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ONE OF THE HARDEST THINGS I HAVE EVER HAD TO DO

Jane Woodward reports on the highs and lows of studying Indonesian in-country.

Taking part in the January 2007 In-country Indonesian course at the Satya Wacana Christian University in Salatiga, Indonesia, was concurrently exciting, terrifying, daunting, challenging, memorable, fantastic and extremely rewarding. There is no way that I could ever have been well enough prepared for the difficulties encountered in the intensive classes, the cultural differences, and the language barrier that the experience in Salatiga was to bring. The month-long stay changed the way I perceived not only the Indonesian people but also their culture and country. When I enrolled in the course I effectively stepped onto Indonesian soil completely blind as to what I would gain and experience throughout the course, but I left Indonesia a different, stronger and more culturally aware and appreciative person.

The course itself was run by the Language Centre at the Satya Wacana Christian University, and the January 2007 course was the 50th course of this kind run by the Language Centre. There seemed to be a general consensus amongst the students on the first day that we had 'thrown ourselves into the deep end' and it was a matter of sinking or swimming. That feeling stayed with us for the entire month. The Language Centre provided 3 'friends' who were students of the English Department at the university to assist us with our learning, our understanding of the culture, our appreciation of the geography of the town, and any other difficulties that confronted us. Those 'friends' were our saving grace. On occasions they helped us with homework that otherwise would have been nonsensical to our overloaded brains, provided critical advice on cultural aspects of Indonesian life and were considerably useful translators in the town. Despite all this, we learnt more than we ever could have imagined and completed the course with flying colours.

Prior to this trip and despite having previously holidayed in Bali, I had never appreciated how many differences there were between Australian and Indonesian culture. Although, as a matter of necessity our ways of life are

Students on the course in Salatiga try Javanese gamelan music



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ONE OF THE HARDEST THINGS ... (cont. from p1)

similar in many respects, the way in which we shop, travel, eat, bathe and exist are significantly different. At first it was quite hard to deal with, but I became accustomed to the differences and eventually enjoyed the way that the Indonesians approach those activities from a community based perspective - one that seems to be lacking in Australia. The home stay where I was accommodated was very luxurious by Indonesian standards, and was comfortable at all times. However the cold 'mandi' (pouring water over yourself scooped from a tub with a ladle) proved to be my biggest obstacle at 6am every morning. I had to mentally prepare myself for the shock of cold water before dumping the bucket over my head. The food also proved to be a little difficult as I opted to be a vegetarian on advice from previous participants and as there are not very many vegetarians in Indonesia, there was a lot of confusion about the vegetarian diet. However, in true Indonesian style, the home stay found a way and I ended up eating a lot better than the non-vegetarians (thank goodness I like rice!).

The most noticeable thing about the town of Salatiga is that it is relatively untouched by western influence and the level of English of the majority of the locals is minimal. This makes the experience for participants in the language course a better one and the theory of learning by submersion can truly apply. However, when it came to communicating basic wants and needs, it became a little challenging. The main phrase that a lot of the locals seem to have learnt without understanding its meaning was

'Hello Sir, I love you'. If you walked to university and had this said to you only once, it was a good day. The bulk of Indonesians that we encountered on the street also struggled to understand that what they were saying failed to recognise the distinct difference between a male and a female. Everyone received 'Hello Sir' or 'Hello Mr' regardless of whether they were talking to man or a woman. This forced us to use our developing Indonesian language skills to communicate with people and despite the fact that we found it challenging and embarrassing initially, our language skills are so much better for it.

The entire experience in Salatiga was riddled with sayings much like 'What doesn't kill you only makes you stronger'. This is because, certainly from my perspective, it was one of the hardest things that I have ever had to do. The course was hard, the home stay was hard, communicating with locals was hard, speaking the language was hard, and being so far away from friends and family in such circumstances was hard. However, the fact that we managed to swim to the top and tread water there just long enough to survive was, for many of us, the most satisfying feeling in the world. That feeling at the end, the feeling of completion and achievement and satisfaction also made one of the hardest things I have ever had to do, one of the most rewarding things I have ever done.



Jane Woodward in Indonesia



Street scene in Salatiga



Yogendra Yadav convenes the Applied Hindi course in Dehradun

BEEP, HONK, CLATTER: THE SOUNDS OF OUTDOOR HINDI

McComas Taylor took part in an Applied Hindi course in India last summer.

The beep, honk and clatter of the jungle birds seemed to be locked in a constant battle-of-the-sounds with the passing traffic outside the compound walls. Both provided an exotic aural backdrop for the ANU Applied Hindi course.

This is the seventh year that the course has been held

in Dehradun, a dusty city of a million people, about eight hours north of Delhi at the edge of the Himalayan foothills. Eight students and their lecturer, Mr Yogendra Yadav of the Faculty of Asian Studies, spent six weeks in an open air classroom on the flat roof-top terrace of the White House Hotel, north India's own Fawltly Towers. The White House was the art-deco patrician home of a colonial judge. Once surrounded by jungle, it is now an idiosyncratic but friendly half-star guesthouse right in the centre of the city.

Freezing nights in front of open fires in the bedrooms dawned into mild sunny days spent in our rooftop classroom. Most mornings we had four or five formal sessions, ranging from grammar lectures and drills to reading exercises. A tray of hot sweet chai appeared at about 10:30, and then our wonderful mono-lingual tutors took over for an hour. Anil and Vinita are two fine young folk in their early twenties who have worked on the course for several years. They arranged all sorts of fun and games for us – all in Hindi. 'Simon says' was a great success; in the Hindi version it is a parrot, not Simon, who does the 'saying'. We were also introduced to the thoroughly physical South Asian team sport of Kabaddi, which is a cross between touch football and 'tag'. (See kabaddi.org for details. No kidding.)

Students had the afternoon to themselves for study, extra tutorials or exploring the city. The bazaars were all within easy auto-rickshaw ride and provided many hours of happy browsing. The markets were brimful of pomegranates, papayas, guavas and sweet limes. Bananas were a great treat at around 20 cents per kilo. Within the first few days word of these Hindi-speaking Australians had spread around, and we became famed for our shopping endurance. For dinner, the White House is surrounded by a dozen cheap restaurants – a good *thali* (a tray of half a dozen different curries) cost less than \$3.00 Australian, and an excellent *masala dosa* (a giant crispy pancake filled with *curry-de-jour*) cost about \$1.20.

Dehradun is an old British administrative centre, and is home, for example, to the fabulous Forest Research Institute. This is a vast white elephant of a building– a huge palladian folly built by the British in the middle of nowhere for all the wrong reasons just before India's independence. It is a breath-taking must-see example of colonial arrogance in brick and mortar. Dehradun is in no sense a tourist town, but the Sikh *gurdvara* (temple complex) provided a pleasant oasis of green and tranquillity. The Tapkeshwar pilgrimage site on the edge of the city gave an insight into the day-to-day personal spiritual practice of the faithful. The tumble-down British hill station of Mussourie, about an hour's climb above Dehradun, is now one of India's top honeymoon destinations.

January marks the beginning of the wedding season, and weddings mean noise. Lots of noise. The groom is led to the reception on a white horse in the middle of a procession. First comes a two-meter sound system on wheels with its own luggable generator for light and power. A madcap ten-piece brass band, each member apparently playing a different tune, whips all the jiving, bumping and grinding

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Students on the Applied Hindi course, January-February 2007



THE SOUNDS OF OUTDOOR HINDI (cont.)

rellos into a frenzy. Pyrotechnics worthy of Skyfire light up the neighbourhood. On a 'good' night we could expect up to three of these spectacles to grind past the White House. By the time the wedding bands had finally expired, the last distant skyrockets had been detonated, and the dogs had settled down, the muezzin was calling the faithful to prayer in the predawn greyness, and the birds were awake again.

In spite of the ups and downs--India has been described as the world's biggest mixed bag--the course was a great success and is highly recommended for any student who has completed at least a year of Hindi.



Left: Kiera displays the traditional henna patterns on her hands. Patterns like these are used on special occasions throughout India

Right: Students on the Applied Hindi course visit Chilla National Park



MAYBE IT'S THE SOUND

Tomomi Sato talks to McComas Taylor about why she loves Sanskrit.

'Maybe it's the sound,' replied Sanskrit student, Tomomi Sato, when explaining her love for India's classical language. Tomomi recently completed her first year of an Asian Studies specialist degree, having finished high school in Japan in 2005. 'We are used to singing in class. I used to sing solos in singing contexts and festivals,' she said, so the singing component of the first-year Sanskrit course came very naturally to her.

Tomomi was drawn to the ANU by her interest in Asian languages and Asian studies. 'I was originally interested in tracing the sources of Japanese culture to China and Persia. These cultures all have something that attracted me. I am still interested in agricultural practices, and somehow I have ended up in India!'

Although she had been aware of Sanskrit inscriptions and mantras in religious contexts in Japan, Tomomi came to the ANU without any intention of studying the language. It was not until she was enrolling in Melville Hall that she considered taking the subject. 'It just happened,' she recalls.

As her Sanskrit studies have progressed, Tomomi says, 'I am interested in how different cultures perceive things differently.' Concepts like body, action, law and rule, while readily translated from one language to another, may in fact signify deeply different entities. Tomomi's interest in comparative cultural studies will carry her a long way. She is hoping to be the Faculty's first Year-in-Asia Sanskrit student in 2008.



Sanskrit lecturer McComas Taylor and first-year student Tomomi Sato share their enjoyment of Sanskrit song

THE THAI ELEPHANT COMES TO SCHOOL

Caitlin Ellis has an interest in both animal conservation and languages.

As a Bachelor of Arts/Science student who is also undertaking an Asian studies diploma in Thai, I have a keen interest in issues involving animals and their relationship with humans. The Thai elephant is one example of an animal that has had a close association with Thai people throughout the ages. THAI3003 *Reading Thai Sources*, a primarily research based course, gave me the opportunity to combine two main areas of interest - animal conservation and languages - in my degree at ANU. The topic I chose for my research project is: "The Asian Elephant and its relationship with Thai people in the past, present and future".

Coincidentally, Year 6 students at Orana primary school in Canberra are currently researching the plight of the Asian elephant and plan to undertake a fundraising project to help the species. On 29th September last year, using the knowledge I have acquired during my research, I went to the school in Weston Creek to give a talk on the Asian elephant to a class of approximately 25 students. The talk was a great success and a wonderful experience for all involved. With the help of the National Thai Studies Centre, Thai Program, and staff of Menzies Library, ANU, I was able to put my research to practical use, and hopefully inspire others to make a difference.



Thai lecturer Chintana Sandilands with Caitlin Ellis at Orana School in Canberra

THE AYUI FOUNDATION

A former ANU student outlines her work with young people from the Akha hilltribe in Thailand.



Ms Sumalee Milne, formerly a student of the Thai program in the Faculty of Asian Studies, has established an organisation in Thailand that works with young, at-risk hilltribe people. The Ayui Foundation, headquartered in Chiang Rai, is a non-profit, non-denominational organisation that focuses on providing practical support, educational opportunities and a safe, warm and loving environment for hilltribe adolescents. Currently the Ayui Foundation is working to establish a hostel called 'Baan Ayui' for thirteen young Akha people.

Ayui (pronounced 'a-yeu') is an Akha word meaning 'older sister' and 'Baan Ayui' means 'our older sister's house'. The hostel is based on the concept of a nurturing and understanding older sister providing guidance and support on all levels. Baan Ayui supports teenagers who are unwanted or have little or no means of support, and helps them to become confident young adults.

Situated on the outskirts of Chiang Rai town, the home (*above*) is located in the peaceful and semi-rural Baan Mai community, populated by a mix of Thai lowland and hilltribe people. It is close to the local market where hilltribe people sell their crops, and not far from the Maekok River and the Sahasart Suksa School. The school is Chiang Rai's first school established specifically for hilltribe children.

Baan Ayui is run on a day-to-day basis through the employment of a young Akha housemother. The housemother lives at the hostel and is responsible for the children's practical needs and organisation of the house. She is supported closely

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THE AYUI FOUNDATION (cont.)

through the hands-on involvement and management of the Ayui Foundation's Director. The Baan Ayui housemother is an Akha woman; a single mother with a five-year old daughter who has two years' experience as a housemother at a hilltribe children's hostel. She has known all of the children for a few years now, and is another 'older sister' figure.

The most important aspect of this model is that the young Akha people are in an environment with strong Akha role models and their own culture, beliefs and traditions are being celebrated. Baan Ayui has four pairs of siblings, which also nurtures a family atmosphere.

The 12 children (six boys and six girls) who will live at Baan Ayui are from poor families with many siblings, single-parent families, or families with one or both parents in jail for drug trafficking. There are four pairs of siblings (four older sisters). Their ages range from 11 to 19 years old.

The young people's education levels range from Grade 4 to 11. All the children will attend the largest hilltribe school in Chiang Rai where they are made to feel proud of their traditional hilltribe culture and wear traditional dress to school every Friday. The Foundation will support the children's education to the highest level they want to achieve, and will provide assistance and guidance with job placement.

The Akha Hilltribe

The Akha hilltribe is one of the four main ethnic minority groups living in the mountainous northern provinces of Thailand. The Akha people settled in the Chiang Rai province as far back as 200 years ago. However, they still exist as a minority group who are often treated as second-class citizens.

The hilltribe people face many challenges, and the Akha are known as the least "developed" group. Many Akha people lack proper legal documentation to make them eligible for Thai citizenship and are considered illegal immigrants, even in the country of their birth.

Officially recognised by no nation, they are vulnerable to the worst that humanity has to offer, and have no way of claiming government assistance. Without legal documents, many Akha people have no rights to healthcare or school graduation records, and cannot open bank accounts or take any legal action if they are exploited by employers.

As each hilltribe has its own distinct language and culture, the Thai language is not their mother tongue. Illiteracy and poverty result in lack of opportunities and choices for young people. Educational opportunities are limited in most of the hilltribe villages and there are great social problems facing their communities including drug use, drug trafficking, HIV/AIDS, child prostitution and abuse.

Further information

The Director of the Ayui Foundation is Sumalee (Sue) Milne, a Thai-Australian woman who has been working with children and hilltribes in Chiang Rai for the last 10 years, including three years with a World Vision hilltribe project. She currently teaches at Chiang Rai's largest primary school, and has six months' experience as a director managing a hostel that housed 32 hilltribe children.

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Six of the nine young people who are among the first to benefit from the Foundation's work



FAREWELL TO A MUCH-LOVED GURU

After many years of service to Indonesian and Malaysian studies, Professor Virginia Hooker retired at the end of 2006. At a function on the ANU campus Dr George Quinn sketched her many accomplishments. Here are some extracts.

Of course "retirement" is entirely the wrong word, because it suggests "ceasing to work", or at least "slowing down". Retirement for Virginia will mean release – sure – but release into a new freedom to be even more creative and more energetic than she has been.

Actually it is difficult to imagine how Virginia (Mbak Nia, as she is known to many of us) could be more creative – more energetic – than she has been. In all the conventional categories of what we are supposed to do as academics she has excelled. In teaching she has offered a wide range of courses at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and has taken on a huge burden of higher degree supervision. She has an extraordinary record in research and has been a prolific publisher in refereed journals. She has also worked hard in the relentless and thankless tasks of administration, and she has also worked hard and effectively in service to the wider Australian and Indonesian public (and Malaysian public too). In all of these areas she has forged a dazzling record that has brought great credit to the Faculty and to the University. In fact the catalogue of her academic accomplishments is, literally, a good deal longer than your arm.

If I were to try to describe – even to just sum up – everything that is in this extraordinary record of her achievements, it would be a very fascinating story, but a very long one and very dense. So I won't do that... but I do want to dwell on just one or two of the many original and influential contributions that Virginia has made over the years to the Faculty and University.

I think it would be accurate to say that Virginia has contributed to the Faculty in five principal teaching and research domains: (i) in literary studies (especially Malay and Malaysian literature), (ii) in the history and contemporary sociology, and the arts, of Malaysia and Indonesia, (iii) in gender studies, (iv) in the study of Islam, and (v) in the teaching of language (Malay and Indonesian).

Back in the mid 1960s, while she was undertaking her Bachelor's degree in Asian Studies here at the ANU, Virginia made a momentous decision. She decided to opt for a stream of studies built around the Indonesian-Malay language combined with Arabic. Her early decision to go with Arabic as a complement to Indonesian-Malay has coloured most of her subsequent scholarship.

After completing a BA with first class honours here at the ANU in 1968, Virginia's career as scholar working on Malay-Indonesian society really took off with her work on an annotated edition of the Malay historical text, the *Tuhfat Al-Nafis*, which constituted the core of her PhD completed at Monash University in 1973. Her edition of the *Tuhfat Al-Nafis* has left an enduring mark on our understanding of Malay literature and history. The text is a 19th century Malay history written by Raja Ali Haji of Riau. The text is sometimes said to be the first attempt to write a "modern" history in the Malay language, although it is clearly a transitional work between traditional Malay histories and modern



Professor Virginia Hooker

scholarly history. The *Tuhfat Al-Nafis* gives a revealing portrait of Malay society in the middle years of the 19th century: the political intrigues, ethnic tensions (particularly between the Bugis and Malay peoples), the cultural life of the time, and perhaps above all, the debates and conflicts surrounding the role of Islam in Malay society of the time. Virginia translated this key text from Malay into English and illuminated it with very erudite commentary and annotations. Published in 1982, the study has been translated into Malay and re-issued several times in a variety of guises. Today it is universally recognised as a classic of scholarship on Malay history and culture, especially insightful on the transformations of Islam in Malay society in the 19th century.

Virginia's edition of the *Tuhfat Al-Nafis* was a springboard for further explorations in Malay literature, history, the arts, Islam and gender. These explorations have produced a large number of studies that have made a major contribution to our understanding of Indonesian and Malaysian society.

I have to confess to a favourite among these studies, her comprehensive account of the Malay novel (and of modern Malay society), published in 2000 under the title *Writing a New Society*. I like this work very much, not only because it is illuminating in a lot of broad-brush and subtle ways, but because it also documents very thoroughly the major authors and works that are the basis of the study. All too often studies on Indonesian and Malaysian society work from

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FAREWELL TO A MUCH-LOVED GURU (cont.)

a very narrow empirical base – perhaps one or two texts, or one village, or one allegedly “key” event – and extrapolate from this very narrow base to make broad generalisations about Malay-Indonesian society, often without any argument whatever to justify this extrapolation. Virginia’s study of the Malay novel is not simply an insightful analysis – it is a record, a beautifully organised catalogue, of the factual reality of Malay novel writing in the 20th century. In the realm of scholarship on the humanities and social sciences where theories come and go like seasons, good data, reliably and thoroughly collected and clearly organised, is forever (or at least has a very long shelf life). *Writing a New Society* is going to be read well into the future because it has this breadth and in its analysis exudes good scholarly common sense.

These virtues are also very much in evidence in Virginia’s most recent work, *Voices of Islam in Southeast Asia*, compiled in collaboration with Greg Fealy and with the participation several other ANU authors. This sourcebook makes a huge contribution to our understanding not only of Islam in Southeast Asia, but of Islam more widely, and of Southeast Asian society in the broader sense. The selections in the sourcebook reveal the quite extraordinary breadth of the familiarity that Virginia and the other authors have with Islam in Southeast Asia. Virginia’s presence can be felt throughout the sourcebook, but she has special responsibility for the section to do with expressions of Islamic faith in everyday life. It is in this section especially that you get a very vivid portrait of Islam not as rules / theology / ideology, but as a tradition, a civilisation, a powerful source of identity for the peoples of Southeast Asia. And what strikes you very forcibly in this section is how Virginia’s wide range of skills and knowledge have enabled her to identify apt sources and engage with them with the very immediate empathy and humanity that is so much part of the Virginia we know from our day-to-day interactions with her.

And it is Virginia’s personal warmth and her sense of connection with real people that have driven the extraordinary work she has done to bring Australians and Indonesians together. For the past five years, for example, she has been a very active member of the board of the Australia-Indonesia Institute. Through the Institute – and together with Professor Merle Ricklefs – she has undertaken a very successful series of initiatives to bring Indonesian Muslim leaders to Australia and to introduce Australian Muslim leaders to Indonesia and Indonesians. She has also been instrumental in bringing young personnel from regional Islamic institutions in Indonesia to Australia for study and familiarisation with Australian society. In short, Virginia has been right at the forefront of practical and far-sighted efforts to resist and break down the ignorance and paranoia regarding Islam that we can feel so strongly in Australia today.

As for her language teaching, students in the Faculty’s Indonesian program will be familiar with the challenging content of her language courses and with her always meticulous preparation for classes. Language study is the foundation of what we do in the Faculty, and with her command of both pre-modern (i.e. classical) and modern forms of

the language, with the Malaysian variant as well as with the Indonesian, with formal as well as colloquial registers of the language, Virginia brought a range of skills to our language tuition programs that is quite unmatched not only in the Faculty but across the country. Our students, like all of us, always found Virginia to be tough-minded but gentle-hearted as a teacher.

Ladies & gentlemen, I have been able to sketch only part of what Virginia has brought to our Faculty, to the ANU, to Australia and to the wider world of scholarship and people-to-people relations. We will miss her energy and vision, of course, but we will especially miss her personal warmth – her spontaneous willingness to always respond above all as a human being and a woman. Luckily for us she won’t be far away. As I said, we can expect Mbak Nia to re-double her contribution to scholarship and people-to-people contacts from the quieter waters of retirement.

The *Tuhfat Al-Nafis*, if you translate this title from Arabic into English – means literally “The precious gift”. It is a title that fits perfectly with Virginia herself. As a teacher, a scholar and above all as a person, Virginia has been a “precious gift” to all of us.

We thank you, Mbak Nia, for that gift. As a Faculty we will miss you, but we have at least the consolation of knowing (as I said) that you and Barry will not be far away, that you will both be working as energetically as you have in the past, and that you will both remain the very best friends our Faculty and University could possibly wish for.

Selamat berpensiun! Terima kasih atas segala yang telah anda berikan kepada kami semua. Semoga anda bersama Barry senantiasa sehat walafiat. Dan semoga pula anda tidak lupa akan kami.

PUNCHING THE BALLOT PAPER IN EAST TIMOR

George Quinn was an international election observer in the first round of East Timor's presidential election on April 9. The experience made an unexpectedly emotional impression on him.



Voters in East Timor

George Quinn poses in front of a small church in East Timor

Night falls quickly over Maliana in the rugged hills near East Timor's border with Indonesia. There are no streetlights. A dense blackness wraps the small town. United Nations cars cruise the wide streets picking out in their headlights the diminutive shadows of the local people. The town and its surrounds still bear the scars of the Indonesian departure back in 1999. Seven years later the market building in the centre of town is still a shattered ruin. Many houses are no more than four charred walls. There is electricity from 6.00 pm until midnight - just six hours a day ... and even that is not very reliable.

Maliana was my first stop. On the evening before election day, in front of a grimy roadside stall selling plastic bottles of petrol, I spoke to two young men, both locals, but students in Dili.

"Francisco Xavier do Amaral is the key to East Timor's future," they told me. Do Amaral was East Timor's president for just nine days after the country's abortive declaration of independence in November 1975. If he returns to the presidency, even if only for a few hours, it will put everything right."

"And what about Fretilin's candidate, Francisco Gutterres?" I asked.

"We don't want him! We tried to stop his people from campaigning. What has Fretilin ever done for us?"

The following day I was up at 5.00 a.m. after sleeping the night under a mosquito net on a hard tile floor. I took a cold bath by torchlight (there is no such thing as a hot, or even warm, bath in the villages of Timor) and headed - resplendent in my observer's tee-shirt and cream-coloured blazer - to the polling station in the centre of town.

In the pre-dawn gloom, working by the light of tiny, battery powered lamps, Timorese polling officers were methodically following set-up procedure in the town's airy but leaky sports hall. Cardboard booths were put in place, each equipped with a pencil and a nail (voters can mark their choice on the ballot paper by punching a hole through it with the nail). Piles of ballot papers and small pots of indelible ink stood ready.

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PUNCHING THE BALLOT PAPER IN EAST TIMOR (cont.)

As dawn broke voters began to queue. By 7.00 am there were hundreds of people waiting to cast their votes. Many were dressed in their traditional Timorese finery - batik head cloths tied in exotic folds and brightly coloured tie-dyed sarongs. When the polling station opened (a little late, at 7.20 am) and these simple but determined people filed in to vote it was an emotional moment. I had to lean forward over my observer's notebook scribbling meaningless notes until the unexpected gust of emotion passed.

As each voter entered the polling centre their hands were examined to check for the tell-tale indelible ink that would show that they had already voted. Their voter registration card was punched in one corner and its number copied on to a record sheet. The voter was then given a ballot paper, stamped and signed on the back by an electoral officer. Behind a cardboard booth each voter punched a hole through a box beside the name of their preferred candidate. They dropped the ballot paper into a carefully sealed box and dipped their index finger into a pot of ink. In the course of the day I witnessed this ritual hundreds of times in eight polling centres in the mountain towns of Maliana, Cailaco and Gleno.

In the late afternoon I watched the counting of votes in a polling centre in Dili. In front of party agents, independent observers and an impatient crowd of voters, each ballot paper was held aloft and its validity checked. When

counting proper began, each ballot paper was greeted by cheers and applause. Far into Dili's warm night the extraordinarily transparent counting process continued to draw an excited audience.

In Dili, Prime Minister and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Jose Ramos-Horta dominated, polling more than all other candidates combined. But back in Maliana it was Democratic Party candidate Fernando de Araujo who dominated. Over the country as a whole, though, Fretilin candidate Francisco Guterres emerged the clear winner, though only claiming 29% of the vote. A complicated pattern of voting emerged. A second round, run-off election would be necessary, pitting Jose Ramos Horta against Francisco Guterres.

I wrote my observer's report and headed back to Australia. It had been a memorable experience. As the tiny plane rose into the air over Dili and crept south over the choppy brown hills of Timor I was still thinking of that emotional moment in the half-light of Maliana's dawn. All the fears and hardships of travelling in Timor were worth it for the power of that moment. I wished I could go back and experience it again - "that certain something" that the regimented, regularised lives we live in so-called advanced countries so coldly deny to us - the unexpected shock of feeling a raw sympathetic connection with completely different people fighting hard to set up a new country.

The faces of East Timor's voters

