframe between 2005/ARF and 2011/membership application), the clash of egos seems to have caused wariness and distrust in ASEAN as to the commitment of Timor-Leste.

We conclude that since the period of the first official membership application, no internal (or external) consensus has been reached. The collision of interests between the president, the prime minister and the foreign minister remain unsolved. The lack of coherence in decision-making once more reveals the structures of a patronage society, in which each leading individual aims to carry out their own strategy to remain in the spotlight. This comes to the fore when considering the social situation we have presented, used metaphorically for the greater context in play. Each one having a different strategy towards the membership once again highlights an absence of national consistency in decision-making. Through this contextualization, we come to the conclusion that ASEAN centrality does not appear to exist for Timor-Leste. Moreover, we understand a centrality of egos as being at the crossroads between a house-society structure and the modern nation state.

2.2   *Internal & External Ambivalence*
Following this analysis of the clash of egos inside the country, we propose that the polylogue between tradition and modernity – of house societies and the modern nation state – is still of great relevance. This, as we propose, has to be

understood through the predominance of patronage and clientelist social organization (an intermingling of clanic with modern nation state). Understanding that patronage can only function when there is a clientele and that brokers (led by big men) are needed for establishing a realm between communities and the individuals who maintain power, we consider the narratives of civil society as an inevitable avenue for coming to grips with these intermingling processes. Hence, in this section, we interpret the main arguments of the data from civil society representatives, which concern internal and external ambivalence towards the membership admission. This is in line with the arguments from the state actors, considering that civil society representatives can serve as a bridge (or brokers) between leaders and local communities.

As a starting point for exploring this realm, we can once again look at the general opinion on ASEAN membership inside the country and how the procedure is perceived. The majority of Timor-Leste's elite society (state actors, entrepreneurs, university students) sees the membership as inevitable in order to gain international recognition and the chance for market competition in order to grow and develop faster in an economic sense. The disparities of the past between the previous political leaders seem not to have made a meaningful contribution to the final inclusion in the grouping. The lack of efforts towards ASEAN membership as a result of the above clash of egos within a patronage and clientelism social structure causes widespread frustration amongst Timorese individuals.

> With absolute certainty, it depends on the politicians. And politics in general. We have to be in ASEAN. We need to alert our politicians to this.
> Interview CS2, October 2018

ASEAN membership would undoubtedly offer excellent opportunities for Timor-Leste in the international context, in terms of economic benefits, market opportunities and, therefore, increased development of the small state. Clearly, regional support is needed in order to grow faster, to enhance wealth and to gain broader recognition for participating in competition and trade.

Yet, the internal political conflicts outlined above do not do much to contribute to reaching this destination. The problem is intensified when one considers that the leaders are pushing the task and its matters further, looking at the issue through the actions of the others. Paradoxically, even leaders themselves refer to a lack of commitment and the absence of a national consensus. The criticism circulated by the leaders themselves, each one stating that no effort has been made by the opposing actors who are in charge of reaching a consensus together, evidences the narcissism of minor differences:

> The first great disaster was José Luís Guterres, after that, an even greater disaster, Zacarias da Costa, and thereafter the next disaster, but it was my fault too, because I insisted on Xanana nominating Hernani because he seemed very disciplined, a good worker. But oh, he just doesn't know how to lead people.
>
> Interview CS5, October 2018

We cannot discount the fact that the problem is not only an internal one, or one relying only on the supposed clash of egos. External factors (such as economy, politics, identity) seem to play a central role regarding the final admission, when the statements from civil society representatives are considered.

In the context of regional identity, Timor-Leste's position is often referred to as being (metaphorically speaking) 'outside' of Southeast Asia and therefore, closer to Europe (specifically Portugal and, more broadly, the CPLP context) in terms of culture, politics and belief systems. Timor-Leste is described as rather liberal, democratic and highly advanced in terms of human rights records/peacebuilding processes. This is seen as a great contribution the small country could bring to ASEAN but is also referred to as something which may not be welcomed by the region, due to the extreme differences in political systems (rather military, autocratic, dictatorships, oppression, etc.). Furthermore, the country differs in terms of language, which may be another indicator for it not being welcome in the region. On this specific matter, the majority of interviewees refer to the region as neighbors, but to CPLP and Portugal as brothers. They themselves state that in terms of identity, the country may not be similar enough to the region (which could be an indicator for the objections of ASEAN because of the ASEAN identity).

Considering the regional identity construction of ASEAN on the basis of the aforementioned indicators, we have to take a close look at its centrality. The argument that Timor-Leste is not 'Asian enough' (Interview CS4, October 2018) and that culturally speaking it has more similarities to CPLP and its 'European brothers' may be explained through a 'narcissism of minor differences'. The narcissism of minor differences is a concept which has been profoundly used by Sigmund Freud for explaining rivalry amongst people with common ties and, more broadly speaking, amongst neighboring states. As Freud framed it within his psychoanalysis approach, people tend to focus on their minor differences from others for defining their 'uniqueness' and therefore, their identity.

> Neighboring groups tend to exaggerate their distinctiveness from each other, attach a disproportionate significance to those few features that

> differentiate them and jealously – even violently – seek to protect their
> real or imagined collective idiosyncrasies.
>
> Freud, 1930, p. 114, in Harrison, 2006, p. 2

This opens up the understanding that when there is very close proximity between people, crucial conflicts are often predicted for renegotiating identification processes for defining the 'self' towards the 'other', as it is, in general, a predominant discourse in anthropological perspectives on social organizations. Considering ASEAN in its totality as a region, we have to consider its social growth, change and expansion over recent decades through a variety of diverging decolonization processes.

> Hence, as the scale of society grows, so people must diversify to avoid conflict, 'speciating' into functionally interdependent groups, their overall integration coming to rest increasingly – though never completely – on their differences.
>
> Harrison, 2006, p. 2

Timor-Leste holds a very specific position within this context. Bearing in mind that the small country shares the island with its Indonesian neighbors, narrating its kinship roots to a much wider context than the small country itself (Seixas, 2016; Traube, 2007; Fox, 2011; and others), it is curious that, in regional terms, Timor-Leste is perceived 'different, other, not the same'. This is often pinpointed through discussions on its colonial past, for instance, or its national context and its political patterns, which are different from those of its neighbors. But we must ask: are these 'differences' visible and/or significant enough to question ASEAN centrality for Timor-Leste in such a crucial way, which, as understood through the data, partly competes with CPLP centrality? This narcissism of minor differences – "the idea that it is precisely the minor differences between people who are otherwise alike that form the basis of feelings of strangeness and hostility between them" (Blok, 1998, p. 1) – may not be predominant only on ASEAN's side. Taking into account that, even inside the country, clear ambivalence towards the membership can be seen amongst its leaders (Clash of Egos in a big man construct), Timor-Leste may perceive (and present) itself as different from its neighbors, and perhaps the aim is to keep it that way. As Blok further framed it, we may understand that it is primarily the minor differences which tend to be related to social conflicts and division (Blok, 1998). Furthermore, we may take another conceptualization into consideration, which has its origin with Gregory Bateson (1958). What Bateson called a 'schismogenesis' (similar to the 'conflictual mimesis' framed by Girard, 1978)

can be understood as a social organization dualism in which 'two or more pro-tagonists react to one another, and react to one another's reactions, in a circu-lar, escalating pattern'. (Harrison, 2006, p. 3)

Along the same lines as the narcissism of minor differences and the schis-mogenesis processes which can be used for understanding the Timor-Leste case in the context of ASEAN centrality, Norbert Elias' conceptualization of civilizing processes is another relevant domain for coming to terms with the complexities at stake. He argues that 'civilization' and 'power' are neither fixed nor stable. According to his approach, power always stands in relation to the social and political interdependence of the group's actors/representatives. For Elias, civilization is a result of ongoing historical processes and mechanisms in which people's actions and habits are transformed according to the will-power of certain leading figures – as is the case in political power relations expressed through social links (Elias, 2008). This idea fits the above outlined social dynamics involved, in which individuals are in a continuously ongoing negotiation process with their followers in the realm of civilizational patterns and power relations within a schismogenesis of individuals and, more broadly, countries – as seems to be the case in Timor-Leste's internal power negotia-tions and its relationship with ASEAN. Bateson emphasizes that within a sym-metrical schismogenesis 'opponents are locked in a rivalry generated by their similarity, a rivalry generating further reciprocal imitation – and escalating rivalry' – a relationship of interdependence as well as competition (Bateson, 1958, p. 238 in Harrison, 2006, p. 3). Considering our case study, this realm comes to the fore through the arguments of our second social cluster, Civil Society Representatives. This cluster shows that a general lack of interaction and communication is predominant, not just within Timor-Leste in terms of its political leaders, but also between the country and ASEAN itself, which demonstrates reservations and disjunctions within their relationships.

> In political terms, there are problems. Because today, people say that there is a political impasse, but I say that there is political uncertainty. In fact, it continues to exist and this also delays Timor's application for membership of ASEAN.
>
> Interview CS3, October 2018

From this extract, we can see that internal ambivalences are still central in Timor-Leste, which is consistent with what we discussed in the previous sec-tion through the clash of egos evolving from a patronage and clientelism social structure. We propose that there is a meta-conflict at stake, understanding that the schismogenesis outlined above is seriously affecting the relationship

between the small country and the grouping. Furthermore, as the data in this section reveal, ASEAN is seen as a good opportunity for expansion, yet it appears not to be the country's first priority:

> I think that this is part of the process of how Timor-Leste integrates into the world. As a young country, we cannot isolate ourselves in one corner of the world, but we have to be out there, become engaged, know the world, and also allow the world to know us, how we can share the values that we have, share the experience that we have. (Interview CS3, October 2018)

More than having ASEAN as a priority, a multiple strategic relationship seems to be of greater interest and benefit to the small country.

> Timor is a unique case [within ASEAN] because in terms of regional organizations, Timor is also part of the CPLP, so they [ASEAN] are a little careful, because … I'm not entirely sure, but I suspect that Timor's independence was not a movement 100% supported by ASEAN. Timor has many friends in Europe, especially Portugal. Also in Mozambique, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde – the CPLP older and younger brothers who were their staunchest independence supporters. So … we talk about politics. Regional policy, geopolitics, geostrategy … ASEAN is sometimes careful about this. If we compare it to Laos or the others … Geographically, Timor is similar to the others, but given the exceptional case of Timor's independence, it is not similar to other countries.
>   Interview CS2, October 2018

This interview extract is very consistent with what we have proposed to be the result of a narcissism of minor differences. Geographically speaking, Timor-Leste is clearly part of Southeast Asia, yet it is perceived as being very different from the rest of the region – based on a minority of criteria (such as its close ties to its CPLP 'brothers'). In line with this, another interviewee reveals ASEAN's fears of not being 'similar enough':

> Probably, some ASEAN members worry that we are too close to certain … ah … countries … or, so called, big brothers or big sisters…. but, we told them that we are independent-minded … ah … we share some values with … whoever or whatever countries that share some of the principles that we believe in … that these values are all good and we share these things. Then, we will certainly … be able to have good cooperation

> because we all share these values. If there is anything that we feel that we
> are not comfortable with, I think we have the ways and means to settle
> that.
>
> Interview CS4, October 2018

This interview extract once more emphasizes that ASEAN's focus may well
be on minor differences setting Timor-Leste apart from the region due to the
country's multiple strategic relationships. We interpret this as a multiple stra-
tegic relationship with Timor-Leste, which seems to be at the root of its ongo-
ing rejection by the grouping and could be seen as a possible threat to ASEAN's
sociopolitical 'identity':

> We don't want to be a burden on ASEAN, we want to contribute. I think,
> we believe that there are a lot of values … ah … that we, we have and
> that we can share with ASEAN – our experience, our engagement with
> CPLP countries, the experience we have in the organization, we can share
> with them, our reconciliation with Indonesia post-independence, it's a
> very good value, that we can share with them – how to settle the differ-
> ences that we have, our democracy, our freedom of … the press, speech,
> all these things are good values that we can share with them.
>
> Interview CS4, October 2018

Hence, when considering this chart more closely, the data go along with
the internal and external ambivalence towards the membership procedure.
Qualitative negotiation processes cannot take place if there is still an absence
of interaction. When considering the possible predominance of multiple
strategic relationships for Timor-Leste, this may cause rejection by ASEAN.
According to certain critics, Timor-Leste is not committed enough to join-
ing the grouping (Seixas, Mendes & Lobner, 2019) due to its participation in
other regional/global organizations (CPLP, Asia-Pacific region, G7+) – clearly
explained through the lens of a narcissism of minor differences: "Social iden-
tity lies in difference, and difference is asserted against what is closest, which
represents the greatest threat". (Bourdieu, 1964, p. 479)
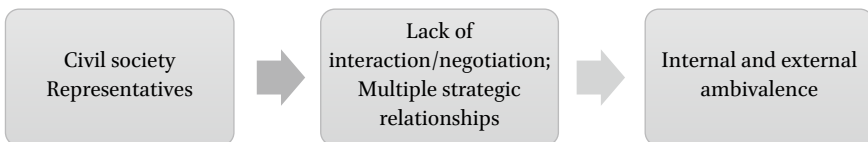
FIGURE 5.4   Internal and external ambivalence

Looking more closely at this definition, our interpretation of Timor-Leste's case for ASEAN's centrality, objections from the ASEAN side seem to arise from its different approach to belonging and identity construction. Bearing in mind that Timor-Leste is, in the eyes of some ASEAN member states, considered 'not committed enough' to the 'Asian identity', the small country's multiple strategic relationships appear to be a threat to the region's togetherness.

According to the data in the previous section, another very frequent argument for the discrepancies between Timor-Leste and ASEAN is a general lack of interaction and communication. Our respondents state that there cannot be progress in advancing the membership procedure if the leaders are not able to work things out together. This debate is closely connected to the arguments in which the absence of a consensus and common strategies among Timor-Leste's leaders come to the fore.

> If the State of Timor-Leste really wants 100% to join ASEAN, it has to make an effort. But a real effort. For example, only a lobby is not sufficient. Just saying, 'wait, it's almost done … [the preparations]', is not enough. Sometimes we say, 'you are liars, you lie to society'. Because the community doesn't know what ASEAN is either, what Asia is … a lot of people don't know! So, in this process, ASEAN has to move forward, but Timor-Leste also has to move and improve – in terms of socialization, education for communities about what the ASEAN organization is, talking about these things … once we are a member, what will our obligations be and what rights will our people have? It is these things.
>
> Interview CS5, October 2018

In terms of the external lack of interaction, the empirical data reveal general concerns on the absence of exchanges between Timor-Leste and the entire ASEAN community. The arguments of our respondents precisely tackle the need for more information on the current situation of the admission procedure, such as official statements on how the country can still improve in order to achieve membership.

> In fact, we don't promote ASEAN [in Timor-Leste], we don't do that. If the state has a big commitment to this, it has to do it – it has to educate, through publications/information about ASEAN so that society and communities can understand what ASEAN is, what Asia is! The two are not the same. And … how do you build [the ASEAN community]? Culturally, politically, socially, economically … That the people have to know and

then, when Timor-Leste's request is approved, our people will not be scared and will welcome the situation that arises.

> Interview CS2, October 2018

Even though our respondents do reveal certain ambiguities in this case, stating that there's no clear collaborative approach from either side, ASEAN seems to hold back its voice regarding the admission procedure in the public arena, which shows its concerns about the impact of the intermingling between both 'parties' (ASEAN & Timor-Leste).

> All the leaders that we met, I accompanied my Minister of Foreign Affairs recently in ... ah ... in Singapore, he met all the ASEAN foreign ministers and they all support our ASEAN membership. No one of them objects to our membership. They said, soon ... ah ... the final mission will come to Timor-Leste ... ah ... but, they haven't said when.
>
> Interview CS6, October 2018

The data show that there is no productive advisory board about the membership when it comes to including Timor-Leste in development strategies in terms of dialogue and cooperation within the region.

> They [Timorese people] would need to have technical know-how, so we can meet the standards of exports, etc. But I think this is why we need to have interactions and exchanges in the community – to be able to get cooperation and to get investments and all that.
>
> Interview CS2, October 2018

The interviewees call for the need for proper interaction between the region and TL in order to dispel concerns about a possible burden. In terms of the internal lack of interaction, our respondents plead for better dissemination and contribution of knowledge throughout the country.

> Our state has to examine policies well so that, after we join, the benefits are not only for a certain group or two (especially for one or two people, elected politicians), but are felt directly by the people.
>
> Interview CS3, October 2019

Integration or exclusion is heavily reliant on the political leaders and their strategic interplay at the crossroads between traditional house societies and the modern nation state in the realm of (international) regions.

2.3   *Economic Capability Deficit*

In the previous two sections, we elaborated on how ASEAN's centrality may be contextualized firstly through a clash of egos, which can be understood through a polylogue between tradition and modernity, a big man society constantly negotiating to continuously reconfigure power and status. Secondly, we pinpointed Timor-Leste's case within ASEAN as an issue of the narcissism of minor differences that constantly uses several foreign 'others' to create internal dynamics of differentiated power within a multiple strategic relationship context, resulting in internal and external ambivalences in play. Lastly, we have to tackle the fear of the country's capability deficit in order to compete within the larger market.

> ASEAN Member States, especially nations like Singapore – which are more advanced within the region – have made suggestions for Timor-Leste to improve its internal economic system (mainly at micro-level, such as entrepreneurs, private sector level, but also in the public sector) so that when Timor finally joins ASEAN, sufficient conditions are in place for it to happen.
>
> Interview Y1, December 2019

Given the content of the interviews with our third social cluster (Youth), it comes to the fore that knowledge has not been disseminated enough for the population to advance the necessary preparations. Young people believe they have been placed in the background without any inclusion in state dynamics. This may also be interpreted as a result of the clash between 'tradition' and 'modernity', as young people with traditional influences have strong ties to clans in which their voices are not considered of great relevance. In the country's modernity context, young people are embedded in urban cosmopolitan structures (such as universities), in which they, nevertheless, continue to struggle to be heard.[4]

It is mentioned that information is kept in Dili only and, to a large extent, rural areas not only do not know what Asia is, they are far from even being aware of ASEAN itself. Some of the interviews reveal that the membership can only be approached if everyone plays a part in it, considering that at the present moment there are neither enough human resources nor the economic ability to compete in the larger market of the region and even less so,

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4   During this struggle for inclusion and 'to be heard', a new political party arose which is affiliated to martial arts groups. This new political development contributed to the framework of the country's new government.
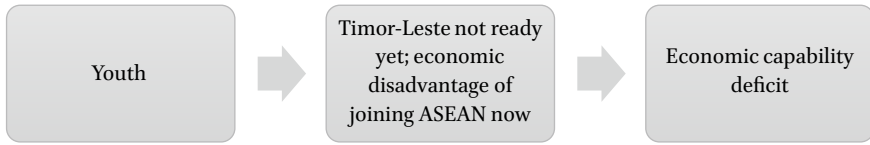
FIGURE 5.5 Economic capability deficit

in an international context, which also refers to a possible disadvantage for Timor-Leste joining the grouping when its people are not properly prepared for this degree of competition.

> It is a very big problem. When we talk about being within ASEAN, our fear is the condition of our human resources. They [ASEAN neighbors] come to invest, but they bring their own workers. So, this is a problem. If they bring their specific workers in the areas that already exist, then they come to work here with high wages. Then, they would eventually also employ Timorese people, but of course, they would only earn a minimum wage.
>
> Interview Y4, December 2018

> We already talked about joining – we already talked about it, but.... the answers of our businessmen, of those who can understand the situation further ahead, they think that at this very moment we are still too weak to be able to be in ASEAN: it is just that thing of competition. We certainly can't compete with them.
>
> Interview Y3, December 2018

What comes strongly to the fore is that the membership itself is not always perceived by the small country as an advantage for the current state of quality.

Our interviewees frequently refer to the urgent need for better preparation. This would, according to the respondents, lead to active participation in the labor market and to having qualified resources in order to be protected against the large influx of human resources from other ASEAN countries. Therefore, a certain ambivalence prevails regarding the fear of being 'overrun' by outside interests.

> I am not pessimistic about Timor's entry into ASEAN, but I think we have to be realistic about the situation we face on a daily basis. From the economic side, small businesses particularly should be well and profoundly established when we join ASEAN, so that we can compete.
>
> Interview Y3, December 2018

> Timor-Leste's membership of ASEAN has advantages and disadvantages. Advantages because, from the moment that Timor joins, the Timorese can take their products to compete, because the free market would be open by then. This means that local products can be taken to compete. But there are also disadvantages of Timor-Leste joining ASEAN, because the free market has already opened previously, so there is already an agreement between ASEAN members and Timor-Leste – which means that we are already open and then, even more, ASEAN members can come and invade our market.
>
>   Interview Y1, December 2018

This argument is of great relevance regarding the internal country ambivalence towards the membership, considering the plea for better internal preparations in order to be ready for the increased competition. The notion of a multiple strategic relationship gains in importance in this context, added to the ambivalence towards the membership, considering that ASEAN may not look positively on the issue of Timor-Leste's participation in several interests/groupings. Bearing this in mind, Timor-Leste actively participates in various groupings and cooperates with several global players, not least of which being China. As required by the ASEAN charter, each member state has to be deeply committed to the grouping, which may introduce another point of conflict between the country and the regional grouping. However, our interviewees do not see the interaction with various players as a burden on the grouping – in fact several actors refer to such cooperation as advantageous for ASEAN, due to a potential exchange of strategies, ideas, plans of action, etc.

> Timor is also part of the CPLP and therefore could link ASEAN to the CPLP. They (CPLP) also strengthen trade and business there, so Timor can become a bridge between both [ASEAN and CPLP]. I think this would also be beneficial for ASEAN nations.
>
>   Interview Y6, December 2018

A strong Chinese presence in Timor-Leste (investors, business, infrastructure, etc.) may cause the fear that through admitting Timor-Leste, China would 'spread its tentacles' within the region, while already having strong ties with certain member states such as Myanmar and Cambodia, for instance. Hence, when considering the idea of a multiple strategic relationship, it appears to be of greater advantage for Timor-Leste to be in cooperation with more than one group.

> The role of the State of Timor – when involved in these regional organizations – we see, mainly in geopolitical terms, the position of Timor-Leste between the Pacific Islands, close to ASEAN, close to Australia, to Indonesia. So, the natural position is clear, and this means that strategically, it could bring great economic power to Timor-Leste.
>
> Interview Y2, December 2018

As it is an active member of CPLP due to the country's historical past[5] and through sharing the same language, Timor-Leste might be perceived by certain ASEAN member states as being closer to Portugal and therefore, European culture.

Even though this narrative is well-known to our respondents, the majority of the interviews reveal that due to the ongoing[6] approach to ASEAN, which still has not received a positive reply, it does not appear to be strategically useful to give up other relationships – specifically when there is no resolution to ASEAN membership in sight.

> **Researcher:** Well, are you saying that it is equally important to maintain relations with other neighbors...?
> **Interviewee:** A small state has not a lot of capabilities and should therefore not start 'wars' [disputes] with others ... [*laughs*].
>
> Interview Y2, December 2018

As this interview extract reveals, the respondent sees it as strategically smarter for small countries to maintain peace and good relations with several players/actors in order to benefit as much as possible.

Therefore, internal discrepancies are not the only ambiguity we have to consider when looking more closely at the case of Timor-Leste within ASEAN. As mentioned earlier, there are serious concerns about economic issues. Our respondents reveal that joining ASEAN could well lead to a great burden for the small country, considering its lack of qualified human resources and, therefore, possibilities for market competition. If the country's human resources are not strengthened and improved (both in terms of language and knowledge distribution), joining ASEAN would be seen as a disadvantage rather than good fortune. The fear is of a foreign invasion of human resources and investments, which Timor-Leste in its current position is unable to compete with

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5   Portuguese colonization from 1536–1975.
6   In-depth discussion in Internal and External Turning Points in Timor-Leste's ASEAN Admission Procedure, chapter 2.

and would therefore have a negative impact on the population and its own growth opportunities.

> We have not yet joined ASEAN, but ASEAN communities have already entered Timor, as is the case with the Indonesian presence. So, we have seen the challenges which arise, especially when talking about the free market. There are already some nations outside ASEAN – such as China, India … – that come to invest in Timor. They come with an economy that does not open a large field of work here, but they have already started to enter. Now, the big challenge for Timor is that 80% or 90% of the country is dependent. We can put the country at the level of producing countries, such as in the agriculture sector, but if we look at the reality, Timor still doesn't produce anything considerable.
>
> Interview Y3, December 2019

> From the government's perspective, it would be good. Now, according to the general academic and civil society perspective, it will have a major impact – the invasion of Timor-Leste by goods and workers.
>
> Interview Y3, December 2019

Hence, the economic argument goes along with the unresolved preparation of Timor-Leste. Following the previous arguments, criticism of the government again comes into play.

> The government must have a clear policy in order to be able to resolve social conditions in economic terms, in terms of education and in relation to the sociocultural sector, so that the people can have benefits after joining ASEAN.
>
> Interview Y5, October 2019

Considering the data from the interviews, what comes to the fore is that the focus should be placed more on its people than on anything else, otherwise the kind of country/region they wish for will never become a reality. Once again, a great lack of interaction between the government and its people is visible, as well as between ASEAN and Timor-Leste. There is a kind of a metaphorical clash of generations: Timor-Leste as a young country facing its more mature neighbors is characterized by its youth and its fear of losing ground in the battle for employment.[7]

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7 Nowadays, the fear of economic invasion may well play the same role as the 'ancient looting wars'.

3   A Ghost Partnership: A Well-kept Secret?

By taking a closer look at the discourse of Timor-Leste's relationship with ASEAN, we were able to pinpoint the often wrongly portrayed idiosyncrasy of its membership case within the regional grouping from a new perspective. Considering that the small country has been approaching ASEAN officially since 2011 with no final admission in sight, we raised the question of how the procedure may be influenced by the greater dynamics in play. We tackled this avenue from a 'bottom-up' perspective, meaning that we collected opinions on the membership issue from inside the country in an attempt to understand ASEAN's centrality through a new research approach. Bearing in mind that Timor-Leste is a small island state which continuously needs to defend its 'fragile' position in the midst of several global players, the country's multiple strategic relationships come to the fore. Considering that Timor-Leste could function as a middleman between various geopolitical interests, ASEAN's centrality comes into perspective through the protracted membership procedure. Taking this into account, we have put the impact of an interplay between clientelist and patronage politics into perspective, as well as the existence of multiple strategic relationships through a narcissism of minor differences and a capability deficit of a small island state for market competition in an interplay of several global actors (ASEAN, South China Sea, European Union).

Our analysis was based on the statements from three Timorese social clusters: state actors, civil society representatives and young academics. We collected perspectives from inside the country on its membership application to the grouping and ASEAN's evolution as a central actor. We explored who the main actors in the forefront are and how they can influence decision-making processes in terms of ASEAN's inclusion-exclusion dynamics. We asked what exactly such a process could mean for a regional identity and how this could be coordinated through the sociopolitical mechanisms of Timor-Leste as a small island state.

What remains as core in our fieldwork is that above all else, there is much ambivalence, both from the inside and from the outside. Timor-Leste's leaders appear to be uncertain about a straightforward strategy towards entering the grouping, which could be understood as a strategy in itself: being neither inside nor outside. This is the case for both ASEAN and Timor-Leste, not least because of the advantages and disadvantages of a 'ghost partnership'. Timor-Leste is already in a market exchange with the region, yet not as established as it would be in the event of membership. As shown in the data representation, joining the grouping at the present time could cause great economic disadvantages for the small country, bearing its weak human resources and capacities in mind. We must not disregard the fact that the country is still recovering from the

former Indonesian invasion (1975–1999) and despite its great improvements and advances, several sectors still have to be enhanced or even established.

It may be ASEAN's strategy to hold Timor-Leste 'on a short leash', considering its role as a middle ground between several international players. Given all of this, we must not disregard the fact that ASEAN as a regional grouping is facing its own long-term procedures which happen to be of the grouping's nature rather than a main strategy. Having approached this sociological problem through a scattered polylogue, we outlined this theme through a crosscut between politics and civil society, tradition and modernity, house society and the state. Bearing these dualities in mind, our approach was to contribute to the realm of hierarchical distance and the control of uncertainty as it seems to be involved in ASEAN's (dis)integration dynamics and identity building.

It seems that ASEAN plays an opportunity-opportunistic centrality, which is displayed differently by each group. The aim of our research was to contribute to understanding ASEAN's centrality construction in the eyes of Timor-Leste's societal and political realm. We propose this to be a scattered polylogue, considering that the interviews which we collected were specified for certain clusters which were, in the end, cross-cutting. Therefore, we understand the presented polylogue of voices as a scattered interaction domain. In this sense, our approach to the ASEAN membership issue is part of a broader discourse in the field of traditional leadership as a coping mechanism for new times in a new realm. Timor-Leste's position within the region may also be understood as a cover for greater interests in play, considering the small country's role as a middle ground between several international players. Hence, as the research has demonstrated, there is a need to continue with further research on ASEAN's centrality from the largely ignored standpoint of sociocultural constructions and perspectives in order to understand macro-dynamics through a bottom-up approach.

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Neighbors and Kin: ASEAN as an Ecumene? Reality Constructions from a Timorese Perspective

Paulo Castro Seixas, Nuno Canas Mendes and Nadine Lobner

1 Introduction

ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. As one of the core regions of the world, the grouping has received much attention in international relations and the political discourses of recent years (He, 2006; Caballero-Anthony, 2014; Acharya, 2017; Nishimura, Ambashi & Iwasaki, 2019; Yam, 2019). These discourses mainly frame the grouping within an economic and a geopolitical context, while the sociocultural construction of ASEAN seems to be absent from debate in scientific discourses. We want to explore the construction of meanings beyond borders within the context of the regional grouping, trying to understand its positioning within a globalization and transnationalism discourse. We ask if there is a strong bottom-up narrative of ASEAN as an international entity, or if it is a matter of geostrategic politics and economy only. Are there bottom-up narratives towards international matters at all? And above all, how can ASEAN, as one of the main regions, be understood internationally when approached through the sociocultural avenue of a small country? We want to tackle this issue through a case study of Timor-Leste, which has been standing on the threshold of the regional grouping since 1975. We believe that voices from inside the country and translocal imaginations are a convenient realm for exploring ASEAN in is ecumenical dimension.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

In theoretical-conceptual terms, we aim to analyze the scientific issue presented based on a globalization and transnationalism framework of anthropological discourses complementary to international relations discourses. Understanding that the avenue of regional organizations is mainly tackled through economic and political perspectives (Adler, 2017; Beier, 2005; Montison, 2018), our aim is to broaden the debate on the problem of space in an interdisciplinary manner. In order to understand the meaning that constitutes relations between the local and the global, we propose that the understanding of space needs to be (re)considered. Furthermore, we propose that

bottom-up approaches for constructing international regions are strongly engaged with 'carrying ideas beyond borders', embedded within a translocality approach. With the start of the new century, 'Translocality' has received much attention in a multitude of scientific strands. Nevertheless, focusing primarily on an anthropological approach, authors such as Escobar (2001), Appadurai (1995), Peleikis (2003), Gottowik (2010), Greiner & Sakdapolrak (2013) and others have made important contributions to this 'new' research path within the beyond-border realm. The term translocality itself usually tackles "phenomena involving mobility, migration, circulation, and spatial interconnectedness not necessarily limited to national boundaries" (Greiner & Sakdapolrak, 2013, p. 4), which goes beyond the classic framework of transnationalism studies.

These new transnationalism trends have been one of the subjects of in-depth discussion by Oaks & Schein (2006), Tenhunen (2011), Brickel & Datta (2011) and Emrich & Schroeder (2018). Such a translocal construction understanding includes the growing importance of the dimension of imaginations and how they establish links towards the world at large, which is why we see it as a relevant tool for approaching our research question. Translocality is a research and interpretation realm which, in the present day, already includes a multitude of perspectives on global-local interactions in an interdisciplinary manner. By no means do we aim to exclude these important (beyond) transnationalism approaches from our work, yet what is of core interest for our research is to understand translocal imaginations within an ecumene construction domain. Translocal imaginations, as defined by Brickel & Datta (2011, p. 18), frame the imagining of links between places which go beyond a 'traditional' understanding of fixed nation-state boundaries. Our purpose is to "challenge regional limitations [...] and emphasize that the world is constituted through processes that transcend boundaries on different scales" (Greiner & Sakdapolrak, 2013, p. 6).

1.2   *Translocality, the Ecumene and International Regions*

For understanding ASEAN as an international region from an anthropological perspective, we will analyze local narratives from Timor-Leste. For this matter, we take a "multi-sited, translocal approach between and within various localities" (Murphy, 2008 in Darling-Wolf, 2014) to be of great importance, using concepts such as the global ecumene (Hannerz, 1992) and translocal imaginations (Oaks & Schein, 2006; Tenhunen, 2011; Brickel & Datta, 2011) as support for the analysis. These items serve for exploring local links to a larger context, closely observing the micro-macro interactions. When applying a translocality approach for understanding links between the local-global space, "the concrete conditions under which various local/national environments relate to each other in a globalized world" (Darling-Wolf, 2015, p. 2) come to the fore. Furthermore, translocality as such is "used to describe socio-spatial dynamics

and processes of simultaneity and identity formation that transcend boundaries, including, but also extending beyond, those of nation-states" (Greiner & Sakdapolrak, 2013).

This beyond-border issue will be contextualized through the kinship and amity domain, bearing in mind that Timor-Leste's local narratives (our case study) mainly refer to family and friendship relationships when talking about the inside-outside realm and the relations between states. We propose that kinship and amity imaginations can be seen as metaphors for creating international regions. Our quest is how "individuals imagine the global as cultural products and social relations" (Giddens, 1990, p. 21, in Darling-Wolf, 2014) and what kind of 'new spaces' evolve out of these.

This work is constructed on two main moments: firstly, bibliographical research and a literature review, and secondly, the application and interpretation of previously gathered field data from our CRISEA interviews. Our work is based on a social constructivism approach, through which we aim to use relationships and interactions to understand the larger dynamics prevailing: ASEAN built as an international region from the bottom up. As international region contexts have been mainly observed from the perspective of economy and politics, we believe it is of great relevance to understand (as we propose, complementary) sociocultural ones. These, we suggest, may bring a clearer understanding of the context of the world at large through the anthropological approach of using voices from bottom-up: reality as a product of social interactions and relationships, embedded in temporal and spatial boundaries of cultural dynamics.

This chapter is built on three sections: firstly, a bidimensional literature review on existing debates about ASEAN and its role in international matters. Secondly, we present two sets of narratives (i. Narratives from the library, ii. Narratives from the field) from Timor-Leste to understand its beyond-border constructions from the bottom up. We aim to show how our data contribute to the building of ASEAN as an international space of important cultural exchange: an ecumene. In conclusion, the relationship between Timor-Leste and ASEAN will be further put into perspective to recognize the interplay between the global and the local.

2   Beyond-border Relations: A Bidimensional Perspective

Beyond-border relations is a domain which is embedded in various dimensions. We can frame these into four main dimensions, which, of course, do have their own strands within. These four dimensions can be understood through the strand of international relations on the one hand and through anthropology

on the other: the economic and political dimension in the former and the social and cultural in the latter. We believe it is of great importance to establish an interdisciplinary debate when it comes to issues in the world at large. This approach aims to contribute to broadening consciousness and awareness by taking a variety of voices and using them to explore global complexities. However, this approach is far from having been comprehensively dealt with in scientific discourses, where the dimension outlined above is divided up much too often.

In international relations discourses, this issue has already received some attention in previous years. Through constructivism approaches, the processes for understanding the context of the world at large seem to increasingly incorporate the social and cultural dimension – or at least acknowledge the previous lack of it. There is growing awareness of the importance of the interconnection of the economic-political and sociocultural, knowing full well that at times of intense movement and change, larger issues can only be seized when both the local and the global are taken into consideration (Reus-Smit, 2019; Acharya, 2005).

This issue exists not only in the field of international relations studies. Anthropological perspectives are also in need to increasingly adapt to economic-political discourses when looking at global contexts through local matters (Eriksen & Neumann, 1993). The concern of this chapter is to understand the economic-political construction of a regional organization from the standpoint of sociocultural narratives within an international context. Hence, as we move towards this theme through ASEAN as one of the main global players, we will present a literature review on how ASEAN is represented within two diverse yet interacting points of view as they are predominant in scientific discourses: international relations/politics and anthropology/sociology.

3   ASEAN as a Relationship between States: A Literature Review

The initial aim of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations regional organization, established in 1967 as a post-Second World War construction, was to create a protective ground for a togetherness of states located within the geographical area of Southeast Asia. The objective of the ASEAN community was to provide a base for promoting human rights and democracy, similar to what had taken place in other regions, such as the EU, the Pacific Community, the Organization of American States and others. As ASEAN conducts important international negotiations in economic and political affairs, it is now seen as a "global powerhouse" (Lee, 2018).

Tracing the grouping from this perspective should provide a brief insight into how it is mainly depicted in scientific discourses. ASEAN is, to a broad extent, discussed from the institutional side and its role as an economic-political togetherness of states acting on a global scale. These discourses are predominant in international relations studies through which it can be seen as a common meaning and unity of actions between several states within a geographically locatable territory (He, 2006; Singh, 2011; Frost, 2013; Caballero-Anthony, 2014; Croissant, 2016).

Furthermore, ongoing discourses discuss ASEAN as a regional organization within a certain framework of integration dynamics, which also largely covers the political and economic dimensions, followed by the supposedly sociocultural ones (three ASEAN pillars) and the groupings leadership role towards the togetherness of member states (Sudo, 2006; Lee, 2010; Acharya, 2017). Its free trade agreements play another important role in scientific debate on ASEAN. The international contexts which are created through global trade negotiations remain in the forefront in attempting to understand the dynamics of the regional organization in the world at large. The focus continues to be the quest for a better economy, security and politics (Ganesan, 2000; He, 2007; Albert & Maizland, 2019).

Nevertheless, there is also a more constructivist attitude towards ASEAN, which discusses its member states through the quest for regional identity construction and social interconnectedness (Jones, 2010; Acharya, 2017). Even though communities and social structures are considered in these approaches, they do not go far beyond the state as the central actor for constructing an (international) regional realm (Nye, 2008). Hence, ASEAN, within an international regional organization context through its sociocultural dimensions is barely touched on in scientific literature discourses. As the concept of ROs is a rather institutional and economic-political one which aims to make the togetherness of states understandable in pursuing common goals, actions and the convictions of their interconnection, the sociocultural realm, even though it inevitably plays a role in state relations on a macro-scale, is poorly debated or analyzed.

Nevertheless, Southeast Asia within its geographical context has received some attention in sociocultural discourses as well. Several authors discuss cultural, religious and ethnic diversities/encounters within the region, the distinction between inter-regional spaces and the complexities these diversities bring to light for the eventual unity of the region (Steedly, 1999; Zialcita, 2003; Gerke & Evers, 2006). Even if in a rather geographical analysis, the social dimension comes well to the fore in the book *Southeast Asian Localities: A Geography of Knowledge and Politics of Space* (Kratoska, Schulte-Nordholt & Raben, 2008).

In their book, the region is looked at from a variety of perspectives in order to grasp its quest for relevance for the togetherness of the states located within it. Transnational flows are considered in a unique way, as there has only been limited use of these in scientific discussions when trying to look at the region in its 'totality'. A very frequent point of analysis in SEA discourses is the observation of interregional ethnic groups and boundaries. However, these analyses do not go beyond the regional idea with its geographical limitations, despite the inclusion of historical circumstances in a (post)colonial framework. In conclusion, SEA, or rather, ASEAN is, as far as we know, not yet understood in its international embeddedness through the social dimension. Anthropological debates on Southeast Asia mainly draw on the postcolonial nation-state construction and the building of identity and ethnicity discourses within the region. The predominant quest seems to be to discover who the people we can call "Southeast Asians" are and what structures they are embedded in.

As literature demonstrates (Lande, 1999; Kratoska, Schulte-Nordholt & Raben, 2008; Scott, 2009; Hack, 2012), the region itself cannot be explained, described or understood through fixed, stable and unchangeable phenomena. Moreover, it is necessary to pay attention to its international embeddedness and regional, cross-border interconnection at varying levels and degrees, instead of seeing it as a homogenous area with clearly distinguishable entities. The region which is called Southeast Asia and the people that inhabit this area went through a broad complexity of historical occasions which are embedded within an international context, not least through its historical and (post)colonial experiences. Not only is Southeast Asia shaped by shifting forms of domination, power and violent occupation by Western empires, but there has also been constant relocation of ethnic groups throughout the reconfiguration of political structures, the emergence of nation-states and the adoption of new forms of power, interacting with traditional, local systems of structuring societies (Kratoska, Schulte-Nordholt & Raben, 2008).

Next, we propose that in our everyday faster moving and more interactive world, the realm of space needs to be carefully reconsidered, which is why we also aim to expand our own approach towards understanding a regional construct – as is the case of ASEAN – within the global realm. As there is a lack of exclusively bottom-up perspectives on ASEAN (Southeast Asia as a region) and how it may be built as a space of meaningful cultural exchange, we will approach this issue in further steps through our case study. That is to say, the building of ASEAN as an international region, from the bottom up, people-to-people, through imaginations and perceptions in order to cope with (and construct) a new sociocultural reality of the relationship between states.

In the next section, we will explore our case study of Timor-Leste for a clearer understanding of this gap in literature: bottom-up beyond-border reality constructions.

4   A Case Study: Timor-Leste's Translocal Imaginations

Timor-Leste and its beyond-border realm have been receiving more and more attention over the past 15 years. This complexity is comprehensively discussed through the country's inside-outside relations, which are presented through two main strands (which are, to a great extent, complementary): the modern perspective with a focus on institutions and the nation-state (Seixas, Hohe, Leach, Silva & Simão) and the "traditional" perspective with a focus on narratives located within the precolonial era, myths of origin and a kinship/amity domain (Traube, 2011; Fox, 2011; McWilliam, 2014; Bovensiepen, 2015; Sousa, 2010).

Nevertheless, before exploring this avenue further, we need to take a closer look at why this domain is relevant for understanding ASEAN as an international region, built on translocal imaginations. In previous studies, we approached this issue through Timor-Leste's relationship with the regional grouping, followed by its links to other international regions. We proposed that, depending on various social contexts, Timor-Leste constructs a new realm through perceptions, imaginations and world views from below, creating a space of intense cultural exchange within the world at large: the ecumene (Lobner, 2020; Lobner & Seixas, 2020). As discussed earlier in this chapter, exploring regional organizations from the bottom-up perspective of translocal imaginations seems to have barely been touched on as a research avenue. Our attempt is to contribute to filling this gap, which we believe to be of great relevance when considering the geopolitical and sociocultural world context for understanding its dynamics as an inter-relational matter between the global and the local.

In order to explore this complexity, we first undertook to collect anthropological Timor-Leste narratives about the beyond-border realm from within the anthropological library, followed by the narratives which we gathered in the field.

4.1   *Narratives from the Library*
The library narrative brought us to a double bind set of discussions with two different interpretation strands. However, it must be understood that these strands are complementary and are strongly interdependent. We created a

table with the main arguments on Timor-Leste's inside-outside relations, as they are predominant in anthropological literature:

TABLE 6.1   Narratives from the library

Kinship and Cosmology	Institutions and the Modern Nation-State
Myths of Origin	Independence
Older/Younger Brothers	UN peacebuilding mission
Stranger Kings	Nation building
Clan structures/Uma Lulik	Foreign NGO presence
Male/Female	Political patterns: democracy vs. patronage/clientelism

As presented in the first cluster in the table, a kinship and cosmology narrative is predominant in literature. Based on this, there are several influential works from the past 30 years tackling how the small country's society distinguishes the 'inside' from the 'outside'. We can take a closer look at the first cluster: myths of origin. Myths of origin are a relevant domain in Timorese social organization (Fox, 1986; Schulte-Nordholt, 1971; Traube, 2011; McWilliam, 2014; Sousa, 2010; et al.). A core narrative with a great number of variations is on the relationship and disputes between the older and younger brother. In most cases, the younger brother went abroad and came back to Timor under (depending on the myth) specific circumstances. A narrative which is often understood as a coping strategy by the small country to deal with foreign power relations (Fox, 2011; Traube, 2011; Seixas, 2008; Van Engelenhoven, 2010; Bovensiepen, 2015; Hohe, 2005, p. 2). As used by Fox (2011), the stranger king narrative, within the Austronesian linguistic region, is to be understood as a tool to cope with the takeover by a foreign power in colonial times: "… indigenous presence and the coming of an outsider or an outside group, […] who alters the structure of the society" (Fox, 2011, p. 202). Furthermore, the story of the crocodile is another relevant ancient narrative, which opens up to the imagination of a boy sailing around the globe on a crocodile which, at the end of the 'adventure' settled where the island of Timor[1] is to be found (Wise, 2006; Gomes, 1972; Seixas, 2008). In several myths, clans are divided through older-younger brother imaginations in a Lulik (sacred) discourse. The dimensions of the male

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1 The island of Timor is often said to resemble a crocodile.

and the female also support the distinction of the inside and the outside (Fox, 1986; McWilliam, 2014; Traube, 2011).

A variety of narratives show Timor-Leste to be at the root of everything, the ancient center of the world – a big moon from which everything descends (Schulte-Nordholt, 1971; Fox, 1989; Seixas, 2016, p. 420). Hence, certain ethnographies open up this debate on installing the 'outsider' inside (Fox, 1989; Seixas, 2008; Engelenhoven, 2010; Bovensiepen, 2015; et al.). Following this brief outline, what comes clearly to the fore is that imaginations on cosmology and kinship are tools for coping with quests in the world at large, the beyond-border realm as a translocal imagining by the small country. We propose that ancient narratives and the often-used kinship terminology greatly contribute to the building of international regions from the bottom up, where a "translocal perspective provides a vehicle to engage with subjective and phenomenological dimensions of place making" (Greiner & Sakdapolrak, 2013, p. 10).

As this is complementary to the second cluster in Table 2, the 'modernity' approach, we can consider a set of ethnographies more closely. These samples are closer to what we have discussed as state relations, including post-independence institutional discourses and nation-state building (Hohe, 2002; Silva & Simão, 2012; Seixas, 2016; Scambary, 2019) and political patronage and clientelism patterns within a supposedly democratic system (Aspinall, Hicken, Scambary & Weiss, 2018). These approaches lead to the debate in international relations discourses in conjunction with anthropological approaches for understanding the beyond-border realm through translocal imaginations. Within these ethnographic works, the reciprocity between tradition and modernity is considered, in order to understand how the inside is incorporating (and coping with) the outside, as is the case, for example, with the UN presence in post-independence Timor-Leste (Hohe, 2002; Seixas, 2010; Silva & Simão, 2012).

As mentioned earlier in this section, foreign presence is often explained through translocal imaginations of a kinship setting: "the younger brother who came to resolve the violence" (Hohe, 2002, p. 1). This serves as another example of how the small country constructs the inside-outside realm through emotional proximity. Even though the geographically distant space of Portugal (and through this, Europe and the CPLP) is described as a younger brother, Indonesia (and the context of occupation) – Timor-Leste's spatially proximate neighbor – is in many narratives represented as "the presence of the common" (Hohe, 2002, p. 5). The narrative of the brothers seems to be an ever-present "tool" for coping with beyond-border relations, used as a situational function depending on the context. Therefore, ASEAN can be interpreted through translocal imaginations as the older brother, that is – through Timor-Leste – of

the same kind – interconnected with the younger brother within the context of the world at large (ASEAN, Europe, CPLP):

> The Portuguese once invaded the country as yB [younger brothers] to pacify when oB [older brothers] were fighting against oB. Now that the "Javanese" are classified as oB, "Javanese" and Timorese are involved in a violent relationship as oBs. UNAMET arrives, representing the contrasting value category "yB", to pacify its older brothers. Additionally UNAMET is assembled out of many different nations. This time not only does Portugal arrive as yB, but agents of all nations. They all came.
>
> Hohe, 2002, p. 9

This reference underlines the situational use of translocal imaginations: modern foreign institutional presence such as UNAMET may be the younger brother who comes back from the 'outside' (interpreted as a rather lose idea of the West) in order to contribute to the country's well-being – namely, everyone outside of ASEAN. This narrative sample reinforces the link created through Timor-Leste, ASEAN (through Indonesia) and the rest of the world.

As the findings from the library demonstrate, the world may be understood as a gigantic family in Timorese terms, which contributes much to the building of a global space of meaningful cultural exchange. The narrative of the older-younger brothers remains through both approaches, tradition and modernity. Yet, they seem to be used situationally, as it "always depends" on the context (Hohe, 2002, p. 1).[2] Hence, the link between the inside and the outside, as it is established through translocal imaginations, serves for understanding what we try to pinpoint within the realm of ASEAN: an international region in the making.

4.2   *Narratives from the Field*

As we undertook fieldwork to explore the relationship between ASEAN and Timor-Leste within the CRISEA project, we collected 30 interviews with three social clusters: state actors, civil society representatives and youth.[3] These

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2 'It always depends' is a phrase commonly used in Timor-Leste which enables negotiation with various contexts. Using the ethnography of Hohe as an example, Indonesians are referred to as being of the same kind (hence, the older brother). When following this ethnographic narrative, older brothers do not have a good relationship with each other, which could be used as a strategy for coping with the former Indonesian invasion (as opposed to the case with "the younger brother who comes to resolve the violence") (Hohe, 2002, p. 1).

3 This data collection took place during the CRISEA research for the purpose of understanding the complexity of ASEAN's centrality for Timor-Leste. Aside from this precise approach, we

TABLE 6.2   Narratives from the field

ASEAN	Beyond
Indonesia: Friends	Europe/CPLP: Younger Brothers
Neighbors	Brothers from abroad
Diplomatic relations	Family context
Timor-Leste not Asian enough	Timor-Leste & Portugal common ground

interviews revealed strong kinship and amity terminology when referring to regional organizations and, more specifically, to ASEAN in a global context. In order to continue with the presentation of our data, we want to provide a table which frames the predominant indicators while tackling the beyond-border realm of the small nation in terms of international relations.

As we tackled the precise context of ASEAN and Timor-Leste relations in our fieldwork for the previous CRISEA research subject, the data we collected concern how the small country perceives (demonstrated through the three social clusters used as samples) the "outside" world and uses it in various situational metaphors. Kinship and amity terminology is most frequently used when referring to the inside-outside realm in institutional and diplomatic state (and regional) contexts. This means that our interviewees, as can be seen in Table 2, referred to ASEAN as their neighbors, their friends and create a further distinction in using phrases such as "Timor-Leste is not Asian enough". When looking at ASEAN and its beyond border context, a greater family narrative comes to the fore. Therefore, when referring to Europe and in many cases the CPLP, our social clusters understand an emotional/family proximity, which seems to be different in SEA regional terms. Next, we will present some interview excerpts for enlarging on our discussion:

4.2.1   Excerpt 1

> For the nation's cooperation, for their negotiating partnership for … many nations like the CPLP, these are like older brothers and younger brothers. The CPLP, it comes from there. Right now, they continue to maintain the relationship as older brothers and younger brothers, to establish history and establish development as a partnership. With Australia and

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were also able to use the data collected to broaden our analysis and embed it into a wider context.

> Indonesia … it is more a trilateral relationship between neighboring
> nations, to further establish the relationship at sea and on land, to coop-
> erate through material things, like the humanitarian aid that exists.
>
> CRISEA Interview PA2, October 2018

As can be seen from this first interview excerpt, the (international) regional organization context is referred to metaphorically through kinship and amity terminology. Referring to older and younger brothers in the geographically rather distant community of the CPLP needs to be looked at more closely. In Timorese conceptualizations, Portugal, as also discussed in the previous section on narratives within literature, is in most cases perceived through family terms (yet, 'it always depends'). This may be a strategy for coping with former colonization and/or a strategic continuance of a strong bond due to history, language, official democratic political patterns,[4] human rights discourses, religious systems[5] and bilateral/multilateral relations. What chiefly comes to the fore in this interview excerpt is the notion of a trilateral relationship with neighboring states, such as Australia and Indonesia, which leads to the interpretation that neighboring countries that are in geographic proximity are not necessarily related to Timor-Leste in family terms in this particular case. This is mainly relevant to our discussion due to the link with Indonesia and, therefore, ASEAN, understanding that a diplomatic friendship approach is applied, rather than an emotional proximity of kinship clusters. This is particularly relevant when considering the case of Indonesia. Indonesia, as outlined above, is not seen as kin in any of the empirical cases; rather, through a diplomatic approach, in which the country is perceived as a friendly neighbor. Taking this emotional proximity and distance within international region contexts into account, another interview excerpt reveals relevant data for our discussion:

4.2.2   Excerpt 2

> It is one thing for Timor to become a member of regional organiza-
> tions such as ASEAN, the CPLP is another thing. With the CPLP, histori-
> cally speaking, Timor-Leste has a similar context of interests, because
> of shared history. Countries which were colonies of Portugal share an

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4   It needs to be understood that the official state structure does not imply that other forms of political structures are predominant, as clearly seen through patronage and clientelism politics (Aspinall, Hicks, Scambary & Weiiss, 2018). Nevertheless, its official democratic system differs greatly from the region's autocratic and military regimes.

5   Christianity on the surface.

emotional historical relationship. Related to other respects we may continue to discuss, but I think that the CPLP is also linked to ASEAN. ASEAN countries are also proud when a country in their organization is a member of an organization in a different region. Timor-Leste can become an instrument for ASEAN civil society and CPLP civil society in order to work together, share knowledge and regional issues. This means that they cannot be closed, they must be open. Now, ASEANs civil society must also know that there would be an opportunity to access the space of the CPLP through Timor-Leste, in order to access the civil society space in Europe.

> Interview CS4, October 2018

This excerpt clearly shows that our social clusters understand the important relevance of an interrelation between regional matters on a global scale. Bearing in mind that CPLP is an international organization which cannot be geographically encompassed in a single glance at a map (as opposed to the case of Southeast Asia), our interviewee constructs a link between two regional constructs of different kinds. This link, according to the interviewee, could be Timor-Leste, as a middle-ground, a facilitator to establish a connection. Understanding this within an international context, the relevance of ASEAN as a space of strong intercultural encounters – an ecumene – comes to the fore. Although our respondent relates historically (and emotionally) more to CPLP, ASEAN seems to be a key for Timor-Leste in order to create an international meeting and exchange zone.

When delving more deeply into this area, we can take a closer look at other kinship-amity terminology within the discourse of Timor-Leste and ASEAN (concerning the still ongoing membership procedure):

4.2.3 Excerpt 3

> Well, if we are in an organization of course we are going to follow the rules of engagement with that organization. But that doesn't mean that as a sovereign country we cannot be friends with another person, like you married your husband but that doesn't mean that you abandon all your friends. You need to have friends still!
>
> Interview PA6, September 2018

Here, the interviewee refers to ASEAN as a family, which Timor-Leste, metaphorically speaking, would marry, in the event of becoming a member of the grouping. Our interpretation remains as follows: if referring to kinship and amity relations (marriage, friendship) in the context of international

regions, the perception of family and its meanings on a macro-level come to the fore. This can be understood as translocal imagination based on kinship emerging from local social organization in order to justify international state relations.

The following interview excerpt is another relevant sample for the intersubjective projection and construction of ASEAN as an international region. Here, similar to a previous excerpt, the relevance of the link between regions – in which Timor-Leste is again proposed as a facilitator – is shown:

4.2.4   Excerpt 4

> *Fieldworker*: It was good to have approached this other area now, because at the article and academic level, it is often invoked as one of the obstacles to Timor's membership, the fact that Timor is playing, let's say, in several areas, such as at the level of the CPLP, or concerning the Pacific Islands Forum … To what extent do you consider this to be seen as an obstacle [for ASEAN]?
> *Interviewee*: From our point of view, I think it's not a hindrance. It's even an opportunity. For example, in relation to the Pacific Islands Forum, it is a fact that there are certain restrictions which imply not belonging to two regional organizations at the same time. Now, in relation to the CPLP, it is no longer a regional organization, it is already trans-regional, so there actually cannot be such problems of membership.
>   Interview CS4, October 2018

As we interpret this excerpt, it serves as another perception of ASEAN building a space of meaningful cultural exchange – the ecumene. International connections seem to be established through translocal imaginations which enable a global link between regions through bottom-up constructions. This is very much in line with what we have outlined to be a relevant tool for international relations and anthropology: the interaction between the micro and the macro for understanding matters in the world at large. Demonstrated through the excerpt samples, the building of the 'inside-outside' realm in our case study often seems to be arbitrary, 'depending on the situation'. Even though ASEAN is described more as a neighbor in most of the samples, it is understood as a relevant domain for establishing a strong link within a larger realm. Creating such a link between international zones through Timor-Leste as a middle-ground leads to the building of international regions from the bottom up through translocal imaginations legitimizing global links.

Yet, we need to ask what this may mean for ASEAN international regionalism. Is there relevance in Timor-Leste's beyond-border relations for the construction of ASEAN as an area for meaningful cultural encounters? Are imaginations from a small country that, on the one hand, is geographically part of the region but, on the other hand, stands on the threshold of the grouping, a relevant domain for exploring the organization's bottom-up top-down constitution in a global context?

5   ASEAN as an Ecumene: An International Region in the Making

In the first two sections of this chapter, we outlined Southeast Asia (ASEAN) through two theoretical perspectives: a relationship between states on the one hand, and a sociocultural relationship on the other. We demonstrated these two perspectives through discourses on international relations and anthropological discourses. As can be seen from these two approaches, ASEAN – and as such, the Southeast Asian Region – is mainly understood through economic-political discourses in which its role as a global powerhouse comes to the fore. Therefore, as we tried to find sociocultural discourses about the region, there is, to the best of our knowledge, no narrative that tackles the regional organization through bottom-up debate. We believe the absent debate on ASEAN as a socially constructed international region is a relevant issue to be approached. Our aim was to tackle this rather new research avenue through a case study. As we see Timor-Leste as a convenient ground for exploring this problem, our previous research on the relationship between the small country and the regional grouping has opened the door towards exploring the building of international regionalism. In the later sections of this chapter, we presented some examples of how Timor-Leste's society (represented through three social clusters for analysis) copes with state relations from the bottom up. More precisely, we presented two sets of data: 1) ethnographies which were collected on Timor-Leste's inside-outside relations, 2) interview data samples which we collected from previous research projects within the CRISEA framework.

As our empirical data reveals, there is a strong narrative by Timor-Leste which distinguishes its relationship with ASEAN from its relationship with other regions such as Europe (Portugal) and the CPLP. When our interviewees refer to ASEAN in international terms, the grouping is mainly seen as the country's neighbor. However, a kinship terminology is used for the CPLP and Portugal: brother from abroad, younger brothers, brother who came back home to Timor-Leste.

Yet, when looking at the ethnographic data we presented, a multifaceted narrative seems to be predominant. On the surface, what is obvious is the translocal imagination of Europeans and the CPLP through an emotional proximity, through kinship terminology like that used in literature (Fox, 1989; Seixas, 2008; Sousa, 2010; Traube, 2011; Bovensiepen, 2015). Nevertheless, in a more in-depth examination of our approach, the situational function of the linguistic use of certain expressions such as "brothers" or "neighbors", another interpretation can be made: it always depends on who is narrating the context of Timor-Leste, ASEAN and beyond, and what precisely is being referred to. In some cases, ASEAN is described as a neighbor "only", in others it is described as of "the same kind" (through the link to Indonesia, for instance). What remains in the fore is that Timor-Leste could be the essential "gateway" for connecting ASEAN with the rest of the world: with Europe, with the CPLP, Australia, the Asia-Pacific region. Hence, it is important to understand this complexity through the dimension of space in a translocal approach. Translocal approaches can be seen as a contribution to understanding a multitude of phenomena which are connected to the (re)production of social constructions of "space". These cover complexities such as internal-external movement, the building of identity, knowledge transfer and local development processes, which go beyond geographical-dichotomous conceptualizations: rural-urban, space-place, local-global, center-periphery (Hannerz, 1992; Appadurai, 1996; Agnew, 2005; Greiner & Sakdapolrak, 2013).

Therefore, when considering translocal imaginations on global interrelatedness, the building of international regions gains prominence. As we have pinpointed this realm through an amity and kinship context as strategies for coping with new times and new spaces, we propose that people's narratives have to be closely considered, in an attempt to comprehend state relations in interregional and international matters. As Kalir and Sur (2012, in Kalir, 2018, p. 350) frame it, using transitive concepts (such as the global ecumene in this case) can "sensitize us to alteration and movement rather than to fixity and preservation", going on to add, "They pay heed to borders and boundaries precisely because they focus our gaze on their permissiveness and on the things that move across them".

Hence, a translocality approach enables us to cope with ecumene imagination as a tool for understanding the role of movement within localities all over the world. It is actor-centered and sensitive to day-by-day interactions of localities and their agents, which enriches our mindset towards a modifying world of movements in ways which matter to the individuals who experience and create change, movement and mobility (Kalier, 2018, pp. 352–354). According to Kalier's perception of the importance of translocal approaches

for understanding new spaces in the making, the relevant role of bottom-up perspectives beyond geographical borders and barriers comes to light. Through this definition, territorial limitations can be overcome, and international regions can be built through translocal imaginations which may turn into a new object of study.

In its geostrategic interrelation with various regions in the world, ASEAN, as previously outlined, has been quite widely addressed in international relations and political sciences. However, it has been determined more as a locally fixed, regional phenomenon, understood through its economic and political clusters. What we propose in this chapter is that ASEAN (as well as other global regions) is more than just an economic-political construction in response to World War II and Cold War communism. Through the exploration of Timor-Leste's translocal imaginations and ecumene constructions, we understand that ASEAN is to be looked at as a global meeting place for important cultural exchange. This interpretation evolves out of the local narrative domain represented through myths of origin and inside-outside relations. Nevertheless, as we have tried to demonstrate, micro-constructions interact closely with the 'macro': translocal imaginations for coping with the world at large, linking the bureaucratic construction of nation-states beyond cognitive recognizable borders. There is, as has been widely focused on in anthropological transnationalism discourses (Hannerz, 1996; Escobar, 2001; Appadurai, 2003; Gottowik, 2010; Greiner, 2010; et al.), no such a thing as static, clearly distinguishable societies or regions. In our everyday faster moving, growing and interactive world, it is more relevant than ever to continue adding to an important area of reflection for clearly interwoven processes and dynamics between the global and the local.

Hence, when considering ASEAN as an area for meaningful cultural encounters, we propose that within a translocality discourse the concept of the ecumene serves as an essential tool. The global ecumene, as broadly discussed by Hannerz[6] (1992), aims to deconstruct determinations of precisely such fixed territories, locations and attached to these, groups of people.

The ecumene, as understood through Hannerz' definition (1992), is a projection of people's realities evolved from their translocal imaginations through which a new space within the world at large is created. Such projections are situational and take place in international-regional terms, as we have exemplified through Timor-Leste as a case study. Not least of which being emotional

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6 In a previous study (Lobner, 2020) we found three ideal types of ecumene: creolization (the Caribbean) (Mintz, 1996), amity (Lusotopy) (Pina-Cabral, 2010), global lineages (the Timorese space). These are based on the ecumene framework of Sidney Mintz, Ulf Hannerz, Pina-Cabral and our own research outputs.

proximity and kinship, which are metaphorically applied to regional contexts, serving to understand how people cope with the past, the present and, eventually, the building of the future.

As Hannerz tackles the global realm through reflection on international asymmetries which contribute to the meaning of cultural expression (Hannerz, 1992, p. 219), he moves back and forth on the center-periphery, global-local avenue. Cultural production, as he puts it, is an output of peripheral contextualization which responds to power structures established and produced within the center. He closely examines the interactions which are taking place within these alleged center-periphery distinctions, which are, as he defines them, a space of meaningful cultural exchange created from bottom-up. This is referred to as the ecumene, through which cultures and social interconnectedness can no longer be seen as distinct entities (Hannerz, 1992, p. 266). Even more so, such flows and translocal movements of imaginations go far beyond borders and create new interdependencies.

With this brief outline, we want to show that it is relevant to observe "the space between spaces", understood under the building of different ecumene. This, as we proposed through Timor-Leste as a case study, is established through translocal imaginations on international regions, as they have been gaining more and more relevance in our field in recent years. As Kokot (2007, p. 20) puts it: "The 'local' is to be seen as a site where global processes are transformed into action or are constituted by practice".

Hence, it can be understood that ASEAN is an ecumene that provides a ground of interaction and bonds based on emotions, feelings, imaginations, as a new space for the relationship between the local and the global. Through this conceptualization, the ecumene can be seen as a result of former disciplinary distinctions which we try to overcome in a world that is more connected than ever, beyond physical and material conditions. Within translocal debates, the fact that "social networks sharing cultural knowledge or generating cultural practice may not necessarily exist within the physical space at all" (Kokot, 2007, p. 17) comes to the fore. Humanity can no longer be separated into distinct areas – if this has ever been the case at all. Therefore, we propose to look at ASEAN as exactly such an intercultural meeting space: the link between several regional constructs which, up to now, have been understood as separate entities; this is something to be overcome in the 21st century of scientific, political and interpersonal discourses:

> Everywhere we go, there are hints and connections to other cultures or "beings", and to their interconnectedness. Humans are continuously in search of both similarities to and differences from 'others'. We are in an

> ongoing process of creating a greater context of belonging which goes
> beyond borders, using certain circumstances situationally and for spe-
> cific purposes. Making a compromise seems inevitable when it comes
> to the construction and understanding of interconnectedness: ecumene
> projections contributing to the building of international regions.
>
>   Lobner, 2020, p. 31

We propose that the sociocultural dimension needs to be closely considered
when trying to grasp global interrelatedness. The micro does not exist without
the macro, for which reason we understand that state relations do not exist
without people relations. Hence, if we want to understand ASEAN in its broader
context, we must look at its role as an ecumene as one of great relevance. As
Hannerz puts it, global influences are filtered at local level, where they are
being transformed and incorporated into reality constructions, actions and
the building of livelihoods: "The local level is the arena in which a variety of
influences comes together, acted out perhaps in a unique combination, under
those special conditions" (Hannerz, 1996, p. 27).

Finally, what we propose is that a comparative analysis of international rela-
tions and anthropology approaches for understanding international regions in
the making (through different ecumene models) enables a translocal meeting
zone in four dimensions: the local, the global, the interregional, the interstate.

6   Final Considerations

Throughout this chapter our aim was to contribute to the debate on globally
interconnected meaning systems as they are reproduced through translocal
imaginations on the ecumene. We proposed that ASEAN, as a regional organi-
zation, could be put into the framework of social reality constructions within
the context of the world at large. For this debate, we first presented a literature
review on how Southeast Asia as a region (ASEAN) is represented in scientific
discourses in a bidimensional approach.

This consists, in our precise case, of international relations debates which
mainly tackle the economic and political framework of the grouping, and
secondly, sociocultural analyses which try to grasp inter-regional dynamics.
Nevertheless, what we propose to be a very relevant dimension of local-global
interconnectedness of regional organizations on the ground is still a relatively
unexplored research avenue. Therefore, after our literature review on scientific
discourses, we presented our case study of Timor-Leste through which our aim
was to contribute to establishing this missing link between the local and the

global. Through Timor-Leste's translocal imaginations on ASEAN and beyond (through kinship, amity, cosmological and state narratives) we presented two sets of data reinforcing our proposal: i) data collected from the library and ii) data collected in the field.

Our focus was on how (translocal) imaginations from the bottom up construct a larger realm. Considering perceptions (and imaginations) as situational coping mechanism functions, we showed that reality constructions should be looked at as different paths of social organizations within globalization and transnationalism contexts. Putting this into the framework of geopolitical power discourses and the impact of global players, we found that ASEAN plays a relevant role for the international region context and has not, as far as we know, been analyzed previously through such a bottom-up approach. In conclusion, we add our findings to the debate on ASEAN as an international region of meaningful cultural exchange: the ecumene through translocal imaginations. Because "the local level is the arena in which a variety of influences come together, acted out perhaps in a unique combination, under those special conditions" (Hannerz, 1996, p. 27).

It is relevant to mention that our research path is an open one, with the purpose of contributing to a new avenue: the essential connection of international relations and anthropology discourses for coming closer to understanding the various meaning systems in play when debating contexts in the world at large. Within the anthropology of space, we propose that implementing such a bidimensional research dynamic using bottom-up and top-down mechanisms (micro/macro) in the construction of a new realm is an excellent contribution to expanding, negotiating and rethinking previous and current conceptualizations of global interconnectedness. As social scientists, we need to continue questioning the meanings behind a supposedly constructed world and its ongoing dynamics for reinventing realities. We suggest an ongoing and continuing dialogue on interactions as a whole in order to grasp the imaginations for the building of international regions.

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Disputing Centralities amidst Covid-19: The Triangular Relationship of ASEAN, China and Timor-Leste

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1 Introduction

As Covid-19 has grown into a pandemic marking 2020, international relations dynamics find themselves steeped in a significant rearrangement of previous power constellations. In this research, we want to explore the building (and reorganization) of regional centrality in the midst of a pandemic crisis, looking at ASEAN and China and their longstanding silent dispute about their geostrategic and international power dynamics (Kuok, 2020). This dispute, as we propose, should be analyzed through Timor-Leste as a middle-ground of negotiation/middleman between global powers, understanding, on the one hand, the small country's long history with ASEAN while standing on the threshold of the grouping as a member yet to be and, on the other hand, its bilateral relations with China which have been strengthened since Timor-Leste's independence in 2002.

We want to explore this issue of the rise of new regional dynamics in the midst of a pandemic crisis through two main narratives (the Western narrative and the Chinese narrative), through which we aim to understand regional centrality construction and negotiations from a new perspective. We ask if there might be a 'straw man fallacy' (Walton, 1996) prevailing in the struggle for power positioning between ASEAN and China through Timor-Leste as the middleman. A straw man fallacy draws on the potential arbitrary controversy that is built towards the opposite position, which we propose to be the case of these two global actors through the allegedly 'invisible' entity of Timor-Leste. The straw man, unlike a 'real' actor, cannot respond to differentiated objections (or even reject them), which is the case in considering the small country's fragile position within the regional as much as the world context.

This issue emerges primarily through the relationship between Timor-Leste and ASEAN, which the small country neither officially belongs to, nor is officially excluded from. In the protracted struggle to join the grouping (officially

since 2011), several narratives have discussed why no decision has been made by ASEAN yet, as the supposedly central actor in Southeast Asia. In these debates, the argument of ASEAN's fear of China's economic power in the region (and globally) is gaining ground. When following former discourses on this complex issue (Tobin, 2019; Ortuoste, 2019; Seixas, Mendes & Lobner, 2019), it appears to be what is understood through the 'straw man fallacy' outlined above: Timor-Leste's ongoing membership as one of the last threads for preventing a centrality clash within the region (and perhaps on a global scale).

Understanding that the roles of regional power actors (such as the case of ASEAN and China) are being questioned now more than ever, amidst a pandemic, we target this issue from the perspective of bilateral and multilateral relations. We understand Timor-Leste as a relevant case study which stands in a complex relationship with both actors based on several interwoven indicators, such as economic, political and sociocultural. These relations we pinpoint through **a.** *ASEAN's centrality in Southeast Asia, considering Timor-Leste's positioning within (or outside) the grouping*; **b.** *the question of China's growth dynamics and its bilateral relations with Timor-Leste for reinforcing its regional/international presence.*

As the spread of the pandemic opens up a new interpretation realm, we raise a set of questions: Is Covid-19 creating new international relations dynamics in Southeast Asia? Is the return of sovereignties making the pace of bilateral relations prevalent over multilateral ones? Is Covid-19 showing new evidence in the dispute between ASEAN and China? To what extent do the triangular relations between Timor-Leste, China and ASEAN present evidence for addressing these questions?

We intend to discuss this framework through the current state of the art on Covid-19 with Timor-Leste as a 'golden link' in the chain between ASEAN and China's economic and geopolitical power positioning. This research is based on a literature review and netnography, aimed at exploring and interpreting two opposing perspectives: the western language literature domain (English, Portuguese) and the Chinese language literature domain. We propose that cultural translations of the ecumene are needed at the crossroads of both narratives. Our aim is to contribute to an up-to-date discourse on the dynamics of regional-international centrality construction (the building of different ecumene) reinforced through a global crisis.

This chapter is built in three parts: first, we present the current western state of the art on centrality dynamics in SEA, which primarily considers:

i.   ASEAN and Chinese centrality dynamics in SEA
ii. its links to Timor-Leste and
iii. the current Covid-19 scenario.

Next, we present the crossroads of China's perspective, which focuses on its bilateral relations with Timor-Leste. Finally, we will analyze the Western narrative in comparison to the Chinese narrative in order to understand what the latter may imply for the former and vice versa.

2   Centrality Dynamics in Southeast Asia: A Crossroads Perspective

As regional centralities, amidst a pandemic crisis, are being called into question now more than ever, we are using this research to bring the growing relevance of ASEAN and China into our research focus. In recent years, the quest for ASEAN's centrality has been increasingly debated through the grouping's fear of China's rapid growth within the region (and further on, globally). Considering this issue through a specific case, Timor-Leste, we understand that the small country is often used as a (possibly strategic) middleman between both global players, bearing in mind that Timor-Leste's protracted membership procedure seems, on the ASEAN side, to be increasingly dependent on the country's ties with China (Chongkittavorn, 2019; Tobin, 2019; Ortuoste, 2019). Understanding that China itself is seen as a major economic counteractor with rapid regional growth, ASEAN's objections to admitting Timor-Leste as its 11th member state increase. It is expected that if the small country joins the grouping, China's global influence through its strong presence in, and close ties to, Timor-Leste will also increase (Ortuoste, 2019). But how does this western perspective stand in opposition to the Chinese one? As we understand this as a relevant domain yet to be tackled, we will analyze these two narratives based on the literature we reviewed through a comparative analysis, demonstrated through a new emergent perspective: Covid-19 and its effect on regional centrality clashes.

2.1   *The Western Narrative: A Quest for Centrality in a Triangular Relationship*

Considering the state of the art, we first explored the quest for ASEAN's regional centrality role, a pressing issued in international relations debates of recent years. ASEAN, understood as a core regional (/global) actor, has been continuously questioned in terms of its power positioning, leadership role and economic strengths and weaknesses (He, 2006; Sudo, 2006; Leviter, 2011; Frost, 2013; Caballero-Anthony, 2014; Croissant, 2016). More recently, the regional grouping has been explored from the perspective of its sociocultural interplay and centrality construction through the case of Timor-Leste on its threshold (e.g. Acharya, 2017; Arifuddin, 2019; Ortuoste, 2019; Raksaseri & Boonlert, 2019;

Seixas, Mendes & Lobner, 2019). Literature continues to be produced on the quest for ASEAN's centrality construction as a counterpart to other strong presences of regional-international actors in Southeast Asia, as is the case with China's growing influence in the region (Natalegawa, 2018; Ortuoste, 2019; CSIS, 2020).

When considering the latest debates on the quest for centrality in Southeast Asia, the pandemic context gains prominence. Sovereignties seem to return, which creates new consequences such as the rise of (economic) rivalries between global powers (CSIS, 2020; Saramago, 2020; Kloet, Lin & Chow, 2020). As we are pinpointing this issue through a case study, Timor-Leste, literature on the relationship between ASEAN and the small country was being exponentially produced in the pre-Covid-19 era, analyzing the grouping's relevance and strength as a central actor when dealing with regional-international issues (Siapno, 2014; Strating, 2019; Hooi, 2019; Arifuddin, 2019; Ortuoste, 2019; Branco, 2019; Chen, 2020; Seixas, Mendes & Lobner, 2019). In the past few months, this issue has been increasingly discussed through the emergence of a new perspective: Covid-19, a renegotiation of geostrategic centrality dynamics visible through the case of Timor-Leste (Wight, 2020; Mulakala & Ji, 2020, Zhang, 2020).

More and more attention is being paid to ASEAN's challenging relationship with China in scientific discourses, considering the different efforts made by both actors to fight the pandemic regionally (and globally) (Jianguo, 2020; Dermawan, 2020; Rakhmat, 2020; Mulakala & Ji, 2020; Baretto Soares, 2020). As literature is expanding, there seems to be a consistent narrative on China's support in fighting the Covid-19 outbreak within a far-reaching domain, analyzed through several approaches, including the argument that China's soft power strategy and 'mask diplomacy'/health diplomacy remain in the forefront (Chen & Molter, 2020; Zhang, 2020).

Our proposal is that the issue of a regeneration of regional-international centrality between ASEAN and China, amplified through Covid-19, can be demonstrated through the case of Timor-Leste. We have created two sub-narratives within the western umbrella narrative on the triangular relationship between ASEAN, China and Timor-Leste:

i.   ASEAN's centrality role in a Covid-19 context: the case of Timor-Leste
ii.   China's foreign diplomacy to fight the pandemic/Bilateral relations with Timor-Leste

As the debate on this issue has only arisen since the beginning of 2020, with the outbreak of Covid-19, we have, up to the current state of the art, found 36 articles on this domain, mainly in online newspapers (e.g. The Diplomat;

Lowy Institute; Observador; etc.) and international report platforms/forums (WHO; ASEAN; USAID; Asian Development Bank; Chinese Observatorium). Next, we will present both narrative sets in order to continue with our comparative analysis.

2.1.1   ASEAN's Centrality Role in a Covid-19 Context: The Case of Timor-Leste

In the first cluster, 'ASEAN's role in a Covid-19 context: the case of Timor-Leste', the prevailing narrative is that the grouping does not have the major resources and capacities needed to expand its foreign aid (Neves, 2020; Wight, 2020). Timor-Leste is a rather absent indicator within these debates, where it seems that the small country is rarely considered in the grouping's support and efforts to fight the pandemic. Rather, ASEAN is acting exclusively within the group, while also receiving partnership aid from the USA and China (OECD, 2020). Ongoing discourses are framing ASEAN's centrality role within the pandemic context as rather weak decision-making dynamics. These debates have shown that Covid-19 only seems to increase the lack of collective actions and responses by the grouping for strengthening regional coordination and efforts (Koh, 2020; Kuok, 2020). This may have a direct influence on Timor-Leste's positioning on the threshold of ASEAN, implying that there most likely will not be a final answer to its inclusion in the near future (considering that it has never been one of the grouping's core priorities) (Neves, 2020). On Timor-Leste's side, the absence of ASEAN centrality during the pandemic crisis may well play a role in the priority of regional relationships.

These flashpoints call the grouping's geostrategic dynamics into question, bearing in mind that ASEAN's next steps will come under scrutiny at a time when its regional effort is needed more than ever. To understand this context through the grouping's current emergency approach strategies, we can take a closer look at what has been done so far within regional parameters. As ASEAN invoked its 'centrality' for strengthening cooperation ties within a global context, there was an ASEAN Special Summit on Covid-19 (April 14) in which the coordination with 'dialogue partners' such as China, Japan and South Korea (ASEAN + 3) was enhanced (Dermawan, 2020). An additional cooperation network was launched linking the ASEAN Emergency Operations Center, the ASEAN Risk Assessment and Risk Communication Center, the ASEAN Bio-Diaspora Virtual Center and the ASEAN Center for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Management. Furthermore, an ASEAN-EU Ministerial Conference (March 30) and a special meeting of ASEAN foreign ministers on Covid-19 were held in order to strengthen regional cooperation. An environment of a

multilateral 'dialogue' has been praised in contrast to the tendency towards isolationism, although the difficulty is above all in the coordination legislation and in the sharing of information. (Saramago, 2020; Dermawan, 2020; Kuok, 2020).

Going back a few years in time, in 2003, the SARS virus hit the region hard. For this reason, ASEAN created an institutional device for coping with health emergencies at that time (network for public health emergencies/Malaysia, Regional public health laboratories network/Thailand, ASEAN Risk Assessment and Risk Communication Center and others). With this institutional establishment of 2003, there is already some degree of preparedness for coping with the pandemic outbreak (Koh, 2020; Green, Searight, Buchan, et al., 2020). Despite these previous preparations, the grouping seems to hold its leadership role rather in the background, considering the seemingly absent interventions as seen in media. This reinforces the issue of its actual centrality role, which is well demonstrated through the case of Timor-Leste, considering that ASEAN remains absent in the support for the small country on its threshold.

2.1.2   Chinese Foreign Diplomacy to Fight the Pandemic

The second cluster, 'Chinese foreign diplomacy to fight the pandemic: the case of Timor-Leste' discloses the narrative that China is on the forefront of global actors providing aid to the small country for fighting Covid-19. Considering its strong foreign aid strategies for supporting its neighbors (and beyond) through financial aid, human resources and medical health devices, China is by now understood as the main global partner in fighting the pandemic (Zhang, 2020; Jianguo, 2020; Dermawan, 2020; Rakhmat, 2020; Mulakala & Ji, 2020; USAID, 2020). This discourse is demonstrated as based on diplomatic bilateral and multilateral relations on one side, and an attributed soft power strategy called 'health diplomacy' on the other, through which the country seems to be aiming to reinforce its ties with several nations on an international scale.

As the debate around 'health diplomacy' further reveals, there is a widespread western opinion about China's strategic use of the pandemic for its own ends, through strongly reinforcing its foreign aid and diplomatic relations in order to strengthen its ties on a global scale (Kloet, Lin & Chow, 2020; Zhung, 2020). This is in contrast to ASEAN's rather weak efforts and resources for establishing a similar endeavor to fight the pandemic beyond its own borders. In these discussions, the relationship between China and Timor-Leste comes to the fore, revealing that China is Timor-Leste's most committed foreign aid partner in the fight against the pandemic (as the first country that provided a response for building on a strategy to fight Covid-19 in the small country

[Baretto Soares, 2020]). This gives rise to a significant western perception of China using the current crisis as a new diplomatic opportunity, meaning that the challenges established through the crisis seem to offer new chances for a power and influence competition between 'traditional and new players' (Zhang, 2020). Nevertheless, what remains as core within western debates is that China provides intense internal as much external aid in order to boost its economic power positioning on a global scale (Kloet, Lin & Chow, 2020).

This issue is heavily emphasized in the debates on ASEAN's absent support to its member yet to be (Timor-Leste), whilst China is continuously strengthening its relationship with the small country through its effective cooperation and aid in the fight against the pandemic. As the deputy chairman of the Chinese international development cooperation agency said, China's pandemic assistance overseas is the country's 'most concentrated and wide-ranging emergency humanitarian action' in history, 'offering such support … is crucial for China to … live up to the vision of a community with a shared future for mankind' (Boqing, 2020 in Zhang, 2020).

2.1.2.1 *China, ASEAN and Timor-Leste: A Triangular Relationship*

When looking at the centrality debate within Southeast Asia in a Covid-19 context, we propose Timor-Leste should serve as a relevant case to be observed. As the small nation has officially been trying to become ASEAN's 11th member state since 2011 (and unofficially, since 1975), its relationship with ASEAN has been discussed more intensively in recent years. This issue has been attracting more and more attention due to the small country's diplomatic relations with China, which happens to be an obstacle for its ASEAN membership (Ortuoste, 2019). Significantly, in recent years ASEAN has shown its constraint towards Timor-Leste through its fear of China's growing influence in the region (Chongkittavorn, 2019; Tobin, 2019; Ortuoste, 2019). As China already has a strong presence in the region, Timor-Leste might well be the 'straw that broke the camel's back' for opening the doors for China's major economic and geopolitical rise.

2020 has brought a new dynamic into this triangular relationship. As demonstrated earlier in this chapter, China's strong foreign aid during the current pandemic crisis may lead to a balancing of powers within the region. To shed more light on this case, we will present a brief outline of what has been narrated so far in western discourses on Timor-Leste's triangular positioning within the current pandemic context.

As the relationship between China and Timor-Leste is strongly emphasized in the most recent literature on the pandemic context and centrality in SEA

(Horta, 2020; CSIS, 2020), ASEAN remains silent on the matter of foreign aid to support the small country, where, as outlined earlier in this chapter, China remains in the forefront. Besides the aid of China, Timor-Leste has been receiving minor support from its neighbor Australia, slightly more help from the European Union, the Asian Development Bank, the United Nations and the United States (USAID) (ADB, 2020; EEAS, 2020; Galloway, 2020; USAID, 2020). Timor-Leste's own capacity in terms of financial and human resources is seen as comparatively weak for fighting the pandemic, even though case numbers seem to remain low in comparison to its Southeast Asian neighbors and the global scale (specifically Indonesia, which has the highest number of cases in the region) (Agencia Lusa, 2020; Horta, 2020).

Although most sources narrated the Covid-19 situation in the small country as rather controlled at the present moment, important economic consequences are arising for the small nation. According to *The Diplomat* (Li-Li-Chen, 2020), 'The Timorese economy will also go into recession due to its high dependency on oil and trade'. Considering a statement from an Asian Development Bank (ADB) report, the per capita GDP growth in Timor-Leste is expected to be −3.7 percent in 2020 (ADB, 2020). Such outcomes will most likely have a major impact on the country's aspirations for future partnerships and its already critical assigned inclusion in ASEAN. Despite the global systemic effects of this crisis and the urgent need to rethink all the institutional logics within the region, the context is not auspicious for Timor-Leste being admitted to the grouping in the near future. As Covid-19 has spread drastically in the past year, it has also become a crucial turning point for ASEAN's regional dynamics. As the literature shows, the pandemic scenario is just another source of major concern for the grouping's centrality dynamics, which are, within the western narrative, seen as the opposite to how China has been dealing with the pandemic outbreak. China is increasingly portrayed as using Covid-19 as a source for strategic growth and expansion through its foreign aid dynamics, in order to gain regional-international centrality (Zhang, 2020, Kuok, 2020).

2.1.2.2   *Discussion*
The western narrative takes a close look at the divergent approaches from both ASEAN and China in the fight against the pandemic. Whilst China seems to be clearly in the forefront in foreign cooperation and aid, ASEAN remains in the background of the discourse. Nevertheless, when considering the role of ASEAN in dealing with the pandemic regionally (and globally), its multilateral approach and cooperation with international players for a regional pandemic force strategy attracts more attention (Saramago, 2020). Yet, bearing in

mind that Covid-19 has highlighted the differences between ASEAN member states and stressed the need for cooperation within the group, its centrality is being tested. Its capacity to give an effective regional answer to the immediate, predictable and unpredictable problems caused by the pandemic continues to come under heavy criticism in the ongoing discourse (LUSA, 2020; Son, 2020; Saramago, 2020). This is in line with its preexisting critical conditions of human development, political affairs, poverty and economic instability (despite Singapore, Brunei and Malaysia's high ranking [UN human development index, 2020]). Considering these pre-Covid-19 circumstances, it comes as no surprise that if ASEAN does not have the capacity to stabilize its own member states, foreign aid measures to other countries cannot be provided (Son, 2020). This brings China's role into the fore again, particularly its general assertiveness during this period (portrayed as *mask diplomacy/health diplomacy*), which is a major challenge for the grouping's centrality role (Chen, 2020; Dermawan, 2020).

Despite these existing discussions, we see relevance in asking what the practical results of the current crisis are going to look like in the context of ASEAN's regional constitution, where China is in the center of the debate. Hence, as the predominant data from the current discourse reveal, there is a widespread assumption that China aims to bring about the balancing of powers within the region, thus widening its sphere of influence over ASEAN's member states (Kuok, 2020). A relevant indicator within this issue is to what extent individual reactions of ASEAN states will impact a 'new hierarchy' of powers within the region. It needs to be understood how far the citizens of the member states trust or consider ASEAN to be a valuable resource during a global state of emergency and whether its political and economic perspectives remain centered on the elite (Dermawan, 2020).

We also ask how far the reactions of each actor towards the pandemic could impact a new 'hierarchy of powers' and regional asymmetries. As mentioned earlier, ASEAN's multilateral cooperation and mechanisms for fighting the pandemic have been reinforced, yet its responses remain weak in comparison to Chinese dynamics (Saramago, 2020; Horta, 2020). This is clearly in play in the case of Timor-Leste, considering that ASEAN's expression of support for the country on its threshold seems to be predominantly absent. As the impacts of the crisis remain to be evaluated, ASEAN's integration dynamics also continue to come under question and criticism (Hayat, 2020). Considering that Timor-Leste's membership has never been on the top of the grouping's agenda, this scenario of new priorities reinforces the shift away from responding to this longstanding issue. This is problematic when considering that effective

regional and international aid is essential for the small nation state at a time of a global pandemic. However, this matter provides new (and mounting) grounds for the silent dispute between ASEAN and China, considering the grouping's fear of China's geopolitical and economic growth.

Next, we will present the Chinese narrative on its bilateral relations with Timor-Leste with a focus on the pandemic context, for the ensuing analysis of both centralities (ASEAN and China) in the region.

2.2   *Chinese Narrative*

In an era of 'major country' discourses,[1] Timor-Leste, despite its strategic geographic location, is an unlikely heavyweight player in international relations. Amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, Timor-Leste finds itself straddling ASEAN and China, the former representing multilateralism and the latter symbolizing bilateralism. According to Chinese reports, different foreign country leaders have expressed high regard for Chinese actions, through which China has demonstrated its 'sentiment and commitment as a responsible major country'.[2] Referencing recent Chinese press releases and media reports, we review the actions and words from the Chinese side with regard to Timor-Leste. We also raise important questions that western scholarship may have missed due to linguistic or cultural barriers. Chinese texts have been translated to facilitate comprehension. We seek to understand the propaganda and media perspective on bilateral relations as, after all, China is said to have achieved three 'first places' in Timor-Leste: China was the first country to establish diplomatic ties with Timor-Leste, Timor-Leste signed its first joint diplomatic announcement with China, and the two countries celebrated the first economic technologies cooperation agreement with one another.[3]

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1 In high-level diplomacy, officially commissioned Chinese-English interpreters avoid using the expression 'world power', instead, they say 'major country'. This is because the PRC considers itself a 'major country', and 'major countries' like itself and the United States should take on more responsibilities on the international stage and set an example that is worthy of that particular position.

2 '外国政党政要高度评价中方积极支持其他国家抗击疫情 [Foreign political parties and dignitaries highly appreciate China's active support to other countries to fight epidemic]', Xinhua Net, March 20, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2020-03/20/c_1125 744148.htm (accessed October 4, 2020).

3 '东南亚，飘起一面新国旗: 中国在东帝汶创造了三个'第一' [In Southeast Asia a new national flag rises: China creates three 'firsts' in Timor-Leste]', Global Times, May 27, 2002, http://www1.peopledaily.com.cn/GB/paper68/6304/621938.html (accessed October 4, 2020).

Since the start of 2020, there have been at least three major operations by China to donate materials to Timor-Leste,[4] not all of which were directly initiated by state entities. Business interests from mainland China and Chinese companies based in Timor-Leste were involved. It is known that Chinese private/semi-public companies in the Southeast Asian country at some point received information from China about taking part and contributing. We ask then, how do we qualify Chinese intervention? Does mere instruction count? Do the efforts of private companies with state encouragement count?

For example, according to a Xinhua report,[5] the Ma Yun Charity Foundation and the Alibaba Charity Foundation donated medical face coverings and gloves, protective clothing, reagent kits, forehead thermometers and ventilators, etc. These were ceremoniously received on May 26 at the airport by the then Timorese Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Dionísio Babo Soares (2018–2020), and by representatives of the World Health Organization (WHO) in Timor-Leste. Thanking the two Chinese charity foundations, the Chinese Ambassador to Timor-Leste, Xiao Jianguo (2018–present), emphasized that it was 'an act of love' that showed the 'deep friendship' that the Chinese people have always had for the Timorese. He also announced at the time that more help was on the way. Then, Timorese Minister Dionísio Babo Soares assured that his country would continue to cooperate with China, to 'develop relations with China' and 'consolidate the traditional bilateral friendship'. Similarly, the Association of Chinese Enterprises in Timor-Leste, set up in May 2016, was active in the aid campaigns. It donated money to Timorese hospitals in April[6] and medical supplies to the health authorities in September.[7]

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4 '驻东帝汶大使肖建国在东主流纸媒发表《中东携手 共克疫情》的署名文章 [Ambassador to Timor-Leste Xiao Jianguo publishes a signed article in mainstream Timorese print media entitled 'China and Timor-Leste work together to fight against COVID-19']', Embassy of the PRC in the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, May 29, 2020, http://tl.china-embassy.org/chn/sgdt/t1784065.htm (accessed October 4, 2020).

5 '一批中方捐赠抗疫物资运抵东帝汶 [One batch of Chinese donated medical aid to fight epidemic arrived in Timor-Leste]', *Xinhua Net*, May 27, 2020, http://www.xinhua net.com/world/2020-05/27/c_1126036860.htm (accessed July 19, 2020).

6 '东各界感谢中国援助第二批防疫物资 [Different sectors of Timor-Leste thank China for second batch of pandemic combat aid]', Embassy of the PRC in the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, April 29, 2020, http://tl.chineseembassy.org/chn/ddwrzzg/t1774855.htm (accessed October 4, 2020).

7 '驻东帝汶使馆经商参赞耿协威出席中资企业协会向东国家疾控局捐赠口罩仪式 [Mr. Geng Xiewei, Economic and Commercial Counsellor of the Embassy in Timor-Leste, attended ceremony of donation of masks by Association of Chinese Enterprises]'. Embassy of the PRC in the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, September 4, 2020, http://easttimor.mof com.gov.cn/article/todayheader/202009/20200902998773.shtml (accessed October 4, 2020).

The official discourse is uniform and clear, based on analysis of public Chinese-language sources. Essentially, China is reciprocating verbal solidarity with material help. China, as a 'responsible major country' (often used tactically by the PRC to distinguish itself from the USA), promptly responded to Timor-Leste's request for help. On the Timor-Leste side, it is understood that there is recognition of the solid and longstanding relationship with China. The Chinese side prefers to emphasize friendly and good neighborly relations of a social, cultural and historical nature that extend from the past to the present. We therefore ask if China has been a consistent bilateral relations player, if the current pandemic has enabled us to see more clearly how bilateral ties between China and Timor-Leste are overriding other multilateral commitments and if China is in fact continuing with its 'longstanding health diplomacy'.[8]

In the speech by Ambassador Xiao Jianguo at the 'Handover Ceremony of China-aided Medical Supplies to Timor-Leste',[9] for instance, there were several usages of Chinese historical mottos and classical references. The speech in English was given at the time of the gifting of the second batch of much needed supplies. The corresponding Chinese text (officially a 'translation'[10]) was also available.[11] The ambassador took the opportunity to thank the China Overseas Engineering Group (a subsidiary of China Railway Group Limited) and Shanghai Construction Group for having offered substantial logistical help. He also respectfully acknowledged that Timor-Leste had officially and formally sought help from China. Then Minister Dionísio Babo Soares had written twice to China for that purpose. The following compares the official bilingual versions:

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8 Tang Bei, 'A Brief History of Chinese 'Health Diplomacy'', Sixth Tone, May 20, 2020, https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1005687/a-brief-history-of-chinese-health-diplomacy (accessed October 4, 2020).

9 'Ambassador Xiao Jianguo's Speech at the Handover Ceremony of China-aided Medical Supplies to Timor-Leste', Embassy of the PRC in the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, May 1, 2020, http://tl.china-embassy.org/eng/xwdt/t1775584.htm (accessed October 4, 2020).

10 Conventionally, important official speeches are first written in Chinese and checked for their accuracy and correctness. It is only after this that the speeches are translated into English.

11 '驻东帝汶大使肖建国在援东第二批医疗物资交接仪式上的讲话 [Speech of Ambassador Xiao Jianguo at Handover Ceremony of Second Batch of Medical Supplies to Timor-Leste]', Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, May 1, 2020, https://www.fmprc .gov.cn/web/dszlsjt_673036/t1775568.shtml (accessed October 4, 2020).

CN: 投桃报李是中国的传统美德。

EN: It is a Chinese tradition to return a favor with a favor.

The actual Chinese expression used is '*toutao baoli*', literally, receive a peach and return a prune. It comes from 'the Classic of Poetry' (*Shijing*), prescribing the right way to reciprocate.

CN: 作为东帝汶的好邻居、好朋友、好伙伴，中方始终密切关注东疫情形势，同东民众感同身受。

EN: As a good neighbor, friend and partner of Timor-Leste, we are closely following the epidemic situation in Timor-Leste and feel at one with its people.

China defines itself as a 'neighbor', 'friend' and 'partner'. This is a modern, western way of self-presentation, also a sign of accommodation to the other side.

CN: 患难见真情，中方将始终本着人道主义精神，毫无犹豫同东政府和人民站在一起......

EN: Friends should help each other in times of difficulties. Based on the humanitarian spirit, China has no hesitation in standing with the Timorese Government ...

One Chinese idiomatic expression used is '*huannuan jian zhenqing*', which means true friends emerge from sharing difficulties. The humanitarianism that is mentioned must not be confused with simple human rights or humanitarian aid. Rather it should be thought of as a central principle regulating human dealings from the Chinese perspective.

CN: '中国援助' 和之前已有名气的 '中国制造' 为各国抗疫提供了有力支持，充分展现了中国的负责任大国形象......

EN: 'Aid from China', together with the already well-known 'Made in China' label, has provided a steady driving force for the global efforts in the fight against the pandemic, which clearly portrays China as a responsible major country.

As discussed above, 'major country' is a Chinese concept with specific meanings and messages. By highlighting this, the Chinese Ambassador to Timor-Leste was firmly positioning his diplomatic missions in the greater field of Chinese international relations.

The above usages are not exclusive, nor are they exhaustive. In fact, the same expressions tend to be repeated along very consistent rhetorical and international 'politics-cum-policy' lines. For instance, when Ambassador Xiao Jianguo entitled a particular newspaper piece on collaborative Covid-19 combat efforts 'Friends Help Each Other in Times of Difficulties', he was clearly inferencing one of the traditional Chinese good practices mentioned above:[12] As the proverb says, a true friend is known in the day of adversity. At the critical moment when China was fighting the virus, the Timorese government and its people expressed their solidarity and support to China in many ways, which was taken to heart by the Chinese people. As the number of confirmed cases has been increasing recently, China is closely following the situation in Timor-Leste and empathizes with the Timorese. China highly praises the Timorese Government for taking citizens' health and safety as a priority and adopting a series of decisive measures against the epidemic; it appreciates the unity of the Timorese people while facing the difficulties and impact caused by the epidemic in Timor-Leste. As a good neighbor, friend and partner of Timor-Leste, China has no hesitation in standing with the Timorese Government and its people, fighting against the epidemic, and contributing to Timor-Leste within its capacity.

Following state recommendations, Chinese entrepreneurs on the ground should take every opportunity to cooperate positively with Timorese social media to promote a good Chinese image in that country and do their utmost to expand Chinese cultural influences abroad:[13]

> 中国传统文化是世界优秀文化花园中的一朵鲜花，随着中东双方经济文化交流的不断深入而受到当地人民的关注和了解，不少当地人注意学习汉语，以会说汉语为荣。中国企业在当地开展投资合作过程中，应注重弘扬中国传统文化，增进当地人对中国文化的了解。

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12   'Signed article on fighting COVID-19 by H. E. Xiao Jianguo, Chinese Ambassador to Timor-Leste, published in Suara Timor Lorosae', Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, April 27, 2020, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zwjg_665342/zwbd_665 378/t1773855.shtml (accessed October 4, 2020).

13   '对外投资合作国别（地区）指南 [Guidelines on external investment and cooperation in specific countries (regions)]', Institute of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, Ministry of Commerce/Economic and Commercial Counsellor, Chinese Embassy in Timor-Leste/Department of Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation, Ministry of Commerce, 2019 version, p. 61.

> Chinese traditional culture is a fresh flower in the garden of the world's outstanding cultures. With the continuous intensification of China-Timor-Leste economic and cultural exchanges, many local people are paying attention and seeking to understand such traditions. They are learning the Chinese language and are proud to speak it. In the process of enabling regional investment and cooperation, Chinese enterprises should emphasize promoting traditional Chinese culture and increasing local people's understanding of it.

The Chinese definition of 'culture' is very broad and encompasses the manner and etiquette of responding to requests for help from Timor-Leste.

According to the official press release, with the approval of the Central Military Commission, the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) provided prevention aid such as masks and protective clothing to the armies of Russia, Mongolia and Timor-Leste on May 22 and 24, adding that the PLA will continue to strengthen international cooperation in the fight against the pandemic and to contribute positively to the building of a healthy community for humankind.

It is worth saying that apart from public health relief, China is providing military help. To take an example, the Timor-Leste Council of Ministers agreed to receive 'free military assistance' from China in June 2020.[14] For this particular deal, the Timorese Executive authorized the Ambassador of Timor-Leste in Beijing, Abrão dos Santos, to sign the agreement. It is also known that China donated logistics materials to the Timorese Army in August 2019 to demonstrate its willingness to support Timorese military modernization.

Effectively, with regard to Timor-Leste, China is mainly committed to building infrastructure and reinforcing public action capacity in areas such as defense, healthcare, agriculture, and food security. Because of the new infrastructural bases, China was able to send the materials successfully and quickly in the fight against the pandemic. Likewise, it was due to the active cooperation of Chinese business groups (established locally), using the infrastructure they had built themselves, that China was able to continue with its rapid response policies in non-violent bilateral relations.

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14   '中國向東帝汶提供軍事援助 [Timor-Leste agrees to accept a gift of military aid from China]', Permanent Secretariat of the Forum for Economic and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese Language Countries (Macao), June 29, 2020, https://www.forum chinaplp.org.mo/timor-leste-agrees-to-accept-gift-of-military-aid-from-china/?lang=tw (accessed October 4, 2020).

FIGURE 7.1   "Bons amigos compartilham o mesmo barco e a mesma travessia
[Good friends share the same boat and the same crossing]", Ministry
of National Defense of the People's Republic of China, May 25, 2020,
http://www.mod.gov.cn/action/2020-05/25/content_4866055.htm
(accessed October 4, 2020)

3   Comparative Discussion

Throughout the previous sections, we presented two main narratives in the
regional centrality discourse on Southeast Asia: the Western narrative and
the Chinese narrative in the context of Covid-19, with Timor-Leste as a case
study. What we have reached through this data presentation is a scale between
a hollow, formal regionalism on the ASEAN side and open bilateralism on the
Chinese side.

Considering this issue more closely, we can first look at the problems of
ASEAN. As can be seen from the data we collected, ASEAN seems to have no
direct, effective answer for dealing with a major crisis beyond bureaucratic, for-
mal dynamics. This becomes clear precisely through the case of Timor-Leste,
which is not a formal member of ASEAN, but a partner, one that ASEAN does
not seem to engage with by providing help to the small country in any way
whatsoever. This gives the impression of a hollow regional construct with nar-
row multilateralism as standard. The grouping does not show the strength
needed to cope with the constraints that its member states are facing amidst a

ASEAN	China
Narrow multilateralism as standard	Open bilateralism as standard
Hollow, formal bureaucratic region	Traditional relations linked to smart cultural translations
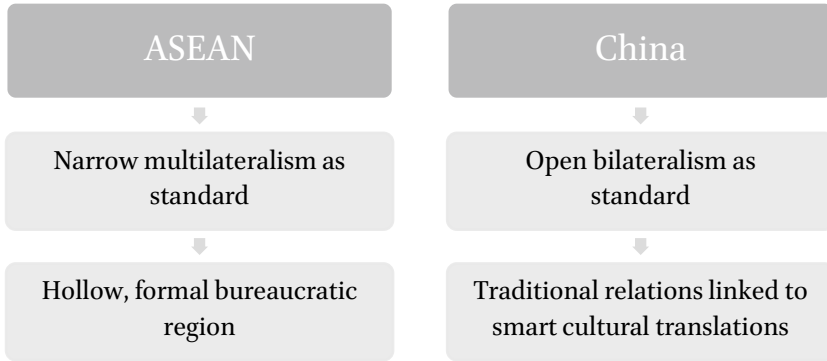
FIGURE 7.2   ASEAN-China dichotomy

pandemic. Rather, a bureaucratic base has been established, through creating a variety of missions and 'boards'.

Looking at the other end of the scale, i.e. China, it is clear that the country is following a very different dynamic of centrality construction: amidst a global crisis, it relies on its open bilateralism standards strengthened by linking 'traditional' relations with smart cultural translations. Talking about 'smart cultural translations' in the case of Timor-Leste, we are speaking more precisely about the country's internal promotion of the friendship and responsibility narrative. Using this form of narrative ('behaving as a major responsible country') in relation to countries where clientelism is strong demonstrates a very accurate understanding of deep societal organization structures. This fits well with the clanic and familiar patterns embraced, mixed with bureaucratic ones (as the indicators of language, 'friendship', and 'responsibility' reinforce).

Within these extremes, there are certainly several possibilities: multiple ways of creating ecumene (as spaces of meaningful cultural exchange). We propose that future research should tackle the possibilities of cross-cutting ecumene within specific regional contexts: a typology of ecumene as 'Typologies of Cultural Translations'. We are all (citizens, countries and the international community) involved in ways of translating different traditions (clanic, tribal, national, international) as a means of creating ecumene that will always be diverse and in translation amongst themselves. Although there may be pressure for exclusivity, there is no reason for mutual exclusion; on the contrary, the richness of the region is the polylogue of the ecumene.

When considering our case study of Timor-Leste, the small country has a long history of being a platform for the translation of traditions. Long before European arrival, Timor-Leste was already the arena for encounters between civilizations: the Malay/Austronesian and the Papua/Melanesian layers

transformed Timor Island into a clash of cultures from around 3,000 BC to 1,000 BC. (Seixas, 2005, p. 154). As literature demonstrates, the 'Wallace Line', which was established in the 19th century, was probably the first conscious evidence of these inhabitations. The Wallace Line, which competes with Darwin's work, proposed a territorial division between the Malay and the Melanesian peoples which went through the island of Timor (Scoville, 2020). Before the arrival of the Europeans (16th century), Timor was almost a single territory with Waiwiku-Wehale as the main center (nowadays in the western part of the island). Waiwiku-Wehale was the center of power and a bridge between two large provinces, Servião and Belo (nowadays in the eastern part). This division was still evident in the early 20th century (Seixas, 2005, p. 158). As a result, the diarchic relations that were and still are evident in Timor through 'the people from the land/mountains' and 'the people from the sea/coast', 'the insiders and outsiders', express a conscious culture of translation which is still clear in wedding and funeral rituals, for example. Within such rituals, a diversity of family traditions from different regions are translated.

Followed by the arrival of Portuguese in 1515, Timorese people gained two more social strata, particularly on the eastern part of the island (Timor-Leste): the European and the African ones. Furthermore, specifically in Timor-Leste, the universe of more than thirty languages and dialects evidences a polyphony and the need for translation. Besides that, 'language' became consciously instrumental: a local language, a vehicular language, a commercial language, a bureaucratic language, an international language.

This brief and rather encapsulated narrative of the history of Timor should serve as an argument to propose that Timor-Leste, probably more than many other countries, has a deep understanding of culture as continuous translation. We propose that Timor-Leste's cultural core is 'translation as continuous negotiations amongst a diversity of traditions' (Seixas, 2007 & 2009). Taking this argument, the relationship between Timor-Leste and the global realm takes its ever-present cultural pattern from translation. As a result, Timor-Leste negotiates a diversity of ecumene (international regional cultures) in dispute, considering the mission of the country to be within them and to incorporate them all.

Hence, what we have achieved through the dialogue presented above is a scale between two extreme poles, which helps to understand the different ways of coping with a crisis (in a macro-context). In the course of reaching these two opposites, we found the building of several ecumene was in the forefront. As we see a dialogue (and clash) between centralities within the SEA region by ASEAN and China through Timor-Leste as a predominant negotiator, we propose the small country's position as a kind of a 'David' in a game

between Goliaths. Furthermore, as Timor-Leste is in the center between these two major geopolitical 'players' (ASEAN & China), it could act as a kind of 'test' for centrality. This shows that ASEAN does not seem to be 'regional enough' in comparison to China.

Understanding this issue through the complexity of the construction of international regions, we need to consider the ecumene concept more closely. As we discussed in a previous study (Lobner, 2020), the ecumene represents an international space of meaningful cultural exchange, a middle ground of action between the top-down and the bottom-up approaches (the people and the state, the global and the local). We believe that there are many ecumene in this construction, which need to be understood in their multiple dimensions. In many cases it is assumed that ecumene are based on multilateralism (Hannerz, 1989; Mintz, 1996; Pina-Cabral, 2010). Yet, we propose that this does not always need to be the case, specifically when we consider China and its open bilateralism standard. Considering the case of China in our research approach more closely, the country's narrative (as presented in an earlier section) reveals that China defines/translates itself as a 'neighbor', 'partner', 'friend'. As this is demonstrated as a western way of self-representation on the one hand, and a sign of accommodation on the other, we see a strategic dynamic for building an ecumene through Timor-Leste as the middleman. China relies on its cultural translation skills, which are clearly promoted through expressions such as 'true friends emerge from sharing difficulties'. This is precisely where the ecumene is constructed, in the middle ground between bottom-up and top-down approaches: 'The humanitarianism that is mentioned must not be confused with simple human rights or humanitarian aid. Rather it should be thought of as a central principle regulating human dealings from the Chinese perspective'. Furthermore, evidence of the ecumene in the making is that the Chinese definition of 'culture' is a very broad one which outweighs the etiquette of responding to requests for help from Timor-Leste (as outlined in the Chinese narrative section). What is relevant here is that when looking more closely at an international relations context, they are to a certain extent built upon the use (or construction) of an 'international etiquette', which we see as being the basis of the ecumene.

This may be understood through a strategic 'change of behaviors', at has been closely analyzed by Elias (1982). As part of his debates on 'the civilizing process' of the western world, it is interesting to show a certain output through our research. Considering the 'etiquette' of responding to Timor-Leste's request for help in a manner much different from ASEAN's visible approach, China offered its aid during the pandemic through an amity-partnership-neighborhood approach. This, as outlined earlier, may be understood as a conscious

cultural translation most suitable for the context of a clientelism state such as Timor-Leste. Hence, as Elias demonstrated in his analysis of changing behavioral patterns in western civilizations (during the rise of the modern nation states), maintaining power over civil society was a form of 'competitive politeness'. For the 'nobles' to remain in a noteworthy position, they had to establish a new way of setting themselves apart from the emerging bourgeois in order to convince everyone of their valid 'superiority' (Elias, 1982; Leithart, 2011). As this behavioral transformation is, for Elias, at the core of the political centralization of the West[15] (and its forces), we see it through a similar lens in the case of China: whilst maintaining (/applying) a mode of 'diplomatic relations with friends/partners/neighbors' in times of a major crisis, unlike the ASEAN response, the possibility for its power centralization and recognition in the region (and perhaps globally) may increase.

Hence, what we have tried to do in this paper is to provide evidence for the multiplicity of ecumene in translation: the dialogue between two centralities and how they problematize several configurations of the building of international regions. We continue to ask if a typology of the ecumene might be prevailing. Our proposal is an open research path towards understanding several ecumene in a crosscut with multiple layers. Considering the first column in our scale presented above, ASEAN, the predominant ecumene is a formal, narrow and bureaucratic one, while the other ecumene (built by China) is based on smart cultural translations – open bilateralism. Therefore, we have found two ecumene layers: one through the western narrative and another, in opposition to the western one, through the Chinese narrative.

The big picture that we have arrived at throughout our data analysis is that a regional impasse is involved: nowadays, the world is facing a wide variety of options, starting with economic groupings, bilateralism, multilateralism and unilateralism with certain political strands and geographically separated regions. Usually, we assume that there is a need to choose one organizational strand, but what if we are no longer forced to do so? What if several layers can be used? This is what seems to be the case in Timor-Leste: a player with several possibilities for international relations.

Hence, our interpretation shows that several layers are in play in any given region, which enables different ways of creating platforms of cultural translations in the world as a whole. What we tried to do with our dialogue-research was to problematize this theme of cultural translations: internationalism with its complex reciprocal layers.

Timor-Leste served as a relevant case study to represent this issue through ASEAN and China, understanding that the small country fosters several

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15   In the early modern period.
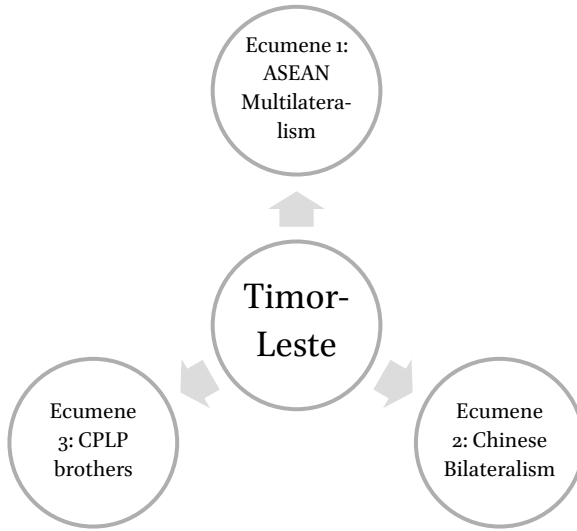
FIGURE 7.3   Internationalism through reciprocal layers

international-regional links through the idea of a middleman/negotiator. Its 'negotiator' position can be seen as the basis for a conscious cultural translation tool. Finally, we will end with open questions that remain for further research, clearly understanding that the complex scientific avenue of the building of international regions is far from being at an end:

– Which countries are more likely to play a relevant role as middleman/ negotiator between international players?
– How can the center-periphery context support this issue?
– Do postcolonial contexts have a significant influence on these complexities?
– How can different 'traditions' be translated?

We propose that anthropology and international relations are a complementary research field in the quest for the construction of different ecumene. We understand that the ecumene itself serves for translating global interrelations, even though ecumene undergo continuous translations: the world's regions are to be seen as a polylogue of different ecumene.

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Timor-Leste ASEAN Membership: Rethinking the Debate

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1   Introduction

Why hasn't Timor-Leste been accepted as one of the ASEAN member states? For years, this question has puzzled policymakers, foreign policy experts, academia, and the general public. Prevalent in the debate of Timor-Leste's ASEAN membership is the pattern of opinions that points to one thing: Timor-Leste's *readiness*. ASEAN researchers such as Paulo Castro Seixas, Nuno Canas Mendes, and Nadine Lobner (2019) found this trend when they conducted research on what pundits, researchers, op-ed columnists wrote about Timor-Leste ASEAN membership in a variety of forums such as academic journals, policy blogs, and newspapers. They found that those opposing Timor-Leste's membership fixate their opinions on the potential economic burdens Timor-Leste will bring to the region, or point to weak internal developments and political clashes. Those who support Timor-Leste's ASEAN membership generally make cases about how Timor-Leste can push ASEAN towards embracing stronger democratic values. Incidentally, these opinions *matter*. Both sides of the debate are so patterned that these pundits become what some researchers refer to as social agents that can influence public opinions and political decisions. I would go as far as to argue that these opinions, in some ways or the other, have stalled Timor-Leste's ASEAN membership.

This entry is not going to further contribute to an already dense debate on *readiness*. To truly understand the complexity of regional institutions, we must allow ourselves to see regions such as ASEAN as not inherently structural but as malleable, socially constructed by humans, and able to evolve over time. The focus on readiness subdues a distinct feature of Asian regional institutions that often international relations (IR) theories fail to capture. A specialist in regional institutions such as Fredrik Söderbaum (2013) argues that the diverse approach to study regionalism constitutes a weakness in itself. Even more so, there is a lack of dialogue among regional scholars. They often write either from the perspective of regional specializations by disproportionately using Europe as the model, or they approach it using different forms of IR theoretical

traditions of rationalism, constructivism, and other *-isms*. Using Søderbaum approach, I cannot help but notice how much of the debate surrounding Timor-Leste's *readiness* reveals ways in which pundits essentialize sovereign transfer, political unification, and instrumentality of regional institutions to make their verdicts – institutional characteristics that do not quite capture "the ASEAN way" of constructing regionalism. Now that we have established how pundits *may* have been incorrect about Timor-Leste as an ASEAN member, I would like to break these ideas down and touch upon the other three themes of ASEAN regionalism, hoping to add more nuance to the debate.

2   Capacity Constraints

The dominant narrative of Timor-Leste ASEAN membership uses capacity constraints to qualify the extent of Timor's preparedness. However, the capacity constraint viewpoint ignores ASEAN's humble beginnings as a regional organization. Material resources that states posed were never a prerequisite to enter ASEAN. Amitav Acharya (2017) argues that ASEAN started by consolidating middle powers and weaker states to form a new kind of regional institution. Lacking material resources, ASEAN leveraged a different kind of regional leadership style that emphasizes mutual cooperation and consensus-building, and less on aligning themselves with one particular big power of the Cold War. He calls the ASEAN model exemplary, "flexible, shared, and pluralized". The ASEAN charter also enshrines these values, which are "to enhance regional resilience by promoting greater … economic cooperation", and "to alleviate poverty and narrow the development gap within ASEAN states". Looking back, the capacity constraint wasn't a prerequisite to Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar when they formally asked to join ASEAN in the 1990s. So why is it that suddenly material and human resources are at the center of the Timor-Leste membership debate?

Let's look at it this way: to this day, capacity constraints continue to hamper cooperation within ASEAN states. One way to look at it is the response readiness to Covid-19, in which some states fared better in pandemic preparedness (e.g., Singapore), and some underfund public health and are not as ready (e.g., Indonesia). Moreover, only ad hoc commissions and small Working Groups, whose purviews are vaguely defined with unenforceable regulations and limited power continue to characterize ASEAN transnational cooperation, including in the handling of pandemics. This is just one example of how capacity constraints have made transnational cooperation among Southeast Asian states slow at times, and effective at other times when it is

done on a case-by-case basis. The point is, pundits are right when they say that Timor-Leste is economically underdeveloped. However, only a small link can be made about Timor is unprepared to be an ASEAN member because of resource constraints. Moreover, not only ASEAN was founded based on capacity constraints, but capacity constraints continue to typify regional cooperation today. We're not just talking about pandemic preparedness, but also in terms of other areas such as security, energy, human rights, and environmental cooperation.

3   Soft and Informal

Regional institutions such as the EU are characterized by hard rules and formal organizational structures that govern trade, security, and human rights; they are also known as HF structures, a shorthand for hard and formal. In HF-oriented institutions, it is reasonable to see states transfer some of their sovereignty for the common benefit of all members, bound by a centralized authority. However, where do we see a centralized power and hard structure visible in ASEAN? In the region that has more than 600 million population, the ASEAN secretariat in Jakarta is only operated by approximately 300 staff with a budget of $20 million a year. There is only one individual staffed to monitor the compliance of ASEAN agreements, let alone enforce them. Instead, states are given the power to partake directly in the regional leadership, and the relationships are done through soft and informal structures, also known as SI. This idea is put forth by professor Saadia Pekkanen in her book *Asian Designs*. She defines Asian regional institutions to largely collaborate through the framework of SI. As a result of these informal structures, scholars studying ASEAN assert that the region is more effective when dealing with issue-specific and result-oriented problems, as opposed to establishing universalized standards across states.

But the debates on Timor-Leste's ASEAN membership are somehow still focused on how Timor-Leste is going to contribute to ASEAN. Citing the lack of human resources and hampered by internal political struggles, the debates often say that Timor-Leste will hinder cooperation. However, the ASEAN Charter makes no mention of those hard prerequisites. States are only required to be located in Southeast Asia, agree to be bound by the Charter, and fulfill membership obligations to become a member of ASEAN. Moreover, these concerns would merit attention if the regional institution in question has more formal structures. But ASEAN is not an HF-type institution. For instance, if we look at the free trade agreement among ASEAN states, some countries continue

to be exempted from free trade agreements because, you guessed it: *domestic interests matter*. Most of the agreements established among ASEAN states are in a similar fashion: they are not binding or enforceable. Even when ASEAN has moved to AEC, which aims to foster the free movement of goods and services, labor, and capital among one another, has not been fully realized, as each state focuses on its own domestic affairs. Lee Jones (2010), another expert in ASEAN, captures it well. He says that when people speak of 'ASEAN doing x', it often does not mean 'ASEAN as *the institution*', but merely some combination of one or more ASEAN states, not all, "acting on the basis of a more-or-less substantive agreement among the rest doing x". This doesn't suggest ineffectiveness. But it should at least offer us insights to rethink how pundits have set a higher standard for Timor-Leste and its ability to cooperate. Meanwhile, in reality, the corporation itself remains weak and is done on a case-to-case basis.

This is to say that states *matter* in ASEAN. By imagining the ideals of political unification, political opinion writers ignore to put emphasis on each state and their positionality in the regional institutions.

4   The Myth of Sovereignty Transfer

By now, we have established that the interaction among ASEAN states is through soft and informal structures. An interesting point to highlight is the debate surrounding the level of democracy of Timor-Leste, which is said to fare better in the region. The debate correctly lays out that, for long, ASEAN states are not receptive to foreign interventions, particularly in human rights issues. Citing the infamous noninterference policy and the respect for individual sovereignty among themselves, the debates have given examples about the indifferent attitude of ASEAN states towards Myanmar's Rohingya case. However, the debate often quickly turns into how Timor-Leste's membership will pose a threat to the regional institution's human rights practices. It mentioned that, if accepted, Timor-Leste will play a huge role in trying to redefine human rights practices in the region.

Let us say that the assumption is correct. Timor-Leste will indeed be outspoken against Vietnam and Laos for its single-party authoritarian rule; or Brunei's strong Sharia law that jails people for merely being gay; or the military regime that is ruling Thailand; or Indonesia's human rights atrocities against West Papuans. Understandably so, because the people of Timor-Leste have long been subjugated to oppression and colonialism twice. Thus, this precondition has cultivated a sense of solidarity for the oppressed members of the society. Will Timor-Leste succeed though? Unlike the HF-type institutions, ASEAN

is not characterized by coercion let alone sanctions. Nor does ASEAN have a regional tribunal to try a member state for their certain human rights abuses. The existing human rights institutions such as the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights, are said to be not as effective, due to the SI-type institutions. Under these conditions, the idea that Timor-Leste's entry to ASEAN will disrupt how Southeast Asian states and the handling of their human rights abuses is an ambitious view. Moreover, Timor-Leste's better democratic standards should not be confused with transnational activism. The latter is almost non-existence, and understandably so due to its relative status as a young nation. The government of Timor-Leste is quiet in the West Papuan's human rights violations, despite similarities in the historical struggle. Even if non-state actors in Timor-Leste could play a role in advancing human rights causes in ASEAN, however, consideration is still up to each state.

Furthermore, efforts to strengthen the institutional capacity are not on the table at the moment. When it was brought up in the 2017 summit, member states saw little changes to be made. Since ASEAN requires a unanimous vote to agree on anything, this proves to be challenging to bring everyone on board with everything. With all of this being said, pundits make a mistake when they try to replicate the theory of sovereign transfer, a political behavior more prevalent in HF-oriented institutions to ASEAN.

5 Final Considerations

In short, the debate on Asian regional institutions such as ASEAN should be examined more critically with more sophistication. The focus on readiness is infuriatingly dominating the conversation of Timor-Leste's ASEAN membership. The narrative of readiness fails to account for the centrality of ASEAN as a regional organization, its distinct approach to leadership and cooperation, and its capacity constraints. Nevertheless, this failure is part of a larger conversation that needs to be addressed: the narrow, sometimes naiveté, inquiry to regionalism using primordial theoretical traditions and Eurocentrism has clouded the judgment of the so-called agents of public opinions, who dominate the platform through their writings. Even so, as Pekkanen argues, their opinions ultimately find their way to shape important decision makings. They act as whispers to policymakers and may or may not influence ASEAN heads of states in their decision-making process in regards to Timor-Leste's fate.

Timor-Leste has always wished to be more integrated within the international community since the beginning. As Asia's most impoverished nation, joining ASEAN could help diversify its economy, move away from oil dependency, and

achieve economic prosperity. However, if *readiness* continues to shape the debate, Timor-Leste will not be considered ready anytime soon. My hope is for ASEAN leaders to reconsider how the debate of Timor-Leste ASEAN membership about the region is carried out, in physical copies and digitally. And ASEAN leaders should reexamine the extent to which those debates advance or distort the narrative of Southeast Asia and ASEAN as a regional institution. At the end of the day, Timor-Leste has always been part of the Southeast Asian community, geographically, historically, and culturally and should be more strongly considered part of ASEAN.

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