East Timor Essay, Research Paper

Sociology is all around us. It is found all over the world. Sociology is the scientific study of social structure. An analysis of the crisis that is occurring today in East Timor is a good example to understand how sociology is broke down and studied. One can identify the social dynamics and the social institutions involved in the crisis at East Timor. They can be determined from the events that occurred in East Timor. Theory conflict would be the best way to characterize the problems in East Timor. In order to understand the situation, one must look at this event in a macrosociological approach. Macrosociology will be used to refer to the study of both societies as a whole as well as the relationships among social structures with societies. But first one must understand the background and the recent events that occurred in East Timor. Then this topic can be fully understood from a sociological approach.

The 20th century started violently with people trying to break free from colonial rulers. At the end of the same century we see similar violence with struggles in East Timor, Puerto Rico and a few other places had the same problem. Portugal ruled East Timor for about 3 centuries. During World War II, thousands of East Timorese lost their lives helping Australia forces fight against the Japanese. Indonesia then invaded East Timor shortly after Portugal abruptly left, in 1975. This was the day after President Ford?s visit. Furthermore, Indonesia at that time had military, economic and political support from UK, USA and Australia. 200,000 people have been killed since 1975, one third of the entire East Timorese population (Mydans, Oct 23rd 1999).

East Timor came to a point where they had a chance to finally get freedom when on August 20th 1999. They were allowed to have a vote on whether they wanted their independence. They were constantly trying to fight for their freedom and the outcome of the vote clearly showed what they wanted. Almost 99 percent voter turnout (Which is very courageous in itself, given the looming threats from militia groups), over 80 percent voted for independence (Mydans, Oct. 17th 1999). This resulted in Jakarta declaring martial law in East Timor where more violence, killings, massacres, rape, burning, looting are taking place by the Indonesian-backed militias. ?They had burned the town-there weren?t even shells of buildings standing. And then they had moved out to the villages which were still burning,? Sojwai said. ?Nothing prepared me for that destruction?(Struck, Sept.27th 1999). The ironic thing is that ever since the 1975 invasion, East Timor had been occupied and controlled by the Indonesian military and so martial law seem to mean anything.

The Indonesian legislature finally ratified the East Timorese vote, October 20th, 1999 allowing East Timor too officially be an independent nation (Mydans, Oct. 31st 1999). However, as the East Timor Action Network are quick to point out, that is half the step. There is still a long way to go; the return of refugees, end to militia activity and prosecution of rights violators should be high priorities.

Even before the August 1999 vote on self-determination in East Timor, which saw a huge voter turn out, there had been many threats and increase violence by militias, to discourage voting, but it still did stop them from voting. Although, this violence had led to a delay in the elections, and even months before the elections, there had been many killings by pro-integration militias. This then lead to many Timorese leaving East Timor and taking refuge in West Timor. This wasn?t the smartest thing to do but the chaos that been occurring in East Timor allowed them no choice. Their houses been destroyed, starvation, killing, just complete turmoil. As refugees poured into West Timor, so did the militias trying to hunt down East Timorese, such that even West Timor was not safe (Crossette, Nov 23rd 1999). As well as fleeing from East Timor to West Timor, many escaped into the hills and are still facing lack of clean water and food. Estimates indicate that 600,000 people were displaced, but humanitarian aid was not reaching them. That is why is what bad to take refuge in West Timor. Worse still, it is feared that as many as 300,000 refugees are unaccounted for and remain missing. The best place for the refugees to take cover was in Australia (McDonald, Sep. 16th 1999).

Some journalists have even commented that this crisis has entered a total state of chaos and that East Timor is out of control. However, the Indonesian-backed militias are not out of control because they are controlled and supported by the Indonesian military. And, the current crisis had been well-planned for almost a year. ?I think the tactics they?re employing show a level of training, a level of aggression, ?Col.Mark Kelly who was attacked by a militia In West Timor which is still under control by Indonesians. In fact, journalist Alan Nairn who was recently arrested in East Timor has witnessed the militias operating from Indonesian military bases and receiving order. Because of this, UN and many Journalists forced out. The UN Assistance Mission to East Timor (UNAMET) and journalists were essentially been told to get out of Timor. It looked very grave indeed for the UN having to withdraw. At first it was considered that they would be leaving some two thousand or so people in their compendia to the ?mercy? of the Indonesian troops. Fortunately, they airlifted them to safety.

Now all this turmoil that been occurring in East Timor, nations around the world knew that they had to do something. This anarchy that was happening must be stopped. Therefore, the United Nations got into the picture to regulate and control this crisis. Countries like Austrilia, France, Thailand, Malayasia, South Korea, U.S., Philippines and many other countries sent troops for the purpose of liquidating these militias. This powerful force was also known as INTERFET, International Force in East Timor(McDonald, Sept 27th 1999). Over ten thousand troops were sent totally from nations across the world to give aid to East Timor (Firdaus, Sept. 16th 1999). Australia was the main support for the East Timorese. Many countries also supplied water, food, and planes to transport refugees and peace talkers. But one of the main reasons peace talks were finally allowed to enter into Indonesia was when Secretary of Defense William Cohen and U.S. Ambassador J. Stapleton Roy came to Jakarta, Indonesia to talk to the president, B.J. Habibie, October 1st. ?Defense Secretary William Cohen bluntly accused the Indonesian military of ?aiding and abetting? the bloody rampages that have laid waste to East Timor and warned yesterday that Indonesia risks further economic and diplomatic isolation if the violence in the battered province does not end quickly?(Zielenziger, Oct 1st 1999). Theses were the beginning steps of East Timor being free because Indonesia really had not choice on what they wanted because the U.S. and U.K. they will stop all military aid that they had been giving them and this was crucial for Indonesia to have. Plus they were about to lose the diplomacy rights in other countries. They really had no choice but to start allowing peacekeepers into Indonesia. This was then the beginning when finally militias and Indonesian troops began leaving East Timor. Problems still occurred like shootings and burnings. Peacekeeping patrols in the western part of the territory have clashed several times with small militia groups. ?In Saturday?s hour long firefight, an Australian officer said, three militia members were wounded in addition to those killed, but no Australians were hurt?(Mydans, Oct 17th 1999). This still shows many problems but also the good part of this is that this occurred in the western part of East Timor showing that militias have been moving away from Dili, the capital of East Timor.

By October 22nd, a new national assembly in Jakarta decided by vote on Wednesday to relinquish Indonesian claims on East Timor that ended a 24 year control over it (Crossette, Oct. 22nd 1999). Then the former president of East Timor Gusmao after being arrested for 7 months by Indonesian for causing rebellion against the Indonesians, finally returned to his land and gave a powerfully speech? We will show the world, we will show Indonesians we will show ourselves that we can do it! We must put in the past the evil they have done to us. Tomorrow is ours!? (Mydans, Oct. 23rd 1999). The last 900 Indonesian soldiers left this island territory pulled down their red and white flag and departed from East Timor of the 31st of October (Mydans, Oct 31st 1999), therefore East Timor was officially free of any Indonesian reign.

Now many researchers say that this is the long beginning of East Timor. What has happened to East Timor will take years of repairing and organizing. The UN will help the people get on their feet. The World Bank also is offering help in the building and rebuilding of the nation of East Timor and is offering up to 10 million dollars to begin fixing East Timor (Mydans, Nov. 2nd 1999). These are the problem effecting East Timor up to today.

The importance now of understanding all the events that occurred in East Timor will make a better understanding of the sociological aspects. In order to understand the situation, one must look at this event in a macrosociological approach. The reason being is because there are many nations are involved in this ordeal which is causing the interaction that is happening to the people. It is out of the people?s hand what is occurring to them. The nations are the ones either trying to fix the problem or encompassing the people with agony. One won?t understand what is going on to the East Timorese people if one does not look at it at a larger sense. Although, because the micro and the macro levels of analysis focus on social structure, they obviously are complimentary; their combined use will tell us more about the social structure than either one alone.

Once one understands to look at this event in a macrosociological approach, there are three perspectives one must try to look at. The perspective that would be the best for the situation at East Timor is Conflict Theory. ?Conflict Theory emphasizes conflict, competition change, and constraint with a society or between societies? (Shepard 18). Because many conflicting groups exist and the balance of power among groups may shift social change is constant according to the conflict theory perspective. Again, East Timor is a primary example of Conflict Theory. Look at the scenario between East Timor and Indonesia, of course there was conflict between because East Timor wanted their freedom and Indonesia wasn?t sure of giving it to them. Then there was many constraints put upon the East Timor by Indonesia. For instance, the beginning of government oriented militias to scare the East Timorese people from wanting freedom. Destruction was the path that the militias left in East Timor Then there was refugees in West Timor that weren?t allowed to leave and go back to there homeland. Then there were constraints on peacekeepers allowing negotiating with the president of Indonesia to allow East Timor to become free. There were constraints to allow reporters in Indonesia and East Timor. Look at Alan Nairn, he witnessed militias operating from military bases and got caught which lead him to get thrown out of Indonesia. These examples are huge conflicts that occur not with just Indonesia and East Timor, but with many other nations. All these events that occurred, lead to huge social change in East Timor and Indonesia. The people finally got freedom, Indonesia lost their province, East Timor must rebuild from scratch.

Now once this comes to an understanding, the social dynamics and the social institutions involved in this crisis can be understood.

Social dynamics is the study of change (Shepard 11). In East Timor, many occurrences lead to change. There was huge change that occurred in Indonesia, and East Timor. Indonesia, now is look upon differently, the loss of East Timor and the presence of foreign troops trying to stop them have humiliated Indonesia and aroused a defensive wave of nationalism (Mydans Oct. 31st 1999).??Indonesia is a very, very sick country,? Peter Carey of Oxford University told an Asia Society audience in New York Monday. ?It needs to be in a process of intensive care.?(Crossette, Nov 23rd 1999). The change of attitude toward the Indonesians causes social dynamics. They still have everything they had before except a good reputation and East Timor. East Timor on the other hand, experienced serious devastating and positive changes. Half of their country was destroyed due to the militias. ?Most homes throughout the territory were destroyed in the militia? campaign of destruction, and most of the population fled their homes or were forced into exile in a mass movement of people?(Mydans, Nov. 1st 1999). This is devastating change, with 70% of their building burned to the ground it will cause great change. The most important change that did occur is that finally the East Timorese people finally have their freedom. This is what they wanted most, (this is self-explanatory because of the vote they took back in August), the people struggled to the toughest of times and got what they wanted similar the U.S. getting Independence from Britain. This is huge social change and East Timor is a good example of social dynamics.

There are so many social institutions that happened in East Timor. But the best way to look at this aspect is to look at this event (East Timor getting their freedom) as and social movement. They are aimed at redefinitions of norms and values rather than at questions of economics and who gets what. They are more global in focus and tend to center on quality-of-life issues (Shepard 488). This is the exact definition of what is going on in East Timor. The people took this vote because they wanted to be freed from the Indonesians. They wanted the norms to be changed, which basically means they wanted freedom. During the course of the movement the economy of East Timor changed. First, Indonesia stopped funding East Timor because they lost their control over them. Therefore, the World Bank has to fund East Timor in rebuilding. This is huge economic change. With the term ?economy?, many different aspects of their economy are going to change and that is what they wanted. The economy is and an example of a social institution which they wanted to change. Freedom and a change of economy are what the people of East Timor wanted and that is what they got, therefore this is characterized as a social movement.

Will everything work out fine for the future of East Timor? Will East Timor become financially stable in the years to come? Will Indonesia ever try to invade East Timor again? Say if there were no United Nations, would have anything of this got accomplished? These are all questions that need to be answered and there are many more to be asked. In order though to understand what these questions are about, a thorough understanding of the events that occurred in East Timor needs to be set forth. Then an analysis of the sociological aspects that occurred in East Timor, macrosociology, conflict theory, social dynamics, and social movement will lead to an easier understanding how sociology is used in ever day life and events around the world.

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