

**HISTORIES OF VIOLENCE, STATES OF DENIAL –  
MILITIAS, MARTIAL ARTS AND MASCULINITIES IN TIMOR-LESTE**

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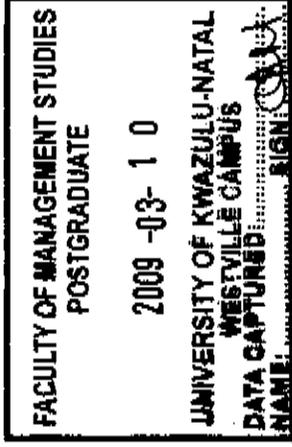
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*Dedicated to the memory of Sharon Kaur Jinnil*

(1981 – 2008)

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Manokwari, 15.07.2010

## Abstract

This thesis examines the complex interplay between violence and concepts of masculinity using the case study examples of former members of pro-Indonesian militia groups and current members of gangs, martial arts and ritual arts groups in Timor-Leste. Thirty-eight former and current members of these groups were interviewed in both Timor-Leste and Indonesian West Timor. While the members of these groups and their violent acts are often cast in relatively simplistic terms as being the work of misguided, socio-economically marginalised, violent young men, the thesis argues that the phenomena of these groups are far more complex and are intricately intertwined with local East Timorese and imported concepts of what it means to be a man. In addition to being political and economic projects, membership in these groups gives the men new, albeit often violent, ways of defining their masculine identity and defining their place in post-colonial, post-conflict East Timorese society.

The violent enactments of masculinity displayed by the young men involved in the various groups examined in this thesis have been formed by the violent history of Timor-Leste but simultaneously the young men have also been personally involved in forming this history of violence. Both on the personal and on the level of the East Timorese state, these histories of violence are dealt with strategies of denial when it comes to taking personal responsibility for violence, leading to impunity and denial of justice to the victims. For the perpetrators, though, denial of responsibility and justifications of violence are used in an attempt to regain masculine honour and respectability in the eyes of broader society. Violence continues to be one of the tools they are willing to resort to for addressing real and perceived grievances, both on the personal and public level.

Given the disruptive and deadly ways in which the activities of these young men have affected Timor-Leste, a central challenge for building a peaceful, just and equitable society will be to overcome the ways in which masculinities are defined through violence – a task which requires the involvement of East Timorese boys and men, but also their mothers, aunts, sisters, daughters, wives and lovers.

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## List of Abbreviations Used

ABRI	Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia (Indonesian Armed Forces before 1999)
ADF	Australian Defence Force
AFP	Australian Federal Police
AMP	Aliansa Maioria Parlamentar (Parliamentary Majority Alliance)
Apodeti	Associação Popular Democrática Timorese (pro-Indonesian political party)
ASDT	Associação Social Democráta Timorese
AC75	Association of Ex-Combatants 1975
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
BLT	Bantuan Langsung Tunai (direct cash aid scheme of the Indonesian government)
Brimob	Brigade Mobil (Paramilitary wing of the Indonesian police)
CAFF	Children Associated with Fighting Forces
CAVR	Comissão de Acolhimento, Verdade e Reconciliação de Timor-Leste (Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste)
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CivPol	Civilian Police (later: UN Police or UNPOL)
CNRM	Conselho Nacional da Resistencia Maubere (National Council of the Maubere Resistance)
CNRT	Conselho Nacional da Resistencia Timorese (National Council of the Timorese Resistance)
COIN	Counter-insurgency
Colimau 2000	Commando Libertação Maubere 2000 (Maubere Liberation Commando 2000 – ritual arts group)
CPD- RDTL	Committee for the Popular Defence of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
Falintil	Forças Armadas de Libertação Nacional de Timor-Leste
F-FDTL	Falintil-Forças de Defesa de Timor-Leste
FPU	Formed Police Units
FRAP	Falintil Reinsertion Assistance Program

Fretilin	Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente
GBV	Gender-based violence
GNR	Guarda Nacional Republicana (Portuguese FPU)
Hankamrata	Pertahanan dan Keamanan Rakyat Semesta (Indonesian total people's defence and security doctrine)
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
Interfet	International Force for East Timor
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
ISF	International Stabilisation Force
Kopassus	Komando Pasukan Khusus (Indonesian special forces)
KORK	Kmanek Oan Rai Klaran ('Wise Children of the Land'), RAG
KTP	Kartu Tanda Penduduk (Indonesian ID card)
MAG	Martial Arts Group
MUNJ	Movimento da Unidade Nacional e da Justicia (political pressure group)
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NTT	Nusa Tenggara Timur (East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesian province)
OPMT	Organização Popular da Mulher Timorese (Popular Organisation of Timorese Women, Fretilin women's wing)
PD	Partido Democrático (also: Partidu Demokratiku)
PKF	Peacekeeping forces
PLUR	Peace, Love, Unity and Respect (Dili-based gang, named after an album by the popular Indonesian pop group Slank)
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PNTL	Policía Nacional de Timor-Leste
POLRI	Kepolisian Negara Republik Indonesia (Indonesian police force post-1999)
PSC	Private Security Company
PSD	Partido Social Democrático
PSHT	Persaudaraan Setia Hati Terate (martial arts group)
RAG	Ritual Arts Group
RESPECT	Recovery, Employment and Stability Programme for Ex-Combatants and Communities in East Timor
SALW	Small Arms and Light Weapons
SAPT	Sociedade Agricola Patria e Trabalho (Portuguese colonial-era coffee company)

SAS	Special Air Service (Australian Special Forces)
SCU	Serious Crimes Unit
SMS	Short Messaging Service (telephone text message)
SSR	Security Sector Reform
TBO	Tenaga Bantuan Operasi (civilian support staff of the ABRI, often forced into service)
TNI	Tentara Nasional Indonesia (Indonesian Armed Forces after 1999)
UDT	União Democrática Timorese
UIR	Unidade Intervenção Rápida
UN	United Nations
UNAMET	United Nations Mission in East Timor
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
URP	Unidade de Reserva da Polícia
UPF	Unidade Patrulhamento Fronteira
UNMISSET	United Nations Mission of Support in East Timor
UNMIT	United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste
UNOTIL	United Nations Office in Timor-Leste
UNPOL	United Nations Police (also sometimes called CivPol, Civilian Police)
UNTAET	United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WAFF	Women Associated with Fighting Forces
Yonif	Batalyon Infanteri (ABRI/TNI Infantry battalion)

## List of Indonesian (I), Makassae (M), Portuguese (P) and Tetum (T) terms used

Adat (I)	Customary law
Aitarak (T)	Thorn (name of militia group in 1999)
Anak buah (I)	Follower
Assimilados (P)	‘Assimilated natives’ in colonial Portuguese classification system
Asuwain (T)	Warrior, hero
Atan (T)	Slaves/servants
Bairo (P, T)	Part of town, neighbourhood
Bapak (I)	Literally: father, but also patron
Barlaki (T)	Bride price, dowry
Brancos (P)	People of European descent in colonial Portuguese classification system
Bumihangus (I)	Scorched earth policy
Bupati (I)	District head
Camat (I)	Sub-district
Chefe de Suco (T/P)	Head of village
Clandestino (T/P)	Member of clandestine resistance network
Columnas negras (P)	Timorese militias used by Imperial Japanese Army
Distrito (P,T)	District, used colloquially in the plural form to denote all areas outside of Dili
Ema bo’ot (T)	Important person, member of the elite (lit.: ‘big person’)
Estado Novo (P)	‘New State,’ fascist political system under Salazar/Caetano
Estafeta (T/P)	Messenger, runner
Firaku (T)	Person originating from eastern Timor-Leste
Funu (T)	War, struggle
Indígenas (P)	Native population in colonial Portuguese classification system
Jaman gila (I)	‘Time of Madness’
Jago (I)	Traditional bandit leader, more colloquially also any leader (Literally also: A (fighting) cock)
Joven (T/P)	A youth

Joventude (P)	Youth (as a concept)
Kakalok (T)	Mystic ‘numbers’ RAGs (such as 5-5, 7-7, etc.)
Kaladi (T)	Person originating from western Timor-Leste
Katana (I/T)	Samurai-style sword
Katua (T)	Respected older man
Kecemburuan sosial (I)	Social Jealousy
Keluarga besar (I)	Community of shared values or shared past affiliation to a particular organisation (literally: big family)
Krize (T)	Crisis (of 2006-2008)
Lia-na’in (T)	Ritual experts
Liurai (T)	Traditional political ruling class
Loro mono (T)	West, western
Loro sa’e (T)	East, eastern
Lulik (T)	Sacred, having magical powers
Malae (T)	Foreigner, though usually reserved for the ‘internationals’ amongst the foreigners
Matan dook (T)	Traditional healers and seers)
Maubere (T)	Term used to denote
Merdeka (I)	Independence, freedom
Mestiços (P)	Creole Timorese in colonial Portuguese classification system
Moradores (T)	Timorese irregular troops used by Portuguese colonial army
Mutu rabu (M)	Group violence
Nahe biti bo’ot (T)	Traditional conflict resolution process (Literally: ‘the stretching of the big mat’)
Orde Baru (I)	‘New Order’ of General Suharto
Pemuda (I)	Literally youth, but also used to refer to militias in Indonesian war of independence
Perumahan (I)	Real estate development project/modern housing area
Preman (I)	Neighbourhood thug, small-time criminal
Rai na’in (T)	Rulers of the land (but also refers to nature spirits)
Rakitan (I)	Home-made firearm
Rama ambon (I, T)	Steel darts shot with slingshots, allegedly the tips are occasionally dipped in battery acid for additional effect
Sakit hati (I)	Heartache, emotional distress

Sabu-sabu (I)	Slang term for methamphetamines ('ice')
Silat (I)	Martial arts
Tais (T)	Traditional Timorese cloth
Taranga (T)	Amulets
Tuak (T)	Palm wine
Uma lulik (T)	Sacred clan house
Warung (I)	Street-side food stall, cafe

## 1. Introduction

*Here is something you can't understand:*

*How I could just kill a man*

*- Cypress Hill, 'How I Could Just Kill A Man'*

The first time I became truly engaged with Timor-Leste<sup>1</sup>, its people, its history and its conflicts, was on a hot, late August night in 1999. It was the first night I spent in what was then still a territory occupied by the Indonesian military. Though I had been following developments in Timor-Leste for a few years by then, it had always been, both in a geographical and emotional sense, from a distance. Now I was in the western suburbs of the capital Dili,<sup>2</sup> participating in the independence referendum process as an international election observer. That night, the experience of being almost trapped in a car by rapidly converging groups of armed, aggressive militia members coupled with the sustained crackle of small arms fire echoing through the night sky a few hundred metres away from my temporary home put an end to that distance.

By the time the sun was up in the tropical sky over Dili the next morning, at least another four to five young East Timorese men had died in the struggle for independence – some supporting the independence cause, others opposing it. According to the following day's press briefing by Human Rights Watch, the dead were Virgilio da Silva, Apollinario Pinto da Silva, Anastacio Moniz, Bernadino Gutteres, and possibly Metta Araujo. Two others remained missing, presumed dead.

Though I have since been examining the violent history of Timor-Leste intensively now for almost a decade, at a very basic and personal level I remain as perplexed by the violence as I was on that August night in 1999 when I was first directly confronted by it, only to be

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<sup>1</sup> See Map 1 for a map of Timor-Leste and West Timor. In the thesis, I have chosen to use Timor-Leste, the official name of the country, rather than East Timor. The adjective form and the term used for the inhabitants of the country remains 'East Timorese.'

<sup>2</sup> See Map 4 for a map of Dili

subsequently confronted by it again in 2006 and 2007. This thesis, therefore, is an imperfect attempt at an explanation.

In this thesis I shall use the theoretical and methodological tools provided by both peace studies and gender studies in an attempt to analyse the background of two recent episodes of violent conflict in Timor-Leste. Located on the far south-eastern end of the Lesser Sunda Islands chain in South East Asia, Timor-Leste has had a history of 450 years of colonialism, military occupation and, since 2002, unstable independence. The thesis will concentrate on two particular periods of political violence – the militia violence of 1998/1999 and the phenomenon of violence-prone gangs, martial arts groups and ritual arts groups which have been responsible for much of the violence in the aftermath of the outbreak of the 2006 political crisis in the country.

In particular, I will examine how concepts and constructions of masculinity interrelate with violence in the East Timorese context. My research question is two-fold:

- What is the role of violence in young men's lives in Timor-Leste?
- What is the role of violence in constructing masculinities in Timor-Leste?

The central questions of this thesis therefore deal with the interplay between violence and constructions of masculinity: how are violent masculinities constructed in a society in the midst of violent conflict and, vice-versa, how do these violent enactments of masculinity contribute to violence in society?

Although the focus of this thesis is on the male perpetrators of violence, it should not be forgotten that due to the actions of this violent minority, it is the majority of the East Timorese population – as well as outsiders engaged with supporting East Timorese society – who are suffering the consequences: the non-violent women and men, girls and boys, caught in the middle of these fights between violent, often powerful and power-seeking men.

It is however also important to keep in mind that even though I will talk extensively about 'East Timorese men' and 'East Timorese masculinities' in my thesis, these are not in any way fixed or homogenous categories. Masculinities are diverse, often contradictory and constantly in flux, especially in situations of great societal change, as is the case in post-colonial, post-

conflict Timor-Leste. East Timorese enactments of masculinity share traits with those from other societies but also have specific local traits. It should therefore not be inferred that East Timorese men or East Timorese culture are inherently violent or that even those who do resort to violence can only be defined through their violence. In fact, one of the most enduring images of Timor-Leste that has remained in my mind since my first visit is that of a Timorese father lovingly caring for his young child in a makeshift shelter which they had fled to from militia attackers. Often, the perpetrators of violence can also be victims of violence themselves, which however does not absolve them of their responsibility for the violent actions they themselves choose to commit.

The central characters of this study, the violence-prone men, are not the majority, but they often are able to, through their violence, to impose their will on society to a large degree, defining the basic parameters of their lives and those of others. Using Philip Gourevitch's (1998, 48) definition of power as 'the ability to make others inhabit your story of their reality,' they are powerful. Yet, as I hope to show, this grip on power is much more ambiguous than it might seem at first sight. Both the militias and the later gangs, martial and ritual arts groups have often been cast in media and in public discourse in simplistic terms. What I seek to show is that male involvement in these groups has been a far more complex phenomenon than merely the popular image of rampaging socially marginalised, misguided, uneducated and rapacious young men would lead one to believe.

Furthermore, although I include both militias and the newer violence-prone groups in this study, this is not meant to indicate that I place them on the same level. For as violent and socially destabilising in their activities as they may be, the gangs, martial and ritual arts groups which are the focal point of my analysis have not displayed the similar horrific criminal energy as the Indonesian-backed militias did in 1998/99, who (with obvious support from their backers in the Indonesian security forces) killed well over a thousand people, utilised sexual violence as a weapon of war on a mass scale, forcibly deported a third of the population and destroyed almost all of the territory's infrastructure. As bad and traumatising as it has been, the violence of the gangs, martial and ritual arts groups has been on a very much smaller scale.

Over the course of my work on this thesis, I have been overtaken by events 'on the ground' in Timor-Leste on numerous occasions. In fact, it was the experience of being caught up in the

political violence of May 2006 which prompted me to look not only at the militia groups of 1999 but also the newer violence-prone groups. I therefore caution that this work needs to be seen as a snapshot of a particular era of East Timorese life and history, focusing mainly on the events of 1999 and the time between April 2006 and February 2008. As far as I am able to, I shall attempt to identify deeper, underlying trends rather than spend time trying to untangle, in detail, the often very contradictory storylines relating to individual actions and occurrences.

The title of the thesis is based on my experiences during the field work, where I soon noticed that my interviewees shared a history of violence, both in the personal sense as well as in the sense that the whole East Timorese nation has gone through a very violent history. In addition, however, I also noticed that there tended to be relatively little sense of personally taking responsibility for the acts of violence by most of my interviewees, or at least when talking to me. The reasons for this are multiple and shall be discussed in more detail in the thesis. This denial is also replicated to a degree amongst the state actors – both the East Timorese and even more so the Indonesian governments which have often been unwilling to face up to the past violence. A further aspect which I noticed was the all-pervasive diffuse fear which gripped much of East Timorese society during many of my visits to the country, a fear which affected perpetrators as well as victims.

The structure of this thesis is as follows: following the introduction (Chapter 1), I will give an overview of the political history of Timor-Leste in Chapter 2, followed by an examination of the socio-economic, political and cultural setting in the country at the time of the field research in Chapter 3. Next, in Chapter 4, I outline my research methodology and discuss ethical considerations and practical challenges of the study. Chapter 5 will present and discuss the primary interviews and contrast them with background interviews with East Timorese and international observers. In Chapter 6, I will then discuss from a theoretical angle issues of violence and masculinities. Next, in the following two Chapters (7 and 8), I will examine in detail the two main groups of violence-prone young men which I have chosen as the focus of my study, the Indonesian-backed militias on the one hand and the various ‘youth’ groups which have gained prominence in the post-independence period will be the focus of a chapter each. This will be followed by Chapter 9, examines gender roles and expectations in Timor-Leste, laying the foundation for the discussion in Chapter 10, in which I revisit my research questions. In the concluding Chapter 11, I will reflect on masculinities and violence, as well as the possibilities for non-violent expressions in Timor-Leste.

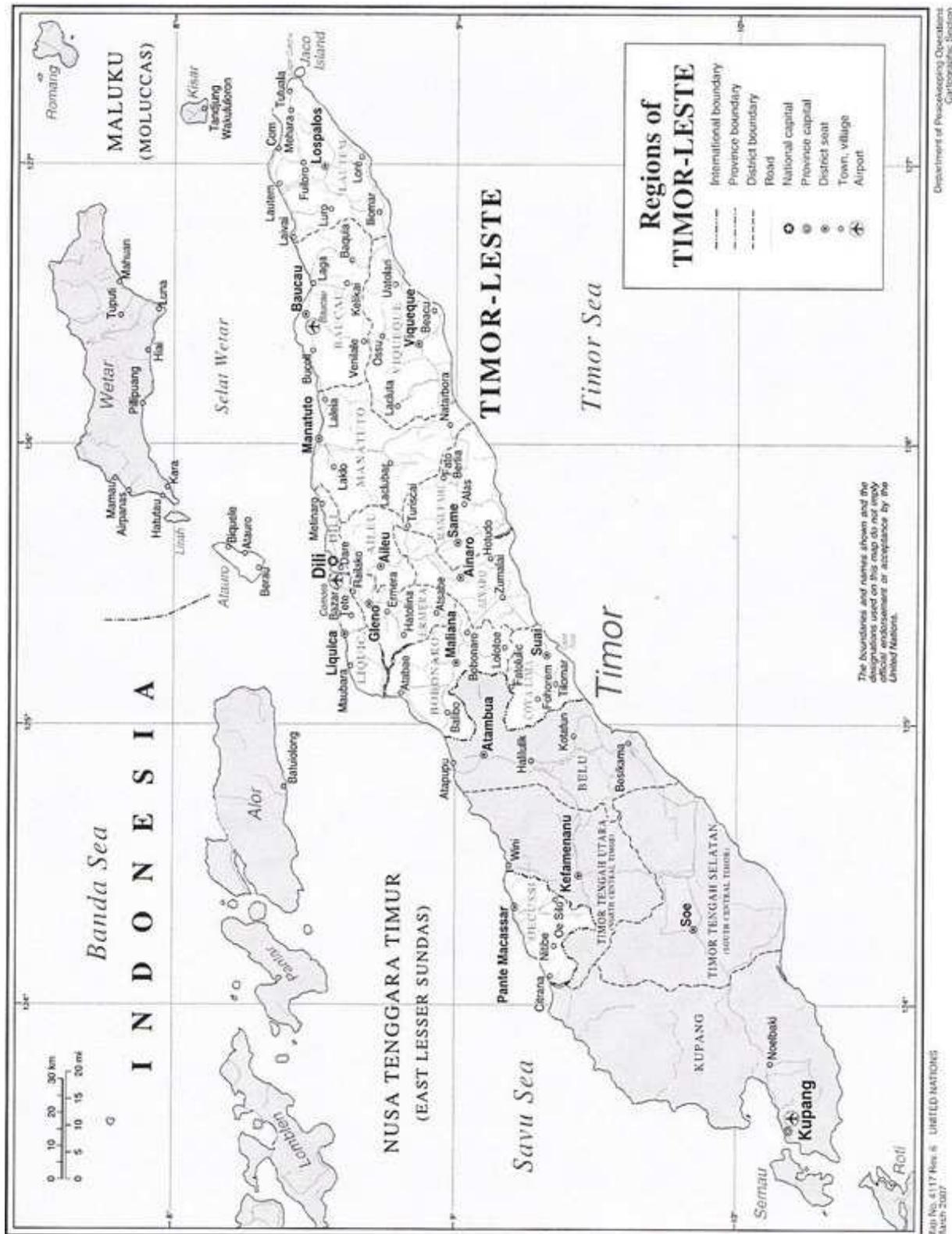
## 2. Timor-Leste – Histories of Violence

When at quarter past midnight local time on April 25, 1974, Portuguese National Radio broadcast the folk ballad '*Grândola, Vila Morena*' signalling the start of the leftist Carnation Revolution in Portugal, the population of what was then Portuguese Timor was already well into its day's work. Though it had been considered a Portuguese colony for 450 years, relatively little had changed over the centuries in the subsistence agriculture-based socio-economic structure of the territory. Little did the coffee farmers in the western hills, the Chinese traders in the capital's small stores or even the few politically active students know that soon 'history would come down on the island like a blade,' to use Simon Young's phrase.

The overthrow of the fascist Salazar/Caetano 'Estado Novo' dictatorship by the leftist military officers in Portugal thrust the colonial backwater of Portuguese Timor into a series of cataclysmic events. Over the course of the next 28 years the people of East Timor would experience a haphazard decolonisation process from 1974-75; a brief but bloody civil war in 1975; a murderous military invasion by neighbouring Indonesia later that year, a quarter century of war with hundreds of thousands of mostly civilian victims, displacement, torture, resistance from 1975-1999; the imposition of a new language and the adaptation of what for many was a new religion; modernisation; the partial overthrow of another, this time General Suharto's 'New Order' (*Orde Baru*) in 1998 followed by more murder, destruction and displacement in 1999; an international administration under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) from 1999-2002; and, finally, regained independence in 2002.

In this chapter, I will examine in detail the political history of Timor-Leste (Map 1), starting with the pre-colonial and colonial period but focusing mainly on the period following the end of Portuguese colonial rule – i.e. the Indonesian occupation, resistance, the road to independence and the post-conflict settlement. An understanding of this history is essential to examining the phenomena of the two groups of violent men I am concentrating in this thesis – the pro-Indonesian militias and the gangs, martial arts groups (MAGs) and ritual arts groups (RAGs).

**Map 1: Timor- Leste (Source: UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations)**



Readings of history are often used to legitimise or de-legitimise courses of action taken and are also important in constructing gender roles and expectations. As the aim of this Chapter is to give a historical background to the societal phenomena of the militias, gangs, MAGs and RAGs, I have chosen a relatively conventional, linear, and one could say, ‘western’ way of re-telling the history of Timor-Leste. As Anne McClintock (1995, 10-11) rightly points out, the linear approach, especially one which divides the histories of former colonies into pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods tends to reinforce a Eurocentric worldview in which history is defined according to the arrival, presence and departure of the colonial power rather than being defined by the society in question. Given the lack of written local or foreign historical sources and narratives which do not follow this linear, colonisation-centred way of depicting East Timorese history which to draw upon, however, I will by necessity follow the same pattern here.

## **2.1. An abridged history of Timor until 1974**

The island of Timor was colonised in prehistoric times by what are assumed to be several waves of immigrants, evidence of whose arrival and influence can be seen in the various linguistic groups existent on the island. These immigrants included Polynesian, Melanesian and Proto-Malay peoples. The sandalwood on the island attracted Arab, Chinese and Gujarati traders early on, some of whom also settled on the island. Portuguese traders and Dominican monks sailing out of their post in Malacca possibly first reached the island in 1511 but established their first permanent base in the eastern Sunda islands on Solor in 1566 (Durand, 2006: 46-48; Hill, 2002, 1-2).

The first semi-permanent Portuguese settlements on Timor were in Lifau and in Kupang, but Portuguese control remained weak and was under constant pressure from the Dutch. Control was exerted mostly through treaties with powerful local chieftains (Durand, 2006, 50-51). Nominally, however, the eastern part of the island of Timor was a Portuguese colony for the next 400 years or so. For much of this period, Portuguese Timor was administered either from the Portuguese colonies of Goa in India or from Macao in China, with day-to-day rule in Timor being carried out by proxy through local rulers. The Portuguese colonial administration did not make many efforts to develop the territory. Visiting British biologist Alfred Wallace described the Portuguese colonial administration in 1869 as being ‘miserable,’ noting that ‘not

a mile' of paved road had been built outside of the capital (Wallace, 1869, 117). Half a century later, another visitor described the colony as being 'forgotten by God and man' (Bron, 1923, 102) and even the former Portuguese governor de Castro saw the positive impacts of Portuguese rule as being negligible and felt that 'unfortunately this neglect seems to be on purpose' (de Castro quoted in Grünstein, 1873, 88).

During the long Portuguese occupation which was characterised mostly by neglect on the part of Lisbon, Timor-Leste did not experience a similar sustained armed struggle for independence as in Portugal's African colonies. As Gunn (2000, 5-10) points out, however, conflict was not unknown to Portuguese Timor, quoting the Portuguese governor Affonso de Castro (1859-1863) who wrote of warfare being 'endemic' amongst the Timorese (de Castro, 1864, 402). These conflicts were mostly between rival clans though on occasion they would be aimed at the Portuguese colonial administration. According to (Durand, 2006, 56), major uprisings against the Portuguese included Topasses ('mixed race' or 'Black Portuguese,' as they were defined as at the time) in 1688-1704 and 1766-1769, the Cailaco campaign 1725-1731, the 'War of the Madmen' (or '*doidos*') in the chieftaincy of Luca in 1779-1807, and localised revolts in 1847-63 and in 1867-1893.

The most serious uprisings were the revolt by Dom Boaventura from 1908-1912 (also known as the War of Manufahi) and the 1959 revolt in Uato Lari/Viqueque. The former led to the death of 15 000 – 20 000 Timorese, and 'the full deployable force of the Portuguese was needed to control the situation as far as was possible,' as a Dutch report stated at the time (Lalau, 1912, 649-664), including colonial forces brought in from Mozambique. Though very clearly aimed against the Portuguese colonial administration, the uprising nevertheless did not have full national independence as its platform but was rather linked to long-standing discontent with the colonial poll tax as well as the replacement of the Portuguese royal standard, considered as being endowed with sacred powers by many Timorese, with the republican flag following the end of the Portuguese monarchy in 1910 (Hicks, 2004, 92; Kammen, 2009, 394-395).

The suppression of the Uato Lari/Viqueque uprising led to possibly around 200 Timorese deaths (Durand, 2006, 163-164). The significance of the latter as an anti-colonial revolt has been contested, whether it was 'merely' a localised conflict between two communities, an anti-colonial uprising or even an attempt to unite with Indonesia (see Gunter, 2007, 27-41). In

putting down both uprisings, the Portuguese were often able to draw on other Timorese to carry out the killing. These occasions were also used to settle personal grudges and conflicts (Gunter, 2007, 33). Until the emergence of East Timorese political parties in 1974, however, there were no sustained political struggles aiming for an independent state of Timor-Leste.

The only significant administrative break was during the Second World War, when the territory was *de facto* occupied by the Japanese although the territory remained *de jure* under Portuguese rule (Goto, 2003, 24-38). Foreshadowing the events of 1999, the Japanese occupation force also used an auxiliary militia consisting of armed West and East Timorese civilians, the *columnas negras*, who committed several atrocities such as the Aileu massacre in August 1942. In total, the Japanese occupation led to the deaths of approximately 40 000 to 70 000 East Timorese (Cristalis and Scott, 2005, 13; Gunn and Huang, 2006, 122).

After the end of Japanese occupation, Portuguese colonial power was reinstated, at times with the help of brute force playing on internal divisions in East Timorese society. The rebuilding of the territory was achieved to a large part through the use of forced labour, a practice which continued well into the 1950s (Hill, 2002, 21-22).

## **2.2. Decolonisation, civil war and Indonesian occupation, 1974-1975**

Following the ousting of the fascist 'Estado Novo' of Salazar and Caetano by a coup d'état by left-wing officers on April 25, 1974, known as the 'Carnation Revolution,' Portugal began a rapid, even hasty, decolonisation process. The following nineteen and a half months were a tumultuous period for what was still Portuguese Timor, a period in which the population of what had very much been a colonial backwater were able to organise themselves politically for the first time. The political scene was dominated by the handful of East Timorese who had been able to receive formal education under the Portuguese. Many key members of the current East Timorese political elite are from this '1974/75-generation,' though many of its key members were also killed during the Indonesian occupation (Hill, 2002, 61-70 and 173-174).

As was the case in Portugal's former African colonies, Timor-Leste was ill-prepared for independence and found itself quickly caught up in the web of Cold War superpower politics. During the short period of decolonisation, fractures emerged within the East Timorese political landscape which eventually led to a brief civil war between the left-leaning Fretilin

(*Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente*) and the more conservative UDT (*União Democrática Timorese*), the impacts of which still reverberate in East Timorese society today. The Fretilin movement in particular was influenced politically by its leftist and anti-colonialist counterparts in Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique.

The civil war was triggered by a coup attempt on August 10, 1975 by the UDT but Fretilin and its armed wing Falintil soon emerged victorious thanks to its support amongst Timorese soldiers who had served in the Portuguese forces and due to its better grassroots support network (Hill, 2002, 96-119). The fighting left possibly up to 2 000 dead and a bitter, unresolved legacy which continues to reverberate in East Timorese politics and society more than three decades later.

Indonesia played a destabilising role in this period, supporting the pro-Indonesian political party Apodeti (*Associação Popular Democrática Timorese*) and organising small-scale military incursions (Conboy, 2002, 205-235). Following their defeat in the brief civil war, most of the UDT leadership along with the smaller KOTA (*Klibur Oan Timor Asuwain*) and Trabalhista parties fled to Indonesian West Timor and signed a controversial plea for help asking the Indonesian armed forces to intervene on their behalf, the 'Balibo Declaration' (Hill, 2002, 163-164).

Fearing an impending Indonesian invasion, Fretilin declared the territory independent on 28 November 1975. Nine days later, on 7 December, Indonesian paratroopers landed in Timor-Leste after General Suharto received the green light from visiting U.S. President Ford and Secretary of State Kissinger. Australia also indicated its preference for an integration of the territory into Indonesia. One of the driving forces behind this invasion was a fear in Washington, Canberra and Jakarta of a new leftist 'domino' falling in Southeast Asia, following the fall of Saigon to the Viet Cong, Phnom Penh to the Khmer Rouge and Vientiane to the Pathet Lao earlier in the year (Blum, 2003, 197-198; Greenless and Garran, 2002, 12-15; Taylor, 1991, 62-65).

In spite of the Indonesian occupation and unilateral integration of the territory into the Republic of Indonesia as the province of *Timor Timur* (East Timor) in 1976, the territory remained, *de jure*, a Portuguese colony until its independence in 2002. It was this legal anomaly which, in the end, made independence from Indonesia possible

### **2.3. Occupation, insurgency, counter-insurgency, modernisation: 1976-1998**

The invading Indonesian armed forces, ABRI, began their invasion with immediate massacres in Dili, especially of the Chinese minority whom they wrongly assumed to have communist sympathies. They also met, apparently somewhat unexpectedly for the Indonesian paratroopers, sustained resistance from the Falintil. Several key Fretilin leaders were also executed in the initial weeks in Dili. Those killed included Rosa Bonaparte, one of the few women in the Fretilin leadership and secretary-general of the women's wing OPMT (*Organização Popular da Mulher Timorense*). The OPMT was the first political East Timorese women's organisation which in the months between the civil war and invasion had organised women's support for the independence movement as well as lobbying for gender equity (Cristalis and Scott, 2005, 28-30; Hill, 2002, 173-174).

Following the fall of Dili, the Falintil forces retreated into the mountains, together with a large part of the civilian population. The main area of retreat was the mountainous interior around Mount Matebian, in the eastern part of Timor-Leste. The initial phase of the fighting, which lasted until 1979, was the bloodiest. Estimates on the number of Timorese killed vary, but the somewhat conservative estimate of the East Timorese Truth and Reconciliation Commission is that around 102 800 East Timorese died during the occupation, the majority during the initial years. For the most part the dead were civilians, and for the most part through disease and starvation (CAVR, 2005, 44).

#### 2.3.1. Military resistance

The East Timorese resistance to the Indonesian occupation consisted of three pillars – the military resistance by the Falintil guerrillas, the civilian resistance inside Timor and in Indonesia as well as the 'diplomatic front' of the exile politicians such as José Ramos-Horta who lobbied for international recognition for the East Timorese cause (see for example Ramos-Horta, 1987). Militarily, the Falintil consisted initially mainly of former East Timorese members of the Portuguese colonial army and volunteers. Initially numbering several thousand, the Falintil were severely outmanned and outgunned by the Indonesian armed forces and their struggle came close to a collapse on several occasions, especially after

the killings and capture of several of the key guerrilla commanders. Nonetheless, and against all odds, the Falintil were able to sustain what, after the early 1980s, became a small-scale armed resistance against the Indonesian occupation forces for 24 years. At the time of the end of the armed struggle, the Falintil numbered around 2 000 members, some of whom had been fighting the Indonesians continuously since 1975.

The guerrilla war waged by Falintil against the Indonesian occupiers also saw internal purges within Fretilin/Falintil, defections and surrenders, and acrimonious feuds over strategy and policy which led to bitterness and grudges which still echo in part today and are reflected in part in current political divisions and alliances (Myrntinen, 2008b; Rees, 2004, 41-43). These mostly took place in the early years of the struggle, when the Falintil were in control of the area around Mount Matabian to where tens of thousands of civilians had also fled to.

The guerrilla war of the Falintil and the atrocities of the ABRI fighting against them continued at varying levels of intensity until 1999, with several particularly brutal episodes such as the *pagar betis* ('fence of legs') operation in 1981 when around 80 000 East Timorese males were forced to walk in lines in front of the Indonesian armed forces across the island in an effort to flush out remaining Falintil fighters (Taylor, 1991, 117-121). The ABRI also forced East Timorese civilians, including children and youth, to act as 'support staff,' i.e. as porters, translators and scouts, which were called TBO (*Tenaga Bantuan Operasi*). Sexualised violence against female and male civilians was a common feature of the conflict, the perpetrators being mainly members of the Indonesian security forces, although there were also Timorese perpetrators (JSMP, 2003).

### 2.3.2. Civilian resistance

While the Falintil were continuing their small-scale military insurgency in the mountains, a 'second front' was opened in the urban areas with unarmed *clandestinos*, men and women, providing logistical support, relaying messages and, on the rare occasions they were able to visit, provide foreign media with access to the resistance. Runners, or *estafetas*, were also used to smuggle arms and ammunition which had often been purchased from members of the Indonesian military (Pinto and Jardine, 1997, 102). At times, members of the clandestine front would also organise attacks on Indonesian security forces. In the years after independence, many of these former *clandestinos* would vent their frustration with what they felt was their

marginalisation in the post-conflict settlement by joining gangs, MAGs, RAGs and veterans' organisations (Sousa-Santos, 2009, 3-4).

The civilian resistance also included East Timorese students studying at Indonesian universities who linked up with progressive Indonesian student groups struggling against the Suharto dictatorship. A third factor in the independence struggle were the efforts of the East Timorese diaspora which, together with East Timor solidarity groups abroad and a handful of sympathetic lusophone governments (notably Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique) tried to maintain outside pressure on Indonesia (Ramos Horta, 1987, 159-163).

In 1987, the various arms of the resistance effort were joined together under the umbrella of the CNRM (*Conselho Nacional da Resistencia Maubere* – National Council of the Maubere Resistance), later renamed CNRT (*Conselho Nacional da Resistencia Timorese* – National Council of the Timorese Resistance) in 1998, as the term '*maubere*,' an appropriation of a derogatory term used during colonial time for peasants, for was seen as being too tightly linked to the socialist-inspired rhetoric of the early days of Fretilin and thus not acceptable to the more conservative parties (Hill, 2002, 73-76).

### 2.3.3. Counter-insurgency

Many of the methods employed by the Indonesian armed forces in their military operations in Timor-Leste bore a striking resemblance to methods used in Central American and other Southeast Asian counter-insurgency (COIN) operations (see for example Carr and McKay, 1989; Gonzales, 2003, 85-98). This 'diffusion of methods' of violence (Aditjondro, 1999, 184) may well be due to the fact that some of the key figures behind the violence both in Indonesia and Central America studied at the same institutions in the USA, e.g. at Fort Benning (the infamous 'School of the Americas') and Fort Bragg (Tanter et al. 2006, 90, 102). In all cases, the perpetrators also received political and financial backing from the U.S. and other western countries and used western military equipment.

These COIN operations included the setting up of and forcible relocation of the civilian population into "strategic hamlets" or setting up of locally-recruited death squads or militias which operated in close collaboration with members of the security forces. Torture and sexual violence were also employed as part of the COIN operations. These included the sexualised

torture of men and women, including inflicting pain on the genitals, rape and castration; mutilation and public display of castrated corpses; sexual slavery of civilian women and wide-scale use of rape of women as a weapon of war. Other gendered strategies of domination included the specific targeting of men for interrogation and extra-judicial killings and forced sterilisation and birth control programmes which were implemented with the aid of the security forces (Aditjondro, 1999, 172-176; Carey, 2001, 185-209; CAVR, 2005, 116-123).

Indonesian occupation, after brutally pacifying most of the territory by the early 1980s, brought with it a degree of economic and social development which eventually set East Timor roughly on par with the neighbouring Indonesian provinces. The majority of the population remained, however, in the rural areas as subsistence farmers, as they did (and do) in much of eastern Indonesia. Coffee remained the most important export of the territory. No major industrial projects were initiated during the Indonesian occupation, though there was a marked increase in the degree of urbanisation, especially around the capital Dili. Compulsory education led to a massive increase in literacy rates and, for the first time in Timorese history, with Indonesian the various ethno-linguistic groups of Timor-Leste had a common *lingua franca*. A further legacy of the Indonesian occupation was a Catholicisation of society, as Indonesian law required all citizens to join one of the five state-sanctioned religions.<sup>3</sup>

While officially a corporatist free market economy, many of the companies in Suharto's Indonesia, and especially in conflict zones such as Aceh, East Timor and West Papua, were owned by high-ranking military officials or military-linked foundations. Military and police involvement in illegal economic activities ranging from illegal logging to prostitution and gambling rackets was also routine (McCulloch, 2003, 101).

Internationally, the almost-forgotten conflict in East Timor gained unexpected prominence when on November 12, 1991, Indonesian military forces opened fire on a funeral procession in the Santa Cruz cemetery in Dili, killing an estimated 250 – 400 civilians. Unlike previous massacres, this one was caught on film by international journalists and led to an international outcry, at least amongst the solidarity movement and human rights community, if not amongst General Suharto's western backers.

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<sup>3</sup> During the Suharto-era, the five state-approved religions which Indonesians had to belong to were Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism and Buddhism. After the overthrow of the Suharto regime, Confucianism was added as a sixth option. Following traditional religions or not belonging to a religious community are officially not options, though it is *de facto* not uncommon

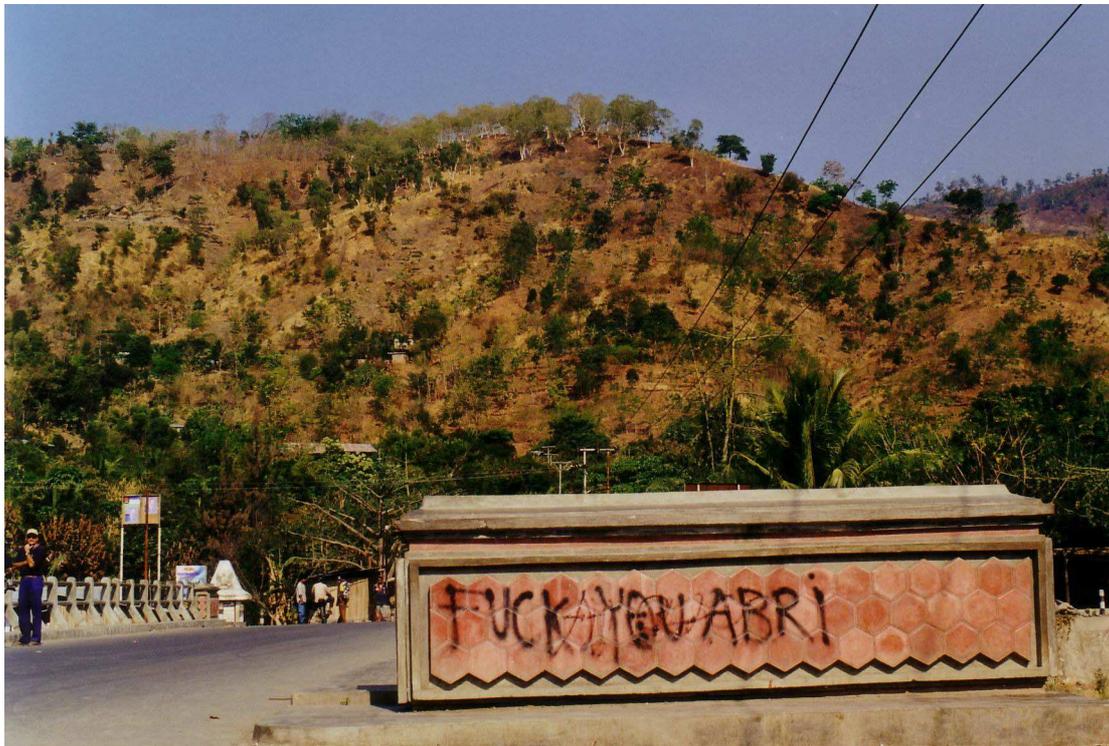
#### **2.4. Winds of change, Seas of Flame: 1998-1999**

Following the downfall of the Suharto dictatorship in 1998, the new Indonesian government under B.J. Habibie surprisingly announced that an UN-supervised referendum on the future of Timor-Leste was to be held in 1999, with the East Timorese people given the choice between special autonomy as a part of Indonesia or full independence.

The run-up to the referendum on independence saw a new quality of violence, with the Indonesian armed forces, now renamed TNI (*Tentara Nasional Indonesia*) after the downfall of the Suharto regime, setting up and arming Timorese pro-Indonesian militias as proxies. These groups were based in part on existing 'civil defence units' which were a key part of Indonesian military doctrine. TNI involvement is documented in Tanter et al. (2006), and by the UN Serious Crimes Unit (SCU, 2003) and has been, to an extent, acknowledged by the former Indonesian martial law commander Lt. Gen. (ret) Kiki Syahnakri in his testimony to the Indonesia-Timor-Leste Commission for Truth and Friendship which examined the 1999 violence (The Jakarta Post, 2007).

These militia groups were established across the territory and enjoyed the overt and covert support of the Indonesian administrative structures as well as of the security forces. According to the 5 May, 1999 agreement that outlined the way the referendum would be carried out, the Indonesian security forces were tasked with ensuring that the ballot could take place in a peaceful environment. While the remaining approximately 1 900 Falintil voluntarily withdrew to cantonment areas in Uaimori (Viqueque), Atelari (Laga), Poetete (Ermera) und Ai-Assa (Bobonaro) and did not engage in the fighting, the Indonesian security forces showed little inclination to stop the numerous massacres, individual killings, rapes, burnings and lootings carried out by the militia in the run-up to the referendum (IOM, 2002, 8). The worst massacres took place in Liquiça in April 1999 and in Dili and Suai in September 1999.

Figure 1. Anti-Indonesian Graffiti at Becora Terminal (ABRI stands for the Indonesian Armed Forces), Dili. (Henri Myrntinen, 1999)



Immediately after the announcement of the result of the ballot – in which 78.8 percent voted in favour of independence – the militias, supported by the TNI and the paramilitary mobile brigade of the Indonesian police, *Brimob*, began an unprecedented rampage. A common conservative estimate is that around 1 500 unarmed civilians died in the violence. Utilising a ‘scorched earth’ policy, the infrastructure of the territory was systematically destroyed. An estimated 70 percent of buildings and houses in the territory were razed. In addition, several hundred thousand pigs, buffalos and cattle were slaughtered (see for example Cristalis, 2002, 227-235; Durand, 2006, 120-124).

The wave of destruction had been openly prophesied by leading militia members as well as leading figures in the Indonesian military apparatus and civilian administration, who promised the East Timorese that they would, in case of a pro-independence vote, ‘go down in a sea of flames’ and ‘end up eating stones.’ Suggestions that ‘the Javanese’<sup>4</sup> in the military sought to bring about a cataclysmic end to their stay in East Timor along the lines of the mythical

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<sup>4</sup> Javanese form the dominant ethnic group in Indonesia and the term is often used as a chiffré for Indonesian transmigrants in general, members of the Indonesian military, representatives of the central government or others perceived by the local population as being representatives of the central government, be they ethnically Javanese or not

*Bratayudha* concept (on the implications of traditional concepts on Javanese political thought, see for example Anderson, 1990, 17-77), a sort of Wagnerian ‘*Götterdämmerung*,’ of going down in flames, are not completely convincing (see also Robinson, 2002, 240). The Indonesian security forces were not seeking to destroy the old world in order to create a new one but rather seeking to deprive the other side of anything useful in the face of an inevitable retreat.

As Greenless and Garran (2002, 201-203), point out, the use of a scorched-earth policy, known as *bumihangus* in Indonesian, is not unknown to Indonesian military doctrine, indeed is seen as a necessity when forced to concede territory to the ‘enemy.’ The application of the *bumihangus*-principle to Bandung during the Indonesian War of Independence is also eulogised in the march ‘*Bandung Laut Api*’ (Bandung – Sea of Fire), a fate both militia and military had threatened for the East Timorese in the case of a pro-independence vote. Thus the wave of destruction should be seen more in the context of the military mindset rather than a ‘Javanese’ cultural predisposition. The key messages being sent by the military through the proxy violence was that of a punishment to the ‘unthankful’ East Timorese who rejected a ‘generous’ Indonesian autonomy offer and importantly that of a warning to other separatist movements in Aceh and Papua of things to come should they seek independence.

Over a third of the East Timorese population at the time, around 250 000 – 300 000 people, were forcibly deported following the referendum. The deportations were mainly to the neighbouring province of Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT) and to a lesser degree to other Indonesian provinces. The majority of the deportees were brought to militia-run camps in West Timor, especially to the border regency of Belu, where the East Timorese refugee population in late 1999 was up to 60 per cent of the local population. East Timorese were also deported by ship to the neighbouring islands of Alor and Flores (Durand, 2006, 123-124).

There have been persistent reports of serious human rights abuses, in particular sexualised violence, in the militia-run camps but there has been no comprehensive, independent investigation of these reports. In addition to rapes, young women have been forced into sexual slavery and/or forced into marriage with militia members. A local NGO, *Tim Kemanusiaan Timor Barat*, documented 163 cases of gender-based violence (GBV) in the camps, which can be taken to represent the tip of the iceberg. Some of these women have not returned to their communities (Cristalis and Scott, 2005, 94; Green Left Weekly, 2001; The Guardian, 2001).

In 2003, the remaining Timorese in the camps were given the choice between remaining in West Timor or of returning to Timor-Leste. Some 30 000 chose to remain, including mostly supporters of integration with Indonesia and former militia members and their families. The ex-militias have been seen as an instability factor in West Timor as well, where their presence has led to complaints from local priests and to conflicts with the local population over access to land and resources (Durand, 2006, 124). The most serious incident involving the former militias was in 2000 in Atambua when three internationals working for the UNHCR were killed by a militia-led mob. Though tensions have lessened over the years, tensions flared up again in April 2008 when dozens of East Timorese rioted in Atambua against what they felt was an inadequate amount of financial support from the Indonesian government (The Jakarta Post, 2008). Further riots followed in Kupang in May 2009, demanding access to the Indonesian government's BLT (*Bantuan Langsung Tunai* – direct cash aid) scheme (The Jakarta Post, 2009). In a somewhat surprising move given their overt hostility to Australia and Australians in 1999-2000, some of the former militias have in 2010 raised the possibility of trying to seek asylum in Australia as they felt neglected by the Indonesian central government (Kompas, 2010).

## **2.5. UN interregnum 1999-2002**

The international outcry over the violence after the August 1999 referendum led to the deployment of an Australian-led United Nations peacekeeping force (INTERFET) in September 1999 and the establishment of a temporary UN administration (United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor – UNTAET) in the territory. UNTAET administered the territory until its independence in 2002, during which time the future structures of the state administration were established.

One of the key issues, both with respect to the need at the time to address the need to re-integrate former fighters into civilian society and with a view to the problems this led to several years down the road, was the way in which the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) process and the setting-up of the new national security forces was carried out.

The DDR process of the former Falintil combatants fell indirectly under the mandate of the UN administration, UNTAET. Crucially, however, the DDR process was not in the original mandate of UNTAET and this lack of leadership had important ramifications for the process. The DDR process was thus poorly structured and relied heavily on *ad hoc* initiatives by various donors or even peacekeeping contingents (Myrntinen and Stolze, 2007). The cantonment, disarmament and demobilisation of the former Falintil were the responsibility of the Australian-led INTERFET peacekeeping force. The disarming and demobilisation of the pro-Indonesian militias who fled to Indonesian West Timor, meanwhile, was the responsibility of the Indonesian security forces, which for a long time proved highly reluctant to do so.

*Figure 2. Member of UNTAET peacekeeping contingent standing at attention in Dili (Henri Myrntinen, 2002)*



As a part of the disarmament process, UNTAET also promulgated a regulation (UNTAET, 2001) on firearms and offensive weapons, in which traditional offensive weapons (e.g. machetes, spears, daggers, swords) were given semi-legal status as long as they are not used

in an aggressive manner. With the flaring up of the gang violence in mid-2006, this proved to be a problematic loophole for the security forces.

Several international agencies (including IOM, CIDA, USAID and UNDP) were involved in the initial FRAP (Falintil Reinsertion Assistance Program) and consequent UNDP-led RESPECT (Recovery, Employment and Stability Programme for Ex-Combatants and Communities in East Timor) programmes for ex-Falintil members. These programmes were, however, less effective than had been hoped for and were more of a stop-gap measure for the ex-combatants than a real bridge into civilian life (La'o Hamutuk, 2004, 1-3; Myrtilinen and Stolze, 2007; and Rees, 2004, 47).

One of the main problems with the DDR process was that the terms 'veteran' or 'ex-combatant' were ill-defined from the outset. In the context of East Timorese society, the term 'veteran' is often seen in a broad perspective. It is not only the former, weapons-bearing combatants who see themselves as veterans of the struggle but also women and children associated with fighting forces (WAFF/CAFF) as well as the urban support network of *clandestinas* and *clandestinos* who supported the Falintil guerrilla force by procuring arms, ammunition, medication, food and other supplies as well as organising civilian protests both in occupied East Timor and in Indonesia proper. A presidential commission was established to look into the veterans' issue but did not come up with a final list in time for the DDR process. From the outset, there were allegations that the commission favoured those politically close to the president and former guerrilla commander, Xanana Gusmão. Female ex-combatants were sidelined more or less completely (Myrtilinen and Stolze, 2007; Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002, 117).

The fact that many of the veterans feel that their role in the struggle has not been properly acknowledged and that they have not been able to gain socially or economically from the fruits of the struggle, led to a number of them (especially the male members of the former civilian resistance) to join violence-prone pressure groups. These included gangs, MAGs and RAGs but also various 'veteran's' associations, many of which have been antagonistic to the government. The largest of the veterans' associations are the semi-messianic Sagrada Familia led by the charismatic (and erratic) former Falintil field commander Ely Foho Rai Bo'ot (also known as Elle Sete or L-7) and the Committee for the Popular Defence of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste (CPD- RDTL). These groups also operate under the roof of the

Association of Ex-Combatants 1975 (AC75) and have formed links to gangs, MAGs and RAGs as well as to political parties<sup>5</sup> (Scamary, 2009b, 269-271).

Interestingly, in the light of later events during the 2006 crisis in which East Timorese from the western parts of the country complained of discrimination, the initial complaints of being disadvantaged in the East Timorese DDR-process came from the eastern part of the country. A few years down the line, in 2006, it was the complaints of discrimination in the DDR processes by soldiers originating from the western districts of the country which led to the collapse of the new security forces. Thus the politicisation of what meagre spoils were to be had from the DDR-process led to a 'zero-sum'-dynamic in which ex-combatants from both eastern and western regions were envious of each others' perceived gains.

The major employment opportunity offered to ex-combatants was joining either of the two new security forces – the police (*Policía Nacional de Timor-Leste* – PNTL) or the new armed forces (*Falintil-Forças de Defesa de Timor-Leste* – F-FDTL). Approximately 150 ex-combatants were integrated into the former and some 650 into the latter force, out of a total force size of approximately 1 500 and 3 000 respectively, based on a plan drawn up by foreign consultants (KCL, 2000).

As a part of the effort to make the new national security forces more inclusive and representative of society, both PNTL and F-FDTL included women in the new force make-up. The PNTL initially had approximately 20 per cent and the F-FDTL approximately 6 per cent female members. In spite of gender sensitivity training for the security forces, however, they remained heavily male-dominated (especially in the leadership positions) and there were numerous serious allegations of sexual misconduct, harassment and sexual violence that were levelled against members of the security forces, which tended to brush them off (Alola Foundation, 2004, 43-44; Myrntinen, 2009b, 35).

## **2.6. Independence and turbulence 2002-2006**

With the declaration of independence on May 20, 2002, the United Nations officially ended its UNTAET transitional administration of Timor-Leste. The follow-up mission to UNTAET,

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<sup>5</sup> Commander L-7 was elected to the National Assembly in 2007 as a member of parliament for the UNDERTIM party

the United Nations Mission of Support in East Timor (UNMISSET), continued on a smaller scale until 20 May 2005. This was followed by a much reduced mission, the United Nations Office in Timor-Leste – UNOTIL. After the flaring up of violence in April/May 2006, a further UN mission was agreed upon, the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT).

### 2.6.1. Instability and pervasive fear

The years immediately following independence were marked by economic and social instability as well as a growing political crisis. December 2002 saw rioting on the streets of Dili, aimed mainly against the remaining UN presence during which a supermarket frequented mainly by the expatriate community went up in flames. It is alleged that members of disgruntled veterans' organisations had been involved in instigating the riots, in addition to violent youth groups, drawing on the increasing frustration in society with the slow pace of socio-economic development and the growing income differences between foreigners and locals (Kingsbury, 2009, 140).

Violence-prone youth groups, including gangs, martial arts groups or ritual arts groups, began mushrooming around the country during this period and began to become an increasing source of internal instability, in addition to the groups of disaffected veterans. Furthermore, local gangs began playing an increasingly conspicuous role in many of the poorer *bairos* of Dili. There was some degree of overlap and co-operation between the veterans' groups and the MAGs/RAGs. Meanwhile, the militia groups in West Timor remained as an outside threat, with several small-scale militia incursions into Timor-Leste, especially during the initial years of the UNTAET mission and independence (Jane's Intelligence Review, 2001).

In addition to the real and visible threat of instability posed by these various groups, the spring of 2004 saw a return of a more ethereal threat, the 'ninjas,' which can be seen as being symptomatic of the high degree of fear and insecurity in East Timorese society. The 'original' ninjas were death squads organised by the Indonesian special forces, *Kopassus*, who, in the mid-1990s, dressed in black, would go after suspected independence activists in urban areas (Aditjondro, 1999, 172). 'Ninja'-violence has also taken place in other parts of Indonesia, such as in East Java and West Papua (Sidel, 2007, 150-152). The term is used for murders and acts of violence committed by phantom perpetrators who move stealthily at night, have black magic powers and are often rumoured to be linked to the security forces. The phenomenon of

the ninjas can be seen as an amalgamation of traditional local beliefs in dark powers and black magic, the very real experience of violent conflict mixed with globalised media images.

The 2004 ‘ninja-phenomenon’ started with several burglaries and ‘ninja sightings’ in the border area to West Timor. Fear of ninjas quickly spread to Dili, where in May/June 2004 roadblocks were set up at night and paramilitary police together with Portuguese peacekeeping forces (PKF) carried out extra nocturnal patrols. Rumours abounded as to who was behind the ninjas – ordinary criminals, militias from West Timor, ex-Falintil, ex-*Kopassus* or perhaps the security forces themselves, who were thought to be stirring fear in an attempt to create a task for themselves (Lusa, 2004). The ninja-scare disappeared, however, as quickly as it emerged, leaving behind a lingering feeling of insecurity in society. ‘Ninja’ sightings have continued sporadically ever since, adding to the pervasive feeling of diffuse fear in the country.

#### 2.6.2. Insecurities in the security sector

A further complication were the increasing tensions between the armed forces F-FDTL and police force PNTL, whose respective roles in society were not properly defined. The differences between the two forces were further exacerbated by deliberate politicisation of the schism by key members of the political elite, such as former Interior Minister Rogerio Lobato (UN, 2006b, 19). Discontent has also surrounded the inclusion of around 350 former Timorese members of the Indonesian police force POLRI (*Kepolisian Negara Republik Indonesia*) into the PNTL. Some former Falintil members, especially those not integrated into the new forces, saw this as an affront as people they considered to be collaborators were being rewarded while they, heroes of the resistance, were left unemployed (Mobekk, 2003, 9-11; Rees, 2004, 52). Feelings of mistrust and inter-service rivalry between F-FDTL and PNTL have in the past run dangerously high, and led to violent confrontations such as the one in Los Palos in February 2004. The two forces became highly politicised, and, as Rees (2004, 5) already noted before the crisis, an ‘adequate and appropriate civilian oversight [...] of the security sector...’ does not exist.’

Prophetically, in the light of the events of April/May 2006, a leading Timorese women’s rights activist, Ubalda Alves, noted in 2004 that the men in the new Timorese security forces now ‘felt powerful’ strutting around displaying their UN-supplied weapons (quoted in

Abdullah and Myrntinen, 2009, 197). Proper weapons control and storage remained a problem (Amnesty international, 2003). Assaults, beatings and sexual harassment by members of the new security forces went unchecked. There were also splits within the forces themselves, with various cliques based on political or regional allegiance forming themselves both within the PNTL and F-FDTL (International Crisis Group, 2008, 16-17; Rees, 2004, 33).

Following inadequate responses by the security forces to heavy rioting in Dili in December 2002 and a border incident involving militias and criminal groups in Atsabe in January 2003, a paramilitary police force named the Rapid Deployment Unit (*Unidade Intervenção Rápida - UIR*), a Police Reserve Unit (*Unidade de Reserva da Polícia – URP*) and a Border Patrol Unit (*Unidade Patrulhamento Fronteira - UPF*) were set up, all coming under the command of the Minister of the Interior (Rees, 2004, 19). Rather than providing solutions, the establishment of these units further muddied the waters as far as the separation of duties between the police forces and the military was concerned.

## **2.7. Malcontents, mutinies and martial arts, 2006 – 2008**

Events came to a head in March 2006, when the government sacked approximately 600 members of the country's armed forces who had been protesting against their working conditions, alleging discrimination based on their geographical origin (i.e. originating from the western districts of the country). This group became to be known as the 'petitioners.' In demonstrations after the sacking, fire-fights erupted between the rebellious troops and pro-government forces, between police and army units and between police units and between armed gangs, MAGs and RAGs. The most detailed examination of these events was by a UN Commission of Inquiry in late 2006 (UN, 2006b)

### 2.7.1. Ethnic conflict?

One defining feature of the wave of violence in 2006 was the open emergence of an east-west divide, between East Timorese of '*loro mono*' or '*kaladi*' (western) and '*loro sa'e*' or '*firaku*'

(eastern) descent.<sup>6</sup> The sudden divide into these two camps took many outside observers by surprise as prior to the outbreak of the crisis these two categories had hardly ever been mentioned in the Timorese political discourse. The fact that the split into these two groups nevertheless happened rather quickly shows that these two imagined categories were already pre-existent in people's minds. In fact, as Helen Hill (2000, 77) points out, Fretilin in October 1975 was campaigning against 'tribalism' in Timor-Leste:

*'... [leading Fretilin cadre] Mau Lear criticised those who held tribalist attitudes. 'One of the variations of tribalism is the division of the population in Loro Mono and Loro Sa'e, into Kaladis and Firakus [...] and the belief that some groups are superior to others.'*

Although the 'east/west' conflict was at times described in the international media as an ethnic conflict, this is not exactly true, as the division is a geographical one, even if the exact dividing line between 'east' and 'west' remains vague. Both geographical areas contain a number of different ethno-linguistic groups, some straddling the imaginary dividing line and there are numerous intermarriages between 'easterners' and 'westerners.'

Taking the line that the crisis was mainly due to politically-motivated rhetorical exacerbations of existing divisions, David Hicks (2007) argued that 'the opposition between both groups is largely a rhetorically-driven fantasy, it can not be neglected that at least the terms Firaku and Kaladi have existed for quite some time.' A slightly different view is taken by Prüller (2008, 78), who contends that

*'...deeply-felt ethnic hatred is not at the heart of the problem. Nevertheless, the categories in discussion have been found to have preceded the 2006 crisis by many years. Firaku and Kaladi are not merely fantasies in current political rhetoric, as Hicks (2007) argues, but identity concepts that have been loaded with highly explosive content in post-independent East Timor.'*

It needs to be noted that there are also many communal (and other) conflicts within these two 'communal' categories of 'loro monu' and 'loro sa'e,' a key example being that of the long

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<sup>6</sup> The western East Timorese should not be confused, as has occasionally happened in the international media, with the West Timorese. West Timor remains a part of Indonesia and West Timorese played no role in the *loro monu/loro sa'e* conflict

and bitter conflict between Makassae- and Nauteti-speakers in Viqueque district which coloured at least the 1959 uprising, 1975 civil war, 1999 violence and, more recently, post-election violence in 2007 (Gunter, 2007, 21-47).

On a national level, the communal conflict between *'loro monu'* and *'loro sa'e'* also disappeared from the political stage, or at least from public discourse, almost as quickly as it had appeared in April/May 2006. It can not be ruled out however that the issue could be mobilised on demand again.

### 2.7.2. The appearance of the gangs, MAGs and RAGs

The security vacuum which was created by the disintegration of the security forces was quickly filled by various violence-prone groups, especially gangs, MAGs and RAGs, which in part had active members of the security forces in their ranks and had access to firearms. For the next two and a half years, these groups remained a major source of instability in the country, especially in Dili. The initial stage of fighting in April-June 2006 led to the deaths of 37 people and to approximately 100 000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) fleeing their homes. By the time I was carrying out the main part of my field research in late 2007, the continuing small-scale urban violence perpetrated by the gangs, MAGs and RAGs had led to an estimated additional 100 people killed (Scambary, 2009b).

Australian and New Zealand peacekeeping forces of the International Stabilisation Force (ISF) arrived in Timor-Leste in late May 2006 followed by additional UNPOL, including Malaysian, Pakistani and Portuguese formed police units (FPU) under the new UNMIT mandate. The peacekeepers, now responsible for internal security in Timor-Leste, clashed repeatedly with the gangs, MAGs and RAGs. These were mostly small-scale incidents but evolved at times into major stand-offs.

#### *The Case of Major Alfredo Reinado*

A key figure in these events was the late Major Alfredo Reinado. A former commander of the F-FDTL Military Police, he deserted the army on May 3, 2006 together with some followers and ambushed policemen and soldiers loyal to the government on May 23, 2006, leading to the deaths of five people (UN, 2006b, 31).

He was arrested by Australian ISF forces in July 2006 but was able to escape from Becora prison just outside of Dili about a month later, escaping to the mountains with his supporters. A charismatic and erratic figure, he gained widespread support in East Timorese society, especially amongst many of the young and within the gangs, MAGs and RAGs in Dili and beyond. An unsuccessful attempt by Australian Special Forces to arrest Major Reinado in March 2007 led to widespread rioting in Dili, causing both the ISF and the government to back off from arresting the renegade officer. At the time of the main part of my field research in October-December 2007, Major Reinado remained in the hills in hiding with his supporters, on occasion giving anti-government statements to the media.

*Figure 3. Pro-Alfredo graffiti remains on the streets of Dili as a memento of the dead idol (Henri Myrntinen, 2009)*



Paradoxically, Timor-Leste's most wanted fugitive from justice was also seen by many, especially many youths, as a symbol of justice, an example of a man fighting against the injustices committed by the political elite and the international community in the post-independence years. He quickly became a lionised, almost messianic figure, a repository of

the hopes and dreams of those who felt their hopes of a better life after independence had been betrayed by the elites (see also Myrtilinen, 2008b).

At the break of dawn on February 11, 2008, Major Reinado and his followers entered, with what remain at the time of writing unknown motivations and in uncertain circumstances, the residential compound of President José Ramos-Horta. In the ensuing fire-fight, Major Alfredo Reinado was killed along with one of his followers, Leopoldino Exposto. President Ramos-Horta was shot and wounded and had to undergo medical treatment in Australia. A second group of Reinado's followers headed by Gastão Salsinha surrounded the residence of Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão, who however was able to escape. In spite of the presence of the East Timorese security forces as well as the foreign ISF units and UNMIT's FPU's, all of the attackers (apart from the two dead) were able to make a get-away more or less completely unhindered and unseen.

In the aftermath of the attacks, a state of emergency was declared and a nationwide manhunt by a joint F-FDTL/PNTL taskforce for the mutineers was launched, effectively sidelining the ISF and UNPOL. The Joint Command has raised concerns amongst national and international observers for a number of reasons. These include the use of the F-FDTL for internal policing and abuses were committed by the security forces during the state of emergency (Wilson, 2009). There also remains no clear delineation of duties between the security sector institutions (International Crisis Group, 2009, 1). Furthermore, the continued politicisation of the security sector and close links between individual members of the security forces (as well as of the private security companies – PSCs) to MAGs, RAGs and gangs remain problematic. The last of the mutinying soldiers, led by Gastão Salsinha, surrendered to the joint taskforce on April 27, 2008. The joint taskforce was decommissioned on June 4, 2008.

The events of the morning of February 11, 2008, while taking politically-motivated violence to a new level, led, at least in the short and medium term, to an improvement as far as the overall security situation was concerned. The increased presence of security forces under the state of emergency, the strict curfew and a general societal sense of having been 'a bit too close to the precipice for comfort' led to a marked calming-down of the security situation.

Following the surrender of the last of the mutinying soldiers and the improved security situation, F-FDTL/PNTL rivalry seems to have diminishing while both the self-confidence

and assertiveness of the Timorese security forces have increased. However, many of the key problems remain at the time of writing, with the roles of the security forces not being properly delineated and the armed forces playing an increasingly active role in internal policing, the police taking on an increasingly paramilitary role, democratic oversight lacking, and the even-handedness of the forces being undermined by competing loyalties of individual members to other clientelist networks, such as political parties, veterans' organisations or gangs (Fundasaun Mahein, 2010; Myrtilinen, 2008d, 27-30; Scambary, 2009b, 269-272; Wilson, 2009, 18).

The social, economic and political fissures and pressures which led to the crisis in 2006 and the events of February 11, 2008 remain unresolved at the time of writing, with the exception of the persona of Major Alfredo Reinado who through his death exited the political stage in the most dramatic way possible. Though they have kept a lower and more peaceful profile since the death of Reinado, the structures remain in place as do the factors which have led to their emergence in the first place (see also International Crisis Group, 2009). Thus violent instability may reappear, though its political and social legitimacy might be diminished.

The East Timorese government, the Catholic Church as well as a number of national and international organisations have been seeking to address the phenomena of the gangs, MAGs and RAGs by encouraging reconciliation meetings, sports-oriented activities, community work or other forms of engagement. These have included youth leadership training, dialogues, or the community services such as the building of Nativity mangers at Christmas time. Also, efforts have been made to encourage martial arts groups to focus on actual martial arts rather than street fighting (Whande and Galant, 2007).

While these efforts have been partially successful in creating new, non-violent ways for some of the less determined members of the various groups to express themselves, other, more criminally-inclined members have diversified their activities by offering protection to Chinese-run brothels in Dili, entering the gambling and cock-fighting industry or increasing the reach of their extortion activities (TLAVA, 2009, 4). Occasional fighting between various gangs, MAGs and RAGs continued in 2008-2010, but at a much lower and less publicised level than in the previous years.

## **2.8. Unity, Justice and Peace?**

In the period since the violent events of February 11, 2008, Timor-Leste had for the most part remained calm. By late 2009, the vast majority of the IDPs had returned to their respective neighbourhoods of origin and the petitioners had come down from the mountains and surrendered. Gang violence had been at its lowest since the outbreak of the 2006 crisis, the calm was an uneasy one and many of the underlying problems remain unresolved (International Crisis Group, 2009, 1). The threat of renewed violence continues to hover over the island and resorting to violence to address real or perceived grievances remains an option. Returning IDPs have reported of renewed tensions as they try to reintegrate into their previous neighbourhoods again and try to regain access to livelihoods and markets (Interview, Luis Esteves, 2008; Scambray, 2009a, 3).

A minor incident on Independence Day 2009 underscored the high levels of anxiety in society, but also the importance attached to national symbols and omens. The incident itself consisted of a few brief seconds during which one of the honour guards tasked with the lowering of the national flag in front of the central Government Palace during the Independence Day celebrations accidentally let his end of the flag slip and touch the ground. According to eyewitnesses the incident led to a spontaneous, collective gasp amongst the crowd, who saw the incident as an omen of violence ahead. The wave of collective angst became so great that Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão had to issue a public statement to calm the nation's collective nerves.

Apart from highlighting levels of collective anxiety in a society which has, with brief respites, seen 35 years of violent conflict, the incident also points to two other, more fundamental dynamics at work in East Timorese society – the contestation of symbols meant to represent national unity and the inter-mingling of western-inspired political discourses with local belief systems. Judith Bovensiepen (2009, 2-3) also notes the pervasive atmosphere of fear in rural Timor-Leste, where a general sense of foreboding and fear of renewed political violence is intertwined with more traditional fears emanating from the spirit world.

The East Timorese government, together with the UN mission and international NGOs has been trying to restore a sense of stability and renewed confidence in the future of the nation. After the nadir of the 2006 crisis had passed, the Timor-Leste government began a very

visible public information campaign utilising the slogans *Unidade, Paz no Justisia* ('Unity, Peace and Justice') and '*Timor Ida Deit*' (There is only One Timor<sup>7</sup>). Visually, the campaign drew heavily on traditional cultural symbols but also national symbols such as the flag or the map of Timor-Leste.

As Tanja Hohe (2001, 78-80) and Douglas Kammen, (2009, 400, 403) have noted, the flag itself is not uncontested, as it is still seen by some as being more representative of Fretilin than of the nation. In spite of these contestations, the flag as a national symbol is often taken very seriously. Certain flags, such as the flag of the Portuguese monarchy (Hicks, 2004, 92) have been traditionally seen as having magic powers or being sacred (*lulik*) and the debates about the flag are reflections of the debate over the identity of the nation, over the role of tradition, modernity, and the Catholic Church (Kammen, 2009, 393-403).

The slogans of 'Unity, Peace and Justice' and 'There is only One Timor,' aiming to draw upon a sense of national identity and unity of purpose, throw up a range of questions itself. Nuno Canas Mendes (2009, 19) argues that in the case of Timor-Leste, there is a

*'[...] historical scenario, in which cultural roots are juxtaposed by colonial influences (Portuguese and Indonesian) and by the UN international administration. These structures and forces led to the formation of nationalism and to the willing of building a State and a national identity.'*

In an article based on my impressions from my field research published in 2008, I noted how seriously East Timorese tended to take these slogans, seeing them as necessary ways out of the crisis. However,

*'[...] the widespread support, regardless of geographical, class or political background, for 'One Timor (Leste)' and for 'Unity' also serve to contradict the argument which is still occasionally heard that the country is essentially divided into two quasi-ethnic blocs, 'East' vs. 'West.' While the loro monu vs. loro sa'e issue can not be discounted as being completely irrelevant (even though it has almost*

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<sup>7</sup> This was taken to refer only to the eastern part of the island of Timor, i.e. Timor-Leste. At no point did any parties see this to mean an incorporation of Indonesian West Timor into a 'greater Timor.' The 'imagined community' of the nation of Timor-Leste, to use Benedict Anderson's term, ended at the 1916 colonial border between what was then Portuguese Timor and the Dutch East Indies.

*completely disappeared from the East Timorese political discourse), the overarching, defining but rather vague identity is that of 'Timorese-ness,' of belonging to one nation. It was the implicit questioning of the 'real Timorese-ness' of the westerners which fanned the flames of the 'east/west' conflict last year, not the existence of a *loro monu* or *loro sa'e* identity that was stronger than the Timorese identity and challenging the sense of belonging to the nation.*

*The east/west-issue therefore also highlights the whole problem with Justice, Unity and Peace. The slogan is one which more or less anyone can accept. The question however is who defines what justice, national unity and peace mean. What is the justice that people are calling for? And for whom? On whose terms? Is it economic and social justice? An end to impunity? Revenge and payback? Reconciliation? A forgive-and-forget approach?*

*The issue of national unity is no less tricky. [...] Though Timor-Leste is a small nation, it has a wide variety of differences, be they ethno-linguistic, economic, regional or class differences. An acceptance of this variety and plurality, of the creole nature of much of the culture, of a history of interaction with various outside forces and of still existing local traditions could perhaps be a more fruitful approach than a narrow neo-traditionalism.' (Myrntinen, 2008b)*

Elizabeth Traube (2007, 18) has argued that national independence did not fulfil the millenarian dreams of many East Timorese, who 'drew on a more widespread expectation that [the achievement of] nationhood would usher in a general utopian transformation.' Likewise, Kammen (2009, 391, 408) argues that for the urban, political elite, the 2006 crisis and its aftermath

*'[...] have revealed Dili's failure to be the site of modernity and rationality. [...] For many educated people today, the sociological distance between Dili and Colimau or Cacavem is far greater than that between Dili and Jakarta, Sydney or Lisbon.'*

Though at the time of writing in mid-2010, Timor-Leste has found an uneasy calm, national unity, sustainable peace and justice remain elusive. Whether they are attainable or necessarily desirable in the narrow ways in which they often tend to be framed will need to be debated by

East Timorese society in the upcoming years. Traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms such as the ones advocated by Trindade and Castro (2007) can and have played a role in resolving some of the multiple conflicts which affect East Timorese society. However, given the societal complexities of post-colonial, post-conflict Timor-Leste, other solutions will also need to be explored

## **2.9. Conclusions**

In this Chapter I have outlined in brief the historical trajectory of Timor-Leste, covering the before and during the period of Portuguese colonial rule; the brutal intermezzo of Japanese occupation during the Second World War; the dramatic period of de-colonisation, civil war, declaration of independence and Indonesian invasion in 1974-1975; the years of Indonesian occupation and East Timorese resistance; the 1999 independence referendum and militia violence; UN interregnum and independence as well as the unstable post-independence years. These events have all shaped East Timorese society into what it is today and echo in different ways. The long history of violence has reshaped society, left a legacy of lingering conflicts and led to a normalisation of violence as a legitimate tool for addressing grievances. The historical experiences have also shaped the expectations placed on gender roles in society and culture.

### **3. The social, cultural and economic setting of Timor-Leste**

Understanding the social, cultural, religious and economic setting is essential to examining how gender roles are enacted, none the more so in post-colonial and post-conflict settings as in Timor-Leste. The enactments of masculinities within the militias, gangs, martial arts groups and ritual arts groups and the violence of the conflicts they were involved in need to be seen in this context. The current social, economic and cultural environment in which East Timorese live their lives is of course no fixed entity but has been formed by various, sometimes contradictory elements of traditional culture, the long-term impacts of colonisation, occupation and resistance, modernisation and foreign intervention.

Considering the relatively small size of its population and the relatively small area of the country, East Timorese society is fascinatingly diverse, yet at the same time tied together by many commonalities, not least a shared history of conflict which has shaped the way the nation sees itself. In this Chapter, I will briefly outline the state of Timor-Leste's society and economy at the time of writing in mid-2009, giving special focus to the capital city, Dili, as it was the focus of most of my fieldwork. In the latter part of the chapter, I will examine the role of violent conflict in East Timorese society and traditional methods of conflict resolution.

#### **3.1. Overview of East Timorese society**

Timor-Leste covers an area of 14 610 square kilometres, sub-divided into 13 districts. At the time of writing, it has a population of approximately 1.2 million people, around 570 000 of whom are under 18 years of age. The population that is rapidly growing thanks to a fertility rate which ranks amongst the world's highest with an average of 7.7 children per woman, and the population is projected to double by 2025 (UNICEF, 2007; UN, 2006a). Most of the population lives in rural areas, with only around 8 per cent living in urban areas, though economically motivated migration to urban areas such as the capital Dili and district capitals is increasing (UNESCAP, 2006, 51).



### 3.1.1. Ethno-linguistic groups

Though Portuguese is the official language, it is only about 5-10 per cent of the population are currently fluent speakers of the language. These are mainly members of the older generations who had learned it during the Portuguese colonial occupation, as well as those who spent the Indonesian occupation years in exile in Portuguese-speaking countries such as Angola, Mozambique and Portugal. Increasingly, however, younger school children are learning the language in elementary school. Beyond the classrooms and the sphere of official business (e.g. government business, interaction with lusophone UN staff, the judicial system), Portuguese is almost completely absent as a daily language of communication between East Timorese themselves.

The main (and national) language is Tetum<sup>8</sup> (also spelled Tetun), spoken by about 40 per cent of the population. Depending on the counting method used, a total of some 16 local languages are spoken in the country (see Map 2). These include both Malay and Austronesian languages. Furthermore, Indonesian is spoken by a large majority of the population, though its use amongst the younger generations is diminishing. Elementary education is in Portuguese but secondary and tertiary education tend to be in Indonesian as most of the teaching staff were trained in the Indonesian education system and most text books are still in Indonesian. In my experience from working in Timor-Leste, the Indonesian language was often used in situations where more abstract issues were being discussed, as the relevant terminology had usually been learned in the Indonesian education system and the necessary words may not have existed in the local vernacular. Tetum, for example, has been augmented by numerous neologisms, mostly borrowed from Portuguese, since becoming an administrative language in 1999 to cover concepts for which the language did not have words in the past. Indonesian popular culture, especially music and television programmes, remains highly popular in the country (Sloman, 2009).

In addition to the various Timorese ethnic groups, there are several other minority groups in Timor-Leste, including people of Chinese and Arab descent. Since 1999 there has also been a fluctuating but comparatively large presence of foreign nationals (*malae* in Tetum) working with the various UN missions and international agencies in Timor-Leste, mostly centred in Dili. In addition, there has been a limited amount of economically-motivated migration to Timor-Leste from other Asian countries, especially Indonesia, the Philippines and PR China.

### 3.1.2. Religion and tradition

The population of Timor-Leste is predominantly Roman Catholic (93.5 per cent), with small Protestant and Muslim minorities. Although the Catholic faith was originally introduced to Timor by Portuguese missionaries in the 1500s, the Portuguese colonial administration did not make a concerted effort to convert Timorese to Catholicism, and by the end of the Portuguese period only around a third of the population was Catholic. It was, somewhat

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<sup>8</sup> Tetum is divided into four dialects spoken in both West Timor and Timor-Leste, Tetum-Belu which is spoken on both sides of the border in the region around Atambua (West Timor) and Batugade (Timor-Leste), Tetum-Terik which is spoken on both sides of the border on the southern coast around Suai, Nana'ek spoken in Metinaro and the Dili-area dialect of Tetum-Praça, a creole language which has now become the official Tetum. Of the 442 registered villages of Timor-Leste surveyed in 2001, only 72 considered Tetum-Praça to be their main language of communication and a further 20 chose Tetum-Terik and one Tetum-Belu (Durand, 2006, 95)

ironically given the role played by the Church in supporting the independence movement, Indonesian rule which did most to promote Catholicism. This was due to a number of factors, above all the Indonesian legal stipulation whereby all citizens are required to sign up to one of the officially recognised religions. Furthermore, the Catholic Church in Timor-Leste was able to gain the important concession from the Indonesian authorities that mass could be held in Tetum rather than in Indonesian. The Church was an important source of moral support, identity and refuge (both spiritually and often physically) for many East Timorese during the years of occupation and struggle. Reflecting the Portuguese roots of Timorese Catholicism, the two most commonly venerated figures are Saint Anthony (*Santo António de Lisboa*)<sup>9</sup> and Our Lady of Fatima (*Nossa Senhora de Fátima*) (Cristalis and Scott, 2005, 59-72).<sup>10</sup>

The Catholic Church in Timor-Leste tends to be socially very conservative, taking strong positions on issues such as reproductive health, abortion, homosexuality, contraception and sexuality in general. The Church's views are both socially and politically very influential, often guiding government policy on these matters. Prominent members of the clergy were also instrumental in mobilising opposition to the Fretilin government of Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri in 2005 due to plans to make religious education no longer a mandatory subject in schools. Some of the slurs aimed against Alkatiri, who is from a Timorese family of Yemeni descent, were racially motivated, labelling him a 'Muslim Communist' (Interview, Alex Grainger, 2008).

Animist influences and rituals linked to ancestral worship, often mixed in with Roman Catholic influences, also continue to be widespread and form an important part of East Timorese spiritual cosmology, leading the Catholic Bishop of Baucau, Dom Basilio do Nascimento to quip in the post-independence years that while he was satisfied with the quantity of believers in Timor-Leste, the quality of their Catholicism left room for improvement (quoted Cristalis and Scott, 2003, 59). For most East Timorese, though, there is little contradiction between Catholicism and ancestral worship and adhering to traditional belief systems.

Belief in sorcery and witchcraft is also widespread, with occasional cases of witch-burnings taking place, such as in the town of Liquiça in 2007. The use of amulets and the belief in the

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<sup>9</sup> He is for example the patron saint of the East Timorese police force, PNTL

<sup>10</sup> *Santo António* was also chosen as the name of one of the more prominent clandestine groups, which included future militia commander Eurico Guterres.

spiritual power of sacred (*lulik*) objects is very common (Bovensiepen, 2009, 3-6; Nugroho, 2009). A number of clandestine resistance groups such as the Santo António group, veterans' organisations like Sagrada Familia or RAGs such as 7-7, KORK or Colimau 2000 also actively combine Catholic elements with animist beliefs (see also Loch, 2007; Kammen, 2009, 400-403; Traube, 2007).

Figure 4. Cemetery in Maubisse (Henri Myrntinen, 2002)



A central element in traditional Timorese thought is that of 'belonging to a house,' i.e. tracing one's lineage to a particular clan, the spiritual centre of which is symbolised by a sacred house (*uma lulik*). The design of the wooden, thatched-roof houses on stilts changes depending on the region but central elements are carved, symbolic ornaments on the roof in the form of stylised water-buffalo horns (*lakasoru*), the central 'male' and 'female' pillars (*ai-riin mane* and *ai-riin feto*, respectively) which play important roles in annual ceremonies in honour of the ancestors, a central hearth where ceremonial meals are cooked and taken with the spirits of the ancestors as well as sacred objects of the clan, such as sacred swords, flags, *tais*-fabrics, silver and gold ceremonial shields and jewellery. Traditional ceremonies carried out in the *uma lulik* tend to be marked by strong dualisms, which are often gendered (Loch, 2007, 184-185). The reconstruction of *uma lulik* destroyed during the Indonesian occupation has played

an important role in also symbolically re-constructing the unity of the nation and social peace by re-establishing cosmic harmony by appeasing ancestral spirits (Trindade and Castro, 2007).

Both the Catholic Church and traditional East Timorese beliefs are influential in forming gender role expectations as well as defining the degree of social acceptance of violence, of conflict resolution and reconciliation. Though religion and tradition are influential, however, they are not the exclusive sources that give meaning to peoples' lives in Timor-Leste nor are they free from internal contradictions. It would for example not be unheard of for a young, Indonesian-educated East Timorese woman to combine a belief in a rigid gender dualism based on tradition with Fretilin's socialist-inspired rhetoric of gender equality, conservative views on reproductive rights espoused by the Catholic Church and an urbanised lifestyle.

### 3.1.3. Social structure

East Timorese society tends still to relatively strongly and hierarchically stratified, with the general category of the '*ema bo'ot*' (literally 'big people') at the top of the social pyramid. Given the long history of interaction with Arab, Chinese, Dutch, Malay and Portuguese traders, clergy and administrators (the last two referring mainly to the European powers), colonial Timorese social structure was also influenced by these outside forces as well. Intermarriages, alliances, forced labour and rule-by-proxy through *liurais* appointed by the colonial masters and Christianisation campaigns all served to keep the traditional power structures in flux to a degree, though considering the 450 years of nominal Portuguese rule over the territory, their footprint remained surprisingly light. Indonesian rule, which opened the territory to modernisation, also imposed its own, highly militarised administrative structure, a structure which was partially open to East Timorese as well.

The traditional social strata in Timor-Leste were somewhat different depending on the ethno-linguistic and regional group, but in general consisted of nobility, commoners and slaves/servants. To give a simplified version of traditional Timorese society, the highest level of society was occupied by the *liurai*, the traditional political ruling class, the power of which runs along family lines and which are at times seen to have supernatural powers. Next to the *liurais* were the spiritual leaders, the *matan do'ok* (traditional healers and seers) and *lia-na'in* (ritual experts) and the more general category of *katuas*, respected older men. Lower down

were the lesser nobility (*dato*) and commoners, *ema rai*. The lowest categories were the *atan* (slaves/servants) and *lutun* (cattle keepers). The slaves were often people captured in raids and war (Hill, 2002, 2, Kammen, 2003, 74-76, Schlicher, 1996, 87-89).

Furthermore, in Portuguese Timor the racial politics of the colonial administration created other categories of differentiation. The 1930 Colonial Act gave different rights and responsibilities depending on the 'racial' status of an individual. The lowest caste was that of the *indígenas* (native population), followed (in ascending order according to the racist precepts of the day) by *assimilados* ('assimilated' natives), *mestiços* (creole Timorese) and *brancos* (whites). Other ethnic minorities, i.e. the African, Arab and Chinese minorities had special status. The various categories had different access to education and to political power, with the 'native' population practically completely disenfranchised and with no access to education and the 'white' population enjoying full privileges (Hill, 2002, 13-15).

Indonesian occupation brought with it new, but limited social and political possibilities for East Timorese, as for the first time administrative positions up to the post of provincial governor were opened up. Other influential posts were those of *bupati* (district head) and *camat* (sub-district head) but also posts in the influential Indonesian security forces. With independence, naturally, East Timorese have now gained full access to all levels of administration.

As Kammen (2003, 76) points out, the class divisions of traditional society still reverberate in East Timorese society in the post-independence years. The positions into which the Portuguese colonial power and Indonesian occupation authorities elevated East Timorese also continue to bestow legitimacy or carry the stigma of co-optation and co-operation, leading to local level power struggles (Bovensiepen, 2008, 32-34).

### **3.2. Socio-economic setting**

On the eve of regaining its independence on May 20, 2002, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) declared Asia's newest nation as also being the region's poorest, and it remained in this position at the time of writing (UNDP, 2007).

Unemployment is high and the population is young – 43.5 per cent of the East Timorese population was less than 15 years old and 75 per cent are under 30 years of age in 2006 (Wigglesworth, 2007, 52). As in many similar developing countries, the definition of what constitutes un- or underemployment tends to be a difficult one given the important roles played by seasonal labour or work in what is termed the ‘informal’ economy (see also Table 1 below).

A majority of the population lives as small-scale subsistence farmers. The only export crop of any real significance is coffee which is cultivated in the highlands. Average landholdings are small, with the size of the average farm being 1.2 hectares. Main agricultural crops are maize and rice, grown by 81 per cent and 23 per cent of the farming population, respectively. Average incomes are mostly below the internationally used poverty line of less than a U.S. dollar a day. According to the national census of 2004, 54.2 per cent of the population is illiterate, though the UNDP places the figure at a slightly lower 49.9 per cent. School attendance is especially low in rural areas and especially for girls, who on average receive 1.5 years less schooling than their male counterparts (UNDP, 2006).

With one of the world’s highest birth rates of 7.7 children per woman, the population is expected to double to over 2 million by the year 2025 (UN, 2006a). Women tend to marry and have children at a young age, with the average age dropping according to a 2003 survey of the Ministry of Health. The median age for a Timorese woman to have her first child is 20 years but this tends to be lower in rural areas. About one third of all Timorese women have a child every year between the ages of 16 and 20 years (Ministériu Saúde, 2003, 48). Men tend to marry later and according to Ostergaard (2005, 35) by the age of 25 more than twice as women as men are married. Maternal health, however, remains a major problem and death at childbirth is not uncommon.

Given the conflicting and powerful outside influences of the past three decades, many traditional notions have been diluted or disappeared altogether, while others have proven more resistant to change. In traditional East Timorese society during the long Portuguese colonial period (see for example, Hicks, 2004, 77-81), gender roles were strictly circumscribed with men given more political, economic and social clout than women.

What is visible in Timor-Leste in addition to the general tendency of subsistence agricultural societies to have a high birth rate is a pervasive sense of maternalism, i.e. the perception that women's main role in society tends to be seen as that of child-bearers and –rearers, and as such is also often a source of female honour and status. The high birth rate is also at times seen as a way to compensate for the losses of the nation during the Indonesian occupation. The celebration of maternalism is also supported to a great extent by the highly influential Catholic Church, which is opposed to all forms of contraception and family planning. In addition to religious and ideological pressures, family planning also suffers from a negative image due to experiences during the Indonesian occupation, when family planning and contraception methods were enforced with the aid of the military.

**Table 1: Key demographic and socio-economic data (UNDP, 2006, 2007)**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Total</b>
Population			923 198
Life expectancy (years)	60.5	58.9	
Percentage of population under 15			43.2
Estimated earned income (nominal USD)	126	621	
Literacy rate (%)	43.9	56.3	50.1
Mean years of schooling	3.4	4.9	
Unemployment rate (% of total labour force)	5.4	8.3	
Youth unemployment rate (% of total labour force)	19.4	26.4	

### **3.3. Dili – from a colonial backwater to a semi-urban sprawl**

Ever since the capital was moved to Dili (Map 3) by the Portuguese colonial administration in 1769, the city has functioned as the territory's administrative and economic centre under the subsequent Portuguese, Japanese, Indonesian, United Nations and Timorese administrations. The city (see Map 2) is divided into several *bairros* which tend to become increasingly village-like with increasing distance from the colonial-age buildings lining the city centre's sea front. At the time of writing, the city had a rapidly growing population of around 212 000 inhabitants (Direcção Nacional de Estatística, 2008, 12).

While the city centre has seen an increasing amount of urban development, such as the refurbishing of colonial-era administrative buildings and construction of new administrative buildings, much of the rest of the city tends to have a ramshackle appearance. Burnt-out shells of houses destroyed in the militia violence of 1999 and the communal violence of 2006 continue to line the streets. Basic services such as running water, electricity and waste management are often lacking. Food security is often ensured through backyard market gardens and the keeping of chickens and pigs which often roam the city streets.

Though it had been the Portuguese administrative capital for 158 years at the time, the urbanised area in Dili was in 1927 only a thin stretch perhaps 1.5 kilometres long and at best several blocks of houses deep, set along the beachfront close to the Palacio de Gobierno. By 1950, the urbanised area covered an area of perhaps 2.5 kilometres by two kilometres, and by 1964 the population of the city was a mere 7 000 inhabitants (Teague, 1964, 117). The real period of urban and peri-urban expansion came between 1966 and 1990, and especially during the Indonesian occupation, when the area of the city doubled. During this period, traditional houses were replaced by concrete houses and more informal structures of corrugated iron and wood (Durand, 2006, 114).



Much of the city was destroyed during the last wave of militia and Indonesian military violence in September 1999. At the time of the research, the damages from 1999 had not yet been fully rebuilt, especially in the outer sectors of the city. A new wave of house-burnings and destruction has accompanied the *krize* (crisis) which has gripped the nation in April-May 2006. While the aftermath of the 1999 militia violence brought an influx of new migrants to the city, the 2006 crisis has in part had the opposite effect, with some residents at least temporarily seeking refuge in quieter parts of the country.

The main economic centres of the city are around the port area, the administrative centre and what could be termed the ‘central business district.’ There is little in the way of industry in the city apart from small repair workshops, construction companies and several logistics centres, as Dili is the main port in the country and has the only international airport. Many of the commercial interests in Dili are in the hands of foreign nationals (including Australians, Chinese, Indonesians, Portuguese and Singaporeans) and, traditionally, also in the hands of members of the Chinese-Timorese minority. While the foreign *malae* and the better-off Timorese shop in the air-conditioned supermarkets and smaller shops, most inhabitants of Dili procure their goods from the numerous outdoor markets, which have become occasional flash-points for fighting between rival groups. Beyond the commercial and administrative centre, the city has a largely peri-urban character, with small gardens, orchards and banana groves mixing with very simple housing structures. It is not uncommon for the residents to keep chickens and pigs in their backyards and allowing these to roam freely in the streets.

The city currently has a population of approximately 150 000 – 200 000 inhabitants. At the time of my primary field research in 2007 approximately 30 000-50 000 were living in IDP camps in Dili and in nearby Hera and Metinaro following the outbreak of violence in April-May 2006. Another 50 000 – 70 000 were living as IDPs in other parts of the country, though these were not necessarily all from Dili (OCHA, 2007). It was the peri-urban fringe and the IDP camps which were the focal points of much of the fighting between the various groups of gangs, MAGs and RAGs.

### 3.3.1. The *Bairos* – The peri-urban fringe

Much of the fighting between the rival gangs and other groups has been mainly concentrated in the poorer parts of town, especially at the western end of the city, such as in Bairro Pite,

Comoro, Delta, Pantai Kelapa and Fatuhada (see Map 2). Becora, at the south-eastern end of the city, has traditionally been a tense area but has remained mostly calm during most of the 2006/2007 crisis. One of the most highly contested ‘prizes’ in the initial struggles between the various groups in April-June 2006 were the relatively modern real estate development schemes (*perumahan*) erected for civil servants and their families during the Indonesian occupation in Delta and Bairo Pite (Interviews, Francisco da Costa, Antonio da Silva and José Trindade, 2007).

The economy of these urban or peri-/semi-urban areas tend to be characterised by what is often referred to as the ‘informal’ sector, though many inhabitants do commute to work to other parts of the city for more ‘formal’ employment. Unemployment tends, however, to be high and demographically there is a bias towards younger generations. The walls of the *bairos* of Dili are covered with slogans and graffiti, often referring to various gangs (thus acting as territorial markers) and often with a derogatory, anti-‘easterner’ messages from the time of the 2006 crisis.

Many of the inhabitants of these peri-urban areas are first- or second generation migrants to the city and the new migrants tend to move into areas where previous migrants hailing from the same region have settled, leading to a degree to a reproduction of village-level networks of support and loyalty in the city (Scambray, 2009a). Increased migration to Dili from rural areas has been quoted by several East Timorese and international observers as being a key factor in leading to unstable, unsettled (in a dual sense) neighbourhoods which lack the social cohesion of older urban communities, thus becoming more susceptible to social phenomena such as gang violence (see for example Prüller, 2008; Streicher, 2008). Ben Moxham (2008, 19) notes that ‘those seeking opportunity in Dili were increasingly faced with acutely unequal and stagnant employment markets, a housing squeeze, unaffordable basic commodities and exposure to the volatile global rice market.’

One aspect of life in Dili which is often striking and which grew even more pronounced during the political crisis is the extreme locality and lack of mobility in most city-dwellers lives. Especially for the socio-economically less well-off citizens living in the *bairos*, much of their life tends to take place within a radius of perhaps a few hundred metres. This is due to both to imposed restrictions, such as lack of modes of transportation and the prohibitive cost of taxis, but also due to self-imposed limitations engendered by the prevailing climate of

diffuse fear ever since the outbreak of the crisis. Especially women's mobility has been reduced by the crisis (Myrttinen, 2008b).

### 3.3.2. The IDP camps

A defining feature of life in Dili during the period of my field research was the presence of the IDP camps around Dili, a constant reminder of the impacts of the 2006 crisis. The crisis had thus produced a number of communities which were highly volatile, highly concentrated and highly politicised (in the general sense of the word). Some of the most volatile of these camps also happened to be located in some of the most vulnerable strategic points of the country: at the international airport, at the main port and the heart of the government district, opposite the UN headquarters and straddling the country's main road next to the major army base in Metinaro. The last of the camps was closed in late 2009.

*Figure 5. A scene from the Airport IDP Camp (Henri Myrttinen, 2006)*



Official figures at the time of my field research in 2006-2007 put the number of IDPs at approximately 100 000, though some people I interviewed, both nationals and internationals, suspected that this number might be inflated by people seeking to benefit from the aid given to the IDPs. During the course of 2008-2009, both the East Timorese government and international aid agencies were able to persuade several thousand IDPs to return home, due to the improved security situation, through relocation packages and in some cases pressure (International Crisis Group, 2009, 3). By late 2009, all IDP camps had been disbanded and the inhabitants have mostly returned to their communities, but up to 45 per cent of returnees reported having experienced renewed conflict upon their return to their communities (Scambary, 2009a, 3).

Tensions in the camps were often inflamed by party political differences and mutual distrust between the IDPs and the surrounding population, gang rivalries, personal conflicts and the daily stress of protracted camp life. During the approximately two-and-a-half years of their existence, the IDP camps had started developing into small communities of their own, with their own shops, markets, supply lines, social hierarchies, sometimes even *warungs* (street-side kitchen/food stall) selling food. Those with steady jobs commuted to work from the camps while others sought to find temporary jobs in the more informal sectors of the economy. There was a relatively high degree of interaction between the major camps in Dili with IDPs, especially young men, shuttling between various camps. There were rumours going around that some of these camps would in fact be turned into permanent settlements.

As the camps became more established, they became incubators for political activity. The daily circumstances of the lives of the IDPs were a constant reminder of the fact that the 2006 crisis has not been resolved. In spite of the visible presence of Fretilin flags at the time of the main field research, no one party seems to have been able to unite this politicised populace under its banner. The major, temporary unifying factor was often a perceived common outside 'enemy' that is seen as a threat to the IDPs in general, such as the international peacekeeping forces in cases where IDPs have been shot or governmental and international agencies which are not seen as delivering aid fast enough.

### 3.3.3. Locating violence and poverty

As Goddard (2005, 19-22) points out in the case of the Papua New Guinea capital city of Port Moresby, the local and international media, public opinion, government authorities and researchers often have a tendency to link gang violence with life in the settlements. The same can be said for Dili during the time of my field research. In the public discourse, the violence was located in the ‘hot spots’ of the poorer neighbourhoods such as Bairo Pite, Becora, Fatuhada, Delta, Comoro or the IDP camps, with the ‘Airport Camp’ gaining the most notoriety at the time of my field research. It was difficult if not impossible for example to convince taxi drivers to drive to some of the neighbourhoods in the daytime – and no taxis ventured out at night.

In 1999, many Timorese I spoke to tended to dismiss members of the militias as either being non-Timorese or as being from the lowest classes of society. A similar sentiment is evident today with respect to the gang violence in Dili. As the web blog Return to Rai Ketak (2006) records it:

*‘The Timorese diaspora, or educated class with good jobs here in Dili, tend to blame the ema beik, the stupid people who have come from the districts and live in these shitty peripheral neighbourhoods in Dili. Why do they resort to violence? They are ignorant. Beik.’*

Less pejoratively, numerous East Timorese NGO respondents in the background interviews to this thesis also pointed to rapid urbanisation as a key cause for the violence, as was also the case in the analyses carried out by Prüller (2008) and Streicher (2008). What is interesting is that these respondents were by and large educated people from middle class backgrounds rather than the residents of the poorer areas who raised this as a contributing factor. Residents of the poorer areas, including members of the gangs, MAGs and RAGs, on the other hand, tended to try and cast their neighbourhood in a good light, countering claims of the areas’ purported instability and violence (see also Grenfell et al., 2009, 78-79).

Figure 6. *Life in the bairios of Dili bears the scars of previous conflicts (Henri Myrntinen, 2006)*



The gang violence has thus led to a stigmatisation of the poorer areas of Dili as being ‘hotbeds’ of criminal activities and their inhabitants as being inherently prone to crime and violence. These neighbourhoods have also therefore been targeted by occasional and often heavy-handed crackdowns by the security forces. Most residents of the ‘problem areas’ are, however, not involved in criminal activities and seek, where and when possible, to find regular employment, and are more often the victims rather than the perpetrators of criminal activities.

Ben Moxham (2008, 2) sees the *bairios* both as a site of integration and disintegration, that

*‘rather than Dili driving state-making through a process of [...] ‘internal integration’, it housed it the failures to do so, where economic disintegration and political and violent challenges to the state were profoundly urban.’*

Douglas Kammen (2009, 391) has similarly argued that for the East Timorese political elite, the crisis ‘revealed Dili’s failure to be the site of modernity and rationality’ which they had expected would arrive after independence.

### **3.4. Conflicts and conflict resolution in East Timorese society**

In a summary of one of my visits to Timor-Leste written for and published by a German NGO (Myrntinen, 2008b), I likened the situation in the country to a kaleidoscope of conflicts:

*‘Like the pieces in a kaleidoscope, the conflicts in Timor-Leste come in a range of various shapes and sizes. Some are bright and visible, others remain hidden from view. They overlap, link and lock into each other, they are reflected in each other, and with every turn of events, the shape, form, size and colour of the overall pattern produced changes.*

*I chose to use the kaleidoscope metaphor in order to try and visualise for myself the dynamics of the numerous conflicts and their permutations in this country. The different types of conflicts (e.g. political conflicts, land rights and other socio-economic conflicts, communal conflicts, gang fighting) are interlinked in various ways, some rise to temporary prominence while others simmer below the surface. Local conflicts are reflected in national level conflicts and vice-versa, conflicts change shape and form, adversaries become allies and allies become adversaries.’*  
(Myrntinen, 2008b)

The UN Commission of Inquiry investigating the events between January – July 2006 puts it rather more bluntly:

*‘Both the Portuguese and Indonesian eras created and subsumed internal divisions within Timor-Leste. Political competition within Timor-Leste has been historically settled through violence.’* (UN, 2006b, 16)

Though this assessment does not take into account many of the non-violent means by which political differences have been and are settled in Timor-Leste, there is a kernel of truth to the statement.

### 3.4.1. Violent conflict

East Timorese society has been deeply impacted by a history of violent conflict. It is important to see the conflicts in Timor-Leste as not taking place in a vacuum, as the various levels and types of conflict often flow into each other. Personal animosities can flow into communal conflicts which in turn may change into political conflicts. Given the relatively small size of East Timorese society and the often intricate webs of competing loyalties (e.g. to the family/clan, ethnic group, political party or other group identity), these webs of conflicts are often difficult to untangle and also often characterised by very personal and acrimonious animosities – and sudden, new alliances between former enemies.

Conflict was not unknown to Portuguese Timor and many of the historical tracts written by Europeans on Timor place a heavy stress on the ‘warlike nature’ and ‘perpetual conflict’ of Timorese society (e.g. de Castro, 1864, 402-404; Fiedler, 1929, 49-50; Lalau, 1912, 649; Studer, 1878, 240). One needs to keep in mind that many of the available sources describing ‘traditional’ Timorese warfare, just as most available sources on pre-colonial and colonial Timorese culture are from European colonial officials, traders and missionaries. A common feature tends to be a disdainful attitude towards ‘the savages’ or ‘heathens’ and their culture including that of the local way of conducting warfare. Few of these authors immersed themselves into the local cultures in the sense of modern ethnographers, and instead many accounts are embellishments based on hearsay or copied from other sources.

With these caveats in mind, the historical sources can however reveal information about the local cultures as seen through the colonial gaze. As Gunn (1999 and 2000) summarises, Timorese society during the colonial era was apparently characterised by almost continuous small-scale warfare. Much of this was internecine while, on occasion, the violence would be directed against the colonial masters, be it the Dutch (in West Timor), the Japanese or the Portuguese.

#### *Traditional Timorese warfare*

The style of warfare described by the colonial sources is not dissimilar to the Melanesian warfare described elsewhere in the region (Knauff, 1990, 256). According to visiting

naturalist Henry Forbes (1886, 150-152), warfare was preceded by rituals in which support of the ancestral spirits for the cause at hand was summoned by slaughtering a water buffalo on a sacred rock, after which each warrior brought a chicken which was to be slaughtered. If the chicken raised its left leg, the warrior would be obliged to stay back to protect the village, if the right leg was raised, the warrior would go to war. Warriors would commonly wear protective amulets (*taranga*) and use magic potions (*biru*) which could be administered by *matan do'ok* or *lia-na'in* or, in later times, by priests, Falintil commanders or gang leaders (Loch, 2007, 210-211, Nugroho, 2009)

The most detailed description of Timorese warfare comes from the Portuguese governor Affonso de Castro (1864, 402-404) and his description has been copied by other colonial sources who did not witness warfare first hand. In de Castro's description, the key elements of traditional Timorese warfare were fighting at long-distance and in irregular formations, often employing hit-and-run tactics rather than pitched battles on open fields. A stress was placed on spectacle, with ceremonies taking place before and after the battle and on the battlefield, often involving a noisy stand-off at a safe distance between the two opposing groups. At the end of the battle, the victorious party would burn the vanquished opponents' houses and steal the cattle and other livestock. Male members of the vanquished party were apparently killed and female members and children taken as slaves.

European ethnographers at the time took a special interest in head-hunting in the region in general, Timor-Leste included. While ritual head-hunting was indeed part of traditional Timorese warfare, the scale of it is difficult to gauge. It does however seem that the cutting off of heads (or, more precisely, of *a* head) was the culminating point of a battle and once one head had been captured the victorious party retreated. The successful warriors would be welcomed home as heroes, as *asuwain*. The vanquished party would, on occasion, wait for years or even decades for an opportune moment to take revenge on the victorious party. According to Fox (2006, 177), 'headhunting was ritually organised and linked to ceremonies of harvest increase' and was later incorporated by the Portuguese colonial administration as part and parcel of the punitive expeditions carried out by their Timorese proxy militias or *moradores*. In these punitive expeditions, however, many more heads were collected than in traditional raids, often at the behest of colonial administrators (see also Gunn, 1999 and 2000).

The traditional Timorese style of warfare, ridiculed by European colonial observers for its apparent ‘inefficiency,’<sup>11</sup> had its own code of honour and self-imposed limitations to the violence. While ambushes, looting and taking of slaves were acceptable, there is no evidence of large-scale massacres apart from when Timorese troops were recruited by Dutch or Portuguese colonial forces, and later by the Japanese occupation forces, as proxy forces for punitive operations. Instead, casualties were kept to a minimum and warfare highly ritualised, with a high degree of emphasis on the role of magic and spectacle.

*Figure 7. The Timorese Warrior in the national imagination. Statue of Dom Boaventura, Same. (Henri Myrntinen, 2007)*



### *Fear and rumour*

In describing Melanesian warfare, Bruce Knauft (1999, 144) also points to two factors affecting violent conflict which also play a major role in Timor-Leste – fear and rumour:

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<sup>11</sup> These disparaging comments were made at a time when European powers were industrialising warfare to an unprecedented degree, enabling battles such as the indecisive Battle of the Somme in 1916 with close to 1.5 million casualties. In the eyes of these European colonial observers the mass slaughter in the trenches of the Western Front was apparently a far more mature and logical way of conducting warfare than ending a battle after one person had died.

*'Many accounts of New Guinea warfare [...] suggest armed conflict was initiated not so much from a positive drive to seek prestige or reward but from fear of attack - a pre-emptive raid was preferable to a defensive response. Indeed, a key obstacle to controlling highlands warfare has been the difficulty of combating rumour and suspicion; each side is encouraged to preparedness and action in the belief that the other side may suddenly attack.'*

These two aspects are nowadays amplified in Timor-Leste by a pervasive atmosphere of fear which is in part a product of the country's violent history and the spreading of rumours via telephone text messaging. The role of rumour in conflict is also noted upon by Cynthia Brady and David Timberman (2006) as well as Sara Gonzalez Devant (2008). In analysing root causes for the 2006 crisis, Brady and Timberman (2006, 10-11) conclude that

*'In Timor-Leste there is a striking absence of consistent, reliable and accurate information. Partially as a legacy of the resistance period as well as due to the tribal/clan-based nature of the society, there has been a strong reliance on informal communication networks. This has resulted in a tendency to only trust information passed through personal contacts. [...] Moreover, because of the combination of poor communications infrastructure, high illiteracy, and language complications, access to information is extremely limited, especially outside of Dili. This has led to pervasive misinformation and a rife rumour mill throughout the country.'*

In analysing the impacts of this 'rumour mill' on conflict and displacement in Timor-Leste, Gonzales Devant (2008, 16) points out that

*'The relationship between rumour and truth becomes extremely ambiguous in the context of violent conflict. The causal chain between an event and knowledge of the event is distorted. In their anticipatory form, rumours are indicative of potential paths of signification in relation to events that have not yet, but may still occur.'*

The public reaction to the rumour of violence was often out of any real proportion to any actual violence that had happened but was able to trigger both fear and retribution (Mendes, 2007). Rumours of violent events, spread rapidly by telephone text messages, can therefore

turn into self-fulfilling prophecies as well as leading to ‘anticipatory displacement’ (Gonzalez Devant, 2008, 22-23) when people flee in anticipation of violent conflict rather in direct reaction to it.<sup>12</sup>

An aspect of the gang violence gripping Dili since 2006 which was often mentioned by Timorese observers as a conflict driver was that of ‘social envy’ or ‘social jealousy,’ a direct translation of the Indonesian term *keceburuan sosial*, and this was also used by some observers to explain the destruction of property by militias in 1999. ‘Social envy’ seems indeed to have played a motivating role in the violence in Dili, with the houses and other property of those who were seen as being better off going up in flames. It can also be seen as lying behind much of the ‘east/west’ discourse in Timor-Leste in which allegations of social and economic discrimination have been at the centre as well as in the fears of members of the ‘middleman minorities’<sup>13</sup> of ethnic pogroms. These anticipated racially-motivated attacks did not occur in the end in Dili, unlike in Jakarta in 1998 or a few weeks previous to the May 2006 unrest in the Solomon Islands.

The destruction of property both during the militia violence and the gang/MAG/RAG-violence can thus be seen as a kind of ‘social levelling’ in which those who are economically worse off destroy the material belongings of those better off (rather than, for example, appropriating it for themselves), bringing them down to the same level or lower than that of the attackers.

The mobilisation of local militias by exploiting and mobilising existing grievances between communities in a classic ‘divide-and-rule’ manner was successfully utilised by the Portuguese through the *moradores* in East Timor and by Dutch colonial forces in West Timor. It was also used during World War II by the Imperial Japanese Army with the *columnas negras* (Fox, 2006, 177). This pattern was then replicated in a modernised way by the Indonesian armed

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<sup>12</sup> An example of violence as self-fulfilling prophecy based on rumour is what came to be known as the ‘PNTL Massacre,’ when 9 people were killed and 27 wounded in ‘retaliation’ for a massacre that was falsely rumoured to have been perpetrated by members of the PNTL but had in fact never occurred (Interview, Pedro Rosa Mendes, 2007; UN, 2006b, 33-37).

<sup>13</sup> The term is, as far as I can tell, from Bonachich (1973, 583) referring to ethnic minorities over-represented in the running of trade and business in a given society. In the case of Timor-Leste, this would be mainly the Chinese minority, including Timorese-Chinese and more recently arrived Indonesian- and ‘mainland-Chinese.’ As the fighting increased in Dili in May 2006, both the Chinese and Indonesian embassies arranged for their nationals to be quickly evacuated in fear of these pogroms. The Philippine Embassy did the same, fearing (as I was told by a Filipina nun at the time) that Filipinos might be mistaken for Chinese or Indonesians by the gangs. For an interesting preliminary look at the history of the ‘Chinese’ (in parentheses as the overall term covers many nationalities), see Kwartanada (undated)

forces in 1998/99. The gangs, MAGs and RAGs, on the other hand, are East Timorese constructions, even though some MAGs claim to be part of international networks.

In addition to this kind of more organised warfare or public group violence there is also another kind of public violence which is not uncommon in Timor-Leste. The term *mutu rabu* is used especially in Makassae-speaking areas for outbursts of group violence, in which young men coalesce around a conflict, for example at a party or in the market place, often with alcohol involved. One provocation leads to another and soon two opposing camps have formed which get involved in a mass brawl. Often the dividing lines between the two camps are pre-determined by the networks of loyalty, be it through kinship, party political allegiances or membership in a gang, MAG or RAG. The incident triggering the polarisation and subsequent brawl may be due to existing tensions between the two opposing camps on a more general level (e.g. supporters of one party vs. supporters of the other) or be payback for a particular previous incident, be it past aggression or perceived slights (on *mutu rabu*, see Loch, 2007, 435-438).

#### 3.4.2. Traditional conflict resolution

According to James Fox (2006, 179), traditional conflict resolution methods in Timor-Leste aim to restore balance and make restitution:

*‘Major restitution generally involved an exchange of livestock or other valuables as well as the exchange of women between appropriate groups. It had little to do with an emotional change of heart, nor was it a matter of individual responsibility. It was a formal act between groups through their acknowledged representatives, who took it upon themselves to act on behalf of their group. In the past, such agreements would also involve the drinking of blood, mixed in local gin or arak, and the swearing of an oath that, if violated, brought a curse on the perpetrators and their descendants.’*

Perhaps a more common and less dramatic form of conflict resolution is the *nahe biti* or *nahe biti bo’ot* ceremony (literally ‘the stretching of the (big) mat’), based on concepts of local customary law (*adat*). This ceremony involves a ritualised process of negotiations between male community leaders (*liurai*, *katuas* or *lia-na’in*) who sit on a traditional mat made of

palm leaves and involves the ritual chewing of betel nut. In the case of a successful completion of the ceremony, the elders agree on the size and form of the compensation to be paid to the aggrieved party and seal the ending of the conflict with a formal or informal agreement, followed by a communal meal of rice, palm wine, goat, buffalo or pig (Babo-Soares, 2004, 15-17; Loch, 2007, 208-209).

The *nahe biti bo'ot* ceremony has recently been formalised as part of nation-wide conflict resolution efforts in the aftermath of the 2006 crisis, as for example in the case of a reconciliation ceremony organised in the village of Bahlara-ua'in by the Ministry of Social Solidarity in 2009 to settle a localised conflict:

*'During the dialogue, youth representatives of three martial arts groups in Suco Bahlara-ua'in were asked to come forward and sign a document agreeing not to fight each other again. At the end of the Nahe Biti Bo'ot ceremony, community representatives also signed an agreement that the conflict was over. Those who participated believe that to go against the proclaimed outcomes of a nahe biti ceremony is to anger the spirits and to bring bad luck and ill health upon the perpetrator and their family. One of the Lia Nain (keepers of the word) explained "what happened in 1975, 1999 and earlier this year is over. It has been resolved by adat (custom). Now is the time for us to move forward."' (Ministériu Solidariedade Sociál, 2009).*

Important elements of traditional conflict resolution processes are the communal aspect of the process, i.e. it is not individuals but rather communities (be it a clan, a family, a village) who are involved in the process through their representatives, and the central role played by the spiritual world in sanctioning the conflict parties.

### **3.5. Conclusions**

In this Chapter I have outlined the social and economic situation in Timor-Leste and more specifically in the capital city Dili in which the majority of the young men I examine in this thesis have lived. I have also examined a number of cultural influences which are important in the formation of gender roles and expectations, such as religious, moral and spiritual beliefs

as well as looking at how conflict and conflict resolution have been viewed in East Timorese society. East Timorese society at the time of writing was economically marked by low income levels and high levels of unemployment, especially amongst youth. Social life is marked by gendered, hierarchical stratifications. While Catholicism plays a central part in East Timorese life, it is heavily influenced by local, animist beliefs. At the time of my field research, life in the capital city, Dili, was heavily influenced by on-going violence especially in the poorer areas of the city as well as by the continuing presence of tens of thousands of IDPs in camps in the city.

Conflict and conflict resolution have been a part of traditional East Timorese life. The forms in which conflict was carried out and resolved remained relatively untouched by European colonial influences well into the twentieth century. It was the twentieth century, particularly its last quarter, which transformed society in Timor-Leste profoundly, often brutally. It is within this historical, cultural social and economic setting in which the masculinities of the young men at the centre of this study need to be understood.

## **4. Researching Violence and Masculinities in Timor-Leste: Research Methodology, Ethics and Challenges**

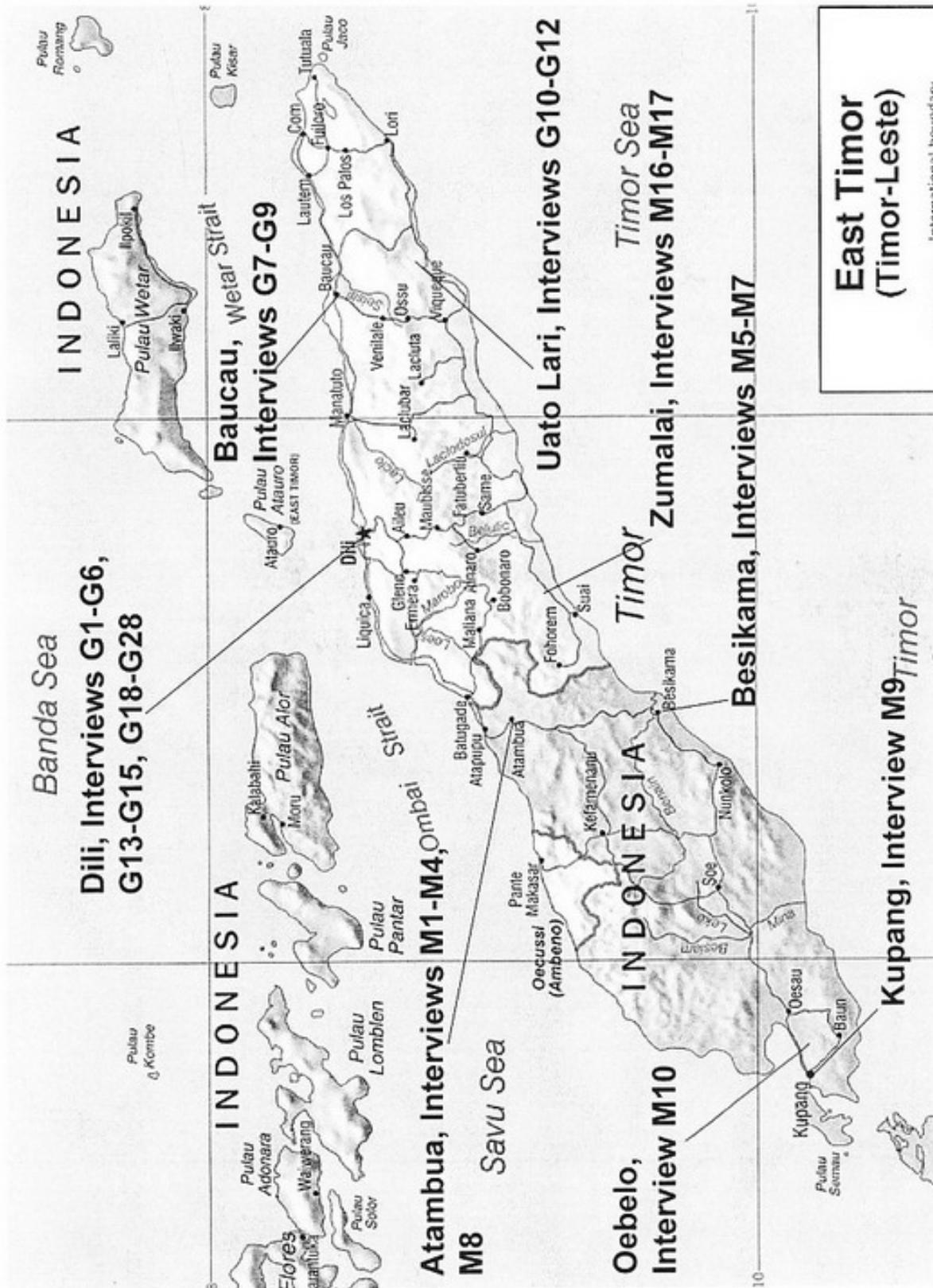
For my thesis, I have chosen two groups of East Timorese men and boys as a case study to analyse the twin questions of

- What is the role of violence in young men's lives in Timor-Leste?
- What is the role of violence in constructing masculinities in Timor-Leste?

The two groups I examine are the pro-Indonesian militias who were mainly active in 1998-1999 and martial arts groups, ritual arts groups and gangs who came to prominence during and after the political crisis which shook Timor-Leste in 2006. This thesis rests primarily on field research data I collected in Timor-Leste and Indonesian West Timor in 2007 (see Map 4), but it also draws on my experiences in the country during numerous visits between 1999 and 2009. The field research consisted primarily of interviews and observations, described in more detail below, though is supported by the study of background literature dealing with conflict studies, gender studies and, naturally, different aspects of Timor-Leste's society, economy, culture and political history. Further invaluable input came from discussions and debates with numerous colleagues and friends, who I would like to thank for their support and inspiration.

In this Chapter I will outline briefly the research context and then discuss the particular practical and ethical challenges posed by the topic I researched (i.e. men involved in groups which have committed acts of violence and partially operate in spaces of illegality) and the post-colonial and post-conflict environment in which the research was carried out. This is followed by a reflection on my own position as researcher in this environment and my motivations for working with this particular subject matter. Next, I will discuss how these challenges affected the design of my field research and choice of research methodologies. I will then proceed to outline the way the field research and analysis were conducted in practice, concluding with the practical challenges encountered when carrying out the research.

**Map 3: Location of Primary Interviews**



#### **4.1. Research context, challenges and ethics**

The history of violence, the struggle for independence and the post-colonial experience have all deeply shaped East Timorese society. However, while much of the focus in the literature on Timor-Leste has been on these external factors, East Timorese society, like any other society, is also beset with its own internal array of conflicts of interest. In Timor-Leste, men, especially young men, have played a visible part in the violence surrounding these conflicts. It is this violence and the groups perpetrating this violence which I chose to study.

My research focuses on essentially two groups of men, both of whom have been or are as groups involved in violent illegal activities including arson, extortion, sexual violence, causing of serious bodily harm to others, murder and, in the case of the militias, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Given the sensitivity of the topics this research touches upon, ethical considerations play an important part in the design of the research methods as well as the collection and analysis of the research material. The key document guiding the research design and implementation in this respect is the Ethical Clearance Application Form of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) (see Appendix 3), which delineates the ethical parameters within which the research can be undertaken for the University.

##### 4.1.1. Ethical challenges faced

The type of social groups I was studying as well as the context in which the research was carried out highlighted ethical complexities and moral dilemmas. As Jun Li (2008, 110) states,

*'In revealing private lives and telling others' stories, field researchers often face ethical dilemmas and moral choices that cannot be easily resolved with general ethical guidelines.'*

As has been noted by others researching groups which partially operate in illegality, (for example Aldridge et al., 2008, 32-33; Bourgois, 2003; van Gemert et al., 2008, 9-10; Wilson, 2010 and Wortley and Tanner, 2008, 194-196), the study of the two groups I chose to look at posed a number of ethical and practical concerns which underscored Li's argument. On the

practical side, these challenges include establishing a rapport with the interviewees while maintaining one's own critical position as a researcher, gaining access to people who may well not want to be easily tracked down, the potential dangers involved for the researcher and interviewees as well as the difficulties of verifying the information gained from the interviewees.

A key ethical challenge faced when dealing with perpetrators of violence – be it regarded as being criminal or not – is to avoid a simplification, essentialisation and stigmatisation of the perpetrators and of their motives, but simultaneously avoiding excessive fraternisation with the perpetrators and the justifications presented, and thus possibly losing one's own moral bearings. Philippe Bourgois (2003, 207-208) provides a discussion of the various levels of this dilemma when confronted with the question of how to deal with the multiple rapes committed by the Latino crack dealers he had befriended:

*'[...] I was unprepared to face this dimension of gendered brutality. I kept asking myself how it was possible that I had invested so much energy into taking these "psychopaths" seriously. On a more personal level, I was confused because the rapists had already become my friends. With notable individual exceptions, I had grown to like most of these veteran rapists. I was living with the enemy; it had become my social network. They had engulfed me in the common sense of street culture until their rape accounts forced me to draw the line [...].'*

*'[...] I was tempted to omit this discussion, fearing that readers would become too disgusted and angry with the crack dealers and deny them a human face [...] I feel, however, that a failure to address sexual violence in street culture would be colluding with the sexist status quo.'*

In reflecting on how to write about violence, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela (2003, 17) points out when reflecting on her interviews with Eugene de Kock, convicted for murder while an agent of the South African apartheid regime, that a key ethical question is whether or not a 'language should be created to understand evil.' She settles on a 'double move' suggested by Holocaust survivor Emil Fackenheim: 'to continue to try to find explanation but not let any explanation become an evasion of responsibility.'

More specifically, when carrying out research with interviewees who might be currently or in the future be involved in criminal and/or violent activities, the researcher is faced by a conflict between the need for confidentiality (and at times anonymity) provided to the interviewee in line with research ethics guidelines and conflicting ethical, legal or societal demands. As outlined by Malcolm Cowburn (2005, 49), for example, refers to

*'the tensions in seeking to obtain as uninhibited account as possible of criminal behaviours whilst not appearing to be colluding with the ongoing harm done to known victims by taking no action to stop that harm. Essentially this relates to managing the boundary between confidentiality and public protection.'*

Furthermore, Cowburn proposes that traditionally, social science

*'...research has held as sacrosanct the confidential nature of the relationship between the researcher and the researched [...] and breaching such a trust has been considered to be ethically unacceptable. However, the issue of undisclosed harmful behaviour is problematic. To know of unreported offences and to take no action may leave victim(s) at risk of further abuse. To know of an offender's intentions to harm someone and not to take action because of the confidential context in which the information emerged raises many issues. Potentially, the researcher can be seen as knowingly colluding with behaviours that are harmful to other people and thus failing to protect members of the public.'* (Cowburn, 2010, 10)

In my particular case, for example, one of the dilemmas I faced was to whether to fulfil what could be seen as my civic duties to report a war criminal at large to the prosecuting authorities or maintain source confidentiality. Though the decision did not come easily to me, I chose the latter as reporting the man would have been a breach of trust – and of the binding ethical guidelines which I had signed up to.

#### 4.1.2. Challenges of Conducting Research in Post-Colonial, Post-Conflict Environments

The challenges faced when studying groups which operate at least partially in spaces of illegality are compounded by the fact that the research took place in a post-colonial, post-

conflict environment, which brings its own particular challenges. From early on, post-colonial studies drawing on for example by Edward Said (1978) and Gayatri Spivak (1988) has problematised the way western social sciences portray the non-western 'Other.' In essence, the post-colonial critique maintains that the way in which research on people that are in a subjugated position within the current global political order is conducted and presented has historically played a central role in the way in which these hegemonic power structures have been legitimised, sustained and reproduced. This critique has led to a comprehensive questioning of the way the research should be conducted, including questioning the validity of using what are essentially western concepts of the self in non-western contexts.

This point is in itself is not new. A good example of this is the debate on the use of western psychological and psychoanalytical approaches in non-western environments. The issue was raised for example by the Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski in 1927 when he criticised the direct transposition of Freudian psychoanalytical interpretations based on a handful of *belle époque*, Viennese, mostly upper-middle class case studies into vastly different socio-economic and cultural settings, in this case the Trobriand Islands of New Guinea (Malinowski, 1927 (2001), 4-7). This critique has been re-iterated for example by Owusu-Bempah and Howitt (2000, 1-3), who see psychology, seventy years after Malinowski, as still being mainly based on western assumptions and that there has been a process 'of the globalisation of Euro-American psychology [which] seeks to propagate Western beliefs and values as the *sine qua non* for economic, political and psychological growth or maturity' (Owusu-Bempah and Howitt 2000, 2).

The challenge as I see it is to avoid the twin traps of imposing western concepts unreflectively in non-western environments – but at the same time avoiding essentialising the non-western environment as 'the exotic Other.' Seeing as my research is essentially based on western concepts of social science and dealing with phenomena which can be seen by the readers as being 'exotic,' there will inevitably be some degree of falling into these traps. Therefore, it is in my mind important to be aware of and acknowledge these dangers even if they are to an extent unavoidable.

In a somewhat similar vein, feminist critiques of social science research have raised concerns with what has been and is being seen as a valorisation of presumed western, male, middle- and upper-class values, viewpoints and interests in the social sciences, coupled with what is

occasionally termed ‘masculinist’ research methods (see for example Franklin, 1997, 100; Harding, 2004, 456-459 and Maynard, 2004, 465-472). The critical debates on research methods, methodology, epistemology and ontology within both feminism and post-colonialism as well as between them have been both extensive and controversial. The net effect has, at the very least, been to raise awareness of how gender, class, historical and other socio-economic structures affect the way social science research is carried out and what its implications can be in terms of upholding inequality. A further important outcome of these debates has been to raise the issue of the need for self-reflexivity on the part of the researcher, of critically re-thinking assumed knowledge, power relations and impacts of research. I will return to these concerns in the next section of this chapter in which I reflect upon my position as a researcher but I have also sought to keep an awareness of these issues throughout my research work.

In addition to the ethical and theoretical pitfalls arising from conducting research as a male, western outsider in a non-western, post-colonial context, the situation was further complicated by the fact that it took place in the tense environment of a society fluctuating between being in a post-conflict and open conflict state – at least as far as the capital Dili was concerned. As Elisabeth Wood (2006, 373) points out,

*‘Field research in conflict zones is challenging for both methodological and ethical reasons. In conflict zones, the usual imperatives of empirical research (to gather and analyze accurate data to address a relevant theoretical question) are intensified by the absence of unbiased data from sources such as newspapers, the partisan nature of much data compiled by organizations operating in the conflict zone, the difficulty of establishing what a representative sample would be and carrying out a study of that sample, and the obvious logistical challenges. Similarly, the ethical imperative of research (“do no harm”) is intensified in conflict zones by political polarization, the presence of armed actors, the precarious security of most residents, the general unpredictability of events, and the traumatisation through violence of combatants and civilians alike.’*

The design and implementation of my research therefore required that I address three separate and over-lapping sets of ethical and practical challenges – that of studying groups involved at least in part with illegal activities, that of conducting research on the non-western ‘Other’ as a

western outsider in a post-colonial context and working in an environment which was officially considered to be a post-conflict society but where at the time of the field research violence was the daily norm.

## **4.2. My position as researcher**

As Michel Foucault (1982, 777-793) pointed out in his approach to the production of social knowledge, both the production and collection of research data and its analysis are by necessity not objective but are dependent upon (and, in turn, constitutive of) social power relations. I do not believe that it is possible to be a mere ‘objective’ observer of a situation. As the researcher, I am locked into an interactive process or feedback loop with the research topic: the way in which I perceive the situation colours the approach I take and the questions I ask; the approach I take and the questions I ask also to a degree pre-determine what kind of answers I will get; these in turn colour the next step of my analysis and so on. This necessitates an openness on the part of the researcher about their respective own motivations and the theoretical and political ‘baggage’ which is brought into the analysis. I do not believe that there is one single, objective truth to be uncovered about masculinities and violence in Timor-Leste. Based on these ontological and epistemological premises, I chose to design my research in an interpretative manner, in which I seek to be as open and aware as possible about my own power position as well as my inevitable subjective biases in the research, analysis and presentation of my data.

### 4.2.1. Leaps of faith and relative positions of power

Bernard Harcourt, (2006, 230-235) in a study on (male) youth gun use in the south-eastern United States urges researchers to own up to the respective ‘leaps of faith’ they take in their research, i.e. lay open the basic beliefs which underlie their work. From peace studies, I take the basic tenet that violence is a choice, and that non-violence is also always an available, if not easy, choice. From gender studies, I take the assumption that gender is not a fixed, biological given, but malleable, socio-cultural constructs. These are my leaps of faith. Rather than casting the men and boys in question as being *a priori* ‘evil’ perpetrators or victims without agency, I sought to, with a grounding in both peace studies and masculinity studies, to

examine the entangled ways in which as individuals and as groups the boys and men I interviewed have sought to navigate their way through often lethally dangerous situations.

In addition to the moral, ethical and political aspects of needing to realise one's positioning towards the topic and people one is researching, a lack of this kind of self-reflection may easily lead to a misinterpretation of motives, meanings and messages. As Pierre Bourdieu (1998, 17) notes, there is a certain danger and a difficulty involved in transposing or superimposing western concepts of reading sex and gender into a context where these are viewed from very different socio-economic and cultural vantage points.

A key issue that has been raised in postcolonial, feminist and post-structural studies is that of power relations between the researcher and those being researched. In the case of my field studies on the violence-prone groups in Timor-Leste, the power relations were ambivalent. In a sense, I wielded the power of the pen/laptop, while they wielded the power of the sword/machete/assault rifle. Thus while the militias in 1999 and the gangs, MAGs and RAGs in the late-2000s had physical power on their side, I had and have the power of defining them through my work for an audience which includes people and institutions (e.g. from international development agencies, the East Timorese government, or the United Nations system) which can have a direct impact on their daily lives. Through my biographical and educational background, I had gained skills and connections which these men did not have; skills and connections which provide privileged access to political and economic power structures and far greater mobility than what the interviewees had. Socially, and in many cases also economically, I therefore had far more capital to cash in than they did.

Furthermore, as I was often working for an international organisation when I was in Timor-Leste, I had the power of easily gaining access to international power structures, be it the UN agencies, peacekeeping forces, international media, foreign donors or embassies in a way that was and is unattainable for these young men. To a degree, this power imbalance did form an undercurrent or sub-text within the interviews, adding to the wariness of my respondents in giving answers to me.

My research however also gave the respondents the opportunity to tell their side of the story, which at times led to conspicuous casting of themselves and their peer group in a good light in an attempt to shake off the 'bad boy' image they felt they had been unjustly labelled with.

While I had privileged access and skills they did not possess, so did they – they had intimate knowledge of secret rituals, of martial arts skills, of East Timorese culture and history that I would never be able to possess to the same degree.

And, importantly, coming back to the quote that opened my thesis, I often found myself in the position of the addressee of the Angelino hip-hop band Cypress Hill's song 'How I Could Just Kill A Man:'

*'While you're up on your hill in your big home  
While I'm out here riskin' my dome  
Here is something you can't understand,  
How I could just kill a man.'*

The men I interviewed could just as well have addressed these words to me – given our very different biographies, how would I be able to ever truly *understand* what drove them to resort to violence? The men I interviewed thus have a deep knowledge that I had no access to.

#### 4.2.2. My personal motivation

My interest in Timor-Leste was initially sparked during the half-a-year I spent in Portugal in the mid-1990s on a student exchange. The Indonesian occupation of the territory and the concomitant human rights abuses by the Indonesian military were much more of a topic in the political discourse of the former colonial power than in other parts of Europe. Upon returning to Finland, I joined a solidarity group which sought to lobby for the right of the East Timorese people to self-determination and to help bring about an end to the grave human rights abuses committed by the Indonesian security forces there. My involvement with Timor-Leste took on a new level of intensity in 1999 when I volunteered to participate in the civil society observer mission to oversee the independence referendum, during which time I witnessed in person the atrocities committed by the militias and Indonesian military forces but also the immense courage and determination of the East Timorese civilians to cast their vote in the referendum even in the face of deadly violence and massive intimidation.

I have continued my involvement with Timor-Leste since, visiting the country numerous times for a variety of reasons – either as part of my work for various NGOs (mostly around

gender and conflict resolution issues), as a free-lance journalist and as a researcher. I therefore can not claim to be a mere outside observer of the situation as the work I have done with East Timorese partner organisations or about the social, political and economic situation in the country has always had either an explicit or implicit transformative agenda: work with East Timorese women's organisations for example with the goal of helping increase gender equity or publishing an analysis of the conflicts with the aim of increasing the understanding of the conflicts.

As Barak Kalir (2010) points out, deciding to study the 'underdogs' of society may also well be due to a personal drive of the researcher to side with the oppressed, but thereby also contributing to a process of exoticising, romanticising and essentialising the 'underdogs.' In my research, I have tried to neither stigmatise nor romanticise the men I studied; instead I have sought to raise various, often contradictory, aspects of the groups they are involved in and their own motivations.

#### 4.2.3. The researcher as insider/outsider

A further issue which needs to be addressed in this respect is the 'insider/outsider' question. As Karin Woodward (2007, 43) has noted,

*'In some instances the 'insider status' of the ethnographic participant observation might be subject to dismissal as too prone to an excess of sympathy, empathy, subjectivism or even reductionism [...] on the other hand an 'outsider' might be subjected to the criticism which might be made of research [...] which is conducted without an acknowledgement of the situation and which claims 'objectivity' determined by 'insider' status.'*

On the other hand (*ibid.*, 57),

*'The researcher as outsider avoids the privileging of 'inside knowledge' and unrecognised collusion with the gendered identities being enacted at this site but this has to be countered with the more limited access to the understandings of [the insiders].'*

In carrying out my research in Timor-Leste, I was in some ways an outsider *par excellence*, having been born into a stable middle class northern European family more than 10 000 kilometres from the *bairros* (impoverished neighbourhoods) of Dili with vastly different possibilities of life choices than those I interviewed. Also, as I noticed during the course of my interviews, many of my personal values and views were occasionally diametrically opposed to those held by the men I interviewed. At times it was a difficult struggle for me to restrain myself from arguing against my interviewees when, for example, they were justifying their acts of brutal violence against unarmed civilians.

However, as I had been involved with Timor-Leste for a number of years previous to my field research and involved in working with East Timorese civil society organisations, I was not as much of an outsider as it might seem at first glance. Rather, I was in the position of what Hermann (2001, 79) calls the *'involved outsider'*:

*'one who is personally connected to the conflict by virtue of belonging to one of the national, religious or ethnic groups involved in it, or because of an identification with a general political stance such as anti-racism, anti-colonialism or non-violence.'*

Hermann further notes that

*'few academics, even if they are geographically, ethnically, nationally and/or religiously complete 'outsiders' to the conflict, are able to maintain even a semblance of aloofness when dealing with tragedies.'* (*ibid.*, 79)

In Timor-Leste, was not merely a neutral observer, detachedly recording events from the outside. As Yamuna Sangarasivam (2001, 98) argues, researchers themselves are therefore also to be seen as informants as

*'[...] social science researchers are participants in every ethnographic moment that constitutes fieldwork, and no longer can claim the status of objective observer.'* (Sangarasivam, 2001, 95)

I was, through the process of my research, through my mere presence as an outsider but even more so through my other forms of involvement with East Timorese society, also involved in constructing the ‘ethnographic moment’ which I was studying.

My ‘involved outsider’ status manifested itself also in another, very concrete way, as both in 1999 and 2006/2007 I came under physical attack by both militias and ‘gangs,’ as part of the wider conflicts which I happened to have the misfortune of experiencing first hand, first as a referendum observer and second when visiting the country as part of my work for a Finnish civil society organisation.

In the extreme case, taking the ethical and theoretical considerations and complexities outlined above into consideration, one option would have been to take the ‘do no harm’ principle to its logical conclusion, disengage myself from the complex world of masculinities and violence in Timor-Leste, and simply not carry out the research. I did however choose to pursue this particular research project, which meant that the issues raised at the theoretical level would need to be somehow accommodated at the practical research level.

#### **4.3. Addressing ethical and practical problems through research design**

In choosing a field research approach and designing my research, I sought to an approach which would be workable in the relatively challenging research environment which I would be entering and would also be sensitive to the various ethical and theoretical challenges outlined above. Though through the presentation of the research methodology below it might seem that I was able to first design a suitable research methodology and then implement it in the field as planned, this would be a misrepresentation of how events unfolded. In reality, carrying out the research in the field involved a high degree of contingency and was highly dependent upon and influenced by factors beyond my control, which I needed to adapt to, to the best of my abilities, on the shifting ground of what David Calvey (2008, 907) calls ‘the blurred reality of fieldwork.’

#### 4.3.1. Case-study research

In choosing the appropriate research method, I decided to primarily use the case study approach rather than other research methods such as quantitative methods (e.g. surveys or other statistical methods) or archival research. Nonetheless, I did use secondary quantitative and archival data where it was available. According to Patrick McNeill (1995, 87-88),

*[...] A case study involves the in-depth study of a single example of whatever the [researcher] wishes to investigate. It may prompt further, more wide-ranging research, providing ideas to be followed up later, or it may be that some broad generalisation is brought to life by a case-study. There is no claim to representativeness, and the essence of the technique is that each subject studied, whether it be an individual, a group, an event, or an institution is treated as a unit on its own. [...]*

In this case, the ‘single example’ was East Timorese men involved with militias, gangs as well as martial and ritual arts groups and while there are some comparisons with similar groups which emerge in the text, I do not seek to make generalisations.

The reasons for choosing the case study approach were two-fold – on the one hand case study research provided me with the most appropriate tools for gaining the kind of information I was seeking and on the other hand the other methods would to a great extent simply not have worked.

Robert Yin (1994, 4) in comparing case study research with archival or statistical research methods uses three criteria to rank their respective applicability:

- *the type of research question,*
- *extent of control the investigator has over actual behavioural events, and*
- *the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events.*

Yin (1994, 4) concludes that in the case of a research question focusing on the ‘how and why’ rather than the ‘who, what, where and how many;’ of a research environment where the researcher has little control over events and which is focused mainly on contemporary events,

a case study research method is more effective and sensible than quantitative or archival research methods. In the case of my research in Timor-Leste, all three criteria favouring case study research were met – in the case of the extent of lack of control perhaps more than I had initially anticipated.

In addition to the theoretical methodological advantages of the case study approach, there were also other, practical issues which favoured this particular approach. Archival research was mostly out of the question, as there are few documents in existence about the particular groups in question, and those many of those which do exist were not accessible to me as they are in the hands mostly of the Australian, East Timorese, Indonesian and Portuguese security apparatuses. Quantitative research, on the other hand, would have either necessitated the existence of reliable numerical data to be analysed or the production of numerical data through surveys. In the former case, there was very little numerical data of any sorts available – and much of what was available, e.g. figures given by gang members about the size of their respective gang, often proved to be highly unreliable. Carrying out a survey, on the other hand, would have brought with it a number of serious practical challenges. These included issues arising from working with a group of respondents which included a high number of semi-literates but also potential security concerns for those involved, given the ‘paper trail’ my research would have produced which could have found its way (e.g. by way of confiscation) to the respective security forces active in the research sites and could potentially have had serious consequences for those who took part in the study (see also Sangarasivam, 2001, 97 and Wood, 2006, 381-382). Furthermore, given the fact that already relatively informal interviews which I carried out in the end tended at times to be, at least initially, rather tense affairs due to the unease of the respondents with the interview situation, filling out survey questionnaires would have been an even more alienating research method.

The main critiques of case study methodology, as outlined by Yin (1994, 9-10), are that the information gleaned out of a case study may not be regarded as representative of ‘broader truths’ as it is not contrasted with other cases, that the case study method itself lacks rigour and that it is subject to the researcher’s own biases. Countering this critique, I argue that being a qualitative study on masculinities and violence in Timor-Leste, I am not seeking to find ‘broader truths’ which would be universally applicable to the way men behave in violent conflicts. As all conflicts are unique, I am rather seeking to examine a specific case in as much detail as was possible. Insofar as my findings concur with those reached by different

case studies, it may support the development of more general conclusions, be it in peace studies, gender studies or studies of Timor-Leste.

As far as researcher bias is concerned, I do not believe that it is ever possible to uncover ‘the whole truth’ about any social phenomenon nor that a degree of researcher bias can be completely avoided. This does not, however, absolve the researcher from seeking to uncover as many of the complexities and contradictions surrounding the social phenomenon in question. I have therefore sought to incorporate numerous different factors which impact upon the issues of masculinities and violence in Timor-Leste, including socio-economic analyses, different readings of the political history of the country and ethnographies from various sources.

In carrying out the case study research, I chose to use three different methods for collecting data in the field. The three methods were

- primary interviews with members of the militias, gangs, martial and ritual arts groups;
- background interviews with East Timorese and international observers of the situation, i.e. representatives of the East Timorese administrative structures, East Timorese and international security forces, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and UN agencies; and
- thirdly what can be called participant observation.

Each one of these methods brought its own practical challenges with them, which I have outlined below in the discussion of how the field work unfolded in practice. I will first however discuss some of the ethical and practical considerations of the two key methods, interviews and participant observation.

#### 4.3.2. Interviews

Interviews are a key tool for gaining the qualitative information in a case study, but, like any other research method, interviews bring with them a range of potential ethical problems. A number of these are addressed in the UKZN Ethical Clearance Application Form, which stresses that the safeguards need to be built into the research to

*'[...] protect the autonomy of respondents and (where indicated) to prevent social stigmatisation and/or secondary victimisation of respondents.'* (UKZN, 2008, 3)

In particular, the form raises issues of informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality (including the possibility of anonymity for respondents), the freedom of the respondents to withdraw from the research process and an understanding by the respondents of 'the nature and limits of any benefits which the participants may receive as a result of their participation in the research' (UKZN, 2008, 5-6).

While some researchers of social activities which are located in the greyer zones of society (e.g. Calvey (2008) on the bouncer sub-culture or Li (2008) on gambling) chose covert or semi-covert approaches to study their respective topics, I felt that this would both have clearly clashed with the ethical guidelines given and not yielded any form of additional benefits. I therefore carried out the research in an overt and open manner, informing all interviewees of who I was, what kind of research I was carrying out and for what purpose and informed the participants of the purposes and nature of my research, issues of voluntary participation, possibilities of withdrawal and confidentiality (i.e. that I would anonymise the interviews).

In a feminist critique of interview techniques, Margery Franklin (1997, 100-105) differentiates between three different forms of interviews – the *information extraction model*, the *shared understanding model* and the *discourse model*. According to Franklin, in the information extraction model, which she sees as having traditionally been dominant in social sciences, the interview is based on the premises that the interviewer

1. [uses] a standardised set of questions and ask them in a pre-determined order,
2. do[es] not respond substantively to what [the] interviewee says (this might "bias" subsequent responses,
3. be friendly enough to facilitate the information extraction process but not more so,
4. do[es] not express [her/his] own views, even if [s/he] thinks this would lead [her/his] "subject" to say more.

In the shared understanding model, by contrast,

1. *the interview be semi-structured, following a guideline rather than a pre-determined set of questions; the interviewer is free to pursue lines of thinking introduced by the interviewee;*
2. *the interviewer comes to the interview as open-minded as possible, with few pre-suppositions;*
3. *the interviewer aims for clarification (by asking questions, providing tentative interpretations) but not at the risk of eradicating genuine ambiguity in the interviewee's view of what s/he is talking about;*
4. *the interviewer paraphrases or interprets while the interview is in progress, encouraging the interviewee's views and corrections.*

Thirdly, in the discourse model,

1. *The interviewer enters into a conversational mode and responds to the interviewee's questions, perhaps even talking about her own experience;*
2. *while a topic or focus generally exists beforehand, the exploration of new themes that arise is encouraged;*
3. *cross-connections may develop: one interviewee might say something that can be used productively in subsequent interviews with others;*
4. *the interviewer attends to and if desired re-arranges power relations between the participants to the ends of establishing equality or even a collaborative relationship.*

In her critique, Franklin (1997, 106) gives clear preference to the latter two models as these both give more room for empathy and room for the perspective of the respondent's views rather than insisting on the point of view set by the interviewer. The latter two methods are also seen by Franklin as being less intrusive and more egalitarian – in short, less 'masculinist' to use Maynard's (2004, 465) term. In planning the interviews, which, drawing on past experiences of doing interviews, I decided to carry out as semi-structured interviews. As I would give the respondent as much room as was necessary for their narrative, and, by both necessity and habit, seek to gain an understanding of what my respondent was trying to tell me through double-checking answers, I was mostly planning on following the shared understanding model.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> I take 'shared understanding' in this context to mean seeking to make sure that I and my respondent had a common agreement as to what the respondent was telling me, as on many of the key issues such as the

In the interviews I carried out as part of my field research, I had two very different sets of interviewees and correspondingly two different ways in which I could and would use the information gained. The first group consisted of the respondents in my primary interviews, who thereby were in a much more visible, exposed position in my research but also, due to their position in society and the nature of their activities, potentially more vulnerable to social stigmatisation or criminal prosecution. The second group consisted of the people who I interviewed for my background interviews, who do not figure nearly as prominently in the text but influenced my view of Timor-Leste society and my argumentation in different ways by helping 'set the stage' for my research as it were. The interviewees in the second group were by and large in a much less vulnerable position in society, as they mostly held more secure positions in society. One of the key ways in which I chose early on to protect the identity of all respondents from the first group was by anonymising the interviews, a choice I will return to in more detail below. From the second group, a number of interviewees appear by name where I quote them directly in the text. It is worth noting though that a number of the respondents from the second group, especially those within the UN system, insisted on anonymity for fear of negative impacts on their careers lest they are seen as being disloyal to their employer.

As McNeill (1995, 14-16) points out, three key concepts in social science research are reliability, validity and representativeness. In order to ensure that these criteria are met, it is crucial for the researcher to be able to verify data gathered, e.g. through triangulation and counter-checking as well as by ensuring through appropriate sampling the group of interviewees is representative of the groups studied. Given the nature of the research topic, the groups researched and the type of research environment, these were issues I was only able to address in the field and throughout the course of the field research.

#### 4.3.3. Participant observation

As a research method, participant observation covers a range of research methods with varying degrees of participating in the activities of the group which is being examined by the

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acceptability of the use of violence, on appropriate gender roles or even of how events had unfolded I often did not share a common understanding with my respondents

researcher. Using a broad definition, McNeill (1995, 4) sees participant observation as being a method ‘in which the researcher both observes the social processes of a group and actually participates in the life of that group.’

The issue of degree of ‘participation in the life of [the] group’ raises a number of problems when, as in this case, the group in question is at least partially involved in violent, illegal activities. On the one hand, as Li (2008, 103) observes,

*‘Generally speaking, the more secretive and amorphous are the activities of the researched, the more necessary it is for the researcher to participate in their activities to learn about their culture.’*

On the other hand, however, as Peter Kraska (1998, 89) reflects,

*‘[...] blurring the distinction between researcher and subject to the point of engaging in the deviance under study, as compelling as a methodology as it may seem, obviously has certain moral limits. Smoking marijuana with jazz musicians or spray-painting murals with graffiti artists may be relatively safe undertakings morally compared to a host of other criminal activities such as rape, assault, burglary, or embezzlement. Is experiment-based understanding in these latter examples desirable, or even possible?’*

Some researchers, such as Dennis Rodgers (2007), have gone as far as to join gangs but even without directly participating in illegal activities and engaging as a more detached participant observer with violent and/or criminal groups can lead to serious moral dilemmas. This is for example pointed out by Ian Wilson (2010) when discussing whether or not his visible presence as a foreign researcher with a Jakarta gang might have at times precipitated displays of violence for his ‘benefit’ and at other times acted as a restraining factor.

#### **4.4. Analysis and presentation**

The analysis and interpretation of the information gathered in the interviews consisted of transcribing the interviews and trying to make sense of the outcome of my research by contrasting it with my own observations, other interviews and available theoretical literature. Inevitably, this process is affected by researcher bias as my way of seeing, analysing and

interpreting the world does to a degree determine the outcome of my research and how I present it. A poignant example is that of the black magic skills which a number of the groups I studied claimed to have. To me, as a non-believer in black magic, I was fascinated by the phenomenon as (as I would see it) a hybrid socio-cultural construct which merges local traditions with globalised media imagery. To my interviewees, on the other hand, it was very much a real and highly dangerous force in their lives – and possibly deaths.

#### 4.4.1. Analysing the data

In approaching the information gathered in the interviews, I consciously tried to keep an open mind as possible and, on the one hand, taking in what I had heard at face value while, on the other hand, contrasting it with my other observations and data gathered. As Alessandro Portelli (1991, 51) points out,

*‘Oral sources are credible but with a different credibility. The importance of oral testimony may lie not in its adherence to fact, but rather in its departure from it, as imagination, symbolism, and desire emerge. Therefore, there are no ‘false’ oral sources [...] ‘wrong’ statements are still psychologically ‘true,’ and [...] this truth may be equally as important as factually reliable accounts.’*

This line of argumentation is further developed by Lee Ann Fujii (2010, 232), who argues that in conflict and post-conflict environments

*‘[...] the value of oral testimonies researchers collect in places that have recently suffered violence does not lie solely in the truthfulness of their content. It also lies in the meta-data that accompany the testimonies. By meta-data, I mean the spoken and unspoken expressions about people’s interior thoughts and feelings, which they do not always articulate in their stories or responses to interview questions. Meta-data can take both spoken and unspoken forms. They include rumours, silences, and invented stories. Meta-data are as valuable as the testimonies themselves because they indicate how the current social and political landscape is shaping what people might say to a researcher.’*

Dealing with the ‘meta-data’ was inevitable, but also inevitably brought with it its own set of ethical and moral dilemmas. How was I for example to deal with assertions by the killers in a massacre of unarmed civilians that they had been ‘forced’ to murder the civilians as they claimed to have been facing a ‘kill or be killed’ situation? Do I have any moral right – or, conversely, do I perhaps have the moral duty – to make the loaded assertion, as I have done, that they are in denial? As Elizabeth Wood (2006, 382) points out,

*‘Field researchers often have to decide whether or not to challenge lies that they are told in the course of their work. This is both a practical and ethical dilemma: should the researcher confront the liar it might result in hostility toward the project and perhaps toward participants. This dilemma occurs with particular force in interviews with perpetrators of violence.’*

I will return to this dilemma below in my discussion of how the fieldwork unfolded in practice.

#### 4.4.2. Contrasting collected data with literature

As part of the analysis of the research data, I also contrasted the primary and secondary information gained from interviews and participant observation with literature from peace and conflict studies, gender studies and works on various aspects of Timor-Leste’s society, history, culture and economy. The latter could perhaps collectively and loosely be called ‘Timor-Leste Studies.’ The theoretical basis and orientation of this study also draws on this work, but adds to it theoretical and comparative angles that are not necessarily part of the existing literature on Timor-Leste. Much of the research I present in the thesis is, however, original in the sense that the phenomena I studied are still very much under-researched and little comparative literature was available.

My choice of literature on peace studies was initially mainly informed by my wish to understand the parameters of the conflicts in Timor-Leste beyond the often rather simplistic and simplifying narratives on offer. More critical texts opened up other possible interpretations and discussions of inherent ambiguities and contradictions, such as the role of war economies, local elites, diasporas, and, critically, the role of gender in conflicts. Over the

course of the research I also became increasingly drawn to the issue of violence itself, its manifestations and dealing with violence in post-conflict societies.

In peace studies, gendered analyses of conflicts are still more the exception than the norm and gender is often equated with what Cynthia Enloe (1993, 166) has collectively called ‘womenandchildren,’ mostly cast as victims without agency. The invisibility of masculinities in much of the literature aroused my curiosity and led me to approach the issue of violent male behaviour in conflict from the angle of critical masculinity studies. As Robert Morrell (2001a, 8) has argued from the history of Natal, conflicts tend to be cast as a history of men but whose gender remains absent, taken unreflectively as the norm with no questioning of the contradictions inherent within and between different masculine roles and expectations.

Masculinity studies, as outlined further in the following chapter, has on the other hand taken up the issue of male violence as one of its main focuses of concern. Much work has been done on masculine role expectations and violence in a number of different areas such as domestic violence, sports and crime but, as Cockburn (2008) and Hearn (2008) have pointed out, relatively little in comparison with respect to masculine role expectations and violent conflict. Much of the research has also traditionally concentrated on industrialised societies.

One of the difficulties that I therefore ran into over the course of my theoretical background research was that much of the published masculinity studies literature that was available often seemed irrelevant to the situation in non-western, non-industrialised, post-colonial and post-conflict societies such as Timor-Leste. Also, studies of violent masculinities seemed at times to be led more by pejorative stereotypes and prejudice than actual research (see also Chapter 4.2.2.).

Grounding the peace studies and masculinity studies theory in the context of Timor-Leste necessitated a study of available literature on the country, its political history and society. Though some of the texts used date back to Portuguese colonial times and the Indonesian occupation, the vast majority have been published after the 1999 independence referendum when the territory became more accessible to outsiders.

In addition, I sought to find literature that, while not dealing directly with issues of violence and gender in Timor-Leste, was looking at somewhat comparable cultural and socio-

economic environments in the South Pacific (especially urban areas in Papua New Guinea) or South East Asia (especially in Indonesia). Given the massive impact that Indonesia has had on Timor-Leste during and after its 24 years of military occupation of the territory as well as the direct relevance of the Indonesian security forces to the militias, I also studied recent Indonesian history, politics and society extensively as part of this research.

The material used was primarily in English and to a lesser extent in French, German, Indonesian, Portuguese and Tetum. The material consisted of print and electronic media (including film footage, photos, radio interviews, internet blogs, graffiti, text messages and e-mail communication), from a variety of East Timorese and international sources. The material was not restricted to a certain type or a single discipline, but was inter-disciplinary, including academic texts, political pamphlets, reports by national and international NGOs, official government and UN reports as well as journalistic reports, the latter including several books written by foreign correspondents based on their personal experiences.

The original contribution of this thesis is to add to the constantly growing but still under-represented body of gendered, critical peace studies, as well as to the growing body of literature on Timor-Leste society. Gender issues are still mostly absent from the study of peace and conflicts and men and masculinities are still often rendered invisible. This is also mostly the case in the body of literature dealing with peace and conflict in Timor-Leste, though over the course of the years that I have been carrying out research for this thesis gender perspectives have become increasingly prominent in peace studies as well. The opening up of Timor-Leste and its society to local and outside researchers after the 1999 independence referendum has, however, led to an exponential increase in studies and reports on all aspects of East Timorese society. Most of this research does however still tend to come from outsiders like myself rather than from East Timorese scholars themselves.

Though there have been a number of publications on gender issues in Timor-Leste, the majority of these tend to equate gender issues with women's rights issues, which, while being an extremely important topic, tend to neglect the role played by men and social expectations of appropriate masculine behaviour in defining gender relations. Furthermore, what is often missing is the voice of the participants themselves, of the victims and of the perpetrators. As Christina Yeung (2006, 10) points out,

*'The contemporary debates fail to assign agency to local stakeholders. One has the sense, in reading the literature on conflict and peace-building, that civilians are always subjugated to situations of conflict as victims; there is little suggestion or discussion that people are stakeholders in the conflict and may have interests in condoning, participating or even causing armed conflict.'*

In the case of Timor-Leste, important exceptions are the final report of the East Timorese Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CAVR, 2005) and several recent studies into the needs and views of youth in Timor-Leste and research into the motivations behind membership in gangs, martial arts groups and ritual arts groups (for example Grove et al., 2007; Scambary et al., 2006; Scambary, 2007; and Streicher, 2008).

#### 4.4.3. Presentation of the data

As discussed above, one of the key challenges in presenting research on socially marginal groups is how to manage, as it were, the research will be used by third parties. Once the research is published, there is of course relatively little the author can do to control who uses the research, in what way and for what purposes. In the presentation of my data here and in other research articles, I have therefore sought to address the theoretical and ethical concerns raised above, such as breaches of confidentiality or social stigmatisation of the individuals and communities involved in the research.

One of the primary ways in which I have sought to maintain the confidentiality of the respondents has been by anonymising them, though inevitably a very well informed reader might still be able to make educated guesses regarding the individual identities. Other researchers of groups and individually operating in spaces of illegality, such as Aldridge et al. (2008) have chosen to go further and also anonymised their research location as well and even knowingly 'falsif[ied] identifying details [...] in order to work against a definite identification' (Aldridge et al., 2008, 42). Apart from further ethical dilemmas raised by the falsification of my research results and legal issues given the ethical guidelines of the UKZN, this would in my mind also have been excessive in the case of Timor-Leste. As far as the militias were concerned, most of their activities have been historically documented and made public to some degree, for example by the Commission for Reception, Truth and

Reconciliation in Timor-Leste (CAVR). As far as the gang, MAG- and RAG-related violence is concerned, it has mostly taken place in Dili and not in any other city in Timor-Leste to any similar degree. Thus any attempt at ‘anonymising’ Dili as ‘Research City A’ or the like would not have added any degree of meaningful identification protection to the respondents involved.

As far as avoiding social stigmatisation is concerned, I have sought to present alternative discourses to the common view of young, socio-economically disadvantaged men being automatically violent, and attempted to paint a more nuanced picture of their lives. Whether this has been successful, is for the reader to judge.

#### **4.5. Case study research in practice**

*“Doing ethnography in sensitive research is like walking a tightrope, as such field work requires ethnographers to keep a mindful awareness of ongoing relationships and to make frequent adjustments accordingly.” (Li, 2008, 109)*

While the research design and theoretical methodological considerations before the actual field research were important, the nature of both the research topic and of the research environment meant that the end result of my research – of what I was able to gather data on, who I could talk to, where I could go to, and so on – was highly contingent upon factors beyond my control. A raid by Australian peacekeepers or a flare-up between two rival gangs might turn a certain part of town into a ‘no-go zone;’ political and personal alliances might shift overnight, forcing a re-evaluation of how to approach someone; there might be a security clamp-down or a black-out; interviewees might or might not appear to the pre-arranged interview; they might be in a loquacious mood or highly suspicious – and the opposite the following day; I might inadvertently broach an issue that was clearly not to be talked about – or one that led to seemingly endless discourses. In short, I found myself trying to adapt my research plan to the realities as I found them on the ground more or less on a daily basis.

#### 4.5.1. Primary interviews

The main part of my field research was carried out over a period of around four months in April-May and October-December 2007, with approximately three months in Timor-Leste and three weeks in Indonesian West Timor. It was during this time that the majority of my interviews with gang members and former members of the pro-Indonesian militias were carried out. In addition, I have carried out several subsequent interviews during visits to Timor-Leste and West Timor in 2008 and 2009. All primary field research interviews are reproduced as summaries in Chapter 3.

The time lag between some of my interviews (between M1-M7 and M8-10 with the former militias and G1-G21 and G22-28 for the gang, MAG and RAG members) which was due to the travel and work opportunities which presented themselves to me after I had completed my primary field research seemed to have different impacts on the two groups of interviewees. In terms of the former militias, there did not seem to be any great difference in their views on the past violence or on their present status. In the case of the gangs, MAGs and RAGs, however, the fact that the initial round of interviews was carried out in a time of continuing street violence while the second set had been preceded by around nine months of relative calm had a definite impact. While the initial set of respondents tended to focus a lot on explaining the violence which was occurring around them, in the second set of interviews the respondents devoted more time and space to looking into future possibilities.

During the primary field research period in 2007, it proved more difficult to find ex-militia members to interview than gang/MAG/RAG members. This was in part due to a reluctance of people to identify themselves as former members of the militia due to the social stigma attached to the term, and in part due to the possible (if unlikely) legal consequences they might face for their actions. It was also logistically more difficult to get in contact with former militia members as they were geographically more spread out being both in Timor-Leste and, to a greater extent, in Indonesian West Timor. Also, there were numerous cases of purely logistical difficulties, such as constantly changing cell phone numbers or locations of the people I was trying to locate. A second possibility for interviews with several former militia members opened itself up in 2009 when I was once again working in Indonesia after a year-long break, and for these I employed the services of a locally-hired research assistant to avoid

the time-consuming process of attempting to set up contact of the previous round of field research.

The interviews with ex-militia members and pro-integration supporters took place in Indonesian West Timor, in Atambua, Kupang and in the relocation camp area in Betun, Belu regency. They took place in the form of two group interviews, with four participating in the first and five in the second interview, and four one-on-one interviews. The interviewees included former high-ranking members of the *Aitarak* militia, several lower-ranking militia/pro-autonomy movement members who chose not to reveal their exact affiliation as well as a former East Timorese member of the Indonesian paramilitary police *Brigade Mobil (Brimob)* who had actively participated in the violence in Dili in 2006 together with the militias. For a full list of interviewees, dates and locations of interviews, see Appendix 1.

The interviews which I carried out with gang, MAG and RAG members took mostly place in Dili and Becora (20), with a further three in Baucau, three in Uato Lari (Viqueque District) and two in Zumalai, (Cova Lima District). The interviewees were mostly in their early twenties and thus 'mid-ranking' members of these groups, though I also interviewed five younger members (late teens) of a neighbourhood gang and four older 'kingpins,' one of whom was in his late twenties, two of whom were in their mid- to late-thirties and one who was in his sixties. The interviewees included members of 7-7, PSHT, *Kera Sakti*, Choque, KORK, Colimau 2000, Kung Fu Master, PLUR, *Potlot* and *Buradu* as well as four gang members who did not wish to reveal their gang affiliation. Apart from five group or joint interviews (the latter referring to interviews involving two interviewees), three in Dili, one in Zumalai and one in Baucau, the other interviews were held one-on-one.

In order to set up the interviews, I relied mostly on personal connections that I had with informants who in turn were connected to other members of these groups, who thus were the 'gate-keepers' of my study. Given the relatively small size of East Timorese society, it was not difficult to find an informant who 'knew someone who knew someone.' In a smaller number of cases, I would seek out the interviewees myself in the particular area that I was in. Typically when using informants in this manner, I would ask them to get in touch with the interviewee after which I would arrange an interview by way of telephone text messages. Often, the process of setting up the interviews also acted as an indication to me as to how the gang phenomenon can not be separated from the rest of society, as the interviewees were

often linked through various connections to political parties, private companies or other social organisations. This method of finding interviewees inevitably left a lot to chance and arguably did not give me a statistically balanced sample. However, I was not looking for a quantitatively balanced study, but for a qualitatively representative sample of respondents. Therefore I sought to talk to as wide a range of various groups' members as possible and was able to have most of the major groups included in my sample and also have what I felt to be a good variation in their ages and positions within the organisations. I often felt during and after my research that the reliance on gatekeepers was far from an ideal situation, but unfortunately inevitable in the given circumstances.

The interviews with the primary respondents from the militias, MAGs, RAGs and gangs took place in a variety of locations. For the most part, I carried the interviews out in private homes of the interviewees, in the club houses of the respective MAG/RAG or gang, in internally displaced persons' (IDP) camps or in a neutral location of the interviewees' choice where they felt comfortable talking (e.g. by the side of a market place, in a café or in a restaurant). Given the potential sensitivity of the topic, which was reflected in the circumspection and reluctance shown by a number of the interviewees, all of the interviews are kept anonymous.

In order to reduce formality, I chose to carry the interviews out in a way which would make the interviewees feel the most at ease. On numerous occasions there was at the very least an initial wariness, reluctance and suspicion, in some cases even a degree of fear of talking to me, a foreigner and outsider, about potentially sensitive issues. It was also remarkable how many interviewees were constantly looking out that no third party might hear us. The location and timing of the interviews was chosen by the interviewees themselves, unless it was a more or less spontaneous discussion.

For reasons of reducing the formality of the situation, I reconsidered my initial plan to use a Tetum-English interpreter. Instead, the interviews were conducted in Indonesian by me. Though Indonesian was the second (and in some cases third) language, the respondents were comfortable with using it. Indonesian is also commonly used in Timor-Leste for discussing more abstract issues for which the local languages lack the necessary vocabulary. Also, my initial, tentative attempts at finding an East Timorese interpreter willing to venture into parts of town generally regarded as being dangerous came to naught, given the pervasive fear of potential repercussions in Dili at the time of my field research.

Depending on how comfortable the interviewee felt with the situation, I would either take notes during the interview or, if necessary, immediately after the interview. For reasons of reducing the formality of the interviews, I abandoned my initial plan to tape record the interviews and recorded them by taking hand-written notes, as this was seen as being less intrusive. While some interviewees felt intimidated by my note-taking, other seemed to revel in it; peering into my notebook on occasion to try and make sure I got their quote right. Depending on how I read the situation, I either took notes directly during the interviews or wrote down notes of the interview immediately afterwards.

The interviews were semi-structured, meaning that I had a relatively general list of questions and topics prepared for the interviews but would allow the discussion to flow as freely as possible and with as little prompting as possible from my side. Over the course of the field research, I modified my set of questions depending on what kind of issues had come up in previous interviews.<sup>15</sup> Often, I would start the interview with a more general question, for example a question about the respondents' current life situation, to get the conversation started. At times, I would also start off with a lengthier explanation of my own background to break the ice and in other interviews this would come in the end, as I also encouraged my respondents to ask me questions if they had any. On average, the interviews would last for around one hour to one-and-a-half hours, in some cases shorter (minimum time being around 30 minutes) to longer ones of around three hours. The shorter interviews were due to the interviewee clearly not feeling comfortable with the situation and my questions and him giving mono-syllabic or repetitive answers. This occurred in about half-a-dozen cases, usually when interviewing lower-ranking members. On the opposite end of the spectrum, some interviewees were highly loquacious and needed very little prompting to lay out their narrative. The latter tended to be the more senior members of the organisations, an observation which correlates with that of Janko van der Werf's findings (2008, 83) on leadership in *raskol* gangs in Papua New Guinea, in which van der Werf sees the capacity for having and passing on expertise, similar to that of traditional village elders, as being a key component of leadership.

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<sup>15</sup> An example of this was the use of magic, which I had in no way considered in my initial questions but which emerged through the interviews as an important element of the appeal of these various groups to the men involved

#### 4.5.2. Background interviews

In addition to the interviews with the ex-militia and gang, MAG and RAG members themselves, I carried out numerous background interviews and discussions with both East Timorese and internationals working on related issues mainly in Timor-Leste but also in Indonesia and in various European countries (e.g. Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Kingdom). In this thesis I therefore draw on discussions carried out over the 10 year period that I have been actively involved with Timor-Leste. The stress tends, however, to be on the two key periods this thesis focuses on – the 1998-1999 period for militia violence and 2006-2008 crisis-period for the gangs, martial arts and ritual arts groups. In part, these interviews and discussions were linked to other related research which I was carrying out in the country.

The interviewees included East Timorese, Indonesian and international activists and representatives of civil society organisations, academics and journalists, both in Timor-Leste and abroad (see Appendix 2 for a list of selected relevant interviews and discussions). Furthermore, I conducted several interviews of members of the national and international security forces, government representatives and members of the various UN missions. Interviews with representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), government or UN officials and academia took place either in the offices of the interviewee in question or in a neutral location such as a café or restaurant. The interviews were carried out in English, Finnish, German and Indonesian and were for the most part semi-structured.

Returning to Franklin's (1997, 100-105) classification of interview techniques, both my primary and background interviews turned out to be, in the end, a mixture of the three different models, taking elements information extraction, shared understanding and discourse models to adapt to the particular situation. In keeping with the shared understanding model, all interviews were semi-structured, I sought to approach each interview 'as open-minded as possible' and I used the tool of re-checking that I had understood correctly by paraphrasing and asking further questions. As a way of creating a more conducive interview atmosphere, I however also used elements of what Franklin classifies as being part of the discourse model, such as discussing some of my own experiences and trying to reduce the formality of the situation. Also, themes emerging in interviews informed subsequent interviews with other respondents.

I did, however, in certain ways also continue to use the information extraction approach in as far as I did not enter into discussions with my respondents about their views and interpretations but merely sought to record them. For example, to take the above-mentioned question of how to respond to a respondent who characterised a one-sided massacre of unarmed civilians as a combat situation, I did not challenge him but rather just noted his interpretation of events. Thus, to return to the ethical and practical dilemma raised by Wood (2006, 382) of how to deal with lies, denials and rumours, I chose to treat them, as Fujii (2010) suggests, as ‘meta-data.’ It did not, however, always come easily as the gut reaction I chose to repress would have been to challenge their assertions on the spot.

#### 4.5.3. Participant observation

As discussed above in my reflections on my position as a researcher, I both was and was not a participant in the ‘ethnographic moment’ which I was studying. When it came to the militias, MAGs, RAGs and gangs, as I was not involved in their daily activities but I did participate more generally with the phenomena, be it through reporting on militia and gang violence or through my involvement with local conflict resolution activities. On occasion, I also became a target of the violence, for example in 1999 when militia groups repeatedly attacked or threatened our referendum observer mission and again in 2006-2007 when places I was staying at came under attack by gang, MAG or RAG members on several occasions.

The degree of my participation was on the one hand delineated by myself and on the other hand by the groups which I was studying. I chose to interact with the groups in question but maintain a certain distance which still demarcated me as an outsider. On the other hand, the groups and individual respondents themselves also seemed to draw the line at more or less the same point – I was not and never would be an insider in their respective groups nor was I at any point invited to come in any closer, unlike for example Janko van der Werf (2008) in Papua New Guinea. This may well have been due to the political environment during the time of the main part of my field research when the gangs, MAGs and RAGs saw themselves by and large as being antagonistic towards the foreign interveners. As far as the ex-militias were concerned, I obviously lacked the historical pedigree of having part of their organisations in 1998-99. I was therefore, both by design and default, relegated to the position of a ‘peripheral

observer' (Li, 2008, 104) as far as the inner workings of the various groups and most of their activities were concerned.

Following my first visit to the country in 1999 as an observer for the independence referendum, I have visited Timor-Leste approximately 20 times, visiting all but one of the thirteen districts. My visits have had different motivations, but for the most part they have involved some degree of analysis of the situation. I have been working in Timor-Leste for journalistic purposes, academic research and as part of my work with local and international civil society organisations. The information gathered and the observations made during these visits, along with discussions with East Timorese from various social and geographical backgrounds, have inevitably flowed into my analysis, even though it is difficult, if not impossible to always pin-point these influences.

In retrospect, it is of course regrettable from the point of view of my research that the idea to write this thesis had not yet occurred to me when I was able to experience the militia groups live in action, as it were, in 1999. Therefore, the militia interviews were more a historical look back, in which the interviewees were speaking with hindsight coloured by the experiences of the past eight to ten years. The same is also true for my own interpretation of my recollections of that period which I have also drawn on in this thesis. Being a referendum observer tasked with being as neutral and even-handed as possible, I was in a very different position in 1999 than during the primary field research in 2007, when I was able to freely decide what issues to concentrate upon. It is of course also important to note that I was also a different person and saw the workings of East Timorese society around me in 2007 in a very different light than when I first arrived in Dili in August 1999 – and along with my views, the society of Timor-Leste itself had changed dramatically.<sup>16</sup>

#### **4.6. Challenges and difficulties**

Conducting field research in an infra-structurally under-developed and volatile post-conflict society such as Timor-Leste brought with it numerous practical challenges, most notably

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<sup>16</sup> It is worth remembering that at the time of the main part of my field research in 2007, the events of 1999, which were my relatively recent past, were statistically speaking half-a-lifetime away for the average East Timorese

restrictions on my own mobility as well as of my interviewees. A further challenge was posed by the technicalities and practicalities of trying to track people down with the help of phone numbers acquired from their acquaintances, friends and relatives in an age of frequently changing pre-paid cell phone cards and numbers. A further challenge was dealing with a contemporary topic, where my research was often overtaken by events.

Given the potential sensitivity of my topic, it is not unsurprising that at least in Indonesian West Timor (where it was rather conspicuous), I was under surveillance by the local security forces. This of course brought with it an element of potential danger to my interviewees and to a lesser degree to me. Quite naturally, my interviewees tended to treat possible interest by law enforcement officials in their activities as being a given. Though it was not explicitly mentioned by any of the interviewees, they might well have assumed that I was collecting my information on behalf of for example the UN police or peacekeeping forces, leading to a degree of wariness on their part. Following on from this, it is of course very difficult for me to assess how forthright my respondents were in answering my questions, especially when they touched upon sensitive issues. These, however, could often be counter-checked by talking to other groups. In fact, it was often easier to gain information on, say, gang A from their rivals in gang B than directly from gang A.

Quite apart from the challenges of conducting the interview in a language (Indonesian) which was neither the native language of the interviewer and interviewee was a deeper lack of understanding, both in the ways gender and violence were regarded by me on the one hand and my counterparts on the other. My understanding of gender roles as social constructs rather than as being 'natural' was not shared by all interviewees, nor did we always see eye to eye as to what constituted violence, let alone justified use of violence. Also, and this was especially the case with the ex-militias, my respondents were often more interested in talking about another issue (e.g. their current economic situation) rather than what I wanted to interview them on.

One practical issue I ran into in a number of the interviews was that, in spite of my personal preference for one-on-one interviews, I did end up having to carry out several group interviews. This was either due to their wish to conduct the interview this way or arose out of the situation, especially if the interview was in a club house, of others more or less budging

into interview situation. Though far from ideal, I chose to tolerate these additional interviewees, who in fact did at times provide useful insights.

The presence of an additional person may of course have also inhibited the interviewee from discussing certain topics he might otherwise have addressed. I did however not get this impression in any of these situations. Rather, the respondents did not feel in any way perturbed or distracted by the additional person or persons.

In conducting my interviews, I often felt a high degree of frustration with the ultimately understandable tendency of many respondents to not directly answer my questions but to retreat to the safer ground of discussing potentially controversial on a general level, as if they were hypothetical issues rather than ones which directly affected their own lives. On occasion, I struggled to maintain my own position as a researcher and not challenge the answers of my respondents. This was especially the cases with the legitimisations given by the ex-militias, who claimed that they had had no other choice but to kill if they wanted to avoid getting killed by the enemy themselves. This in no way corresponded with what I had witnessed in August-September 1999 or with any other accounts of the violence which I have seen. As mentioned above, practically all of the militia violence was directed against unarmed civilians. Nor were the militias under any real threat of retribution from the Indonesian security forces if they did not participate in the violence – the vast majority of militia members did not want to be involved with the violence and simply melted away with no punitive action taken.

Though it was at a different level of severity, the refusal of most gang, MAG and RAG members I interviewed to live up to their personal responsibility for violent acts was similar. The most common justification for the violence of 2006-2008 was that of manipulation by an ill-defined political elite – yet there was no acknowledgement that the various groups had at the very least passively allowed themselves to be manipulated. If, however as was often asserted, the groups were manipulated by accepting money from ‘certain members of the political elite’ (who always remained unnamed, the information thus remaining unverifiable) for carrying out acts of violence, then it was not an act of passivity in the face of manipulation but active complicity.

One of the most striking features in the interviews was the extremely high degree of similarity in the responses I received, regardless of the background, age and geographical location of the respondents, especially within the two sub-groups themselves. It was at times as if the respondents were all reading from the same script. I also often was left with a feeling after the interviews, with a handful of notable exceptions, that the responses I had received reflected not only a sanitised version of reality but were actively (though perhaps unwittingly) presented in a way in which my interlocutors expected me to want to hear the answers and/or how they would like to see themselves and their particular group as being viewed by an international observer. This would include stressing their non-violence and inclusiveness, as opposed to the violent and partisan ways of the other groups. Also, many respondents were aware of the often stigmatising ways in which they have been represented in East Timorese and foreign (most notably neighbouring Australian) public discourse and sought to counter-act these representations. This, then, leads us to the tricky question of how my own presence may well have shifted the discourse and the power relations between the interviewer and interviewee.

Thus, even in interviews where the physical power of the interviewee and his group were stacked against me (e.g. when carrying out the interview in a gang leader's house), the power of interpretation and definition lay with me as a representative (as I was assumed to be by some of my respondents) of the powers that be and that this could have implications for the interviewee, a fact that was, I felt, often reflected in the answers.

The use of gatekeepers to gain access, as mentioned above, was in my opinion far from ideal but inevitable given the nature of the groups I was researching. For the most part, the gatekeepers tended however to be both helpful and useful, willing to provide access and not interfere with the research. The two main exceptions were gaining access to interviewees in IDP camps and dealing with East Timorese officials. In the IDP camps, a strong and pervasive feeling of fear and distrust tended to cause respondents to be, at best, far more guarded in their answers and at worst to not gaining any form of access. Access to East Timorese officials, also noted by other researchers such as Dara Kay Cohen (2010, 59) was often difficult, as was gaining access to potential respondents where East Timorese officials acted as gatekeepers. For example, my plans to interview juvenile gang, MAG and RAG members held in Becora prison rested on getting personal approval from the Minister of Justice, Lúcia Lobato, but

repeated attempts during the field research period to get further than the waiting room to her office's ante-chamber came to nought.

As Morgan (1992, 87) noted,

*'Qualitative research has its own brand of machismo with its image of the male sociologist bringing back news from the fringes of society, the lower depths, the mean streets.'*

I believe that this is even more the case when this kind of qualitative research is carried out in societies which are in conflict. I have little sympathy for and see no particular reason or need for this self-aggrandisement or mystification of this kind of research. Though the costs to the outside researcher are far smaller than the ones endured by the local population, they do nevertheless exist. As outlined with brutal honesty by, for example Chris Hedges (2002) and Anthony Loyd (2000), and analysed by Anthony Feinstein (2006), reporting on conflicts often brings with it a high physical and psychological price. Though the three authors all deal with war correspondents, I believe that the overall picture is not dissimilar for other 'involved third-party outsiders,' who are in the conflict zone. Though the personal and emotional stress of carrying out research on groups acting partially in spaces of illegality and/or of carrying out research in conflict and post-conflict environments have been commented on by some researchers (e.g. Cohen, 2010; Fujii, 2010; Kraska, 1998; Li, 2008 and Wilson, 2010), it remains to my mind still an under-researched issue.

#### **4.7. Conclusion**

In this chapter I have summarised the various ethical and practical challenges of carrying out my research, in terms of questions such as respective positions of power, issues of confidentiality, questions of representation and of reporting on violence. I outlined the various problems raised by researching individuals and groups acting partially on the fringes of society, as well as of working in a post-colonial and post-conflict environment, and of how I sought to address these questions through my research methodology. In the end, due to the nature of my research, the implementation of the research methods in the field required flexible *in situ* adaptations to the situation. Many of the dilemmas raised in this Chapter

remain unresolved to a degree, such as for example the power imbalance between myself as a researcher and my respondents. I have sought, by reflecting on these dilemmas, on the one hand to contextualise the research I present here but also to encourage further debate on the challenges of studying masculinities, violence and groups operating in spaces of illegality as well as of carrying out research in post-colonial and conflict/post-conflict environments.

## **5. Narratives of violence, denial and belonging – the interviews**

This chapter summarises the individual interviews with former militia members and members of gangs, MAGs and RAGs which I carried out as part of my field research in Timor-Leste and West Timor. Following the presentation of the primary interviews, I analyse similarities and differences both within the two sub-sets of militias on the one hand and gang/MAG/RAG interviews on the other, as well as between the two sub-sets. These are then contrasted with the background interviews which I carried out with local and international observers.

I have reproduced the interviews here in a summarised rather than verbatim version in part for the fluidity of the argumentation and in part due to my data collection method, which was not done by tape recorder but rather by handwritten notes, which, depending on the situation during the interview, I often needed to write up after the rather than during the interview situation.

I have chosen to keep all respondents anonymous, using numbers preceded by ‘M’ for members of the former militias and other pro-integration supporters I interviewed and numbers preceded by ‘G’ for members of the MAGs, RAGs and gangs. Given the relative ease with which people can be identified in a society as small as Timor-Leste, I have also chosen to only give an indication of the respective rank in their organisation and of the general age bracket into which the interviewee fell into at the time of research rather than a more exact indication. A list of primary interviews can be found in Appendix 1, a list of selected background interviews in Appendix 2. All of the interviews of the gang, MAG and RAG members took place in Timor-Leste while the ex-militia interviews took place in various locations in West Timor, Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT) province of Indonesia.

The translations of the interviews from Indonesian to English are my own. The summaries and partial interpretations presented after the interviews are also my own, based mostly on me contrasting and analysing the primary interviews in the light of my own observations as well as the background interviews. As such, they are of course open to debate – a debate which I would very much encourage, especially also with the participation of East Timorese rather than merely outside observers.

## 5.1. Interviews with Ex-Militias and Pro-Integration fighters

The interviews summarised in this section are with former members of the pro-Indonesian militia groups which emerged in Timor-Leste previous to the referendum on independence in 1999 as well as a former East Timorese member of the Indonesian paramilitary Brimob (*Brigade Mobil*) police units which assisted the militias.

*M1, Atambua, NTT, 30.11.2007 – ‘Yeah, they were heartbroken, that’s why they reacted violently’*

Contacted through one of the gang leaders in Dili, M1 was to be my initial contact in West Timor for arranging the first round of interviews with former members of the militia and other members of the pro-integration camp. In his early thirties now and originally from Dili, M1 remained vague about his exact role and activities in 1999. He was however well connected to various ex-militia members, former East Timorese members of the Indonesian military and other pro-integration supporters. The interview took place in a hotel lobby in Atambua, West Timor. Throughout the interview, he retained a calm and self-confident demeanour, responding to the questions in an almost detached manner.

He saw the pro-integration struggle as being first and foremost a political one, one in which the East Timorese population at the time ‘had to choose - to join the pro-independence camp, remain neutral or join the pro-integration camp.’ He did not see the choice of joining the pro-integration camp as being one forced upon the East Timorese by the militias or the Indonesian security forces but rather as a personal political choice. Though he maintained that the majority of the militia members were non-Timorese migrants, he did acknowledge that some East Timorese joined as well. In his opinion some joined for the money one could earn as a militia member, others were lured by the promise of positions in administration and better pay in case of a victory by the pro-integration camp, and others for personal reasons such as the possibility of settling personal scores and others by the power one enjoyed as a militia member:

*'Yeah, the Indonesians promised them jobs in the administration if the integration side won. But some, they just wanted to be a jago,<sup>17</sup> you know, enjoy the power and maybe get back at people.'*

In discussing these motivations, M1 was not referring to his own reasons for joining the pro-integrationist camp. Rather, he referred to those lured by promises of power and money derisively as being *'orang kampung,'* which literally means villagers but has the connotation of country bumpkins.

*'A lot of those militia, they were just orang kampung, you know, they couldn't read or write and didn't even know what a KTP<sup>18</sup> looked like, you could fool your way through their checkpoints so easily. Yeah, some of those guys just went for the money, joined in for the money and the promise of jobs.'*

He saw the militia violence as stemming mainly from feelings of sadness and frustration at the prospect of the severing of ties to Indonesia and at seeing their political project fail. M1 made no reference to militia violence prior to the referendum, though

*'After the referendum, that's when things started. Yeah, the militia, they were heartbroken,<sup>19</sup> you know, that's why they reacted violently. They wanted integration with Indonesia and they lost. So they were frustrated and heartbroken, that's why there was violence.'*

Following the retreat of the militias and the forced deportation of 300 000 civilians to West Timor which they facilitated, M1 said that the militia members soon became disillusioned with their leaders and the Indonesian government for failing to provide them with what they felt was adequate compensation and recognition for their sacrifices to the pro-integration cause. According to him, the ex-militias now felt 'traumatised' and were afraid to return to Timor-Leste out of fear of retribution and in the knowledge that their former homes were now occupied by others. The news about gang violence in Dili was a further deterrent.

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<sup>17</sup> The term literally means a fighting cock but carries the connotation of a tough guy or macho

<sup>18</sup> KTP – *Kartu Tanda Penduduk*, Indonesian identification card

<sup>19</sup> The term used by M1 was *sakit hati*, which carries a slightly broader connotation than the English term and covers general feelings of heavy-heartedness, profound sadness and frustration

*'We don't want to go back to Dili now, its too dangerous. All those martial arts groups...But we don't like being treated like second-class citizens here. A lot of people would like to go back but they're afraid of what would happen. They feel traumatised, they want guarantees for their safety.'*

According to M1, some of the MAGs and RAGs from Timor-Leste did have members in West Timor as well but these had not caused any problems.

*M2-M4, group interview, Atambua, NTT, 30.11.2007 – 'We had to do it, it was a time of madness'*

The group interview was organised with the help of M1 and consisted of a mid-level former commander of the *Aitarak* militia (M2) who was now in his mid-forties; his '*anak buah*,'<sup>20</sup> a young man in his late twenties (M3) and a former East Timorese member of the paramilitary Brimob police unit (M4), now in his late thirties, who in 1999 had actively supported the pro-integration cause. All were originally from Dili or from nearby Becora. The interview was initially to take place in a restaurant but as the interviewees felt that they would not be able to talk freely there for fear of being overheard, they requested to relocate to my hotel room which was nearby. Once they had ascertained themselves there that no-one was eavesdropping, the interview was able to go ahead. M2 and M4 proved very talkative while M3 remained silent until the very end of the interview after the two others had left.

M2, the oldest and most senior of the group, gave a lengthy explanation of the political aims of the pro-integration movement in 1999, claiming, amongst other things, that what they had actually been aiming for was independence, just not in the immediate term but after a 1-2 year interim period under international auspices.<sup>21</sup>

*'We wanted independence! That's what we were fighting for! But we knew that we would not be ready immediately, that we needed outside support for maybe one or two*

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<sup>20</sup> Follower or disciple, see Chapter 9 for a more extensive discussion of the term

<sup>21</sup> Somewhat ironically, this is of course was of course more or less what did happen in the end, when the territory was placed under UN mandateship before independence. At the time, in 1999, the militia which the respondent belonged to expressly rejected this option.

*years before independence. We knew the Timorese weren't ready yet, but the independence side wanted things immediately, they wanted to go too fast.'*

He saw his membership in the militia mainly as a political choice and considered himself to be a good Timorese and Indonesian patriot, albeit one who has been misunderstood and misrepresented. He also felt that his sacrifices for the cause had not been properly acknowledged. He saw himself as a patriot, good Catholic and a good family man, but felt 'traumatised' by the lack of recognition the militias had received and the impossibility, as he saw it, of returning to Timor-Leste for fear of reprisals.

*'We all struggled for the nation, but we get no recognition. We can not go back to Timor-Leste yet, it's too dangerous for us. We don't know what would happen. And that makes me sad. We are all traumatised by it. Here, the Indonesians, they treat us like second-class citizens. And we fought for them! We get no recognition, no support from the government.'*

Regarding the violence carried out by the militias, he admitted to having participated in it, including in an unspecified number of killings, but justified these with a number of explanations – he was under orders, it was a wartime situation of killing or being killed in which he feared for his life, and the militias were 'heartbroken' ('*sakit hati*') because of their loss at the poll in the referendum.

*'You know, we were in a war. It was war. We had to kill. It was kill or be killed. The independence side, they had weapons. And the Indonesians too. We had to protect ourselves. We were under orders, it was war, there was no choice. And yes, after the referendum, we were all heartbroken, we were very sad...'*

He was however more keen to stress how he had, in 1999, saved lives of neighbours and in 2000 had unsuccessfully tried to intervene on behalf of the three foreign UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) staff who were killed by a militia-led mob (UNHCR, 2001).

*'You know, in 2000, I was there, I tried to save those foreigners. I tried to help them, but they [the mob] didn't listen to me. I tried to help them escape, but I couldn't save them.'*

He hoped that East Timorese society would stop focusing on the past and instead welcome the former militias back in order to build a new, independent Timor-Leste.

*'We want to go back, we want to live in Timor-Leste again, we want to build the new Timor-Leste together, to develop it together. But we need guarantees for our safety, the government has to guarantee our safety, that nothing happens to us. We need to forget the past and look into the future, build the future together.'*

Similarly to M2, interviewee M4, spoke of the pro-integration movement and militias as being politically motivated with no coercion to join. M4 also admitted to having taken part in the violence but remained non-committal as to whether he had killed anyone, saying that it was possible. Like M2, he characterised the situation in Dili in August-September 1999 as a 'war,' and as 'a time of madness' (*jaman gila*) in which he was under orders and fighting a lethal enemy. With respect to his acts of violence, he said that he did not remember much as he was 'overcome with emotion' at the time. He also located the disappointment and frustration with the result of the referendum as being a primary factor in triggering the violence in 1999 as well as 'provocations' by the pro-independence side.

*'It was madness, it was war. We had to do it, it was a time of madness. And I was there, in the war. I had to follow orders. It was kill or be killed, really. And the independence side, they kept on provoking us. But, yeah, it was madness. I don't really remember much of it, I was just too overcome with my emotions then.'*

As in the case of M2 as well, M4 cast himself as a patriot and family man. He also cast himself as a good and devout Catholic though he did confess to wearing protective amulets. He also saw himself as having been denied the recognition he felt was due and felt 'traumatised' by his current life situation. He, too, felt it was time to move on rather than dwell on the past.

*'Look, we need to let the past be. We need to work together for the future. [...] The government here does not give us the support, the recognition we deserve. We want to go back to Dili but we are still too afraid. We don't know what would happen if we would go back. We are all traumatised by it.'*

As mentioned above, interviewee M3 remained silent throughout most of the approximately two hour interview and only began to talk after the other two interviewees had left. While many of the other interviewees, be they ex-militias or active in the current gangs, MAGs and RAGs, had often talked in a somewhat casual manner of being 'traumatised,' M3 was clearly so and in a severe manner which I felt could require professional psychological care. In what might, would professional psychologists be consulted, possibly be diagnosed as a form of the so-called Stockholm syndrome in which a hostage develops a strong emotional attachment to her/his captor, M3 was absolutely devoted to interviewee M2, whom he had latched on to in August-September 1999. M3 had become an '*anak buah*' of the militia commander after an attack by the very same militias against the house of the family of M3 in Becora. While the rest of the family had been killed by the militias headed by M2, M2 had apparently intervened on behalf of M3, who then joined the group as they retreated to West Timor and has remained with M2 ever since. His narrative kept returning over and over again to the killing of his family and the 'kindness' shown by M2 by not killing him as well.

*'He saved me, he saved my life when everyone else in my family was killed. He saved my life and then he took me with him here to Atambua. That's why I became his anak buah.'*

As he had been the one to put me in contact with interviewees M2-M4, M1 joined in the interview situation as well but did not participate in the discussion beyond a few clarifying remarks.

*Figure 8: Life in a relocation camp for former East Timorese refugees, Oebelo, West Timor (Iman Nugroho, 2009)*



*M5-M7, group interview, Besikama relocation camp, NTT, 01.12.2007 – ‘Our life here is very hard, but that was the choice we made’*

The second group interview with former members of the pro-integration movement took place in Besikama relocation camp, on the southern coast of West Timor, close to the border with Timor-Leste. The camp was located in a remote and inhospitable area and consisted of dilapidated buildings which were clearly originally meant for temporary use only. Three men agreed to a joint interview but tended to be rather terse in their answers; the atmosphere remained somewhat tense throughout the interview.

The three men all admitted to having joined pro-integration groups in 1999 for political reasons, but refused to go into more detail as to what kind of positions or in which organisations they were in. All three originated from the area around Suai, which is just across the border in south-western Timor-Leste. Following the vote for independence, they had decided to follow their political leaders, together with their families, into exile on the Indonesian side of the border. All three saw the violence in 1999 as being a result of the frustration of the pro-integration side with the result of the referendum. However, unlike most other respondents who tended to concentrate on their status as victims, the three interviewees were ready to accept the full consequences of their choice in 1999. As M5 put it,

*'Life here is hard, very hard. Just look around you, look at how we live here. But we made a decision to join with Indonesia in 1999 and now we will remain with Indonesia. We will not go back to Timor-Leste, we will bear the consequences of our decision. It was our decision back then and we will live with it.'*

The relationship between these 'new citizens' of Indonesia, as they were sometimes called, and their West Timorese neighbours were often tense, especially surrounding issues of land use and access to resources. The interviewees felt that as East Timorese they were being discriminated against, having been given mostly non-arable land and little access to other resources.

M6: *'Yes, we have a lot of problems with them [the neighbouring communities]. Especially in the beginning, there were a lot of conflicts with them. And the land we got, it's useless. But that's what we have to live with. The [Indonesian] government, they don't care about us. It's difficult.'*

The interviewees were clearly reluctant to talk about the past and instead repeatedly turned the conversation to their current, difficult living conditions, the way they felt they were treated as second-class citizens and were not receiving the humanitarian support they had been promised by the government and by international organisations. Unlike other pro-integration interviewees, they exhibited little nostalgia for Timor-Leste, however, nor did they demand recognition for their role in the past.

*M8, Atambua, NTT, 16.07.2009 – ‘It was kill or be killed.’*

In his late thirties, M8 is now a civil servant in Belu regency, West Timor. He is also the secretary-general of a local pressure group lobbying for the rights of ex-militias and other pro-integration supporters, demanding compensation and support from the Indonesian government as they see themselves as victims of a political decision which was imposed upon them from the outside. Earlier in 2009, he had been involved in organising a protest by former militia members demanding access to the direct cash compensation from the Indonesian central government (*bantuan langsung tunai* – BLT) which turned violent and for which he was briefly jailed (The Jakarta Post, 2009).

M8 came from a family, originating in Ermera, which had supported what was then Portuguese Timor’s integration with Indonesia in 1975, seeing it as the best alternative for the territory’s future. His father had supported early undercover Indonesian military special forces incursions into the territory as a guide and M8 considered himself and his family as being ‘blacklisted’ by the pro-independence camp. Thus, for family and for political reasons, he joined the *Aitarak* militia in Dili. He initially joined as a computer operator, an indication that contrary to the public opinion of the militias as being socially marginalised, they were also able to draw on more educated youth as well.

*‘I chose Aitarak and the pro-integration because of my principles. In the history of the struggle for integration, I just followed my parents who thought that uniting with Indonesia was the best decision. My father was a former member of an underground group of the Indonesian Special Forces which infiltrated East Timor. In the eyes of the pro-independence camp and Fretilin, we are the black list people.’*

Fearing potential reprisals in the case of a victory of the pro-independence camp, M8 quickly became more involved with the militia, going from computer operator to militia fighter and joining in on the massacre at the house of Manuel Carrascalão on 17 April, 1999, in which at least twelve but possibly over thirty civilians were killed by the militias. He admitted to having at least had the intention of killing, though he was not absolutely certain that he had indeed killed someone. He saw the situation in August-September 1999 as a war-like situation, one of killing or being killed.

*'I once shot at a suspicious person. I did not know whether the man was hit or not. It was on September, 6 or 7 in Vila Verde [a neighbourhood in central Dili], Post number nine. I did not know if he was dead or not because I was shooting in the dark. We were attacking because the options were only death or life.'*

He did not have any regrets whatsoever for his deeds, citing provocations by the pro-independence side and the need to 'survive' in a 'conflict' in which he and his family might become victimised further down the line. He did however admit that arrogant and ignorant attitudes by Indonesian security forces *vis-à-vis* the East Timorese population had worked in favour of the independence camp.

*'I had a gun in my hand, so did my enemy. The choice was to kill or to be killed. Whoever would live first. [...] Sometimes, the army intelligence agents made wrong reports and as a result, many residents were caught. This was one of the main factors which made East Timor people lose their sympathetic to Indonesian authority.'*

It was however more the current state of affairs which was more pressing for M8 than past deeds, and he repeatedly laid out how poorly the ex-integrationists had been treated by the Indonesian government, tinged with bitterness about the lack of recognition by Indonesian society for the 'sacrifices and trauma' the ex-militias had endured. He went so far as to accuse the Indonesian government of trying to systematically kill off the East Timorese ex-refugees by not giving them better land to settle on.

*'We are being systematically killed by the [Indonesian] government. The refugee area was built in a dry location, with no access to water, in order to kill us East Timorese slowly. It is happening right now. A systematical killing! We can see at the public cemetery that most of people buried there are refugees from Timor-Leste. They died because of starvation and diseases.'*

Interestingly, unlike most other ex-militias, he seemed to view a return to Timor-Leste as a possible alternative if the Indonesian government continued to turn a deaf ear to his demands. The possibility of reprisals or having to face justice for his past deeds did not seem to factor in this equation in any way. Nonetheless, he questioned the value of Timor-Leste's

independence, pointing to enduring poverty, the continued presence of foreign troops and influence of Indonesian culture.

*'After the United Nations leave Timor-Leste and there are less security disturbances, we'll go home. My children will go to Timor-Leste after completing their studies. If they don't have a bright future in Indonesia, it is good for them to return to Timor-Leste. And after being retired as civil servant, I'll also probably go home. I'm not alone. Many ex-militias feel psychological pressure here. They don't own land and house. Meanwhile, the majority of East Timorese people still consume Indonesian instant noodles, so it's not so different there.'*

Animism and ancestral worship played a strong part in his life and in spite of living outside of Timor-Leste and thus being physically separated from the proper places in which to venerate them, M8 still regularly made sacrifices to his ancestral spirits from afar.

*M9, Kupang, NTT, 19.07.2009 – 'I was only acting under orders.'*

In 1999, M9 was a key militia leader. Originating from the southern coast, orphaned early on, he spent most of his youth in Dili. He had joined the precursors of the militias, the *Gardapaksi*, in the mid-1990s and took up a key position in the overall militia hierarchy. As such, he was directly involved in a range of serious crimes committed by the militias, including involvement in some of the more notorious mass crimes in Dili, such as the Carrascalão-house massacre in April 1999. He did not deny his participation in these acts in any way but pointed out that he was not the only one responsible and was acting under orders at the time. He felt that being Timorese, he was being unfairly singled out as a guilty party while his former Indonesian military backers had advanced in their careers or retired comfortably.

*'Yes, I was there, I never denied that, I never denied what I did. But I was only acting under orders, I was doing my duty. I am not the only one responsible for what happened – I am innocent. And now, afterwards, I was made the scapegoat while my old bosses lead a nice life in a villa in Puncak [a mountain resort close to Jakarta].'*

*Why were only Timorese tried [in the Indonesian ad hoc tribunals]? Why were no Indonesians tried? But I am a patriot, that's why I was ready to go to prison.'*

Now in his late thirties, he tried to find new respectability by running for a political office but had ultimately failed. Instead, he now channelled his energy and ambitions into the activities of an NGO promoting the rights of ex-militias in Indonesia. According to his associates who helped organise the interview, he has now become a mellower and more thoughtful man than he was back in 1999 – 'in the past, he was quick to pull his gun, but now he is more thoughtful,' according to his private secretary.

When it came to his family history in terms of supporting independence or integration with Indonesia, it was a rather mixed affair, with some for and some against. One of his relatives had however played a role in the 1959 Viqueque uprising against Portuguese rule.

Similar to M2, M9 cast himself as a wronged Indonesian and Timorese patriot whose contributions had not been adequately honoured. He saw his militia membership as being a part of a political struggle and the violence of 1999 occurring in the context of a war-time situation. He was derisive of the treatment the former pro-integration fighters had received from the Indonesian government, calling it a 'half-hearted, inhumane response' rather than the 'honour and appreciation they deserved' for fulfilling their patriotic duty. The past, in his eyes, should not be dwelled upon though.

*'Joining together with Indonesia was our choice and it certainly had political risks we had to face. We should not be upset and angry about everything that has occurred. Let the past memories become history. The next issue for me is how the Indonesian government will finally start paying more attention to us pro-integration fighters. I think it is essential because of our dedication and services to the state. Someone must finally take responsibility and not close their eyes to us. Man's patience has its limitations.'*

He showed no regrets though he did confess to feeling a longing for Timor-Leste and a wish to return. Like M8, he questioned the degree of Timor-Leste's independence given the dollarization of the economy and the continued presence of foreign troops and police, but made a point of saying that he respected it. He felt that it was time to move on, not to dwell on

the past and to build a new Timorese society. In his opinion, however, East Timorese tended to have difficulty in uniting behind any single cause unless it was against an outside force.

*'I still communicate with my old friends in Timor-Leste who used to be pro-independence. I think their rights should be respected. However, I hear their disappointment and regrets. They realise that the freedom they wanted is not like they had imagined it to be. I'm so concerned... They said that their life had been difficult in Timor-Leste. I answered that we live in the same, difficult situation in Indonesia. Once more, however, I don't want to interfere in Timor-Leste's political matter. My hope is that freedom will bring benefits for all Timorese people who have sacrificed themselves and suffered.'*

Using his political connections, he was hoping to take his case to the Indonesian central government and was also planning to publish a book outlining the integrationist side of the history of the 1999 referendum. There was no space in his narrative for the victims of militia violence.

*M10, Oebelo, NTT, 20.07.2009 – 'My hands are bloody.'*

M10 was also a former member of the militias, was now in his mid-thirties and working as a casual labourer, scraping together a living in a resettlement area several kilometres outside of the NTT provincial capital Kupang. The interview took place in his house with his wife and four children around. A few years back one of his children had died of malnutrition and he was clearly bitter about his current life circumstances. Life in the resettlement area was hard, earning a livelihood difficult and relations with the local West Timorese poor. He was not very keen on granting an interview initially but opened up slightly more over the course of the interview, though a question on the use of magic and ritual tensed up the situation again, as he felt these matters should not be discussed out of fear of retribution by ancestral spirits.

Previous to joining the militia, he had been a coffee farmer in the western highlands before moving to Dili and Viqueque. In the militia he had been a mid-level member and had been involved in several acts of violence. Though he did not wish to elaborate beyond saying that

he had been involved in killings, the insinuation was that he had possibly committed numerous serious crimes. He was therefore now afraid of arrest and did not foresee a return.

*'I joined in Aitarak in 1999 and had a member card. Before that I was a farmer in Timor-Leste, I had some coconut trees, a coffee farm and rice field. But I just can't return there now because my hands are bloody after what I did in 1999. I was involved in some attacks against pro-independence people in which some people were killed. If I go back, I'll be caught and arrested. I often have communicated with some families who live in Viqueque and Dili. They recommended not going home now because we would be caught by the law.'*

He had no regrets about his deeds, and was proud of his past membership, showing off his militia membership card. Similar to the other ex-militias interviewed, he saw his actions as taking place within the 'kill or be killed' context of a war and saw the violence of 1999 as being politically motivated.

*'I don't regret it. The options were live or die. Either I killed someone or someone would have killed me. It is the way of war.'*

He wore a magic amulet which he had acquired in a sacred house (*uma lulik*) in Viqueque and which he had worn 'to battle' in 1999, but discussing it made him, as mentioned, uncomfortable.

As most of the other former members of the pro-integration movement interviewed, M10 was bitter about the lack of recognition and compensation he had received for what he saw were his sacrifices to the nation, especially as unlike M8 he had no steady, respectable job or, like M9, any degree of political clout. One of his children had died in the refugee camp in West Timor, increasing his bitterness.

*'I had four children, but one of them died in 2005 because of diarrhoea and starvation. We did not have enough money to take my child to hospital. We're still suffering until now. I fought for Indonesia in East Timor but I don't get any appreciation from the government.'*

Similar to the other ex-militia interviews, the victims of the militia violence found little space in the narrative of M10.

## **5.2. Interviews with MAG-, RAG- and gang members**

The interviews summarised below are with members of various gangs, martial arts groups and ritual arts groups in Dili, Baucau, Uato Lari and Zumalai.

*G1, Dili, 19.04.2007 – ‘The political elite was responsible for the violence’*

G1 was the oldest of the interviewees, he is in his late fifties-early sixties, had been a member of the Portuguese colonial army, a member of the armed resistance during the Indonesian occupation and was now considered to be one of the ‘godfathers’ of the ritual arts group 7-7 though he remained vague about his position in the organisation. His importance in the hierarchy of the organisation was however obvious from the state of his residential compound, which was where the interview took place. The compound was fortified with high walls and razor wire and a number of members of the organisation milled around the yard. According to rumours circulating in Dili, several assault rifles from police stockpiles were stored in the compound. The fortifications were set up after an attack on the compound in 2006 by rival martial arts group PSHT (*Persaudaraan Setia Hati Terate* – The Faithful Brotherhood of the Lotus Heart). The area surrounding the compound, which was in an impoverished former lower middle class area, was heavy with 7-7 graffiti. The interview was cordial but remained rather formal, and G1 tended to be guarded with his answers.

In an attempt to break the ice, I commenced the interview by asking G1 questions about his personal history and his assessment of East Timorese history, from the hasty decolonisation in 1974 to the 2006 crisis. The discussion focused mostly on his recollections of the 1999 militia violence, in which he gave an account of the militias which, to me, was surprisingly positive. Amongst other things, he characterised notorious militia leader and indicted war criminal Eurico Guterres as an East Timorese patriot and maintained that his *Aitarak* group had not killed any East Timorese, and down-playing, after I mentioned them, the massacres of unarmed civilians by militias in Liquiça and Suai 1999.

*'Pak Eurico is a great patriot, he was always fighting for Timor-Leste. He never killed any East Timorese. Aitarak never killed any East Timorese. If anybody killed East Timorese, it was the Indonesian army dressed in civilian clothes. [...] But well, yeah, maybe the militia guys in Liquiça and Suai were a bit hard-headed.'*

In discussing the gang, MAG and RAG violence, he maintained that there was no economic motivation (e.g. stealing or looting) behind the violence though socio-economic factors, above all the lack of jobs, drove young men to join the groups. He saw manipulation by political parties and *ema bo'ot* (lit. 'big people,' i.e. the political elites) as being the key factor in the escalation of the fighting, not gang leaders like himself.

*'It was the ema bo'ot, the political elite who was responsible for the violence. They manipulated the youth. The government failed the youth, they have not created jobs. And then the politicians manipulated the groups. That's why we had the violence, it's all political manipulation.'*

The late renegade Major Alfredo Reinado (who was still hiding in the mountains at the time of the interview), on the other hand, was for him a symbol of justice and resistance to oppression. His threat of setting Dili on fire was no idle threat – a botched attempt by the Australian SAS to arrest Reinado a few weeks prior to the interview had indeed led to widespread rioting and the setting up of burning barricades across Dili.

*'Alfredo is a true patriot, he is a fighter for justice. He is fighting against the corrupt elites, he's fighting for our nation. We all support him and if something happens to him, Dili will go up in flames!'*

In addition to rhetorical manipulation, he claimed that political parties were funding various groups, alleging that rival PSHT was being supported by PD (*Partido Democrático*) and included ex-militia and former Indonesian soldiers in its ranks. He denied any involvement of gang, MAG or RAG members with drugs, but did see alcohol abuse as playing a role in the violence.

*'No, there are no drugs here, not here in Timor-Leste. But yes, when the boys get drunk, when they have some tuak<sup>22</sup> and beer, then they start fighting. We Timorese are hot-headed, it doesn't take much for us to get into fights'*

Thus, while violence was seen by G1 on the one hand as a normal part of life and had no qualms about threatening the use of violence in the case of the capture or killing of Reinado, he was adamant that the public violence which had shaken Dili since the outbreak of the crisis of 2006 was the responsibility of unnamed political elites, not leading gang, MAG and RAG members such as himself.

*G2, Dili, 03.11.2007 and 13.11.2007 – 'We want to fly airplanes when we can't even repair mopeds'*

In his late thirties, G2 made a name for himself as a clandestine fighter in his neighbourhood by attacking Indonesian security forces during the occupation. He has been running a gang in his neighbourhood since Indonesian times which was involved in both petty criminal activities as well as supporting the independence struggle. According to himself, he gained enough notoriety for then-resistance leader Xanana Gusmão to intervene in 1999 to ask him to refrain from further actions out of fear that these might jeopardise the independence referendum. He was subsequently arrested and maltreated by the Indonesian police before escaping from captivity.

G2 is a body-builder and has physically much larger presence than many of the other young men interviewed. Combined with his persona and his personal history, he has become a relatively well-known figure in Dili beyond his neighbourhood. I was not able to ascertain what his level of involvement with violent crimes has been, but rumours abounded.

During the 2006 crisis, he was a mid-level player and was able to keep his neighbourhood calm. He was previously close to Major Alfredo but by the time of the interview he had distanced himself from the renegade soldier. He was no longer directly active in running his gang, which he preferred to view as a youth group, but remained a charismatic and loquacious figure of authority. As such he was also courted by foreign donor organisations, which

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<sup>22</sup> Palm wine

explained why the interview was conducted over a period of a week and was split into two. The first interview was cut short due to a meeting he had to attend after which he was not available for a week as he was attending a donor-sponsored workshop for ‘upcoming youth leaders’.

He tended to analyse processes from more of a distance than most other respondents, questioning some of the political slogans otherwise commonplace in the responses of other interviewees. On the issue of Reinado’s purported quest for ‘justice,’ he for example saw justice as depending on one’s point of view and position in society rather than as an unquestioned given:

*‘Yeah, that’s what he says – he claims he’s fighting for justice, but really he’s just like a petty thief. And I told him that. And what’s justice, really? I mean, I can say that I fight for justice but that’s just my version of justice, of what I think is justice – but is that going to look like justice in somebody else’s eyes? No, it’ll just be my version of justice.’*

He also saw a general reluctance to confessing and admitting to past mistakes as a key problem in East Timorese political culture.

*‘We East Timorese never confess, never repent anything. And that’s a problem. We always find someone else to blame for our faults. And then we have unrealistically high expectations, ambitions beyond our means, and when we fail, we again blame someone else. It’s kind of like someone who only knows how to fix a moped wanting to build an airplane, and when it crashes, blaming someone else. We always want to fly airplanes when we can’t even repair mopeds!’*

Regarding the emergence of the gangs, MAGs and RAGs as well as the violence, he saw a failure of the political leadership (who he described as *preman*<sup>23</sup> or thugs) as a key factor, with the previous Fretilin government in his view lacking both a vision and a policy for addressing youth issues and political parties as manipulating the groups. On the whole, he felt that there was a lack of positive role models in East Timorese society, especially for youth.

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<sup>23</sup> See Chapter 9 below for a more detailed discussion of the term

*'The Fretilin government, the political elites, they have all failed the youth. They have no concepts, no programme, no vision for the youth. All they are is a bunch of preman. The youth have no jobs, no proper role models. See, that's why so many join the gangs, the MAGs and RAGs. And then these groups get manipulated by the elite – that's when the violence then occurs.'*

While he saw the disappointment of the former members of the clandestine movement with the post-independence order as a further driving force, he also was of the opinion that there was a degree of unrealism in the demands made, that youth were asking for hand-outs and jobs without gaining the requisite skills first. He saw the fighting in the western suburbs of Delta and Comoro being partially motivated by access to housing, more specifically the coveted *perumahan* (real estate development schemes) built for Indonesian civil servants during the Suharto-era.

*'I mean, yeah, the clandestinos are disappointed, they're frustrated. They look at their lives now and look at the lives of the former guerrillas and they see how the former leaders are rich and living in fancy houses and stuff and they remained poor. So yeah, they are disappointed, they want recognition, they want compensation too. They want proper jobs, they want proper houses too. But they also need to understand that they have got to get themselves an education too, they can't just demand things. And that's their problem.'*

Similar to G1, interviewee G2 was also surprised me with the degree of sympathy for former militia members in spite of the fact that he, like G1, had also been actively involved in the independence struggle.

*'I keep in touch with some of them and it makes me sad, you know. They made a political choice in 1999 and they're still suffering from it. They are being treated like second-class citizens there. That's no way to live. They should be allowed to come back here again.'*

While much of the interview revolved around violence and his own participation – directly and indirectly – during the independence struggle, the 1999 referendum, the post-independence years and the crisis, G2 remained detached from it in his narrative. The

violence was there, but he, as the narrator, always maintained a certain distance to it, never explicitly bringing up his own role in the violent incidents.

*G3-G6, group interview, Dili, 05.11.2007 – ‘We just didn’t want any trouble’*

I interviewed respondents G3-G6 together in a group interview in their ‘club house’ in a poor neighbourhood of Dili which had seen much fighting between various groups from 2006 onwards, especially between PSHT and 7-7. The respondents were all in their late teens to early twenties but were seen as the more senior members of their neighbourhood-based gang. Other members milling about the meeting place were in their early teens. The gang was relatively small and highly localised<sup>24</sup> and was in the process of trying to transform itself into a youth group that could provide activities and vocational training to its members. For this, they were seeking outside funding but had as yet little idea of how to go about it. During the interview, the respondents remained rather guarded and wary of my intentions. There was also a degree of nervousness in talking about potentially sensitive subjects, which was done in hushed voices.

After introductions and a more general discussion about the form, membership, history and goals of their group, I broached the issue of the ‘east/west’ divide which emerged in 2006 and the remnants of which were highly visible anti-‘westerner’ graffiti on the walls of the neighbourhood. The respondents were quick to distance themselves and their group from the violence.,

*G4: ‘No, not at all. ‘Race’<sup>25</sup> was never an issue here. We never had any problems with that, no east-west problems here. The violence, the problems, that was all political. It was the manipulation of the groups by political elites, by the ema bo’ot, that’s what caused the violence, that’s what caused the problems. ‘*

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<sup>24</sup> During the interview it transpired, for example, that none of the respondents had ever been to the beach, which was only several hundred metres away as they felt they would have had to cross through ‘unsafe’ territory to get there

<sup>25</sup> It was not uncommon for the respondents to refer to linguistic, ethnic or regional differences as being ‘racial’ issues (*soal ras* in Indonesian)

The respondents were also quick to distance themselves from getting involved in political debates. In the fighting between PSHT and 7-7 which had racked their residential area, they had, in their own words, been unwilling to pick sides.

G3: *'Yeah, so it was PSHT and 7-7 fighting here [pointing down towards the main road] back then and we just didn't want any trouble. We wanted to stay neutral, we didn't want to pick sides as this only would have increased problems here. So when the fighting was going on, we just remained neutral and protected our neighbourhood.'*

Unemployment and lack of alternatives was seen as a further problem, which was their motivation for turning their gang into a youth group with a more constructive outlook. The name change was in part due to a drive to increase their respectability in the eyes of their *bairo* community. It did however also involve a more substantial change in their outlook, as they sought to get away from being a group of hang-arounds who occasionally scuffled with other groups to becoming more pro-active in searching for solutions to their problems in life, such as lack of employment. A key driver in this respect had been their previous, extended contact with an older NGO worker.

They did not see drugs such as *sabu-sabu* (methamphetamines) as being involved though did see alcohol abuse, primarily beer and palm wine (*tuak*) as a further driving factor in escalating potentially violent situations which might turn around personal issues of jealousy, be it over status, wealth or sexual partners, into more widespread violence.

G4: *'No, there's no drugs here. No, we're too afraid to try them, we're scared of drugs. But yeah, you know, whenever there's loads of beer and tuak and people get too drunk, there's always fights.'*

G5: *'Yeah, that's how a lot of the gang fights start too, you know, the boys get drunk and fight over a girl and then the whole group gets involved.'*

G4: *'Yeah, yeah... and there's a lot of social jealousy too, you know, and yeah, that leads to fights too.'*

On the whole, the respondents tended to stress their position as victims of outside powers beyond their control and the economic hardship they were unquestionably exposed to.

*G7-G9, Baucau, 08.11.2007 – ‘We are all one big brotherhood’*

The interview was carried out in the meetinghouse of the local chapter of PSHT, a figurative and at times literal stone’s throw away from a large UN Police (UNPOL) post in Baucau, Timor-Leste’s second largest city. G7, in his early thirties, claimed to be the local head of the MAG, an assertion which was however questioned later in the day by a local NGO worker I talked to. In the house, which was sparsely furnished, hung a large PSHT symbol next to a picture of the Virgin Mary and during the interview a number of younger PSHT members and other people, including young children sentence is incomplete. Throughout the interview, the respondent remained rather tense and nervous, giving his answers in a very guarded manner. About three-quarters of the way through the interview, two of his younger lieutenants, G8 and G9, joined the interview situation of their own accord.

The interview started out with the respondent sketching out a brief history of PSHT, which according to him came to Timor-Leste in 1983, brought there by a member of the Indonesian armed forces. According to him, problems started arising in Baucau in the immediate post-referendum period in late 1999-early 2000, when PSHT began clashing with rival martial arts group *Kera Sakti* (KS – Sacred Monkey) over the control of territory. According to his narrative, it was the opposing group which had triggered the clashes and PSHT was forced to react in self-defence. PSHT’s actions, he maintained, were merely in self-defence and that they sought peaceful co-existence with other groups. He felt that his group had been given unfair treatment in the public debate which tended to cast them as troublemakers.

*‘It all started back in 1999-2000, that’s when KS started coming in and wanting to control our territory. So we had to defend ourselves, defend our territory. And that’s how we are, PSHT acts only in self-defence. But still we get blamed.’*

Problems increased according to him over the subsequent years due to political meddling, manipulation and a lack of neutrality on the part of the new East Timorese security forces. These were compounded by the lack of employment opportunities as well as social jealousy (*‘kecemburuan sosial’* in Indonesian).

*'The problem is the police are not neutral! They always target PSHT! But we are not the ones responsible for the violence! There's always too much manipulation. The police have to be neutral, otherwise the problems will continue. [...] As long as there's no jobs for us youth, as long as there is political manipulation of the groups, the problems will continue. And yeah, social jealousy, that also causes many problems here.'*

In his narrative and in his description of his organisation, PSHT were clearly the victims of unfair targeting by a biased police force and other MAGs. As an example of this, he cited the recent attack by *Kera Sakti* members in Baucau against a PSHT member, in which the victim's leg was almost chopped off with a machete.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, he saw PSHT of having played an important role in the resistance and paid a high price for it, claiming that the majority of the victims of the 1991 Santa Cruz massacre had been PSHT members.

The respondent characterised PSHT as a transnational brotherhood, a *keluarga besar* (literally large family in Indonesian but with a connotation that is closer to a community than a literal family).

*G7: 'PSHT is open to everyone, to members of all ethnic backgrounds. Party membership doesn't matter. We have no racial, religious, political or national discrimination. All our members join voluntarily and we support our other brothers in need, even across borders. We are all one big brotherhood.'*

*G8: 'Yeah, that's true, we have chapters across Timor-Leste and Indonesia and in Australia and Europe too.'*

The two younger and more junior members G8 and G9 both affirmed this and stressed the solidarity and strength of the bonds of brotherhood as being central to the ethos of PSHT. They too were adamant that their group would only act in self-defence and were worried that the recent attack on one of their own might lead to an escalation of the tensions with their rivals from *Kera Sakti*.

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<sup>26</sup> This attack was apparently in retaliation for a previous attack by alleged members of PSHT against a East Timorese student from Baucau studying in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, who was a member of *Kera Sakti*. In a sense, the incident – and a further fight between PSHT and KS in Yogyakarta in 2010 – did on the one hand underline the claims of the interviewees that their organisation transcends borders. However, it was not local Indonesian chapters of the organisations which were involved in the fighting but rather East Timorese students who had, in a sense, brought their conflicts with them to Indonesia.

*G10-G12, Uato Lari, 09.11.2007- 'Now is not the time for reconciliation'*

The interview took place in an informal IDP camp several kilometres outside of the town of Uato Lari on the south coast of Timor-Leste. The camp was the result of communal violence which had broken out several months previously following the announcement of a new government, which led to a series of arson attacks forcing around 600 people to flee to the makeshift camp. The conflict, outlined in detail by Gunter (2007, 27-41), has been a long-running one and has its roots in land and resource access issues between the Makassae- and Naueti-speaking communities, exacerbated by the two communities joining opposing political sides in most of the major conflicts to affect Timor-Leste since the outbreak of World War II. Given the closeness of the interviews to the latest round of communal violence, the respondents were extremely guarded in their answers, not wanting to divulge any detailed information about their MAG- or RAG-affiliation, or about any party political links they might have had. The walls of the burned-out shells of houses which were used in part for the makeshift shelters were daubed with graffiti, some of it MAG-related, some political and some calling for peace and unity.

In their answers, the respondents concentrated mainly on the latest round of violence in August 2007 and were rather unwilling to discuss topics which they clearly felt were potentially sensitive or divisive. While stressing their positions as victims of unprovoked violence, the respondents were also very careful not to pin down any blame for the burning of their homes on any particular group, but maintained that it was a concerted effort by 'militant'<sup>27</sup> youth who had been trucked in. Asked about the MAG-graffiti, the respondents acknowledge that Dili-based groups had indeed spread out to Uato Lari as well but maintained that these were peaceful groups who would not engage in acts of sectarian violence, unlike in Dili, which they saw as having been caused by political manipulation.

G10: *'It was clear that this [the arson attacks] was political, that these were people brought in from the outside.'*

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<sup>27</sup> In East Timorese usage, the term militant is used relatively liberally, covering all members of a particular organisation or political party, not necessarily implying a readiness to use violence or a radicality of their political positions or views.

G11: *'Yeah, it was militants from the outside. We haven't had any trouble here before. You had some people in some of the martial arts groups but no violence – it's not been like Dili here. This was done by outsiders, this was planned by outsiders.'*

G10: *'The [martial arts] groups here, yes we have them, but its not like Dili, it hasn't been like in Dili, it hasn't been political, it's been peaceful here.'*

They did however express their complete mistrust in the East Timorese police force (PNTL – *Policia Nacional de Timor-Leste*) and placed their faith in the East Timorese armed forces instead. This reaction was somewhat understandable given the inaction (at the very least) of the PNTL during the arson attacks: the first house to be torched was less than 10 metres away from the Uato Lari police station and the PNTL did not intervene.

In spite of stressing the purportedly peaceful nature of the community relations in Uato Lari and denial of previous community tensions, it was clear that the interviewees were not in a hurry to forgive and forget.

G12: *'Now is not the time for reconciliation. Not yet. How can we think of reconciliation while we live like this?'*

At the time of writing in 2010, the communal tensions in Uato Lari had continued and several mediation attempts by the government and NGOs had not been successful.

*Figure 9: Standoff between MAG members and Portuguese FPU, Dili (Courtesy of GNR, 2007)*



*G13-G15, joint interview, Jardim IDP camp, Dili, 13.11.2007 – ‘Gang and MAG identities are left at the entrance to the camp, we have no conflicts here’*

Due to the sensitive circumstances in which the interview was carried out, this was the only one carried out through the mediation of a translator. The interview took place in a rather squalid IDP camp where the atmosphere was palpably tense and access was only possible through intermediaries from an international relief organisation. It was a staff member of this organisation who I requested to translate my questions from English into Tetum in order to

defuse any potentially inflammatory questions I might inadvertently ask. Though I had been informed ahead of the interview by the organisation working in the camp that the interviewees had strong affiliations with gangs and MAGs, the interviewees described themselves as merely being ‘youth leaders’ in the camp, denied, and were clearly nervous about the situation and worried about whether someone might overhear our conversation.

In stark contrast (or in some cases direct contradiction) to what I had heard from my background interviews with the staff of the above-mentioned relief organisation previous to the interview, the two interviewees maintained that no gangs, MAGs or RAGs were active in the camp; that there were no political or other divisions in the camp; no illegal economic activities were taking place (including gambling and prostitution) and that all problems in the camp were solved peacefully through internal mediation processes. Though the respondents acknowledged that some of the youths in the camps may be affiliated to gangs or martial arts groups, these affiliations were ‘left at the entrance’ of the camp and did not affect life there.

G13: *‘No, we don’t have any conflicts here. And if there are any conflicts we solve them internally in the camp.’*

G15: *‘Some people here might be in MAGs or RAGs or gangs, but they don’t bring that into the camp.’*

G13: *‘Yes, the gang and MAG identities are left at the entrance to the camp, we have had no conflicts here.’*

While my inquiries into gang activities were stonewalled, the young men stressed the hardship of life in the camp, their position as victims of violence, the trauma and the fear they were exposed to. Violence had been triggered by the manipulation of youth and of sensitive issues (e.g. regional divisions) by the political elite. They saw both the national and international police unfairly targeting them as suspected trouble-makers.

G14: *‘People always say the camps are the problem – but we are the victims! Look at this life here! We are all scared, we are traumatised. We can’t go back to our neighbourhoods, we’ve been living here now for almost two years! The east-west issue was manipulated by the politicians and we have to suffer.’*

G13: *‘The police label us, the police target us unfairly. They think we’re all trouble-makers. The PNTL and the UN, they’re both not being fair.’*

According to them, key problems were the lack of security which kept children in the camp from attending school and a lack of jobs for the youth. Quite explicitly, they saw it as the responsibility of the government and international community to provide them with jobs and food aid as well as finding a political solution which would allow them to return to their homes from which they had been evicted or fled one-and-a-half years previously.

Talking to the staff of the relief organisation which had facilitated the interview after the event, my translator's explanation for the disjuncture between the background information I had received and the respondents' answers was straightforward: 'they were scared. They were scared that what they said would be used against them.'

*G16 and G17, joint interview, Zumalai, 15.11.2007 – 'Yeah, market days are bad, that's when there's violence.'*

The interview took place on the edge of an abandoned market place in the centre of the village of Zumalai, Cova Lima district, about 8-10 hours drive from Dili or 1-2 hours from Suai, depending on road conditions. The interview was initially with G9 until we were joined about half-way through the interview by G10. Both were members of Kung Fu Master, in their early twenties, and had been attending a village-level conflict resolution workshop as representatives of their organisation. Somewhat unsure and guarded at the beginning, the conversation started flowing easier after a while. Nevertheless, both young men kept their voices down and kept scanning the area to see if anyone might be listening in on our conversation.

Conflicts between Kung Fu Master and rival PSHT had gone back several years after a fight in which a PSHT member had been killed by a member of Kung Fu Master, though, as the respondents stressed, no weapon was used. Since then, sporadic fights had broken out irregularly on market days, when young men loitered around towards the end of the day around the market place, drinking palm wine, betting on cock-fights and other forms of gambling. As a result of the fighting, the village had been divided into areas controlled by Kung Fu Master and PSHT, respectively. In an effort to reduce fighting between the MAGs, the village had now moved the market place some way outside of town.

G16: *'On market days, there's often trouble. We try to keep things calm but then the others come, they get drunk, provoke us. We just want to keep things quiet, defend our territory but then there's trouble.'*

G17: *'Yeah, market days are bad, that's when there's violence. That's when there's always fighting.'*

Though the young men traced the conflict between Kung Fu Master and PSHT down to what they referred to as being 'ideological differences' between the two groups, they saw lack of employment opportunities, general frustration and political manipulation as exacerbating the situation. They felt that though they wished for peace and unity in society, they felt they were not able to achieve this even on the local level due to the divisions in society. Furthermore, they felt the police and other authorities unfairly disadvantaged Kung Fu Master.

G16: *'It's difficult. We've had talks, our leaders have had talks, in Dili, between Kung Fu Master and PSHT, to end the conflict. But it's difficult here, difficult to try and make peace, here, at the local level. [...] And we always get labelled, we get targeted by the police, they think we're the trouble-makers. But we're a peaceful group.'*

According to G16, Kung Fu Master had been introduced to Timor-Leste during the Indonesian occupation by a Taiwanese master who had entered the territory clandestinely. Kung Fu Master was, according to him, a national organisation with local chapters, with João Carrascalão, then head of the *União Democrática Timorense* (UDT) party as one of its political patrons. However, party political allegiances were immaterial and Kung Fu Master was open to all and even had 20 female members out of a claimed total of 500 members. After some prodding on the issue, the respondents said that they would even accept it if someone living in 'their' neighbourhood joined PSHT – though this statement was possibly made for my benefit.

G18, Dili, 19.11.2007- *'I've done wrong and I want to change my life.'*

The interview was somewhat different from the others in that the interviewee had previously been a gang member (though he refused to name the gang he had belonged to) but had now,

with the support of his foreign girlfriend, decided to leave the gang and lead a more productive life. Now in his early twenties, he had been active in a gang in Los Palos, in the east of the country, but had been convinced by his girlfriend to move to Dili to escape the pull of the gang. He related that he had received threats from his former comrades and while slightly nervous and concerned during the interview, he was clearly more than willing to share his experiences in almost a cathartic manner. More than other interviewees, he had spent more time reflecting about his personal motives for becoming involved in a gang, something other interviewees tended not to be willing to get into, stressing the role of outside factors instead.

He saw his involvement in the gang as being initially motivated by boredom, the frustration of unemployment and what he saw as the need to defend his 'race' (i.e. language group) in a local conflict between Makassae and Fataluku speakers in Los Palos.

*'Back then, I didn't have a choice, I had to join in, I had to defend my race in the conflict. But now I know that I've done wrong, and I want to change my life, I want to get away from the violence, help others get away from the violence.'*

The greater phenomenon of gang, MAG and RAG violence was however in his mind due to social jealousy, political manipulation and the lack of neutrality of the police force.

*'The youth, we're frustrated – no jobs, nothing to do, there's jealousy, getting drunk... and then somebody pays you to stir up trouble, that's how it goes, that's when you have violence. It gets manipulated and then it spins out of control. And then we get targeted, unfairly, and we get more frustrated.'*

In reflecting upon his personal motivations for joining and remaining active, in a relatively senior position in his gang, he saw several factors at work. These were the feeling of power and respect that he gained through violence, which compensated for being overall, as he felt, in the position of a victim. He also saw what he termed 'being a *jago*' as being 'sexy.' While his parents had given him moral guidance, it was through his gang activities that he could release his emotions and frustration, with alcohol acting as a catalyst and the gang as a group amplifying each others' negative feelings.

*'Ya, I wanted to be a jago, I enjoyed that. It was sexy, you know? But it was also all the frustration I had in me, feeling heartbroken (sakit hati), we all felt that. Being in the gang was like a release for it. Getting drunk, going around... But I know now that it was all negative, that's why I had to get away from it. But that wasn't easy, and they've tried to pull me back into the gang again. But I want to get away from it now, I want to do something constructive.'*

He had decided to leave the gang life due to his current partner but also due to concern for his parents. He had now become more aware of spiritual issues, tried to control his aggressions and hoped to contribute to society in a more positive way, e.g. by helping other gang members to leave their gangs. Though he had started to study on his own, he scoffed at the possibility of studying at a college, as that was 'only for rich people.'

*G19, Dili, 21.11.2007 – 'We have our own language, one that combines universal influences with eternal Timorese words.'*

The interview had originally been arranged with a senior member of KORK, but upon arriving at the interview venue he excused himself as he had another meeting and conducted the interview with another high-level member instead. In his late twenties, G19 radiated a high degree of confidence but not quite to the same degree as the even more senior member, who had visibly not done too badly for himself financially as was evident from his flashy imported high-end clothes, top of the line cellular phone and large, brand-new four-wheel drive vehicle which set him off from other gang, MAG and RAG leaders. My interlocutor gave the impression of having been used to answering questions in a polished manner about his organisation and its role in the violence. He remained very friendly and at least seemingly open during the interview, without deviating from the official line.

The reasons for the outbreak of violence, as he saw it, lay mostly with political interference and the lack of employment opportunities. In as far as MAGs and RAGs could be blamed, it was because the government had not provided legal frameworks or facilities to move their activities off the streets into more regulated spaces.

Though KORK was according to him in no way an aggressive organisation, it did reserve for itself the right to self-defence, a right which was according to him a part of East Timorese culture. He described his organisation as being open to all, with political or regional allegiances playing no role, as these are personal issues which would be ‘left outside’ of the realm of being a KORK member, in spite of popular views of KORK being a highly politicised and sectarian organisation. He described his organisation as drawing its strength from its high morals and spiritual values.

*‘We Timorese have never been an aggressive nation – but if you push us, we push back. It’s only natural. So KORK also only acts in self-defence, only acts when we are attacked. KORK is an organisation that is not against anyone – its open to everyone, we do not discriminate against any ethnic groups, not against people of one religion or another, not against people with any party-political connections... we are open to everyone. And that’s one of the strengths of KORK, that’s where we gain our strength from. It’s from our values, that’s what gives us strength. We have high morals, that gives us strength. We have strong spiritual values, that gives us strength.’*

Interestingly, G19 also offered to show me some writing samples of ‘*bahasa KORK*,’ i.e. KORK language, a language, complete with its own self-styled alphabet (visually similar to Amharic), drawing, according to him, on a number of influences:

*‘We have our own language, one that combines universal influences with eternal Timorese words. We take these words from local East Timorese languages, but also Indonesian, English, Mandarin and Arabic.’*

Proficiency in the language and in other spiritual matters (including magical powers) would increase as one progressed through the ranks and was revealed in the form of new information and skills by the higher-ranking members. While G19 was very open about the spiritual and linguistic aspects of KORK, questions about involvement with violence were smoothly side-stepped by him.

*G20, Dili, 22.11.2007 – ‘My organisation is a spiritual one, that is why we are strong.’*

The interviewee was a high-level leader of Colimau 2000, though not part of the national leadership. He was in his late thirties and gave the impression of being more interested in spiritual rather than political issues. The interview was carried out on the fringes of a workshop organised by a donor organisation in an effort to bring the various MAGs and RAGs together to solve the on-going violent conflicts. The genesis of his organisation is the subject of various competing narratives. I chose this as an opening for the interview, but my interviewee was not willing to say more than it was established in 1987 and that Colimau 2000 leader Ozorio Leki<sup>28</sup> would be able to tell me more, but that he was currently abroad on a donor-funded training course for future leaders (see also Chapter 8 below on the contradictory histories of the genesis of the group).

He described Colimau 2000 as being foremost a mass-based spiritual organisation, denying any rumours of splits which I had heard from other sources. He saw no contradiction in his group’s mixing of traditional East Timorese animism with Catholicism in its spiritualism and stressed his group’s peaceful, open character which does not differentiate between the political, religious, regional or ethnic origins of people. He saw the deep religious spirituality of his group as being central to its existence and showed me several of the Catholic and traditional animist amulets he was wearing. Through its spirituality, members of Colimau 2000 had gained magical powers and were in contact with ancestral spirits, but also drew strength from their belief in God.

*‘You see this amulet here [showing me an amulet hanging from his neck depicting a Catholic saint framed by woven frame, feathers, beads and animal bone], this is what gives us strength – our spiritual power gives us strength. We believe in God Almighty, we are Catholics. We believe in Jesus Christ. We gain our power from our ancestral spirits which we communicate with, who help us. My organisation is a spiritual one, that is why we are strong.’*

Colimau 2000 was according to him essentially a peaceful group, aiming for justice and unity in East Timorese society, in spite of accusations levelled against it regarding its role in inciting violence during the 2006 crisis.

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<sup>28</sup> Also spelled Osorio Lequi or Osorio Mau Lequi

*'It's lies, all lies [responding to my question about accusations of Colimau 2000's participation in violence]. We never attacked anyone, we only act in self-defence. Colimau 2000 has always struggled for the Timorese nation – during the occupation, during the crisis, now. We are struggling for the Timorese people, for justice, for peace. We need to be united again.'*

He regarded this spirituality as one of the defining differences between RAGs such as his and MAGs such as rival PSHT and that while 'martial arts groups did sports, RAGs were mobilising mass constituencies.' This, according to him, also created a strong sense of unity within the organisation, which was somewhat in contradiction to his following statements regarding differences between older and younger members of the movement.

*'We in Colimau, we believe in spirituality, in unity. We struggle for the unity of the Timorese nation, we as Colimau are united [...] but sometimes, the younger ones, you know, they don't listen to us leaders, they're difficult to control. We tell them to make peace but all they do is fight, they do their own stuff. But they need to listen to us, to the elders, they have to listen to us.'*

As many other interviewees, he saw political manipulation and lack of alternatives for the youth as key underlying factors in the violence. A complicating factor in finding a solution to the violence was in his mind that while the upper level leaders (like himself) might be able to make peace amongst each other, the younger members, the *anak buah*, were harder to control. This led to continuing problems as it drew the organisations into cycles of retaliation.

*G21, Dili, 22.11.2007 – 'We can't control them, they don't listen to us.'*

On the sidelines of the same workshop, I interviewed a nominally high-ranking member of Kera Sakti (The Sacred Monkey). G21 was a middle-aged, middle class man employed by an NGO and did not seem to have much of a connection to the everyday activities of his organisation's members. This may have been due to the very different social milieu he inhabited when compared to the average members of Kera Sakti, nor did he seem to have the charisma of several of the other leaders I interviewed, such as for example G1, G2, G19 or

G20. He admitted his lack of connection with the regular members indirectly when referring to the problem of trying to control local chapters as being a main obstacle to conflict resolution between the various feuding organisations when I asked him about the Kera Sakti-PSHT feud in Baucau, echoing in a way the frustrations of G20 with the ‘young guns’ – but also those of G16 and G17 about the difficulty of making peace on a local level.

*‘Well, you know, we tried to control our guys, tell them to keep the peace. But sometimes, yeah, it’s difficult. We can’t control them, they don’t listen to us. We here in Dili tell them to stop fighting – but they won’t. They have their own agendas, their own fights. And the young ones, they want to fight, even when we tell them not to. They just don’t listen.’*

A further complicating factor according to him were the difficulties faced by the central leadership in countering unsubstantiated rumours of provocations by rival groups which often tended to inform the activities of the local branches, leading to attacks in pre-emptive self-defence. On the local level, conflicts could also be easily exacerbated by personal feuds, be they based on personal animosity, jealousy, fights over girlfriends or over the control of ‘turf.’ He however saw the main conflict drivers as being political intervention and manipulation of the various groups by the national political elites.

*‘A lot of it [the violence between groups] is based on private issues. Like the guys in Baucau for example, they get drunk at a party and then get into a fight over a girl and things like that with someone else and then we have to step in. But like I said, they don’t always listen to us... But Kera Sakti is not about that, we are a martial arts group, not preman. We only act in self-defence.’*

According to my interviewee, Kera Sakti was established in Timor-Leste during the Indonesian occupation. As was the case with other MAGs, the Chinese Shaolin-monk traditions upon which Kera Sakti claimed to build its identity, had been introduced to East Timorese during the Indonesian occupation by members of the Indonesian security forces in the efforts to promote ‘character-building’ activities amongst the (male) youth across the archipelago. Similar to the other MAGs who traced their lineage to Indonesian times, my interviewee vehemently denied any militia-style connections to the occupying forces. Kera Sakti was also, according to him, a peaceful organisation, open to people of all ethnic,

religious and political backgrounds. While the organisation had been involved in violent incidents, these had been in response to attacks by others. As seen in previous interviews, this was a common claim of most MAGs and RAGs.

*G22-G24, group interview, Dili, 9.12.2008 – ‘Yeah, there’s still resentment’*

The group interview was the first one of what turned out to be a mini-sub-set of interviews which I carried out approximately one year after my primary round of field research. I was in Dili for my new employer, an NGO focusing on conflict analysis, and was carrying out a series of interviews with a range of actors, including members of gangs, with the aim of assessing the potential for a return to violent conflict.

The first group interview was with a local gang in the Bairo Pite neighbourhood which was now recasting itself as a community-focused youth group. The interviewees were two mid-level members of the gang in their early 20s (G22 and G23) and one lower-ranking member in his late teens (G24). The interview took place next to the gang house in a relaxed and open atmosphere. This was a strikingly different atmosphere compared to the diffuse fear which had been pervasive in Dili during my previous visits; a result of the reduced levels of gang-, MAG-and RAG-related violence in the city after the February 11, 2008 death of Major Alfredo Reinado and wounding of President Ramos-Horta.

Through the mediation and social work projects of an international NGO active in the neighbourhood, the various gangs, MAGs and RAGs active there had signed what amounted to a peace treaty. According to the respondents, they were now in the process of negotiating with other groups to overcome the mistrust and calls for revenge which were the legacy of several years’ worth of fighting between the groups.

*G23: ‘After all this [the crisis and its aftermath], we need peace.’*

*G24: ‘We want this place to be peaceful again, we don’t want problems here.’*

*G22: ‘Yeah, that’s like I said before, we have reached out to the other groups. We need peace, we need unity. And that’s why we have these projects, that’s why we reach out to the other groups, to be unified, to forget the past problems.’*

Their group now sought to live up more fully to its name (PLUR – standing for Peace, Love, Unity and Respect) than in the past, had co-organised a football tournament and was now in the process of building a traditional life-size Christmas nativity manger<sup>29</sup> for their local community.

G22: *‘The problem is the youth groups have a bad reputation now for what happened in the crisis. But it wasn’t our fault. But still people say that we’re bad, we’re violent – but we’re not. That’s why we want to do this [build the Christmas manger] and show the people, show society that we’re not the trouble-makers. ‘*

In spite of their new, more peaceful outlook, the resentment and bitterness which had fuelled the outbreaks of violence in the past years was not far from the surface and it was evident from the interviews that the conciliatory gestures between the various groups amounted only to a very tenuous beginning of a conflict resolution process.

G24: *‘But yeah, those others [rival gangs, MAGs and RAGs], we haven’t forgotten what they did. And yeah, there’s still no justice, no jobs for us youth, and there’s still manipulation. [...] Yeah, there’s still resentment here. We’re the victims of the crisis, but people call us trouble-makers.’*

The mistrust of the social and political elite, the feelings of marginalisation and stigmatisation, very much at the surface in the interviews in 2007, had not disappeared after the violence had subsided.

*G25, Dili, 11.12.2008 – ‘It’s a time bomb’*

G25 was a charismatic, energetic man in his late twenties and was in a leading position in one of the locally based, smaller gangs in Bairro Pite. He affirmed that his gang too had joined the reconciliation process with the other groups active in the neighbourhood. The interview took place around the Christmas manger which his group was building for the community (similar to G22-G24) and was also carried out in a relaxed, almost jovial way.

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<sup>29</sup> Quasi-life size nativity scene mangers are commonly erected around Timor-Leste in public spaces before Christmas

*Figure 10. Construction of a Christmas Nativity manger by gang members in Bairro Pite (Henri Myrntinen, 2008)*



The violence of the very recent past did not figure greatly in his narrative and there was definitely a sense of not wanting to discuss the topic at any great length. Instead, G25 was more focussed on the present and the future, stressing how his group wanted to contribute to the building of East Timorese society, of creating peace and ensuring justice. The past troubles were seen as bygones, though there was lingering sense of resentment against the political elite for its role in the 2006 crisis.

*'No, there's no more violence now, that's a thing of the past. We've had dialogues and made peace. What's important now is for us to build Timor-Leste, to develop it together. We all need to work together now. [...] But I don't trust the politicians, they caused the problems in the first place and then blamed the youth.'*

The respondent and his group seemed to be eager to improve their standing in the community and, like PLUR, preferred to be seen as a youth group rather than as a gang. Though they were also involved in the reconciliation processes, a number of grudges continued to be

harboured against rival groups even if these were papered over with the rhetoric of peaceful co-existence and national unity.

*'Yeah, we've been having dialogues with the other groups, we have peace now. We want to work together now, we're all Timorese after all. [...] Back then, my group never attacked anyone. We only acted in self-defence. But you know what, those other groups, those that were behind the violence – their leaders now get money and recognition from the government. That's just not right.'*

Of a central concern to G25 was the issue of reducing youth unemployment and clearly expected the government to hand jobs to 'the youth' or face potentially violent consequences. Having been, at least in his own words, involved in the clandestine front, he also expected societal recognition for his role in the independence struggle, a sentiment which also fed into his resentment against the political elite.

*'The politicians haven't solved any of our problems, they don't listen to the youth. The government has to give us jobs, that's the key issue. It's the unemployment that caused the violence, and the government hasn't solved that. It's a time bomb. It's hard for us clandestinos – we struggled too, but we get nothing. Our leaders, they have fancy cars and big houses – we have nothing. They have forgotten that we struggled too.'*

*G26-G28, group interview, Dili, 14.12.2008 – 'We just hang around, listen to music, we're no trouble-makers.'*

The final group interview was with three mid-level members of the Potlot-gang, aged between approximately twelve and twenty-five. As with the two above interview situations, I found the three working on a Christmas manger for their local community in Fatuhada together with younger members of the gang (including ones I would place at around eight-nine years old) and the interview proceeded in a relaxed manner. Also, similar to the two other interview situations taking place in the post-February 11, 2008 calm, the respondents were keen to stress the positive, community-oriented activities of their group. Rather than dwelling on past violence, they stressed their preference for peace and the communal activities of their group, such as listening to music, painting murals and playing sports.

G26: *'Yeah, now we're building this manger here and [pointing to a group of murals depicting, amongst others, Bob Marley and the Indonesian rock group Slank] we did those a couple months back.'*

G28: *'We want the people to see that we're no bad guys.'*

G27: *'Yeah, people always say the gangs are this, the gangs are that. But it's not true. We just hang around, listen to music, do stuff together, we're no trouble-makers.'*

For the three young men, gaining employment and societal respect for their group were some of the paramount issues. They saw the youth in general but groups such as theirs in particular as being unfairly misrepresented by the media and society as troublemakers. Past involvement in acts of violence was not completely denied but downplayed, again with a sub-text of letting the past rest and of moving on. In their eyes, the real troublemakers were, somewhat predictably, the political *ema bo'ot* who had failed to preserve the unity of the nation, failed to address the problems of the youth and had manipulated them in a time of crisis.

G28: *'People always blame the youth, you know, but the crisis, the violence, that wasn't our fault. It was the political elite, the ema bo'ot. They didn't solve the problems of the youth. That's why we got pulled into the violence. But it was the politicians who started it with their talk, with their manipulation.'*

G26: *'Yeah, they divided the people with their talk, that's what caused the crisis.'*

G27: *'But now we've made peace with the others, now we just chill out, hang around. But yeah, we need jobs. There's still no jobs for us. It's hard.'*

### **5.3. Summarising and analysing the primary interviews**

In the thirty-eight interviews summarised above, a number of recurring themes emerged. These included the stressing of the political nature of their struggle, especially by the former militias, a repeated denial of full responsibility for acts of violence, a stressing of the positive aspects of the groups the interviewees belonged to and a sense of grievance at the way they have been perceived and treated by the rest of society. Underlying themes also included spirituality, a sense of purpose and belonging given by membership in the groups, perceived political, social and economic marginalisation and distrust of 'the elites.' Though the

interviews were marked by a great degree of homogeneity in the answers, there were a few dissenting voices.

### 5.3.1. Ex-Militias – Yesterday’s perpetrators, today’s victims?

For the former militias, the recurring themes in the interviews were the political nature of their participation, the purported necessity of using violence for self-defence in a ‘war’ situation and the dissatisfaction with their current *status quo* as ‘second-class citizens’ in Indonesia.<sup>30</sup> The latter issue tended to be what most respondents wanted to talk about rather than dwelling, unnecessarily as they felt, on past violent actions.

The interview sample for the former militia members includes all possible narratives – except for a confession with remorse. What I found striking was that in spite of their current grievances not one of the interviewees expressed, at least in the interview situation, any regrets about their choices in 1999 or about their participation in acts of violence. In fact, with the exception of M5-M7 who fully accepted the consequences of their actions and did not air any demands, all other respondents saw themselves as being entitled to recognition, respect as well as material and financial compensation for their participation in the militias.

Furthermore, again with the exception of M5-M7 and, notably, M3 (who was by far the most traumatised of all), most cast *themselves* as the actual victims of 1999, rather than the civilian victims of militia violence. A number of the interviewees, most notably M2 and M4, repeatedly stressed that they felt traumatised by their rejection by East Timorese society, and gave no space in their narratives to the sufferings of the victims of the militia violence in which they participated.

In stressing the political nature of their choice to join the militias, the interviewees were seeking to give their actions a higher degree of legitimacy than what the militia movement is generally credited with. A political motivation also carries with it a higher degree of respectability than other reasons for militia membership often stressed by outside observers, such as economic benefits, coercion, or bloodlust. A further reason for militia membership

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<sup>30</sup> At this point it is perhaps useful to recall that in many if not most of the cases of violence the interviewed men were referring to, be it the militia violence in 1999 or in the violence perpetrated by the gangs, MAGs or RAGs, it has not been a case of two armed groups clashing, or of ‘killing or getting killed’ as they asserted, but rather the violence mainly consisted of an armed group (be it the militias, gangs, MAGs or RAGs) attacking unarmed civilians.

which was given by M8 and, with more ambivalence, by M9, was a family history of support for integration which led to a fear of reprisals in case Timor-Leste gained its independence. Thus militia membership had in a sense been pre-determined by the family and clan loyalties which bound them and defined their place in East Timorese society. On the whole, the interviewees therefore saw their membership in the militias as something honourable and politically justified – a view which is in stark contrast to that of most outside observers. The only respondent who reflected on less honourable reasons for militia membership was M1, who mentioned the seeking of financial benefits, personal power and promises of jobs as further motivating factors. It was however clear that he was not referring to himself as being lured by these, but rather referred to those who were attracted by these factors as being ignorant ‘country bumpkins.’

The project of seeking political legitimacy for their activities also led several respondents, especially M2, to present a very different version of recent East Timorese history from the generally accepted version. In his version, the militia groups who campaigned, intimidated and killed for the sake of preventing independence from happening had actually been fighting *for* independence all along. While this struck me personally as a self-serving *ex post facto* justification and reinterpretation of history, it is not inconceivable that the men, if not at the time in 1999 then later, actually did see themselves in this light. This new reading of history serves as a further legitimisation of their violence in 1999, as it was done in the name of a higher and honourable cause, an exculpation and as a restoration of their honour and respectability.

The violence carried out by the militias was mostly legitimised by the interviewees as having been in an (imagined) state of war in which they had had no other choice but to kill if they wanted to survive. While this did not correspond to the reality of the situation in which militias were attacking unarmed civilians, the perception was clearly there in the minds of the respondents. Other legitimisations given were those of being under orders and being overcome by emotions such as frustration and disappointment (subsumed under the term *sakit hati*). Again, it was only M1 who raised the possibility of less honourable or justifiable motivations, citing the settling of scores as one motivating factor, though in his narrative this again was only the case with the less enlightened amongst the militias.

For almost all of the respondents, the post-conflict settlement was highly unsatisfactory and there was a great deal of bitterness against those ‘higher up,’ be it the leaders of the pro-integration cause or the Indonesian government who had not delivered the compensation the respondents clearly felt they deserved. Linked to the critique of the political leadership of their movement and of the country was also the demand for public recognition and thus respectability. In their minds, the past should be forgotten as far as the violence is concerned; what should be remembered instead was what they felt to be their patriotic sacrifice.

Examined together, the discussions around the legitimacy of their cause and of the violence involved, but also the critique of the post-conflict settlement, provide a contradictory pattern of simultaneously claiming and denying agency and thus responsibility for one’s own deeds. The self-image constructed through the narratives vacillates between being a man of action and being a pawn or victim of circumstances. Agency was affirmed when making the political choices of choosing the integration option and joining the militias, when fighting ‘in self-defence’ or when rescuing neighbours. In the post-conflict situation, this agency was affirmed by joining organisations fighting for the ex-militias’ rights. Agency and personal responsibility were however largely denied when it comes to the overall issue of militia violence and its impacts. The respondents cast themselves as being powerless in a violent ‘time of madness’ which was, according to them, not of their own making but forced upon them. They were under orders and/or overcome by emotional forces they could not resist. Instead of being perpetrators of violent crimes, they have now, in their discourses, become traumatised victims, doubly victimised first by their experiences in 1999 and secondly by the lack of recognition for their deeds by both East Timorese and Indonesian society.<sup>31</sup>

A clear difference which emerged in the interviews between the respondents had to do with their social position – the higher up in a position of authority the respondent was, the more confident and loquacious they tended to be, as also discussed with respect to leadership in Papua New Guinean gangs by van der Werf (2008, 83). Nonetheless, it was striking to see the degree of pervasive fear, mistrust and wariness displayed by the various respondents in the interview situations, even those in the more powerful positions.

In summary, the former militia members interviewed presented their participation in the groups in a very different light from the way they have usually been presented by outside

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<sup>31</sup> This critique of the victim discourse does in no way discount the very real possibility, and in the case of interviewee M3 more or less the certainty, of psychological trauma on the side of the perpetrators of violence

observers. The interviewees presented themselves as respectable yet wronged patriots rather than as misguided proxies of an occupation army or bloodthirsty thugs. The violence which was an integral part of the militias' *raison d'être* was not denied but was not a central theme for the interviewees, who would rather not dwell on it. The use of violence was also justified through various legitimising strategies.

In many ways, the former militias remained trapped by their violent past. A decade after the failure of their political project of ensuring the integration of Timor-Leste into the Indonesian state by force, the men interviewed here still defined themselves through their identity as former militias. In part, this was due to the physical circumstances of their lives, especially for those living in the impoverished resettlement camps, and the often difficult relationship between these 'new citizens' and the indigenous West Timorese population, as outlined in interviews M1, M5-7 and M10. However, a number of the interviewees (especially M8-M10) had also made the conscious decision to continue to define themselves as former militia in their political activities lobbying for compensation and recognition. In a sense, the militias had twice struggled to find what they saw was their rightful place in the patriarchal patchworks they live in – first, as young men joining the militia groups with promises of rewards to come in case of victory and fears of retribution in the case of defeat; and secondly as men, now a decade older, trying to find their place in Indonesian, and, more locally, West Timorese society. In spite of the fact that they have spent the past decade in West Timor, their identities and societal positions continue to be defined by their East Timorese histories. Violence was a key component of their struggle in 1998-1999 and remains a form of recourse in their current project as well.

### 5.3.2. Gangs, MAGs, RAGs – Hybrid Identities and Discourses of Frustration

Compared to the militia groups, the interviews with the gangs, MAGs and RAGs tended to be less focused on the historical and political aspects of their involvement and more varied in their themes. This is a reflection of the historical differences between the two groups of interviewees. The militias were a much more deliberately constructed phenomenon, set up and trained by the Indonesian security services and focused on one goal, existing for a relatively short period of time. The gangs, MAGs and RAGs on the other hand, have grown more organically in a sense, each developing in its own way, with similar but slightly different histories and agendas. The latter groups have also been around as a phenomenon for

a longer period of time. The more varied nature of the newer groups is also a reflection of the opening up of East Timorese society and its increased links with the outside world. While the militias drew on a mixture of mostly local East Timorese and imported Indonesian influences, the members of the gangs, MAGs and RAGs are able to also draw on a much wider, global set of symbols, styles and values which they hybridised in their enactments of masculinity.

As in the case of the militia interviews, there was again a striking degree of overlap between the various respondents, irrespective of their age, background, group affiliation or geographical location. Unsurprisingly, the respondent whose answers tended to deviate most from 'the script' was G18, who had voluntarily left his life as a gang member behind him and had been reflecting intensely on his own motivations and past actions. Another more reflective voice was that of G2, who, in spite of his position and his past, reflected in what was often an almost detached way on the activities of the clandestine resistance and the gangs in which he had been involved in.

In reflecting upon the violence since the 2006 crisis in which the various groups of which the respondents were members of had played a major role, the most common reason given was that of manipulation by the political elite. Other reasons were frustration and disappointment (*sakit hati*) with the post-independence years, social jealousy but also self-defence and protection of the community against other groups. As was also the case with the militia interviews, there was a clear tendency amongst the respondents (with the notable exception of G18) to shy away from accepting direct personal responsibility for violent actions. Responsibility was shifted to unnamed *ema bo'ot*, an unspecified category of elite leaders, even by those who like G1 and G2 were in key positions to either promote violent actions by his group (as in the case of G1) or to dissuade them from using violence (as was the case with G2). Similar to the militia interviews, violence was also seen in the context of a wider conflict and the need for self-defence and/or linked to being overcome with overwhelming emotions. However, with the exceptions of G2 and G18, no respondent explicitly stated that he had participated personally and directly in acts of violence and, again with the exception of G18, no regrets were expressed. Where less honourable motivations for violence were discussed, such as alcohol abuse, jealousy or personal reasons, these were either projected on to rival groups or kept on a generalised level, i.e. talked about as wider societal phenomena rather than as personal experiences. The only case of deeper self-reflection was G18.

In discussing the motivating factors for gang, MAG and RAG membership, self-defence and protection of the local community, the search for justice and the 'ideological' or spiritual guidance given by the group were most commonly cited. Unlike many outside observers (see next section below), the respondents saw unemployment and the general socio-economic situation as being problematic, but not as a reason for membership. In other words, in their own narratives they themselves chose to join the various groups because of the pull and attraction of the group rather than because of the push of unemployment. The dire economic situation did however, in the eyes of the respondents, feed into frustration and resentment, into a feeling of *sakit hati* which could be vented by violent means. This was especially true for the former *clandestinos*, who felt that their contributions to the independence struggle had not been sufficiently recognised. There was a strong undercurrent of portraying oneself as a victim in a number of the interviews: they, the youth, had been the victims of the violence of the struggle and of the later violence in 2006-2008, the victims of a post-independence economic order in which they had not received jobs, the victims of political manipulation during the crisis, and now the victims of stigmatisation by broader society and by the security forces who saw them as a threat to the newly established (and shaky) post-conflict societal order.

Interviewee G18 was the only one who openly both confessed and showed repentance. In the other narratives, participation in violence was either fully or partially denied; or, if confessed to, down-played, justified, and excused. Unlike in the study of Streicher (2008), none of the respondents boasted with their acts of violence nor was violence problematised *per se* as an issue, except on a very general level. For the respondents, violence remained a tool at their disposal in their repertoire, seen, as has long been the case in Timor-Leste, as a legitimate way of airing and addressing what are seen as justified grievances (compare also Grove et al., 2007, for similar views on the legitimacy of violence amongst non-gang/MAG/RAG members).

Thus, in terms of looking at the role of agency in the narratives, similar affirmation and denial patterns were evident among militia and gang/MAG/RAG interviews. Agency is affirmed when joining the gangs, MAGs and RAGs and membership is often worn with a certain degree of pride. It is also displayed in the violent actions, cast mostly as self-defence, and in the political demands for their voices to be heard and their socio-economic needs to be addressed. In terms of the role of the groups and of the individuals during the 2006 crisis and

in perpetuating the violence afterwards, personal agency is however denied. In the narratives they now become unwitting pawns of political elites and victims of circumstance. The greatest difference in the interviews with the ex-militia members in this respect was that unlike the gang, MAG and RAG members, the former militia for the most part admitted to having personally taken part in acts of violence, including killings. The vast majority of the gang, MAG and RAG members shirked away from similar confessions, seeking instead, it often seemed to me, to cast their particular organisation in the best possible light for me, the foreign interlocutor. This may have in part been due to doubts amongst the respondents as to whom I was 'really' working for.

As in the case of the militia interviews, it tended to be the ones who were older and in a more secure societal position who were more willing (and perhaps able) to talk more freely and reflectively than younger members of the groups, who I often felt saw themselves being pushed into potentially dangerous territory by my questions. This also echoes findings from Papua New Guinea (Goddard, 2005 and van der Werf, 2008) about gang leaders being in a similar role as village elders in initiating younger members of the group into the knowledge and wisdom that they hold. Also, similar to their counterparts in Papua New Guinea, the leaders stressed the importance of accumulating social over financial capital, though the latter is also not forgotten about completely. An interesting, and to me somewhat surprising, finding was the positive way in which some of the older respondents who had been personally involved in the independence struggle portrayed their former militia opponents, a phenomenon discussed in more detail below.

### 5.3.3. Comparing the sub-sets

A number of striking similarities and obvious differences arose when comparing the interviews with former militia members and those participating in gangs, MAGs and RAGs. In this section, I will concentrate on the similarities and differences which arose in the interviews.

#### *Similarities and over-laps in the discourses*

Overall, if one excludes the very different historical contexts of origin which in the case of the militias led to the much higher degree of violence and a more formal, militarised structure

reflected in part in how they viewed their participation in the groups, a number of similarities emerged between the interviews of the former militias on the one hand and of the gang, MAG and RAG members on the other. These similarities include the way in which the interviewees reflected on their membership in the respective organisation, the denial of one's own violent agency, the casting of oneself as the real victim of the conflict, the tensions between the search of respectability on the one hand and the 'outlaw' status on the other, and the call for past misdeeds to be forgotten.

Almost all former militias and pro-integration supporters framed their participation and the militia violence in much the same terms and almost all complained about the lack of recognition for what they saw as having been the fulfilling their patriotic duty. Members of the gangs, MAGs and RAGs on the other hand tended for example to stress very similar driving factors as being behind the violence, such as political manipulation, unemployment and social jealousy. For a number of the interviewees, various ties that bind, i.e. networks of loyalty were also of importance in determining their actions, including participation in violence. These ties of loyalty could be to the particular group and its leader, to the local neighbourhood, to the family or clan, to a regional grouping or to a political cause.

Taking a step back from the immediate answers and looking more at underlying forms of argumentation present in the answers, a formidable degree of overlap begins to emerge between the two groups, in spite of their different age, different setting and rather different biographical trajectories. What became evident in the vast majority of the interviews was the denial not of violent acts themselves (though these were often cast as self-defence or taking place 'in a conflict situation') but of direct personal responsibility for them, a strong sense of grievance for not receiving the respect and recognition they felt they were entitled to from wider society and a recurrent theme of criticising those seen as being in the social, political and economic elite.

Both the former militias and the members of the gangs, MAGs and RAGs have, to differing degrees, been cast as being outside of what is socially acceptable and desirable both by East Timorese society and outside observers. It is conceivable that, to a degree, the 'outlaw' status with which society labelled the members of these various groups does, at least for part of the time, act as a force of internal cohesion. As Hardtmann (2007, 56) points out in her study of young neo-Nazis in Germany, rituals and similar dress are used by groups to construct a sense

of communality through the exclusion of others. Both elaborate rituals and common dress have been hallmarks of all of the groups in question, and the RAG KORK has even gone so far as developing its own language. The elaborate myths of genesis of some of the organisations, such as that of Colimau 2000, also further add to the mystique, power and pull of the organisations.

However, in stark contradiction to the public image of the members of the various groups as misguided, socially marginalised, manipulated and violent, the interviewees themselves stressed the respectable and honourable sides, both of themselves and of their groups. This may have been in part a strategy to improve their standing in my, and by extension, international eyes but there did seem to be a genuine quest for respectability at work. This is also echoed in the efforts especially of older members of the groups (for example M1-M2, M8-M9, G2 but also gang drop-out G18) to achieve greater social responsibility, be it through public displays of faith or by seeking socially respectable positions.

A further similarity, especially when comparing my last interviews with gang members G22-28 with the former militias is the tendency to let the past be, especially in as far as one's possible involvement in violence is concerned and to move on with life, combined with an appeal to the erstwhile victims to accept the perpetrators of yesterday as fully-fledged partners in building a new East Timorese society. This strategy of forgetting the past (and one's role in it) and concentrating on the future has been echoed on the national level, where the East Timorese and Indonesian governments have been conspicuously unwilling to openly confront the more painful episodes of their joint history. For example, the East Timorese parliament has yet, at the time of writing in late 2009, to debate either the CAVR report (looking at violence in Timor-Leste from 1974-1999) or the final report of the joint East Timorese-Indonesian Commission of Truth and Friendship (looking specifically at 1999) in spite of these reports having been completed in 2005 and 2008, respectively. President José Ramos-Horta has also passed a series of highly controversial amnesties to former militia members as well as key figures implicated in the 2006 crisis.

While this strategy of glossing over (if not denying) the violence of the past is of course problematic from the point of view of impunity and denial, the positive upshot is the demonstrated willingness especially of the gang members in late 2008 to find more productive outlets for their energy. Though some of the rhetoric may not have been more than just that,

there did seem to be a genuine drive amongst all men interviewed to find their place in society again and to find, to quote the gang name from Bairo Pite, ‘peace, love, unity and respect.’

### *Differences in the discourses*

Given the very different historical circumstances in which they emerged, the fact that one group of interviewees was reflecting on past deeds while the other group was in the middle of living out their gang/MAG/RAG masculinities as well as the age differences between the interviewees at the time of my field research, it is unsurprising to find a certain degree of difference between the two sub-groups as well. These differences were mainly linked to the life situation of the interviewees, the differing constructions of masculinities and depiction of the nature of their organisations and why they had joined.

As noted earlier in this chapter, the former militia members interviewed remained in many senses trapped in their past identity. They were identified by others as and often identified themselves primarily as former East Timorese militia members. As such, they were also engaged in re-defining yesterday’s battles or dealing with the personal consequences which their involvement in those battles has had for them. The members of the gangs, MAGs and RAGs have had more opportunities, at least in theory, for developing their identity beyond being merely a member of a particular group. A number of the older gang, MAG and RAG interviewees had other jobs and the younger ones could conceivably later in life define themselves through other avenues than their identity as former or current gang, MAG or RAG members. In this, they also had the advantage of not being clearly defined as a separate (and partially segregated) social group, as was the case of the East Timorese who have settled in West Timor. The respective age and the family situation of the interviewees was also, generally speaking, a major difference between the two groups of respondents, though there was some degree of overlap in this respect. For the most part, the former militia members were older and had families while most of the gang, MAG and RAG members defined themselves as ‘youth.’ The societal and economic pressure to conform to respectable forms of masculinity and to try and provide for their families was greater for the former militia members than for the younger respondents. The latter still felt free to take advantage of the social space given in East Timorese society to young men to act out, including public displays of violence.

The differences in age and in the historical circumstances in which they had joined their respective organisations were also reflected in the shape and form in which the respondents' enactments of masculinity in these groups took on. Having, for the most part, grown up under Indonesian rule, received their militia training from the Indonesian security forces, having fought for integration with Indonesia and currently residing as Indonesian citizens in Indonesia, it is hardly surprising that the former militia members' rhetoric was kept mostly to a formal, semi-official form of Indonesian. While their militia masculinities drew heavily on Indonesian models of protest and militarised masculinity, the current involvement of several of the interviewees reflected more respectable, and formal enactments of Indonesian masculinities, emulating the forms and norms of members of the Indonesian state bureaucracy. The younger members of the gangs, MAGs and RAGs, having grown up in a more open environment with more outside influences, displayed more hybrid forms masculinity mixing East Timorese influences with imported influences. The rhetoric of the second set of interviewees was also heavily influenced by post-independence East Timorese discourses (such as when discussing the east/west-divides or the need to prevent a 'communist takeover' by Fretilin) as well as the rhetoric of the UN system and other international organisations (e.g. regarding demands for justice and an end to impunity for the political elite or in terms of demands to access to jobs and resources).

The difference between the more formal Indonesian approach adopted by the former militias and the more hybrid nature of the gang-, MAG- and RAG-identities was also visible in the way the interviewees described their various organisations. While the former militias saw their involvement as being primarily political in nature and tied to specific goals, the second group displayed more colourful and intricate histories of the origin of the groups and their activities, especially in terms of their mystical powers and rituals. Also, while the former militias defined the membership in their organisations more tightly to those involved in their particular project, a number of the MAG and RAG members had more encompassing views of who could join their organisations, seeing them at least rhetorically as global organisations. The gangs, given their more localised nature, did not entertain similar visions of nation-wide, let alone international grandeur.

#### **5.4. Comparing primary interviews with background interviews**

The background interviews which form the basis of this comparative section were carried out over a period of several years. Given the large number of discussions and interviews I carried out over these years on the issue, I have not summarised them here in detail but have attached a list of a number of key discussions and interviews in Appendix 2. A number of the background interviews took place before my field research, others were in parallel with the field research and some took place after I had completed my field research.

In comparing the responses I received from my primary interviews with the responses I received from my numerous background interviews with various East Timorese and foreign observers, there was a marked difference in how the former militias and the gang, MAG and RAG members were viewed. While the militias tended to be seen merely as being violent tools of the Indonesian military, a view echoed in much of the literature available on the militias, there was much more of an attempt made by these observers to try and understand the motivating factors behind the more recent violence.

Regarding the militias, the international interviewees mostly viewed them through the lens of the need to bring the perpetrators to justice. With East Timorese background interviewees, who were mostly middle-class, educated urbanites, the main issue regarding the former militias tended to be more one of how to reintegrate these wayward members of East Timorese society once they had been brought to justice either through formal or informal processes. Relatively little effort has been put into trying to understand motivations for joining the militias, beyond mostly pejorative ones, perhaps because their cause tended to be seen both by internationals interested in Timor-Leste and large sections of East Timorese society as being illegitimate or questionable to begin with. Apart from stressing the non-Timorese nature of the militias, the reasons most often cited for East Timorese joining the militias were coercion, greed, lust for power and low societal status (often used to imply lack of intellectual capacity). Of these, coercion was seen as the most honourable reason, as this meant the person had not really wanted to join the militias. These views stand of course in direct opposition to the answers of the ex-militia interviewees, who saw their membership as a legitimate political decision, supplemented at times by other additional motivating factors, such as coming from a family with a history of being pro-Indonesian.

With the gangs, MAGs and RAGs, outside observers, both East Timorese and international, were willing to take a more understanding approach to why the young men in question had joined the organisations than in the case of the militias. This was due to a great part to the differences in the quantity and quality of the violent acts committed but also to the greater overall integration in society of the gangs, MAGs and RAGs and lack of association with an occupying army as was the case with the militias. In the background interviews, the phenomena of the emergence of these groups in the post-independence period was mostly linked to socio-economic factors, especially youth unemployment, lack of alternative activities, lack of positive role models, lack of family support and guidance as well as the fragmentation of society in the poorer *bairros*. As regards the violence, many outside observers, especially the East Timorese I interviewed, tended, like the primary interviewees themselves, to stress party political manipulation as a key factor. Other factors mentioned were more focused on the young males themselves, including drivers such as alcohol and drugs abuse, jealousy, lack of education, a sense of entitlement, personal conflicts (e.g. over girlfriends and perceived slights), control of territory for extortion, cycles of revenge, search for attention and a history of growing up in a society marked by violence and, during the Indonesian occupation period, a high degree of militarisation of society.

Overall, there was a high degree of similarity between East Timorese and internationals in their analyses of the situation. To a point, there was also an overlap with gang, MAG and RAG members' analyses themselves, especially when it came to issues of manipulation and the lack of employment opportunities. There were however interesting and striking differences in the interpretation of some of the issues raised, which are at times seen in completely opposing ways. Where, for example, gang, MAG and RAG members saw themselves as protecting neighbourhoods and providing security, outside observers saw them as seeking to control territory for extortion. While outside observers saw employment as a factor pushing young men into gangs, the young men themselves, as mentioned above, saw unemployment as a general problem but not as a motive for membership. Thus, not surprisingly, outside observers tended to be much more critical of the motivations of the gangs, MAGs and RAGs and their individual members, putting more emphasis on personal gain and economic motivations than the members I interviewed.

This pattern of difference in interpreting the various social phenomena surrounding the issue is visible also in other studies on the East Timorese gang/MAG/RAG phenomenon (Scambray

et al., 2006, Scambary, 2007 and Streicher, 2008) in which the voices of the groups' members are contrasted with outside observers' analyses. The interviewed members themselves stress their pride in their membership in their organisation and defend it against outside criticism, stressing positive aspects and casting themselves as victims of powerful outside forces. Outside observers, on the other hand, tend to view the young men as either not having agency (i.e. pawns of manipulative elite politics and victims of socio-economic forces beyond their control, broken families and social fragmentation) or as having negative agency (i.e. bored, drunk, vindictive, uneducated and violent – though the terms used would be less stark).

A listing of reasons for the violence in 2006-2008 as seen by East Timorese youth interviewed by the NGO Plan Timor-Leste (Grove et al., 2007, 7) gives a similar picture of how these groups and their members are seen in East Timorese society, but couched in less sociological terms than my background interviews. The youth interviewed for the study saw the following reasons as being the main motivations for acts of violence by members of the gangs, MAGs and RAGs:

- *'social jealousy,*
- *boyfriend/girlfriend problems,*
- *private problems,*
- *loyalty [to gang/MAG/RAG],*
- *old rivalries,*
- *defend reputation,*
- *family disputes,*
- *hatred/grudges,*
- *ignored by arrogant leaders,*
- *wanted to make a point,*
- *show their strength,*
- *get attention of government,*
- *no jobs or prospects,*
- *don't go to school,*
- *offered food, tuak [palm wine], jobs,*
- *bored, unoccupied [sic]*
- *sitting on street – 'looking for action'*
- *no moral education from family,*

- *don't have 'strong minds,'*
- *lack confidence,*
- *don't believe in themselves,*
- *stupid and don't think clearly,*
- *bad judgement,*
- *alcohol – lose control,*
- *democracy makes people feel like they can do anything they want.'*

This characterisation of reasons given by approximately 470 East Timorese of 15 – 25 years of age about the violent activities of their age group peers is interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, it echoes closely, though in much more graphic terms, the broader societal understanding of gang, martial and ritual arts violence as being located amongst the poor and uneducated, 'stupid' sections of society. Secondly, and this is quite a positive finding, there seems to be little support amongst the interviewees for the violent behaviour of these groups; in fact, there is a sense of frustration with them.

## **5.5. Conclusions**

In this Chapter I have presented summaries of the primary field research interviews which I conducted with ex-militia members, members of gangs, martial arts groups and ritual arts groups in Timor-Leste and West Timor. There are a number of issues and underlying themes which are worth flagging at this point from the interviews. One is the high degree of overlap and similarity in the answers, especially within the two sub-groups of the ex-militias on the one hand and of the gang-, MAG- and RAG-members on the other hand. There are however also overlaps between the two groups. The violence of 1998-1999 and of 2006-2007 were both seen as being primarily politically motivated, though other conflict drivers also were mentioned, such as socio-economic marginalisation, envy, communal conflicts and personal feuds are also raised. Their own membership in the given group is mostly seen as positive, with several respondents raising themes of togetherness and belonging, unity and brotherhood as motivating factors for membership. These relatively vague sentiments find a concrete manifestation in the tight links which tie the more charismatic of amongst the leaders to their followers, ties which are much looser in the case of less charismatic leaders.

In terms of these violent acts committed by themselves and their groups in the past, there is a strong tendency amongst the respondents to cast themselves as victims of circumstance and denying, for the overwhelming part, personal responsibility for the violence. In addition to casting themselves as victims though, they also tended to see themselves, somewhat contradictorily, as politically-motivated actors and acting in self-defence. The search for respect, respectability, social recognition and a sense of being entitled to these were also underlying themes. Also worth noting are the frequent references made to religion and traditional spirituality.

The primary interviews were at times in stark contrast to the background interviews. Unlike the men themselves, many of the local and international observers did not see conviction and belief in the goals of the particular group as primary motives for joining, but rather tended to stress the socio-economic 'push' of poverty, coercion and boredom as driving factors.

## **6. Violence and Masculinities – The Theoretical Framework**

The key concern of this thesis is to examine the complex relationships of violence to masculinity. This is a phenomenon that has attracted a certain degree of attention by theorists and researchers working specifically in gender studies but also in peace studies. In this chapter I draw on this literature to offer a theoretical foundation for the analysis to follow. I will first examine the concept of violence, explain my motivations for choosing a particular definition of the term and then discuss ways in which violence is represented. This is then followed by a closer examination of masculinities, looking at key concepts and the intersections between masculinities and violence.

In the conflicts in Timor-Leste which form the focal point of this thesis, the violence has been very largely a male phenomenon. In order to try and understand these violent conflicts it is therefore also necessary to try to understand why men choose to resort to violence; of how they themselves are impacted by the violence and what role violence plays in their lives. Violence is often cast as male or masculine, especially as young, male and poor. This has also been the case in Timor-Leste, where the violence perpetrated by the gangs, MAGs and RAGs has for example been ascribed to ‘uneducated, unoccupied, unemployed and excluded’ youth (Kostner and Clark, 2007, 4) or ‘poor, uneducated, disenfranchised gangs of young men [who] filled the vacuum with chaotic violence, looting and burning’ (Niner, 2008).

Men tend to overwhelmingly be the perpetrators of violence, but also often form the majority of victims of violence. A non-representative but indicative snapshot of violence in Timor-Leste over underlines this: out of 123 public violent incidents recorded across the country, 103 were initiated by men (17 by men and women, 3 by women only) and in 101 of the cases all victims were men (Belun, 2010, 5-6).

The link between men and violence is often cast in simplistic biological terms or as being part of culture. These seemingly simple explanations obscure the central tenet of peace studies that violence is a choice, as is non-violence. However, cultural and social expectations placed on men, political and economic pressures as well as the emotional burden of fear, stress, anger and sorrow often narrow down the options open to the actors.

In order to examine the complex inter-relationships between violence and men, I have chosen to combine the analytical tools provided by critical peace studies and masculinity studies. Concepts from peace studies such as the varied definitions of violence and the examination of the multiple political, historical, economic and social underpinnings of violent conflicts enable a more informed examination than the more common habit of labelling complex conflicts such as in Timor-Leste as being simply ‘primordial ethnic conflicts in failed states.’ The terminology of gender studies, meanwhile, provides a number of tools to explore the complexities and contradictions faced by the individuals in conflict situations as well as the social, political and economic power structures which shape them and are shaped by them.

In this thesis, I shall use the terms *direct violence* and *masculinities* as follows:

**Direct violence** is the deliberate use of coercive physical, psychological or verbal force to cause injury or abuse<sup>32</sup>

And

**Masculinities** are the various ways of being and becoming a man in a given culture and given temporal space.

The definition of direct violence is an adaptation of the Merriam Webster Reference Dictionary (2003) definition of violence and the definition of masculinities is an adaptation of the definition used by Haywood and Mac an Ghail (2003, 154).

As neither of the definitions is uncontested, I shall explore below in more detail some of the debates around the two concepts and explain my choices to use these particular definitions.

## 6.1. Defining Violence

Violence is a complex issue, culture-bound and often lying in the eye of the beholder: what might be perceived as violence by the person at the receiving end might in no way be seen as violence by the one now cast, in the eyes of the victim, as the perpetrator. The perpetrator

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<sup>32</sup> As outlined in more detail below, for the purposes of this thesis I will not be considering more indirect forms of violence, such as structural and cultural violence

often seeks to portray the act of violence as not being violence in the first place, as being justified or at the very least as unavoidable. And the person who believes that s/he has been at the receiving end of violence may have a range of reasons for claiming to be a victim, including justification of legal actions against the alleged attacker or for a vengeful counter-attack. As Sinclair Dinnen describes it,

*'It is hard to think of a more challenging concept than violence. While we all recognise it when we see it, it is another thing when it comes to trying to explain what violence is. [...] When we say that a particular act is violent, we are projecting the quality of violence onto it, rather than violence being intrinsic to the act itself.'*  
(Dinnen, 2000, 1)

In this section, I will first discuss some of the broader conceptualisations of violence before explaining my rationale for choosing a narrower definition for the purposes of this thesis. After this, I will examine conceptualisations of direct violence closer, followed by an examination of discourse on violence based on work done by Jeff Hearn (1998) on male perpetrators of violence.

### 6.1.1. Broad definitions of violence

The definition of violence is intrinsically linked to the production, reproduction but also opposition to violence. As Hearn (1998, 15) puts it,

*'The definition of violence is contested. This contestation is itself part of the process of the reproduction of and indeed opposition to violence. [...] violence is not one thing; it is not a thing at all. Violence is simply a word, a short-hand that refers to a mass of different experiences in people's lives.'* (Emphasis in original)

In spite of its ubiquity throughout history and across societies, violence remains a central moral and philosophical problem. On the one hand, it is, more or less across the board, seen as 'evil' but simultaneously openings are made for its use as a 'necessary evil.' Violence as 'necessary evil' then becomes justified, mostly in limited and circumscribed circumstances, based on moral assumptions.

Moralistic conceptualisations of violence as being a manifestation of evil are problematic as they tend to conceal more than they reveal, writing off violence as something damnable rather than exploring the dynamics behind it. Resorting to violence is a choice; it is a form of communication, a way of renegotiating power relations; therefore, casting it as a metaphysical evil or as simply 'wrong' does little in the way of helping understand its complexities.

The perception of both conflict and violence varies depending on one's position in the conflict and tends to be coloured by one's socio-cultural and historical background. Violence is bound to specific social and cultural as well as temporal settings. The same physical, verbal or symbolic act can have different connotations, be seen as threatening or reassuring, as meaningful or meaningless. These experiences are also gendered, with women, boys, girls and men having different experiences of conflict and violence, especially when it comes to vulnerability to sexual violence.

Taking an encompassing view of violence, Bourgois and Scheper-Hughes (2004, 19-23) argue that different forms of violence can be seen as a continuum. In this concept of a continuum of violence, one end of the spectrum includes genocidal mass crimes such as the Holocaust, colonial conquests and slavery. Included are also war, communal violence, crime and everyday violence being perpetrated in prisons or in the domestic sphere. In addition to these various forms of direct and mostly physical violence, the concept of the continuum also includes the less visible forms of violence – *structural* and *symbolic* violence.

The concept of structural violence used by Bourgois and Scheper-Hughes has been pioneered by Johan Galtung. In his seminal work on violence, '*Violence, Peace, and Peace Research*,' Galtung (1969) defines two forms of violence, to which he added a third later (Galtung, 1990). According to his definition, there are, in addition to direct physical violence, structural and cultural forms of violence. The latter two are perpetrated in a rather different, far less visible manner than what is usually in everyday speech referred to as violence *per se*. While violence in common usage is mostly used to denote the use of direct physical or psychological force in a coercive manner, structural and cultural violences are subtle and normalised enough to be rendered invisible, and to therefore not necessarily be recognised and named as forms of violence at all.

Structural violence is defined by Galtung (1969, 172) as ‘the constraints on human potential due to economic and political structures, such as the unequal and unfair distribution of and access to resources.’ These include, for example, exploitative international trade regimes, poverty, unequal treatment of women and girls or the lack of access to basic health and educational services.

Galtung defines cultural violence as those aspects of a culture that legitimise direct or structural violence (Galtung, 1990, 295). In a similar vein, Pierre Bourdieu (1998, 63-78) defines symbolic violence as the maintenance of socio-cultural power relations through everyday habits, patterns of thinking or for example modes of speech. These acts are often so internalised as to be almost unconscious but uphold power differences based on, amongst other things, gender, class and ethnic differentiations. Even more than structural violence, these forms of violence are rendered invisible by their normalisation into everyday patterns of thinking and acting.

Violence, as Bourgois and Scheper-Hughes (2004, 1) point out, is ‘reproductive [and] mimetic [...] violence gives birth to itself.’ The reproductive nature of violence also means that less visible structural violence often leads to visible direct violence. It is not uncommon for those who are victims of structural violence to resort to direct, physical violence against those who are in an even weaker position than they are themselves (Bourgois and Scheper-Hughes, 2004, 1). Structural violence or cultural violence can therefore be used as excuses or justifications to legitimise direct violence.

Bourdieu, Galtung, Bourgois and Scheper-Hughes insist on the necessity of using a broad definition of violence in order to make previously invisible forms of violence and domination visible and ‘to purposefully link violent acts in normal times to those of abnormal times’ (Bourgois and Scheper-Hughes, 2004, 20). Though I agree with the necessity of the political project of making ‘invisible’ violence visible, or for that matter re-considering as violence acts previously not seen as being violent, the broad definition is problematic in several ways. The first problem is the loss of analytical focus and a dilution of the definition – if almost any human activity (or lack of activity in the case of neglect) can be seen as being a form of violence, the term loses its meaning. Secondly, the broad definition risks relativising different acts of violence. For example, the purposeful use of mass rape and sexual mutilation as a weapon of war can thus end up being dealt with on the same conceptual level as the lack of

access to education in rural areas. Thirdly, a broad definition of violence also counter-productively opens up back-alleys for attempts to justify violent retribution as legitimate self-defence. An example of these kinds of justifications from Timor-Leste was how the burning down of the houses, murder and forced expulsion of around 100 000 people (mainly hailing from the eastern parts of the country) from their homes was cast as a form of legitimate self-defence by the perpetrators as market vendors from the eastern districts had allegedly overpriced goods sold on the market and had behaved arrogantly towards those originating from the western districts.

*Figure 11. The Aftermath of Communal Violence. Dili, 2006 (AAP Image/Dean Lewins)*



### 6.1.2. Conceptualising direct violence

For the analytical purposes of this thesis I have chosen to use a relatively narrow definition of violence. I will concentrate on acts of direct interpersonal physical, psychological or verbal violence in the context of communal and political conflict in Timor-Leste. I use the term

direct violence to refer to the deliberate use of coercive physical, psychological or verbal force to cause injury or abuse.

I have chosen to use this definition for the sake of sharpening the focus of the thesis, as I shall be specifically looking at East Timorese men who have engaged in groups which deliberately used physical and psychological force against others with the explicit purpose to injure or abuse in the context of their activities in the 1999 and 2006 conflicts. Within the scope of Bourgois' and Scheper-Hughes' concept of a continuum of violence, I will therefore concentrate on one end of this continuum, on that of violent conflict, war crimes, communal violence, individual physical violence as well as sexual and gender-based violence. I will not include, for example, bureaucrats or businessmen whose activities might have contributed directly or indirectly to forms of structural violence or the myriad ways in which symbolic (or cultural) violence is produced and reproduced in society which lays the foundation for the direct violence.

For two reasons, I have also chosen to include psychological and verbal violence in my definition at the risk of expanding the focus of direct violence. Firstly, physical violence always has a psychological and often a verbal component to it. Secondly, in some socio-cultural environments, arguably Timor-Leste included, the use of psychological or verbal violence can be seen as being on par with if not more injurious than direct physical violence (see for example Goddard, 2005, 188; Mitchell, 2000, 199).

Direct violence takes on various forms and serves a number of purposes. It is a transgression, at times spectacular and public, at times routine so as to be unspectacular, hidden, denied and relegated to the private or domestic sphere. Jan Philipp Reemtsma (2008, 106) classifies physical violence into three categories:

- 'Locative violence, *which treats the body of the Other as matter to be assigned to a certain place [...] one could also speak of 'dislocating' or 'captivating' violence. [...]*
- Raptive violence, *which uses the body to perform (mostly sexual) acts on it.*
- Autotelic violence *which aims to harm or destroy the body.* ( My translation, emphasis in original)

In terms of these distinctions, direct physical violence operates in three ways: it forcibly captivates (e.g. forced labour or captivity) or forcibly moves the body of the target of violence (e.g. deportations); it forcibly takes control of his or her body often by the perpetration of sexual violence; or treats the body itself as the target upon which to use force (e.g. torture, beatings).

Psychological violence can be linked to direct physical violence either directly or indirectly (e.g. through the threat of physical violence) but can also take other forms such as verbal or emotional violence, neglect or deprivation. In the East Timorese context, it is also necessary to include malicious rumours and assumed magical spells which can also be used (or assumed to have been used) as forms of verbal violence and coercive control.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention defines psychological violence as:

*'... involv[ing] trauma to the victim caused by acts, threats of acts, or coercive tactics. Psychological/emotional abuse can include, but is not limited to, humiliating the victim, controlling what the victim can and cannot do, withholding information from the victim, deliberately doing something to make the victim feel diminished or embarrassed, isolating the victim from friends and family, and denying the victim access to money or other basic resources' (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008).*

Psychological violence can be direct or indirect, active or passive. At times the mere presence (or even the anticipation of the presence) of what is perceived to be a potentially threatening force can be enough to act as a coercive force, especially if the victim or victims are traumatised by previous experiences of violence.

### 6.1.3. Meanings of violence

In terms of its impacts beyond the direct hurt caused, violence also serves an instrumental purpose and as such it follows its own internal logic. Thus, though it may seem often excessive and transgressive, it is usually not irrational. Violence can be seen as a form of communication, albeit an extreme one where other forms of communication have broken down (Cramer, 2006, 284; Reemtsma, 2008, 107). The most common goal of violence, or the

most common ‘message’ that is communicated by violence, is that of establishing power relations, either by reiterating or by challenging existing power relations. While violence is often seen as a tool of the more powerful party, paradoxically resorting to violence can also be an effort to overcome feelings of powerlessness, frustration or vulnerability (Isdal and Råkil, 2002, 104). The renegotiation of power relations can happen either in the private or the public domain.

Beyond being an instrument of establishing or renegotiating power relations and of coercion, violence is often loaded with symbolic significance beyond the act itself. In her study of politically-motivated violence in Sri Lanka, Jani de Silva notes that ‘excessive’ violent acts

*[...] are fraught with powerful symbolic meanings. They exude a symbolic significance in that their goal looms larger than the rational, instrumentalist aim of subduing an opponent or group of opponents. Such an ‘excess’ of violence over and above what is required to subdue the opponent then, erupts in the form of spectacle.’*  
(de Silva, 2005, 18)

In addition to the more abstract impacts of violence of renegotiating power relations and of conveying symbolic messages, violence brings with it material and immaterial gains for the perpetrator. The direct material – and also sexual – ‘gains’ for the perpetrator are often quite straight-forward. The immaterial gains are often more difficult to pin down and more temporary. These may include for example finding temporary meaning in one’s life or as a form of attempted catharsis. As Wolfgang Sofsky (2003, 29) argues, ‘demonstrative violence aims to spread terror, instil respect and dispel tedium.’ In Eric Hobsbawm’s (2000, 70) depiction of banditry, violence, the ‘appetite for destruction’ becomes an act of impotent rebellion against higher powers:

*‘A wild and indiscriminate retaliation: yes, but perhaps also, and especially among the weak, the permanent victims who have no hope of real victory even in their dreams, a more general ‘revolution of destruction,’ which tumbles the whole world in ruins, since no ‘good’ world seems possible.’*

Violence therefore serves to convey different messages and to reach different objectives. It is a learned response which does not occur in a vacuum and comes with its own history. There

is, however, nothing inevitable about violence. It is a choice rather than something inescapable, resorting to which has been pre-determined by biology or by culture (Mead, 1940, 402-405; UNESCO, 1986). The option of not resorting to violence always exists as well.

#### 6.1.4. Discourses on violence

So far, I have mainly dealt with violence as an act, circumscribing the term for the purposes of this study and looking at its implications. However, another important part of violence is the question of how it is framed by the people involved. Explanations of violence can lead to denials or confessions, can either be liberating for the victim or entrap them further. Often, a key function of discourse on violence is to legitimise the violence as a necessary evil, as inevitable, or to play down its significance. However, as Hannah Arendt argued,

*'Violence can be justifiable, but it never will be legitimate ... Its justification loses in plausibility the farther its intended end recedes into the future. No one questions the use of violence in self-defence, because the danger is not only clear but also present, and the end justifying the means is immediate.'* (Arendt, 1970, 52)

A discussion of violence is however also necessary for overcoming violence, for reconciliation and redressing injustices.

In discussing their violent acts with a sample group of 60 men in the United Kingdom with histories of violence, Jeff Hearn (1998, 108-110) identifies five different ways in which his respondents talked (or did not talk) about their violence. The five categories identified by Hearn and which I will examine these in more detail below are:

- repudiations,
- quasi-repudiations,
- excuses and justifications,
- confessions or
- composite and contradictory accounts.

## *Repudiations*

In the case of repudiations, the perpetrator either wholly or partially denies having committed an act of violence. Repudiations can also involve the discursive removal either of himself/herself or of his intentions from the narrative. Outright denial or a repudiation of violence ever having happened is a common strategy, especially for the perpetrators of violence but can also be employed by victims. As Judith Herman (1997, 8) notes in her study on trauma and recovery,

*'In order to escape accountability for his crimes, the perpetrator does everything in his power to promote forgetting. Secrecy and silence are the perpetrator's first line of defence. If secrecy fails, the perpetrator attacks the credibility of his victim. If he can not silence her absolutely, he tries to make sure that no one listens. To this end, he marshals an impressive array of arguments, from the most blatant denial to the most sophisticated and elegant rationalisation. After every atrocity one can expect to hear the same predictable apologies: it never happened; the victim lies; the victim exaggerates; the victim brought it upon herself; and in any case it is time to forget the past and move on. The more powerful the perpetrator, the greater is his prerogative to name and define reality, and the more completely his arguments prevail.'*

Denial therefore has two main functions – it enhances the power and social position of the perpetrator while further weakening and humiliating the victim, who continues to be entrapped by the power of the perpetrator, the memory of the violence and often the humiliation of not being believed.

## *Partial denial*

In the case of quasi-repudiations, the perpetrator recognises certain types of violence did occur but denies full knowledge of the violence, e.g. referring to a partial, temporal 'blackout' (Hearn, 1998, 115). Partial denials can also involve a minimising or relativising of the violence. Another strategy of quasi-repudiations is a naturalising of the violence, seeing violent acts as 'natural' or 'normal,' especially for men (see also section 2.3.).

Reemtsma (2008, 191) sees different cultures as being ‘characterised by the way in which they define zones of violence: areas in which violence is forbidden, allowed or demanded.’ Although cultural factors undoubtedly shape both a society’s and an individual’s views on the legitimacy of the use of violence, placing the blame for violence solely on culture is an unsatisfactory, yet easy way out. On the one hand, it leaves out other factors, such as power and class relations. On the other hand, it also presupposes a monolithic culture, one which ‘prescribes that [people] would behave in a certain way because of their culture, rather than seeing culture as offering a vast repertoire of actions.’ (Cribb, 2002, 234). Most importantly, however, resorting to the cultural argument leaves out personal agency, in other words the possibility of the individual to either resort or not to resort to violence, altogether.

Similarly, ‘nature’ is also often evoked as a justification, or at least an explanation of violence. This is especially true for men, whose violent acts are often explained away by referring to biology or to likening violence to a force of nature – both by those seeking to critique violent male behaviour and those who seek to deproblematise it. Men are essentialised as being biochemically or physically predisposed to violence, be it due to higher testosterone levels or their physique. Michael Ignatieff (1998, 127) for example describes entering a ‘zone of toxic testosterone’ in the Bosnian War; Johan Galtung (1996, 40-43) sees men as being ‘chemically disposed to violence.’

As Goldstein (2001, 404-405) summarises, these include biologist explanations (e.g. testosterone or oestrogen levels, genetics, body size), simplistic and essentialising psychological explanations (e.g. men’s ‘innate’ aggression versus female ‘innate’ peacefulness) and social causes, such as social support given by men and women to violence in conflict situations, combat as a ‘test of manhood’ and the ‘feminisation’ of the enemy and of non-fighting men. While Goldstein acknowledges biological differences, these do not offer sufficient explanations for male violence in conflict – and for the fact that many, if not most men are not violent.

A local East Timorese example of the ‘force of nature’ argument is found in Loch (2007, 435) whose respondents liken the emergence of communal violence (*mutu rabu*) to a ‘flock of birds swooping down on a rice field to eat the newly-planted seeds.’ As in the case of the cultural argument, the ‘nature’ argument leaves no space for agency, no room for the individual to escape the purportedly pre-determined course of having to resort to violence.

### *Excuses and justifications*

If violence is admitted, there is often an attempt made by the perpetrator to justify, excuse or legitimise the violence. While there is recognition of the violence, the perpetrator denies either his or her responsibility in the case of excuses or refuses to accept blame in the case of justifications. As Hearn (1998, 121) observes,

[...] *the prime form of excuses is the construction of the man as a victimised, potentially violent self, arising from forces beyond his individual self. With justifications, the prime discourse is the construction of the man as a holder of rights of possession of the woman. In both cases, violence is constructed as a reaction to something else.*<sup>33</sup>

In the case of communal conflict, other justifications and legitimisations also come into play, such as discourses of self-defence, of protecting the community or acting under orders. Structural violence may also be cited as a justification for resorting to direct violence. Other justifications which came up during discussions as part of this particular research were feelings of being under threat from the other community and thus having to resort to pre-emptive violence, temporary insanity and spiritual possession.

Justifications and legitimisations however also bring with them the flip side of the argument, the de-legitimisation of other forms of violence, considered taboo, as being beyond the pale, as being brutish, cowardly, carried out for base motives or dishonourable and therefore unmanly. A key aspect in these conceptualisations of legitimate violence is the factor of restraint, which co-defines the honour and rectitude of the cause for which violence is used as well as the honour and status of the perpetrator (Braudy, 2003, 52-53; Carton and Morrell, 2007, 72-74).

### *Confessions*

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<sup>33</sup> Emphasis in original. It is worth noting that Hearn specifically focused on men who committed acts against intimate female partners and hence the perpetrators are all male and victims female

In the case of confessions, the perpetrator recognises that violence did occur and accepts both blame and responsibility, at least in part. An important point raised by Hearn (1998, 134) is that confessions can happen with or without remorse. In those cases in which the confession was made without remorse,

*‘[...] such confessions may become normalised as part of an acceptance of violence in the man’s life; the violence can be taken for granted, repudiated and denied’* (Hearn, 1998, 134).

Confessions and remorse are often seen as a necessary first step for overcoming the trauma of violent conflict. This has been the guiding principle for example in the case of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission process or the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste (CAVR – Comissão de Acolhimento, Verdade e Reconciliação de Timor-Leste), processes in which the open discussion of violence and repentance or remorse is seen as an essential pre-requisite to justice and reconciliation. The same principle is prevalent in many traditional justice systems in which, following an admission of guilt, the victim or his/her family or clan are compensated. However, while western-influenced reconciliation processes seek emotional and psychological closure for the victims and for society as a whole through the confessions of the violence committed, traditional reconciliation methods may be more focused on issues of compensation and re-establishing social (or cosmic) harmony (Fox, 2006, 178-179).<sup>34</sup> Even in the western-influenced processes, however, the confession is however only a first step towards reconciliation, and can not be expected, on its own, to undo the damage caused by the violence or allow a return to the *status quo ante*, erasing the memories of the deed.

#### *Composite and contradictory accounts*

In practice, accounts of violence often mix elements of the four above-mentioned categories. Violence may be partially confessed to and partially denied, seen as justified to a certain point but seen as transgressive beyond that point. Accounts and judgements may also shift over

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<sup>34</sup> The issue for the need of bringing cosmic harmony back into balance through reconciliation ceremonies so that the ‘uncompensated’ spirits of the dead killed in a militia massacre no longer haunt the world of the living is also brought home vividly by the film *Passabe* (2006) documenting reconciliation efforts in Oecussi district, Timor-Leste, after a militia massacre in 1999.

time. In an analysis of the narratives coming out of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission process, Foster, Haupt and de Beer (2005) list a number of 'contested identities' of perpetrators of violence. These include viewing the perpetrators:

- through stereotypical descriptions, (often using hyper-masculine imagery),
- as religious,
- as good, kind persons,
- as victims,
- as obedient servants/following orders,
- as 'mad,'
- as fearless and to be feared,
- as criminals,
- as being bad/evil,
- as cruel, savage, brutal,
- as psychopaths, animals, monsters, or through
- fictional analogies (Foster, Haupt and de Beer, 2005, 42-52).

These different, often contradictory narratives are a reflection of the complexity innate in most acts of violence. The perpetrator may for example see herself or himself both as a victim and a perpetrator; as innately good but driven to evil – or vice-versa. He or she will be seen by the victim in a very specific, but not necessarily mono-dimensionally evil way, and society at large will also have different readings of his or her acts of violence.

Similarly, in his study of German and Austrian World War II war criminals, Harald Welzer (2005, 13-15), raises the issue of how differently victims and perpetrators live with the aftermath of extreme violence. While for the victims of the Holocaust and other crimes against humanity and war crimes covered by his study the violence committed against them often remains a defining moment in their life, many of the perpetrators he studied were able to cope with the violence much easier, rationalising it as being time- and space-bound, 'belonging to a specific frame of reference [...] which allows them to see their actions as being something separate from their own persona.'<sup>35</sup> Austrian and German society on the whole, as Walzer (2005, 15-17) also participated in this particular form of rationalisation of violence, particularly in the immediate post-war years.

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<sup>35</sup> My translation

Though violence is often cast in a simplistic black and white terms, it is a complex phenomenon and is in the way it is practiced closely linked to hierarchies of power which are themselves also contested and fluid. One of the determining elements of hierarchy and power is gender, and violence is often cast as being male and masculine. As Hearn (1998, 144) points out,

*'men's accounts and explanations of violence take place in the context of men's power and generally reflect, indeed reproduce these power relations. [...] Men's accounts of violence are themselves usually within and examples of patriarchal domination and male domination.'*<sup>36</sup>

While Hearn's argument seems to discount to a degree the potential transformative power of violence and discourses on violence in terms of renegotiating power relations and even potentially questioning 'patriarchal domination and male domination,' it does underline the important point that both acts of violence and how they are represented are inextricably linked to gendered hierarchies and discourses of power. In the following section I will explore some of the relevant debates around questions of masculinity and how they relate to violence.

## **6.2. Masculinities**

In this section I will outline some of the theoretical discussions around male gender roles and their links to violence and conflict. After a more general review of the term *masculinities* and its definition, I will discuss two influential concepts in Critical Studies of Men and Masculinities, namely those of *hegemonic* and *protest masculinity*. This will be followed by a look at two other concepts – that of *hyper-masculinity* and what I have chosen to call *warrior masculinity*. The section will end with a discussion of the impacts of violence and conflict on masculinities.

### 6.2.1. Men and masculinities

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<sup>36</sup> Emphasis in original

The argument of my thesis is based on the premise that gender is not a natural, immutable given but rather a social, cultural and, as Dolan (2007, 1) argues, a political construct. The term 'gender' refers to the socially and culturally constructed identities, attributes, expectations, opportunities, roles and relationships associated with being female and male in a particular cultural, economic, social and temporal situation. Gender roles are thus learned, changeable and context- and time-specific. Often, the learning processes take place seemingly sub-consciously and start at an early age, making gender roles often seem like 'natural' attributes of being female or male. These constructs are neither fixed nor monolithic, but rather they are fluid, multi-faceted and at times contradictory.

In examining masculinities, I will adapt a definition used by Haywood and Mac an Ghail (2003, 154) by stating that:

**Masculinities** are the various ways of being and becoming a man in a given culture and given temporal space.

Gender roles are therefore relational and are embedded in the larger power structures of culture, society and economy. According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, 843), 'masculinity is defined as a configuration of practice organised in relation to the structure of gender relations.' Social power structures are not fixed, static pyramids but are fluid and constantly renegotiated. Even in a patriarchal society, as Michael Kimmel (1997, 189) points out, 'it cannot be forgotten that all masculinities are not created equal.'

In addition to gender, other factors such as age, social class, economic position in a given society, a person's ethnic or religious background, further stratify different members of society. As Robert Morrell (2001, 7-8) notes,

*'...masculinities are fluid and should not be considered as belonging in a fixed way to any one group of men. They are socially and historically constructed in a process which involves contestation between rival understandings of what being a man should involve. [...] Masculinity [...] is thus constructed in the context of class, race and other factors which are interpreted through the prism of age.'*

Drawing on Judith Butler's concept of *performativity* (1999, xv and 34), I consider the 'various ways of being and becoming a man' to be a kind of performance. That is not to say that they are in some way inauthentic; rather, the ways in which 'men behave as men' are based on social expectations which have been internalised by the person in question. In looking at violent enactments of masculinity, this also means a rebuttal of the common claim that violent behaviour by men is biological, genetic or natural, as if there would be a 'warrior gene' or, for that matter, a 'wife-beater gene.' I base my thesis on the argument that violent enactments of masculinity, like other enactments, are learned, taught, appropriated and socio-culturally condoned or condemned.

Gender is seen by Butler (1999, 34) as being performative in the sense that 'gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed.' Butler (1999, xv) proposes that gender operates as 'an expectation that ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates.' In other words, internalised socio-cultural norms of what is appropriate masculine behaviour in a given situation become a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy and reaffirmation through the appropriate response that this is indeed the way in which men or women are supposed to react. However, as Butler (1999, xv) continues,

*'performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through the naturalisation in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration.'*

The way the individual man 'performs' or enacts his masculinities, constructing it through social and bodily practices in the given context is defined by his and his reference groups values, tastes, habits, styles, ideologies and other influences. These components of the performances, e.g. postures, ways of moving and communicating or outward styles, are then inscribed on the body through 'body practices and practised masculinity' (Woodward, 2007, 82-88).

Performances of gender roles are repetitive and ritualistic but not unchanging. As with other performances, the 'doing' of gender changes over time. While the general form may remain similar over a sustained period of time, the performance is open to changes in style depending on internal and external factors impacting the performer. As Jeffrey, Jeffery and Jeffery (2008, 13) note,

*[...] people's notions of themselves as men or women emerge out of how they speak, dress and comport themselves, and how these styles come together in their 'performances.' It follows that, as far as identities cohere, they are always in motion, and liable to be unsettled by future rounds of performance.'*

It is important to note that while the concepts of performativity and 'doing gender' open up a variety of enactments in theory, gender roles tend to be strictly policed in practice by society but also by individuals themselves. As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, 842-843) note,

*'one is not free to adopt any gender position in interaction simply as a discursive or reflexive move. The possibilities are constrained massively by embodiment, by institutional histories, by economic forces, and by personal and family relationships.'*

Men and women are thereby constrained by their social, cultural, economic, political and religious environment which lay out the limits of accepted and acceptable gender behaviour, which in turn are internalised and reproduced by the individual.

### 6.2.2. Hegemonic and Protest Masculinities

In analysing the intersections between male gender role expectations and violence, I will first discuss the concepts of *hegemonic* and *protest masculinities*. Developed and popularised by R.W. Connell (1995 and 2000), the concepts of hegemonic and protest masculinities are perhaps two of the most influential and debated conceptual tools for looking at masculinity and power in Critical Men's Studies. The concepts evolved out of a critique of gender theories which were seen as being too rigid in their conceptualisation of men and boys and not addressing issues of power relations and violence between men themselves (Wedgwood and Connell, 2004, 112) The basic tenet of the concepts of hegemonic and protest masculinities is that while men are by and large the complicit beneficiaries of patriarchal, unequal gender orders, power is also stratified between men themselves within the gender order. At the top of this dynamic, fluid, hierarchical system of subordinate, complicit and dominant masculinities are hegemonic forms of masculinity. These can and are however constantly contested and reformulated, reproduced and reconstituted (Carrigan et al., 1985, 551-604).

In Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities, central themes of analysis have been the various intersections between masculinities and violence and the role played by gender in defining relationships of power and subjugation. These include analysing structural violence inherent in patriarchal systems, against women, against other men and against themselves (e.g. through excessive risk-taking and substance abuse) in various spheres of life, including the home, public spaces, sports or violent conflict (see for example Connell, 1987, 1995 and 2000; Hearn 1987 and 1998; Kimmel, 1987; Messner, 1990 and Seidler, 1991 and 2006).

Gender roles in violent conflicts however are complex, shifting and often contradictory. As Hearn (1987, 96-97) has argued,

*'individual men fight, kill each other, die; yet through this enactment of violence men's class power is reaffirmed. Thus individual men may, sometimes in large numbers, perform individual acts that are not in their own immediate interests, perhaps even including their own death, but which maintain the structured relation of men's collective power over women [...] Meanwhile, other men may resist this process. In other words, men's agency may or may not be oppressive.'*<sup>37</sup>

The complexities are, however, not merely restricted to men vs. women or men vs. men, but the complexities and contradictions reach further. Individuals may act simultaneously as brutal aggressors and caring protectors, as victims and perpetrators, as commanders and subordinates.

### *Hegemonic masculinity*

Drawing on the Gramscian analysis of culture and class power relations in society, Connell develops a concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' which

*'can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or*

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<sup>37</sup> Emphasis in original

*is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.'*  
(Connell, 1995, 77)

As Connell points out, this 'currently accepted' version of what men are supposed to be like also incorporates the suppression of other masculinities or attributes deemed as not befitting masculine behaviour, both in society in general and in oneself. Hegemony is culturally and temporally variable. Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne (1994, 20) argue that hegemonic masculinities are

*'... dominant constructions [which] determine the standards against which other masculinities are defined. Rarely, if ever, will there be only one hegemonic masculinity operating in any cultural setting. Rather, in different contexts, different hegemonic masculinities are imposed by emphasizing certain attributes, such as physical prowess or emotionality over others.'*

The concept of hegemonic masculinities is useful for analysing various forms of masculinity and their relative power positions in a given social order at a given point in time. It can be applied as an analytical tool at various levels, be it a global, national, local or institutional setting.

As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) point out, the concept has multiple meanings and applications. The concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' is not unambiguous:

*'It is desirable to eliminate any usage of hegemonic masculinity as a fixed, trans-historical model. This usage violates the historicity of gender and ignores the massive evidence of change in social definitions of masculinity.'*

*But in other respects, ambiguity in gender processes may be important to recognize as a mechanism of hegemony. [...] hegemonic masculinities can be constructed that do not correspond closely to the lives of any actual men. Yet these models do, in various ways, express widespread ideals, fantasies, and desires. They provide models of relations with women and solutions to problems of gender relations. Furthermore, they articulate loosely with the practical constitution of masculinities as ways of living in everyday local circumstances. To the extent they do this, they contribute to*

*hegemony in the society-wide gender order as a whole.* (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, 838)

As Christine Beasley (2008, 88) notes, the term hegemonic masculinity has been used in masculinity studies variously and sometimes confusingly to refer to

- *'the political mechanism [...] to ensure popular or mass consent to particular forms of rule, [...]*
- *as a descriptive word referring to dominant (most powerful and/or most widespread) versions of manhood, and [...]*
- *as an empirical reference specifically to actual groups of men.'*<sup>38</sup>

Drawing on Beasley (2008), I will use the concept of hegemonic masculinity in two ways. Firstly, I seek to show how, 'as a political mechanism (it involves) the bonding together of different masculinities in a hierarchical order' (Beasley, 2008, 99). Secondly, as Beasley (2008, 100) also points out, hegemonic masculinity is a 'discursive ideal mobilising legitimisation' of the existing gender order, a local 'legitimising ideal shaped against *and* in concert with more global forms'<sup>39</sup> (Beasley, 2008, 98). I will however not use it to refer to any specific, actual group of men or boys.

Beasley argues for viewing hegemony less in terms of mere dominance by an actual group of men but more as a political process which leads to the widespread acceptance of the legitimacy of the particular hierarchical order. As Antonio Gramsci points out (1971, 57), there is a difference between mere dominance and the political project of hegemony, where the latter involves some degree of negotiation and acceptance of dominance by the dominated group. Hegemony is also not fixed but shifts and is renegotiated within society (Gramsci, 1996, 1584).<sup>40</sup> Hegemonic masculinities thus are constructs of masculinity which favour certain enactments of masculinity over others, uphold the existing gender order but also have wider societal acceptance.

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<sup>38</sup> Emphasis in original

<sup>39</sup> Emphasis in original

<sup>40</sup> The German citation I used reads as „*dass die herrschende Gruppe sich auf konkrete Weise mit den allgemeinen Interessen der untergeordneten Gruppen abstimmen wird und das Staatsleben als ein andauerndes Formieren und Überwinden von instabilen Gleichgewichten zu fassen ist [...], von Gleichgewichten, in denen die Interessen der herrschenden Gruppen überwiegen, aber nur bis zu einem gewissen Punkt, d. h. nicht bis zu einem engen ökonomisch-korporativen Interesse.*“

This wider societal acceptance naturally is dependent on the existing dominant norms of accepted and acceptable behaviour in the society in question. Drawing on western concepts of hegemonic masculinities, attributes linked to these concepts include heterosexuality, sexual activity and, on occasion, violence, but as Anand (2008, 168) and Munn (2008, 155) point out, hegemonic masculinities need not be *a priori* heterosexual or heterosexually active. Hegemonic masculinities also can but do not necessarily need to be directly, physically violent. In fact, if one uses the Gramscian notion of hegemony, then it is not through violence but through societal consensus that the hegemony of the dominant class is established. A distancing of oneself from direct physical violence may also be part of cultural expectations of hegemonic masculinity. As de Silva (2005, 27) observes for Sinhala culture in Sri Lanka, hegemonic masculinity is linked to a

*'... sedateness of bearing which does not easily lend itself to violence [...] risking the body is often the idiom of minions and underlings who bloody their hands carrying out the project of hegemonic masculinity.'*

Processes of massive societal change, such as de-colonisation, violent conflict, modernisation, urbanisation or globalisation lead to renegotiations of social power relations, including gender relations. One of these renegotiations in situations of societal change often is the relationship between hegemonic and subjugated, protest masculinities.

### *Protest masculinity*

A second useful concept popularised by Connell is that of 'protest masculinity,' i.e. enactments of masculinity which define themselves at one level or another by going against certain societal norms. This may take the aggressive, violent, destructive and self-destructive forms but can also equally well find more constructive, creative and non-violent forms. A previous definition by Broude (1990, 103) uses the term to describe

*'instances of extreme forms of sex-typed behaviour on the part of some males. Key to the concept of protest masculinity are high levels of physical aggression. The protest*

*masculinity profile is also proposed as including destructiveness, low tolerance for delay of gratification, crime, drinking, and similar dispositions.'*

This definition is, however, problematic in a number of ways. It equates protest with destructive and/or self-destructive aggression. The definition is tendentious and normative; protest masculinity is seen pathological and deviant with little room for seeing positive forms of protest or seeking a deeper understanding of the roots of violent behaviour. For example, men who pointedly refuse to participate in what they regard as being violent institutions and practices, e.g. by refusing to do mandatory military service, are also performing a form of protest masculinities which this negatively-loaded definition does not cover. In this, it bears similarities to classic descriptions of male involvement in gangs, which are often seen as a group manifestation of protest masculinity. In his preface to Thrasher's classic text on Chicago gangs, for example, Robert Park (1927, ix) evokes similar imagery to Broude's definition:

*'... [gangs are] composed of those same foot-loose, prowling, and predacious adolescents who herd and hang together, after the manner of the undomesticated male everywhere.'*

As Connell (1995, 112-118) points out, protest masculinity is however a more complex and often contradictory phenomenon than merely (young) men on the fringe of society behaving violently. A key dimension of protest masculinity stressed by Connell (2000, 159) is how these enactments are linked to the defiance of authority as exemplified by hegemonic roles of masculinity dominant at the particular time and space. Protest masculinity is constructed by visibly and vocally *not* conforming to mainstream models of masculinity; respect is sought by going brashly against the norms.

Protest involves the contestation of existing power relations. Certain forms of masculine behaviour may however be perceived by others as a protest, or a contestation of their societal position while the person or persons in question may not see their own actions as confrontational. In de Silva's (2005, 143-146) study of student activists murdered by death squads in Sri Lanka, neither the students nor their families saw their activities as undermining the authority and hence hegemonic masculinity of their teachers, while the latter clearly saw

the activities as an affront or threat to their position in the gendered hierarchy of Sinhala society.

The relationship between hegemonic and protest masculinities, made explicit by Connell, is a complex one. I argue that, depending on the frame of reference, some enactments may be seen simultaneously as hegemonic on the micro-level but as a protest on the macro-level. In other words, while a sub-culture or other social sub-category may define itself as being in protest against the overall social hegemony, the gender regime inside this sub-category is often itself defined by a particular hegemonic model of masculinity. Taking for example the crack dealers of Puerto Rican origin in Philippe Bourgois' (2003) study *In Search of Respect*, the dealers have taken on a form of protest masculinity vis-à-vis mainstream U.S. culture but within their *barrio* their enactment of masculinity has, at least for younger males, become the hegemonic model.

A similar relationship between hegemony and protest can be seen also in other gangs, resistance groups or paramilitary forces. Membership in these groups may well be the only visible option of enacting masculinity for men seeking to gain social, political and economic power. Miranda Alison (2009, 211-245) has shown how these dynamics played out for the radicalised sections of the Catholic and Protestant communities in Northern Ireland. While actively *protesting* against the political *status quo* through their armed violence and against mainstream *hegemonic* models of respectable masculinity through their actions and lifestyles on the level of Northern Irish society as a whole, the *protest* masculinity of the Catholic and Protestant is the accepted, *hegemonic* norm within their own sectarian environment.

### 6.2.3. Hyper-masculinity and warriors

Two concepts linked to enactments of masculinity of importance in terms of violence and conflicts are that of *hyper-masculinity* and *warrior masculinity*, the latter of which is at times conflated with the term *militarised masculinity*.

#### *Hyper-masculinity*

Hyper-masculinity is often closely linked to the above-mentioned enactments of hegemonic and protest masculinity, taking the model of the heterosexual, sexually active, potentially

violent and self-obsessed male to new, often misogynistic and homophobic, heights. It is also, like the other descriptive labels used for masculinity, tied to a certain social and temporal usage, and can often have pejorative connotations.

In this context, I use the term to indicate a type of masculinity that is based on an overt display of physical strength and the readiness in the use of violence and of heterosexual prowess, or, as Mosher (1991, 199) defines it, ‘a personality construct reflecting extreme involvement in and acceptance of the traditional male gender role,’ a system of ideas

*‘forming a worldview that chauvinistically exalts male dominance by assuming masculinity, virility, and physicality to be the ideal essence of real men, who are adversarial warriors competing for scarce resources (including women as chattel) in a dangerous world.’* (Mosher and Tomkins, 1988, 61)

*Figure 12. The term ‘macho’ has also found its way into East Timorese vocabularies. Graffiti in Motael, Dili (Henri Myrntinen, 2005)*



Hyper-masculinity has been and still is often used to label ethnic minority or otherwise marginalised (e.g. colonised) men. A recent report (Landeskommission, 2007, 8) on violence by immigrant male youth in Germany, for example, raised the issue of ‘hyper-masculinity’ of economically marginalised, ethnically non-German youth as a contributing factor to violence. Connell (2000, 61), meanwhile, points out how colonial powers favoured ‘hyper-masculine warrior races’ such as Sikhs, Ghurkhas or Zulus when recruiting for their colonial armies. As Hall (1999, 139-152) points out, the myth of ‘hyper-masculine’ black maleness colours western views from crime statistics to sports commentaries. Phillips (2001, 45) describes how North American and European women come to Barbados looking specifically for black ‘masculine’ men as sexual partners. Thus the label of hyper-masculinity is also used as a tool for ‘othering’ certain ethnic groups or social classes, ‘celebrating their maleness’ but also labelling them as potentially dangerous. Similarly *machismo*, a concept close to hyper-masculinity, has been used both as a celebration but also as a pejorative description of the idealised/stereotyped, ‘othered’ masculinities of lower class Latino males (Gutmann, 2007; Lancaster, 1999).

### *Warrior masculinities*

I have chosen to use the term *warrior masculinities* to denote masculinities which consciously draw upon military and warrior tropes. While there is a certain amount of overlap with the term *militarised masculinities*, there are important differences. Militarised masculinities denote masculinities which are constructed actively through military drill and subordination to rigid, military-style command hierarchy while warrior masculinity is defined more loosely through adherence to concepts of men as fighters. While militarised masculinities involve membership or association with actual military or paramilitary organisations, enactments of warrior masculinities may involve either actual combatants or non-combatants imagining themselves as being warriors. A key element is a worldview in which ‘manliness is equated with the sanctioned use of aggression, force and violence’ (Bryson, 1987, 344).

Militarised masculinities requires the active outside imposition of a systematic militarising regime in a much more purpose-driven sense than in the case of the less regimented and more diffuse ways in which warrior masculinities are constructed. It is also important to note, as for example Barnett (2001, 77-97) and Higate (2003, xviii) have done, that militaries do not

produce one kind of militarised masculinity but rather offer a range of roles, from combat soldiers to air traffic controllers, from logisticians to medics, in which different aspects of military masculinity are valued and nurtured.

A key element in the construction of warrior masculinities in conflict situations is the projection of an aura of 'masculine' power and potential violence by the active participants in the conflict. Whether it is a stand-off between riot police and protesters, a struggle between guerrillas and a central government, an armed insurgency against an occupation force or a brawl between rival gangs, a central element in the conflict is the creation of the respective identities of the groups and their individual members, drawing on a male warrior identity. (Myrntinen, 2008a, 135-136).

The performance or enactment of the respective warrior identity consists of numerous elements, such as uniform clothing and hairstyles (or conspicuous lack thereof), the choice of weapons and their display, the formation taken up by the group, the poses and poises of the individual group members or the *noms de guerre* adopted by the groups and individuals. Furthermore, they may be bound by a common, at times codified, set of rules of appropriate behaviour, including restraint and concepts of what constitutes honour in conflict (Braudy, 2003, 88-89; Carton and Morrell, 2008, 67-80).

These various elements are internalised through ritual and repetition, partially overtly, as in the case of military drill, partially in a more discreet manner, e.g. through the internalisation of concepts of the male warrior which are passed on via various cultural media. The warriors' poses are inscribed into the individual and public mind through TV, video and other media images (e.g. computer games), through heroic tales of warriors of yore, through muscular or sombrely stoic monuments of past generations or the example of elder male members of the community (Myrntinen, 2008a, 135-136).

Using Butler's notion of performativity, it is possible to analyse how the performances of 'warrior' masculinities are created through repetition and ritual and based both on agency of the individual and pre-determined by socio-cultural norms. Through their posing, their display of martial determination, their attire and weaponry, men in conflict situations construct and project a kind of 'warrior' masculinity. This construct or enactment is often a display of

hyper-masculinity, be it in protest against or in defence of a hegemonic, gendered order, in other words a form of symbolic violence.

The various socio-cultural influences define which elements are chosen for the particular performance of the warrior or militarised male, a performance which is internalised through repetition and drill. The choice of the elements depends on the respective social, cultural and historical iconography as well as globalised role models which the group/individual draws upon, on the message which they seek to project and on who the audience for this message is.

The messages the male warrior seeks to send to himself and his audience move along numerous different axes, such as those of rebellion vs. protection of the status quo, defensive vs. offensive posture, intimidation vs. reassurance, ‘outlaw’ status vs. respectability, local and custom-based vs. ‘modern’ and technology-oriented identity or on whether the individual wants stress his individuality or his membership to a group. Often, the messages have explicit or implicit sexualised undertones (Myrntinen, 2003a, 39-40).

By way of example, the British Coldstream Guards standing ramrod straight at attention in freshly-pressed uniforms and bearskin hats outside Buckingham Palace convey a pompous, ceremonial and quasi-folkloristic message of British warrior masculinity. The very same men, this time in desert fatigues, with top-of-the-line weaponry and gadgetry, full body armour, shatterproof shades and headsets on patrol in Afghanistan’s Helmand province, send out a very different kind of message of British military masculinity. In Afghanistan, the NATO-led foreign troops seek to underline their western visions of military-technological, ‘masculine’ prowess. Meanwhile, their opponents, the Taliban, display their local warrior masculinity in almost exactly the opposite way: no body armour, minimal technology, everyday clothing and what can be seen as a celebration a cult of marked, fatalistic disdain for death as the warrior’s ideal (Anderson, 2004, 240; Myrntinen, 2008a, 140-144).

#### 6.2.4. Respectability, Respect, Honour

A defining trait for many enactments of masculinity is the constant need to avoid ‘emasculating’ shame (de Silva, 2005, 27), or, as Bourdieu (1998, 50) puts it, the pressure on the individual man to display ‘manliness’ in all circumstances. I argue that the three constructs of hegemonic, protest and warrior masculinity, rest on similar but slightly different

concepts – respectability, respect and honour. These three concepts can have constructive or destructive impacts as far as the use of violence is concerned. They can be transformative of the violence and act to restrain it. As for example John Iliffe (2005) has shown for pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Africa, concepts of honour are not only varied and central to the construction of gender identities, but were and are also central in maintaining dignity in the face of oppression, conflict and massive societal change. However, the search for honour, respect and respectability can also become obsessive self-centred issues of status and prestige, in which the case the defence of one's personal or one's group's respectability, respect (i.e. the respect one expects from others, not does not necessarily show towards others) and honour become central and violence becomes a tool to achieve this.

Being the result of a political project which legitimises its rule, hegemonic masculinity is dependant on its status of respectability in the eyes of greater society, based on the social contract which ensures this hegemony. As Richard Collier (1995, 221) points out, male respectability is closely linked to and mirrors the ideals of the socio-culturally dominant class. Thus socially dominant hegemonic masculinities are both dependent on respectability while simultaneously playing a central part in defining this standard by which respectability is measured. Hegemonic masculinity enshrines notions of respectability that demand deference from 'lesser' masculinities and femininities, and as de Silva (2005, 28) notes, 'a withdrawal of deference creates anxiety and unvoiced rage. It implies an – unspoken – challenge to one's status.'

In the case of protest masculinities, the search for a respect denied them by greater society becomes an essential, or even obsessive defining factor. In gangs, which as mentioned above, can be seen as a form of a group manifestation of protest masculinities, the group and its assertive violence can give the group and its members respect in a society which has marginalised them, subjecting (or being perceived as subjecting) them to forms of structural violence. As noted in an article on Turkish immigrant gangs in Germany, 'respect is the essential capital for those whom society has denied any form of acceptance' (Die Tageszeitung, 2008, 5). As Tertilt (1996, 207) points out in a study on the same milieu, violence becomes the normalised, habitual reaction to any real or perceived challenges to the 'respect' or masculinity of gang members.

Similarly, a key component of warrior masculinity is honour, in the name of which the violence is often put to use. As Braudy (2003, 52) points out,

*'... the prickly honour's fretful punctiliousness also underlines the fragility with which it is possessed. It must be defended at every turn because it is constantly under siege.'*

At the same time, the 'code of honour' to which the 'warrior' subscribes also 'anchors the personal impulse to a specific group and a set of values ... [to] a purified, totemistic, one-sided masculinity' (*ibid.* 53).

This set of shared values, which to the outside observer may seem far removed from honour, gives the group of potentially violent men inner cohesion and identity as well as a feeling of security to the individual member, be it a platoon on patrol (Bourke, 1999, 130-131), a group of unemployed neo-Nazi youths (Hardtmann, 2007, 56-57), or East Timorese militias, gangs, martial arts and ritual arts groups.

Honour also brings with it an implicit delineation of what is not honourable. Certain styles of warfare and even certain weapons have been seen as being 'unmanly,' 'cowardly' and 'dishonourable.' One historical example of this was feudal, pre-Meiji restoration Japan, where firearms were seen as not befitting a warrior's honour (Braudy, 2003, 87). Asymmetrical warfare used by irregular or weaker forces was also regularly derided by the more powerful, regular (usually western) forces as being cowardly or 'unmanly,' for example in colonial Melanesia (Knauff, 1990, 256) and today the same objection is made in the context of the 'Global War on Terror' (Ehrenreich, 2002). Colonial sources on Timor also often described traditional Timorese warfare as being 'childlike,' 'cowardly' and 'ill-disciplined,' although from the point of view of the feuding communities the tactics employed made logical sense (see for example de Castro, 1864, 402-404; Fiedler, 1929, 49-50; Studer, 1878, 239-241).

An interesting argument<sup>41</sup> from the point of view of male participation in violence made by Antony Whitehead (2005, 416) is that for enactments of masculinities which are based on concepts of equating idealised masculinity with idealised heroism,

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<sup>41</sup> I am indebted to Kjerstin Andersson from Linköping University for pointing this line of research out to me

*'... the Hero cannot exist without his counterpart, the Villain. The Villain, for example the criminal, is the figure against which the Hero, for example the man who upholds the law, shows his courage. Each defines the other through conflict in which each attempts to impose his will on the other. Each is interdependent, divided by social or ideological difference, but bound by a common ideology of masculinity in which the transcendence of fear makes a fearsome counter-force necessary: the more fearsome the Villain, the greater the Hero and vice-versa. [...] The negation of the Hero is not the Villain but rather the Non-Man. The Non-Man may be the coward, who is defined by his failure to enter the Hero/Villain dynamic of masculinity as a public performance.'*

Thus, for those bound in the ideologies of masculinity which are based on male heroism as rooted in respectability, respect and honour, the putting into question of these basic foundations of their enactment of masculinity brings with it the risk of becoming labelled as an emasculated Non-Man. This 'ontological panic' (Whitehead, 2005, 415) can be seen as a driving factor for the often violent policing of masculinity, of respectability, respect and honour. The Villain, though his motives and methods may be put in question, nonetheless remains a man.

As Whitehead (2005, 414) also points out, it is often not possible to 'maintain the idealised and internalised sense of manhood in the face of external realities that point to his inability to do so.' This is an argument that is echoed by Chris Dolan (2002, 57-83) in his analysis of 'collapsing masculinities' in conflict and post-conflict societies, a theme which will be discussed in the following section.

#### 6.2.5. Violence and vulnerability

In post-colonial, post-conflict societies, social and gender roles have been heavily impacted by colonialism, conflict, modernisation and globalisation. As Robert Morrell and Sandra Swart (2005, 91) point out, 'colonialism was a highly gendered process,' with different impacts for men, boys, women and girls, but also for different classes, ethnic and religious groups. As Frantz Fanon (1965, 160-165) already predicted at the beginning of the decolonisation process, these impacts would continue to reverberate in the post-colonial societies. As Vanessa Farr (2002, 10-15) notes, it is not uncommon in post-conflict societies

to see a cultural ‘roll-back’ in which calls for a return to an (imagined) past gender order are made. Morrell and Swart (2005, 97-98) point out some of the dangers inherent in these processes, which in addition to potentially justifying ‘tyranny and injustice,’ solidifying patriarchal and heteronormative power structures, also run the danger of romanticising and essentialising the past, thereby underestimating the range of responses of indigenous peoples to a colonialism which altered their culture and left nothing the same – and continues to reverberate in post-colonial societies.

Violent conflict and post-conflict peace processes also often have very different kinds of impacts on women and girls, men and boys as well as on the gender ideologies underpinning their respective positions in society (Farr, Myrntinen and Schnabel, 2009, 3-6). While the majority of combatants by and large tend to be men and boys, being in a violent conflict does not automatically turn them into killers. As for example Bourke (1999, 69-102) and Grossman (1996, 29-36) point out, extensive training and conditioning is required to get the majority of combatants to shoot at the ‘enemy’ – without this training and conditioning a majority tend to choose not to kill. Beyond being perpetrators of violence and constructing masculinities through acts of violence, men are also victims of violence, be it violent acts of other men against them or violence committed against themselves, usually outnumbering women in both the categories of perpetrators and of victims (Cukier and Cairns, 2009, 18-19).<sup>42</sup> This discrepancy between men’s and women’s involvement in violence can be immense: in El Salvador, 94 per cent of firearm-related homicide victims were male, in a study of 234 random homicides in Honduras 98 per cent of the perpetrators and of the 92 per cent victims were males (Godnick, Muggah and Waszink, 2005, 11, 24). Males are also, by a substantial margin, more likely to use a weapon to commit suicide than females (Carrington, 1999, 71-75).

In addition to the direct impacts of having perpetrated or been exposed to violence, Dolan (2002, 64) notes that in the ‘context of on-going war, heavy militarisation and internal displacement it is very difficult, if not impossible for the vast majority of men to fulfil the expectations contained in the model of masculinity’ prevalent as the idealised form in society. However, for his case study area of northern Uganda, Dolan (2001, 11) argues that

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<sup>42</sup> Cukier and Cairns do however also correctly point out that if one compares the number of female gun owners to female gun violence victims, unarmed women are proportionally affected to a much greater degree than men.

*'the normative model of masculinity [...] exercises considerable power over men, precisely because they are unable to behave according to it, but can not afford not to try to live up to it. The relationship between the social and political acceptance which comes from being seen to conform to the norm, and access to a variety of resources, is a critical one in a conflict situation.'*

Similarly, Sideris (2001, 152) describes, using the case of South Africa, the long-term impacts of drawn-out, 'low-intensity'<sup>43</sup> counter-insurgency wars such as the Indonesian occupation of Timor-Leste on male gender roles:

*'The overall social destruction inherent in dirty wars leaves men with few opportunities to implement traditional roles as providers. Thus war leaves men with either an eroded sense of manhood or the option of a militarised identity with the attendant legitimisation of violence and killing as a way of maintaining power and control.'*

Return to civilian life can also prove difficult for ex-combatants and their support networks as they seek to find their place in the new, post-conflict society. As Thokozani Xaba (2001, 107) writes for the case of South Africa, 'the struggle heroes of yesteryear [...] become the villains and felons of today. The African township youth, the 'young lions' or 'the footsoldiers of the revolution,' have become marginalised and some have become full-time gangsters.' The young men described by Xaba (2001, 114) find that their 'struggle masculinity' leaves them ill-equipped to deal with the challenges of the post-conflict order:

*'When the gender norms of a society change, boys who modelled themselves in terms of an earlier, 'struggle' version of masculinity may grow up to become unhappy men. Those who cannot change together with the society or who do not possess the skills to make it in the new social environment find themselves strangers in their own country.'*

Violence thus impacts on men and their performances of masculinities in complex ways. Paradoxically, long-term violence both undermines realistic possibilities of most men of actually achieving the ideals of hegemonic masculinities while simultaneously strengthening the hold these concepts have on people.

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<sup>43</sup> To use the technical, military term, though for most people involved it is a high-intensity conflict in the sense that the sense of violence and possibility of imminent danger is pervasive and omni-present

In violent settings, fulfilling the societal expectations of what it means to be a man on a personal level can mean resorting to violence, as Joan Wardop (2009, 126) vividly argues:

*'At the extreme, acts of masculinist violence formalise a struggle to reconstitute the self through the construction of a new narrative of self, a self which feels its being in the world, knows its reality. To be present in the social is insufficient, a condition lacking real presence. To be present requires – demands – connection, understood as dominance, and realised most potently through expressive violent acts, projecting outwards an inner world of loss, need and fear, performing compensatory dominance, feeling real even if only for a moment. Constructing the scene theatrically, filmically, participants become performers in their own lives, dressing to kill, conscious of lines of fire, reading the scene spatially through their own bodies, knowing the planes of connection of fist or boot or knife or firearm.'*

Though these dramatic performances of violence can become ways in which men assert themselves in society and gain control over their lives, it is not the only avenue possible. Not resorting to violence remains as an option and is in fact no unusual response, even amongst combatants (Grossman, 1996, 17-28).

### **6.3. Conclusions**

In this section I have outlined some of the key discussions surrounding the two central concepts of this thesis – the concepts of *violence* and *masculinities*. Neither concept is simple or uncontested but rather they are multi-dimensional and constantly renegotiated. Though both are often linked in practice as men tend to form the majority of perpetrators of violence, my argument is that the links are also far more complex than simplistic, essentialist (and common) arguments casting all men as genetically, bio-chemically or culturally pre-disposed to violence would have it. The impacts of violence on masculinities are ambiguous and complex. Men are simultaneously perpetrators and victims, reaffirming and, less commonly, contesting existing social and gender orders, shaping violent events and being shaped by them. Violence also always remains a choice, and often is *not* the response most men choose, even in situations of violent conflict. The use of violence however is often linked to the

renegotiation of power relations, including those between different masculinities, be they hegemonic, protest, militarised or warrior masculinities. Gender ideologies such as concepts of hyper-masculinity often condone a certain degree of violence against other men (especially against sexual minorities), against women but also against the self. Resorting to violence is however often tempered by concepts of honour, respect and respectability, though paradoxically the obsessive fretting about these concepts often can also in itself be a conflict driver.

## **7. Militias – Thugs, Patriots or Misguided Pawns?**

In this section, I will look in more detail at the pro-Indonesian militia groups which, in close co-operation with the Indonesian security forces, unleashed a campaign of terror against the civilian population of what was then the Indonesian province of East Timor before, during and after the East Timorese referendum on independence on 30 August 1999. While officially merely campaigning for integration with Indonesia, the militias and their backers in the Indonesian security forces were responsible for 1 500 – 2 000 deaths, for thousands of rapes, the forced deportation of hundreds of thousands of civilians and the almost complete destruction of the region's housing and infrastructure. Due to their seemingly indiscriminate violence and a style of appearance similar to irregular groups active in the 'new wars' (to use Mary Kaldor's (1999) term) of the post-Cold War, the militia groups have often been used as an example of the brutality of these new wars and its perpetrators (for a discussion, see Myrttinen, 2003b, 129-141). However, as I will argue below, the militia phenomenon is historically, politically and sociologically more complex than a mere sign of Robert Kaplan's (1994) 'coming anarchy' of a Hobbesian state of permanent irregular warfare.

I will first outline the history of the militia groups, followed by an examination of the structure of the militia groups, their membership and their recruitment strategies. This will be followed by a more specific look at the way the militia groups operated in terms of their means of spreading their campaign of fear, including the role of spectacle, ritual and magic in their activities. The final section will look at some of the role models which the militias drew upon and portray one of the militia leaders, Eurico Guterres, in more detail. I have chosen Guterres because beyond being the overall leader of the integration forces, he also became an icon of sorts of the militia movement, in part due to his high media profile. His biography also contains interesting elements and breaks which help highlight how a young, orphaned man growing up in the East Timorese conflict became a war criminal.

Parts of this chapter have been published previously in other articles, such as Myrttinen, 2003b; Myrttinen, 2005; Myrttinen, 2008c and Abdullah and Myrttinen, 2009. Many of the unaccredited observations are based on my own personal, unpublished experiences as a referendum observer in Timor-Leste before, during and after the referendum on East

Timorese independence and the militia violence which accompanied it in August-September 1999.

### **7.1. History of the militias**

The militia groups were for the most part established, trained and run with the active support of the Indonesian military and civilian authorities in what was then the Indonesian province of East Timor in the late 1990s. They were meant to serve two primary objectives. First, they were to terrorise the East Timorese population into not voting for independence and secondly they were a form of outsourcing of violence for the Indonesian security forces. The militias gave the violence an East Timorese face, destabilising East Timorese society while giving the security forces a degree of plausible deniability and giving them the excuse of needing to remain in East Timor in order to keep the militias and independence fighters apart (Bartu, 2000; Myrntinen, 2003b). This latter narrative has been maintained by those involved in the Indonesian military campaign for the decade since the violence, denying military involvement in arming, training and running the militias and the fact that during the independence referendum the pro-independence camp refrained from almost all retaliatory actions in spite of the widespread violence perpetrated by the militias and security forces.

The use of local militia proxies by official military forces in counter-insurgency (COIN) operations is not a new phenomenon, and was put to use by numerous colonial powers to control their colonies. As mentioned in section 4.1., auxiliary Timorese forces were used by the Dutch and Portuguese colonial administrations in their military campaigns but also by the occupying Imperial Japanese Army in the Second World War. These forces were recruited from local communities and often given free rein to settle personal and communal conflicts (Fox, 2006, 174, 177; Gunn, 2000, 5-10).

The first pro-Indonesian militia group, Thunderbolt (*Halilintar*), was established already in the mid-1970s as part of the Indonesian campaign against the budding East Timorese nation by João Tavares in the Bobonaro district close to Indonesian West Timor. However, Halilintar remained inactive for close to two decades until it was resurrected to life in 1998. More concerted efforts by the Indonesian military to establish (quasi-)Timorese militias followed in the late-1980s with the establishment of *Tim* (Team) *Alfa*, *Tim Saka* and *Tim Sera*. These were

units uniformed, lived in barracks and emerged on regular armed forces pay lists (Martinkus, 2001, 55).

*Figure 13. A young militia member carrying a rakitan (home-made rifle) in Dili, February 1999 (AP Photo/Sam Martins, 1999)*



The real push to activate militia groups as part of an orchestrated COIN campaign came from Lt.-Gen. Prabowo Subianto, the son-in-law of then-dictator Suharto and later Indonesian vice-presidential candidate (SCU, 2003, 49). The Indonesian security forces established the *Gadapaksi* (sometimes spelled *Gardapaksi*) organization, the *Garda Pemuda Penegak Integrasi* or Youth Guard in Defence of Integration. In time, a territory-wide network of militia groups was established. Their stated policy was to ensure that the province of East Timor remained an integral part of Indonesia as an autonomous territory, though the details of this autonomy package remained vague throughout the campaign. Members of the *Gadapaksi*

together with Kopassus members are reported to have been involved in the extra-judicial killings of suspected independence supporters by so-called ‘ninjas’ in the 1990s (Aditjondro, 1999, 171-172).

The *Gadapaksi* and ‘Teams’ can be seen in the context of the Indonesian military doctrine of ‘total people’s defence and security’ (*Hankamrata – Pertahanan dan Keamanan Rakyat Semesta*) The concept has its roots in the Indonesian War for Independence 1945-1949, in which armed civilian militias played a key role. It foresees the use of civilians organised in various civilian defence (*Pertahanan Sipil – Hansip* and *Perlawanan Rakyat – Wanra*), public security and people’s resistance groups collectively referred to as *Ratih* (*Rakyat Terlatih – Trained Population*) to assist the security forces (Greenless and Garran, 2002, 131-132; Martinkus, 2001, 185; SCU, 2003, 46-47).

The announcement of negotiations on a possible referendum on independence for Timor-Leste by newly-installed President B.J. Habibie led to the military-backed militias taking on a new, more visible and more visibly political role. Instead of being merely a proxy force for the Indonesian armed forces, they were now to become, on the one hand, the ‘legitimate voice’ of the pro-integration movement while at the same time remaining the Sword of Damocles hanging over the East Timorese about to cast their sovereign vote over their aspirations for independence.

This dual role was also a reflection of the divisions within the Indonesian elite with respect to the issue – while the new civilian leadership wanted to rid itself of the problem (at the time, Foreign Minister Ali Alatas called East Timor ‘a pebble in Indonesia’s shoe’) in a political fashion and may have genuinely believed that the East Timorese might opt for integration with Indonesia, the Indonesian military had both a vested interest in remaining in the territory and few delusions about how the vote would turn out.

Thus, while on August 5, 1998, Indonesia initiated discussions with the nominal colonial power Portugal about the status of the territory under the auspices of the United Nations, a week later the local administration and military command in East Timor convened a co-ordinating meeting for the militia groups under the name of *Operasi Sapu Jagad* (Operation ‘Clean Sweep’ (Durand, 2006, 118).

In the run-up to the referendum, the various pro-integration groups (see Table 2 below) were responsible for organising mass rallies in support of continued integration with Indonesia across the province, bussing in supporters clad in the Indonesian national colours of red and white, distributing free rice, flags, banners and t-shirts as was the norm at Soeharto-era political rallies. At the same time, however, the militias engaged in a campaign of intimidation, which included mass rallies, ‘sweepings’<sup>44</sup>, targeting suspected pro-independence activists but also targeted killings and indiscriminate massacres. Many of the killings were carried out in a highly spectacular manner, including beheadings, slitting open of pregnant women’s bellies and other forms of mutilation. The mutilated bodies were often left for public display to increase the psychological impact amongst the general population (Aditjondro, 1999, 166; ETISC, 1999, 3-5).

One of the first massacres took place in Galitas, Covalima district, on the southern coast and was perpetrated by the *Mahidi* militia of Cancio Carvalho on 25 January 1999 and left six dead, who were mutilated to instil fear in the local population. The dead included a pregnant woman who was disembowelled and her foetus was torn out; a further victim was scalped (Martinkus, 2001, 118-119). The next major massacre occurred in Liquiça on the northern coast on 5 and 6 April, 1999, by the *Besi Merah Putih* militia with the support of TNI Battalion 143. On the first day, the militia killed 5 people in the village of Dato, provoking a mass flight into the town of Liquiça, where the IDPs found refuge in the main church. The following day, the militia, with support from the armed forces and police, attacked the church and killed 67 people (ETISC, 1999).

On 17 April, 1999, a joint public rally of the various militia groups is held in downtown Dili disintegrates into widespread violence following an incendiary speech by Aitarak leader Eurico Guterres exhorting the militias to track down their enemies. In the ensuing rampage, the nearby house of Manuel Carrascalão, a former deputy in the Indonesian parliament for East Timor turned independence advocate was attacked and at least 12 people, including Carrascalão’s son, were killed (Cristalis, 2002, 141-143; Greenless and Garran, 2002, 133-134). Intermittent violence continued across the territory until the referendum, with the pro-integration rally mentioned in the introduction forming another peak in violence and sign of things to come.

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<sup>44</sup> The English-language term is used in Indonesian to denote operations carried out by official security forces or non-state actors aimed at finding suspected members of the opposing side by setting up roadblocks or carrying out house-to-house searches. This tactic was later also used by the gangs, MAGs and RAGs

While the 30 August 1999, the day of the referendum itself, was relatively quiet in spite of volleys of gunfire at the break of dawn in Dili, the atmosphere was extremely tense and by mid-day for all intents and purposes the whole of the eligible electorate (98.5 per cent) had cast their vote and was preparing for the worst. The wait did not take long and militia violence started picking up around the province in a concerted pattern from the periphery to the centre, i.e. the provincial capital Dili. This pattern of violence had two intended impacts – firstly, it forced outside observers, such as UN staff, journalists and NGO staff to Dili to be then subsequently pushed out of the whole territory and on the other hand to force the East Timorese population onto the main transit routes to force them out of East Timor into West Timor – or else face the consequences away from the prying eyes of foreign journalists, election observers and UNAMET staff.

One of the worst militia massacres took place two days after the announcement of the referendum results in the southern coast town of Suai. On 6 September 1999, the main church of Suai, which was still under construction and was housing hundreds of refugees, was attacked by the *Laksaur* militia and Indonesian forces. Possibly up to 200 civilians were killed, along with the three priests in the church. An unknown number of the bodies were moved across the border to Indonesian West Timor (Robinson, 2003, 225-228).<sup>45</sup>

On the same day, the *Aitarak* militia launched attacks across Dili, targeting, amongst other targets, the Red Cross offices, the residence of the Bishop and the Australian consulate. Attacks continued for the following weeks. Except for a skeleton staff at the UNAMET headquarters in Dili who refused to leave the East Timorese civilians seeking refuge in the compound behind and a handful of journalists, the majority of the foreign presence (media, NGOs, observers, most UN staff - including myself) were evacuated to Darwin, Australia. The refusal of the rest of the UN staff to be evacuated without the East Timorese who had sought refuge in the besieged compound saved the lives of hundreds and brought additional pressure on the international community to act.

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<sup>45</sup> One of the key perpetrators of the massacre, *Laksaur* Sub-District commander Maternus Bere, was arrested in Suai on August 8, 2009. However, he was released on the eve of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1999 referendum and, being an Indonesian civil servant, was handed over to the Indonesian Embassy in Dili following pressure from the Indonesian and East Timorese governments on the police and judiciary. The release led to a public outcry, condemnation by the United Nations and a no-confidence vote against the AMP government headed by Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão, which it survived (La'õ Hamutuk, 2009). Following the no-confidence vote which had been brought in by the opposition Fretilin party, former militia members in West Timor threatened retaliatory actions against Fretilin members and their families (Suara Timor Loro'sae, 2009).

On 12 September the Indonesian government agreed to allow international peacekeepers into the ravaged territory. The INTERFET forces arrived approximately a week later and the last of the militias and their military backers withdrew across the border to Indonesian West Timor, though not without committing random acts of arson, vandalism and murder on the way, including the killing of a Dutch journalist, Sander Thoenes, in Dili on 21 September, after the arrival of the peacekeeping forces.

### *Militias after 1999*

Following the militia pull-out in 1999 and 2006, numerous small-scale clashes involving the militias occurred on the intra-Timorese border. The most serious incident involving militia crossing into Timor-Leste from West Timor was an incident in September 2000 in which two UN peacekeepers, one Nepali and one New Zealander, were killed. The events which followed precipitated an attack by a militia-led mob against the UNHCR office in Atambua, West Timor, during which three foreign aid workers (who, in a bitter twist of irony, had been supplying humanitarian aid to the people who killed them) were hacked to death (see also interview with M2, and UNHCR, 2001).

In the meantime, the militia groups in West Timor have not been comprehensively disarmed or reintegrated by the Indonesian authorities. Some have faded back into society, some have returned to Timor-Leste, some remain armed in West Timor while yet others are putting their 'expertise' to new use. Former militia leader Eurico Guterres has, for example, been active in setting up similar militias as in Timor-Leste, such as *Laskar Merah Putih* (Red-White Warriors) and *Barisan Merah Putih* (Red and White Front) in West Papua (TAPOL, 2003a). The armed forces have also established similar militias in Aceh, which is currently going through a fragile post-conflict period (Eye on Aceh, 2004; The Jakarta Post, 2004a).

The remaining armed Timorese militia groups have long been a continuing threat to stability both in West Timor and Timor-Leste, though their influence began waning in 2004-2005 (Agence France Presse, 2004; The Jakarta Post, 2004b; Jane's Intelligence Review, 2001). Organisations led by former militia members have also been involved in violent protests demanding financial support from the Indonesian government (The Jakarta Post, 2008 and

2009). The possible involvement of former militia members in the current gang violence in Timor-Leste remains unclear, with many rumours and little in the way of hard information abounding (Scambary et al., 2006, 4).

The Indonesian military masters behind the militia campaign have not had to face the consequences of their deeds. In fact, many of them continue to enjoy high prestige within the TNI and society as a whole. For example, the overall commander of the TNI at the height of the 1999 crisis, Gen. (ret.) Wiranto was able to run for president in 2005 and vice-president in 2009 in spite of being indicted for war crimes (SCU, 2003) and was at the time of writing the head of a political party represented in the Indonesian parliament. Similarly, Prabowo Subianto, the main driving force behind the militias, ran for the office of vice-president of Indonesia in 2009 and is also the head of a political party represented in the Indonesian parliament. Maj.-Gen. Adam Damiri, former military commander in Timor-Leste was subsequently in charge of military operations in Aceh and former commander of the Bobonaro military district Col. Burhanuddin Siagian, charged by the UN Serious Crimes Unit for ‘torture, murder, persecution, and deportation or forcible transfer of a civilian population,’ became the commander of the Jayapura sub-regional military district in Papua in 2007 where he immediately vowed to ‘crush separatists’ (Cenderawasih Pos, 2007). The last Indonesian police chief in East Timor, Gen. Timbul Silaen, was appointed head of police in Papua in 2003, a post he held until 2006.

It is, however, not only the military patrons who have sought respectability after the years of violence. The Jakarta-based East Timorese gangster Rosario Marcal, more commonly known by his *nom de guerre*, Hercules, who organised other gang members in Jakarta and brought them to Dili to join the militias has acquired the Catholic Universitas Santa Maria in Jakarta and invested in a children’s amusement park in the centre of Dili. Eurico Guterres, on the other hand, sought unsuccessfully to win a parliamentary seat for the moderate Muslim National Mandate Party (*Partai Amanat Nasional* – PAN) in the 2009 parliamentary elections upon having been released pre-maturely from jail where he was serving his sentence for crimes against humanity.

## 7.2. Structure of the militias

The territory-wide establishment of militia groups drew partially on the existing *Hansip*, *Gadapaksi* and *Tim*-networks as well as the support of the local military and administrative structures. Financing for the militias came from official budget sources (including misappropriated World Bank funds, Nevins, 2005, 89) as well as from ‘black’ funds, i.e. money the military had amassed through illicit activities, such as gambling and racketeering. Counterfeit money was also passed on to the militias (Greenless and Garran, 2002, 178-181; Tanter et al., 2006, 92)

Military training was provided by the army special forces (Kopassus - *Komando Pasukan Khusus*), the police mobile brigade *Brimob* and the local military units, such as Battalions 143 and 745, all with a record of serious human rights abuses. Members of these units, especially native East Timorese soldiers, often participated in militia activities – either in uniform or out of uniform (see for example Nevins, 2005, 102; SCU, 2003, 42-43).

The names of the militias reflect the attitude and methods with which they sought to convince the Timorese population to vote for integration with Indonesia in the 1999 referendum: Red and White Iron (*Besi Merah Putih*, after the colours of the Indonesian flag), Thorn (*Aitarak*), Red Blood of Integration (*Darah Merah Integrasi*), Red Dragon (*Naga Merah*) or Life or Death for Integration (*Mahidi – Mati Hidup Demi Integrasi*). Total militia membership was at around 8 000-12 000 people at the height of the campaign, though a large part of these members can not be considered to be hard-core members of the groups (Human Rights Watch, 1999; SCU, 2003).

The groups acted autonomously but formed a joint co-ordinating body, the Integration Fighters’ Force (PPI - *Pasukan Pejuang Integrasi*) in early 1999. Much of the actual power rested however with the pro-Indonesian administration and the security forces, especially the special forces, Kopassus (SCU, 2003, 51, 53, 58, 63-66).

**Table 2** (based on Durand, 2006; Human Rights Watch, 1999; Meier, 2005)

District	1998	1999		Approximate number of members in 1999
		Militia Groups	Leader(s)	
<b>Dili</b>	Gadapaksi	Aitarak	Eurico Guterres	1 500
<b>Baucau</b>	Tim Saka	Tim Saka	Lt.-Col. Joanico da Costa (Kopassus)	970
	Tim Sera	Tim Sera	Sera Mailik	
<b>Los Palos</b>	Tim Alfa	Tim Alfa	Edmundo da Conceicao e Silva and Joni Marques	
		Jati Merah Putih	Joni Marques	
<b>Viqueque</b>	Tim Makikit	Tim Makikit	Jon Caleris	
		Pejuang 59/75	Hermenegildo da Silva and Martinho Fernandes	
<b>Manatuto</b>	Tim Morok	Tim Morok	n.a.	
		Mahadomi	Vidal Doutel Sarmiento	
<b>Aileu</b>	Tim Sakunar	AHI	Thomas Mendoca	
		API	Horacio	
<b>Ainaro</b>	Tim Ainaro	Mahidi	Cancio Lopes de Carvalho	1 300
<b>Manufahi</b>	Tim Same	ABLAI	Nazario Cortreal	
<b>Covalima</b>	Tim Suai	Laskar Merah	Olivio	

		Putih	Mendoca Moruk	
<b>Bobonaro</b>	Tim Halilintar	Tim Halilintar	Joao Tavares	800
		Dadurus Merah Putih	Natalino Monteiro	
		Kaer Metin Merah Putih	Jose Cardoso Ferreira (aka Mouzinho)	
		Hametin Merah Putih	Alberto Leite	
		Harimau 55	Antonio Morais	
		Guntur Merah Putih	Adao Salsinho Babo	
<b>Ermera</b>	Tim Railakan	Darah Merah Integrasi	Lafaek Saburai	
		Naga Merah	Luis Bandes	
<b>Liquiça</b>	Tim Liquiça	Besi Merah Putih	Manuel da Sousa	2 000
		Pana	Domingus Policarpo	
<b>Oecussi</b>		Sakunar	Laurentino Soares and Simao Lopes	

In addition, there were 5 ‘organic’<sup>46</sup> ABRI/TNI infantry battalions (Yonif 144, 315, 401, 512 and 642) in the territory, all consisting of approximately 985 men each, including numerous East Timorese. Furthermore, there at different times varying numbers of ‘non-organic’ special forces in the territory. At the time of the 1999 referendum, there were an approximated 5 000

<sup>46</sup> The terms ‘organic’ and ‘non-organic’ troops refer in Indonesian military doctrine to troops which have been recruited and stationed locally (‘organic’) and those who are recruited and used across the country (‘non-organic’). The former are territorial defense units while the latter refers to the strategic reserve units (Kostrad) and special forces (*Kopassus*). Most of the fighting against insurgent groups such as Falintil was carried out by the ‘non-organic’ forces and the police mobile brigade (*Brimob*) and they are also responsible for most of the human rights atrocities and war crimes committed in the internal conflicts in Indonesia.

members of these units in addition to around 1 000 members of the paramilitary Brimob police brigade in Timor-Leste (Durand, 2006, 116).

### **7.3. Membership and recruitment**

Many of the heads of East Timor's district administrations, and others who had a direct economic or social stake in an Indonesian East Timor were heavily involved with the militias. These included East Timorese ABRI/TNI soldiers and police officers but also ones from other parts of Indonesia stationed in the territory. These made up part of the 'hard core,' together with young East Timorese men who joined for a variety of reasons – political conviction, economic opportunity, family history, allegiance to patrons or direct and indirect coercion. It can not be ruled out that some joined because of the chance to gain notoriety, personal power and economic, social, or sexual gains, or were drawn by the spectacle of violence (Myrntinen, 2008c, 180-204).<sup>47</sup>

The pro-Indonesian militias were very much male-dominated, although female staff did work in administrative duties for the militias. Women also provided important logistical functions such as cooking and other daily support activities, be it as wives, girlfriends, mothers, daughters or in a more organised fashion as 'support staff' for the militias. Other women joined in as unarmed participants in pro-autonomy rallies, though this was often less than fully voluntary (Alves, 2004). Teenage males were also recruited into the ranks of the militias (CSCS, 2001). Many of the members of the militias were what could be termed part-time members, drifting in and out of the structures. Especially those who were trucked in to the militia's mass pro-integration rallies to make up for the numbers tended to be less than convinced of the cause.

Undoubtedly, a number of militia members did have the political conviction that East Timor should remain a part of Indonesia. These included especially those with a stake in the process – those East Timorese involved in the administrative and security apparatus of Indonesia. Also some of those who thought they might otherwise lose out in case of East Timorese independence joined the militias, for example due to their licit or illicit business connections

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<sup>47</sup> Based on Martinkus, (2001, 118-120), militia leader Cancio Carvalho might have belonged to this latter category as he evidently revelled in recounting in gruesome detail his violent exploits to the media, including the disembowelling of a pregnant woman in Suai in early 1999.

to Indonesia. Direct economic benefits also played a role, as militias received a steady income, food and clothing, benefits which can not be overlooked in the impoverished territory. Cristalis (2002, 142), quotes a salary of 200 000 Indonesian rupiah or around 25 USD at the time, being given to the militias, while ETISC (1999, 6) puts the remuneration of *Besi Merah Putih* members at a rather higher 25 000 Rp (slightly over 3 USD at the time) per day, five times more than the average worker in Dili at the time. In addition, further material benefits such as free rice were given out by the Indonesian authorities and promises for further compensation and lucrative jobs after a victorious integration campaign were also made.

Other factors which played important roles were family history and ties to networks of patronage. As Fox (2006, 174) and Gunter (2007, 37), point out, often the militia groups were able to link themselves to previous incarnations of similar auxiliary force used by the Portuguese and Japanese, often drawing on long-standing communal tensions. Family histories and clan connections going back to past conflicts in which one's family had for example supported the anti-Portuguese uprising in Viqueque and Uato Lari in 1959 (Gunter, 2007, 37; Nugroho, 2009) or the integration of what was still Portuguese Timor with Indonesia in 1975 to now joining the pro-Indonesian integration cause for fear of reprisals from the pro-independence side. As one ex-militia interviewee with a pro-Indonesian family background, interviewee M8, put it, 'in the eyes of the pro-independence movement and Fretilin, we were the black list people.'

According to Bartu (2000, 32), the TNI strategy was to use its Timorese units and the militias in such a way as to have them 'bear the brunt of field and urban operations.' In Bobonaro district, Bartu reports, many of the militia structures disintegrated rapidly as events unfolded. This refers mainly to the non-hardcore members, who would have been only half-hearted militia members in the first place and quickly chose to flee with their families to safety following the referendum rather than fight for a cause they did not fully believe in. Half-hearted, part-time militia membership became a way of protecting oneself and one's family from violent retributions by the militia or Indonesian security forces. As the final referendum result for independence showed, this nominal membership did not stop people for making their preferred choice for independence in the end.

For the hard-core members, however, who joined the militias out of genuine conviction, militia membership was an identity-giving project. By joining the militias, they gained a new identity through the group and its political goals. However, it also labelled them in the eyes of the rest of society as well, mostly in a highly negative way, a key reason why many of them have not returned to Timor-Leste since leaving in 1999. A number of the former militias interviewed retained their membership cards, not without a certain pride.

Many of the East Timorese and foreign outside observers I interviewed in 1999 and at later points in time stressed that many of the ‘hardcore’ militia members were often *not* East Timorese (i.e. either from West Timor, nearby Alor, Java or other parts of Indonesia), that they were controlled by non-Timorese (i.e. the Indonesian security forces) and those Timorese who did participate were either coerced or misguided into doing so or were criminals, thugs and riff-raff or members of the security forces. Thus, apart from those who genuinely supported their pro-Indonesian policies, the social and political legitimacy of the militias was low in the eyes of many East Timorese. In fact, they were often ‘othered’ as not being East Timorese or being social outcasts. Interestingly, based on my interviews, their legitimacy tended to be the highest in the eyes of some of their erstwhile pro-independence opponents.

#### **7.4. Militia *modus operandi***

The campaign of violence, terror and intimidation reflected a blend of traditional East Timorese styles of warfare with newer COIN influences which came through the Indonesian military that had trained and guided them. Much of the violence was highly spectacular in the sense that the brutality of the acts, the seemingly wanton and indiscriminate nature of it and their public display were an integral part of the campaign of terror.

##### *Violence and spectacle*

The militia directed their attacks almost exclusively against unarmed civilians. The attacks had the explicit aim of sowing terror amongst the population rather than, for example, seeking to occupy strategic positions as part of a military plan. The most extreme form of these attacks were the massacres committed by the militias, such as the Liquiça and Suai church massacres and the massacre at the house of Manuel Carrascalão in Dili. Individual murders and maimings also took place, and at times corpses would be put on display for added effect.

Sexual violence was also used as a weapon of war. The setting up of checkpoints, ‘sweepings’ and demonstrative temporary occupations of public spaces such as market squares by groups of frenzied, armed young men in martial, paramilitary uniforms also served the purpose of creating a pervasive atmosphere of fear. Deliberate spreading of rumours also served the same purpose (for the most comprehensive studies of the violence, see CAVR, 2005; CTF, 2008).

When in action, the militias often had a more or less uniform appearance, consisting usually of identical t-shirts, usually black, with the name of the militia group emblazoned on it, combat trousers, headbands or bandanas (often red and white in the Indonesian national colours) and military paraphernalia, such as webbing gear. The intended visual impact was one of a paramilitary force, uniform in appearance but with a wild, uncontrollable edge to it.

The weapons used by the militias consisted initially mostly of traditional offensive weapons such as machetes, spears, bows and arrows, swords but also more powerful makeshift weapons such as Molotov cocktails, home-made bombs, and *rakitan* (homemade firearms). As the military-backed militia campaign grew more intense in August 1999 and especially after the announcement of the referendum results, the militias were handed more high-powered small arms and light weapons, such as M-16, SS-1, and AK-47 assault rifles and grenades, by the Indonesian security forces from their stockpiles. In spite of this arsenal of weapons and more or less unlimited access to ammunition from Indonesian supplies, much of the actual killing was done with the more traditional and cruder weapons, such as machetes, perhaps for the added spectacular effect. Often, the assault rifles would only be fired at random into the air in an effort to sow fear amongst the civilian population and, after the announcement of the referendum results, to compel those still remaining in their villages to leave (Abdullah and Myrntinen, 2009, 181-182).

The massacres, the frenzied attacks, the wild gestures, demonstrative firing of weapons into the air led a number of observers to describe the militia violence as a kind of explosion of primordial aggression, of running amok (for a critique, see Robinson, 2002, 244). As described by Geoff Robinson (2002, 260-262), and as also witnessed by myself at the time, the militia violence was not as entirely irrational as the ‘running amok’ theory would have it. The militia violence was, to a degree, highly calibrated and selectively targeted for the purposes of maximum intimidation and ridding the territory of potential outside witnesses, such as foreign journalists, NGO workers and UN staff (Nevins, 2005, 100-104). It was also

highly reminiscent of traditional Timorese patterns of warfare. Like in traditional warfare, the appearance of the group was to stress the martial prowess and power of the group. Spectacular acts like the razing of villages and beheadings were used, though to a far greater, brutal and unrestrained manner than in traditional warfare.

In addition to drawing on some aspects of traditional Timorese methods of warfare, the militias also incorporated methods from elsewhere. These were transmitted to them by their trainers from the Indonesian security forces. While, as mentioned before, colonial forces had used militias in Timor (both East and West) previously, the use of militias and death squads in COIN operations became more sophisticated, widespread and brutal over the course of the ideology-driven conflicts of the Cold War. In Southeast Asia, anti-Communist militias were set up for example in Malaysia 1948-1960, in the fight against the Hukbalahap insurgency in the Philippines in 1946-1955 and as part of the Phoenix Programme in the Vietnam War 1967-1972. In Indonesia, a brutal but relatively unsophisticated militia was recruited from Muslim mass organisations to assist the Indonesian armed forces in the 1965-1966 massacres of suspected Communists. Militias and paramilitary death squads have also played prominent roles in numerous Latin American and Southeast Asian conflicts, and there is a striking degree of similarity between tactics between the Timor-Leste and these ‘dirty wars.’

### *Ritual and magic*

Traditional Timorese warfare and participating warriors relied heavily on rituals and magical amulets for protection in battle. The potential opponents of the militias, the pro-independence Falintil guerrillas, were ‘known’ to have strong magical powers, while at the same time, the *Kopassus* units training and supervising the militias were also locally ‘known’ to be in possession of fearsome magical powers (Kirksey, 2010; Loch, 2007, 210-211). The militias therefore also needed to resort to superhuman powers, obtained through traditional war rituals which sought the blessing of ancestral spirits. Protective amulets would also come from ancestral houses (*uma lulik*) or from other sacred places, Rituals involving the sacrifice of animals were held before attacks in order to appease ancestral spirits and increase one’s power in battle (Nugroho, 2009). More mundane ways of increasing one’s bravery in before staging an attack included resorting to alcohol and drugs, mainly methamphetamines. As related by a nun who survived the Suai church massacre quoted by Loch (2007, 405), ‘*balun*

*nebe'e hemu tiha ona ai-moruk anjing gila,*' or 'some of them [the militias] had taken the medicine of the mad dog [*sabu-sabu*, i.e. methamphetamines]' before starting killing.

## 7.5 Militia role models

The East Timorese militia blended a number of different performances of violent masculinity into an eclectic whole, and often times it was a performance in the conventional rather than merely in the Butlerian sense, being a fearsome show of force meant for the consumption of the local population and of the outside media. The main influences for the militias were the militarised masculinities of their mentors from the Indonesian security forces, traditional Timorese warrior masculinities, Indonesian concepts such as that of the *pemuda* fighter and the protest masculinity ideal of the *jago* or *preman*, as well as imported notions of hyper-masculinity, often put on show by militia leader Eurico Guterres for the benefit of national and international media.

### 7.5.1. Militarised and warrior role models

Some of the militia influences were clearly Indonesian-imported or taken from globalised media, but the militias also tried to actively draw on tropes of East Timorese traditional warrior masculinities, and also on the mythical powers believed to be hiding in these rituals. With relation to head-hunting (or, more precisely, beheadings) Fox (2006, 177) states that,

*'in the lead-up to the [referendum] ballot, militia groups attempted to revive indigenous traditions associated with some of the more fearsome aspects of latent practices. The differences were in scale and in the systematic way in which they were perpetrated.'*

Other aspects of traditional warfare adopted were the burning of houses, killing of livestock, forced slavery (mostly sexual) but also, as noted above, rituals, magic and the spectacle of group warfare.

The dress style and mannerisms of the militias have, as elsewhere in similar conflicts, also been influenced by popular culture, such as video games and action movies, and also by media coverage of other conflicts (Holert and Terkessidis, 2003, 78; Myrtilinen, 2008a, 135). The main role models for the violent masculinity displayed by the militias are, however, to be found in Indonesia. As they were set up, trained, armed, run and partially manned by the Indonesian security forces, the militias owed much to the concepts of militarised masculinities of the ABRI/TNI. As in all armed forces, the Indonesian military cultivates different forms of militarised masculinities. At least during the Suharto era, the ABRI/TNI sub-culture, especially in frontline units, included a very high readiness to use physical violence, a high degree of disdain for civilians and a sense of impunity (Cribb, 2002, 238; Munir, 2001, 20-21).

The existence of this set of common norms and accepted ways of behaviour in the security forces and the militias meant that it was not necessary to give an explicit order for the violent militia rampage. The insinuation that violence would achieve the militia's goals was enough (Robinson, 2002, 272-274). The epitome of this militarised, hyper-masculine sub-culture is to be found, as the name implies, in the 'elite' forces of a security force (Myrtilinen, 2008a, 134-136). In the Indonesian/Timorese case it was the *Kopassus* who epitomised this violent militarism, and it was they who played a key role in the training of the militias.

One can also see a genealogy of violence in the armed forces. The original ABRI drew upon soldiers who had been either trained by the Dutch colonial forces or the Japanese Imperial army. Thus, as Fanon noted, the newly independent society replicated the patterns of violence, especially as embodied in violent masculinity, of their erstwhile occupiers (Fanon, 1967, 119-126). Elaborating on this insight, the Indonesian feminist Ita Nadia draws parallels between the use of rape as a weapon by the Japanese occupiers during World War II and the Indonesian military under Suharto, who himself was initially trained by the Japanese Imperial Forces (Nadia, 2000). Thus the particular ideals of militarised masculinities of the Japanese- and Dutch-trained militants who formed the core of the revolutionary Indonesian army were passed down and adapted over the course of four decades to form part of the performance of East Timorese militia masculinities. Other influences also draw in part on the heritage of the Indonesian independence struggle – the concepts of *pemuda* and *preman*.

### 7.5.2. The *pemuda* and the *preman*

Two other violent Indonesian male role-models who have had a visible influence on the East Timorese militia are that of the *pemuda*-activist (literally, the term means youth but is used historically to refer to the glorified young, reckless political activists of the Indonesian Revolution 1945-49) and that of the *preman* (a street-tough thug). Similar patterns of male behaviour are visible in violent conflicts in other parts of post-Suharto Indonesia (Aditjondro, 2001, 100-128, Colombijn, 2001, 31-40; Nordholt, 2002, 51-54; TAPOL, 2003a and 2003b).

The roots of the *pemuda*-youth culture can be traced back to the armed youth groups established by the Japanese Imperial Army in Indonesia during the Second World War, which then formed the nuclei of the armed *pemuda*-groups of the Indonesian War of Independence. These groups adopted the violent, authoritarian masculinity at the centre of the worldview of the Imperial Japanese military as their own (Anderson, 2006, 30-36; Legge, 2003, 195-196). The various *pemuda* youth groups drew their inspiration and their concepts of violent, militarised masculinity largely from the occupying Japanese Imperial Army, which had trained Indonesian youth in formations such as the *Seinendan*, *Peta* or *Heiho* (Goto, 2003, 237-241). Legge, (2003, 195), describes the young men as being ‘influenced by Japanese authoritarian values and even captivated by Japanese ruthlessness and cruelty [...] and an acceptance of violence almost as a virtue in itself.’

The *pemuda* activist of Indonesian historiography, as depicted in official history and in monuments, bears a striking similarity to the images of maleness manifest in East Timorese militias: young men, dressed casually, often with a bandana on their heads, brandishing swords, spears or handguns, belts full of bullet in poses of martial aggressiveness (see also Anderson, 2006, 237).

The *pemuda* during the Indonesian war of independence were also reported to have drunk blood from *katana*-swords which they had previously used to kill Japanese to ‘imbibe their courage and bravery’ (Anderson, 2006, 155). As noted above, based on my field interviews the former militia members did mention using unspecified ‘magic’ rituals before their attacks in order to increase their sense of strength and invincibility, and alcohol and other narcotics such as methamphetamines were also used for this purpose. I did not come across any acts of drinking the blood of killed opponents, though.

The second role model of violent masculinity which has been evoked is that of the *preman*, or neighbourhood tough, who are often involved in small-time criminal activities and extort money – but also provide an informal ‘security service’ for the neighbourhood. As noted in section 5, the traditional roles of *jago* and *preman* have been historically equally ambiguous – feared but also tolerated, respected but also resented. Observers have for the past decade referred to a *premanisation* or *premanisasi* of Indonesian politics (Nordholt, 2002, 51-52; van Dijk, 2001, 152-167). Not only have *preman* been recruited into the ‘security services’ (*satgas*) of the political parties but criminal gangs from Java have also been used as proxies by members of the security forces in conflicts such as in the Moluccas (Aditjondro, 2001, 110-112; TAPOL, 2003b).

Key militia figures, such as the overall military commander of the militias, Eurico Guterres, had been involved in semi-legal or illegal activities (O’Shea, 1999). The TNI itself has admitted to using funds from illegal gambling ventures to pay for the Timorese militias in 1999 (Tanter et al., 2006, 92). East Timorese underworld figures such as the Jakarta-based gangster Hercules mentioned above were also mobilised by the Indonesian security forces to add manpower to the militias.

Unlike the more heroic term *pemuda*, the term *preman* commonly carries a derogatory connotation in common Indonesian language. Its strong normative and pejorative labels are traceable at least to Suharto’s repressive New Order, the security- and stability-focused discourses of which have left a strong mark on Indonesian but also East Timorese society (see for example Pemberton, 1995, for an excellent study on these impacts on Javanese culture and Rutherford, 2003 on West Papua). In both Tajima’s study (2004, 22) on ethnic militias and gangs in Lampung and Brown and Wilson’s study (2007, 18-21) on ethnic gangs in Jakarta, the strong aversion by members of these groups to being given the disrespected label of *preman* is clearly visible. Similar to interviewee G3, one of the Jakartan gang leaders insists that the real *preman* are the ones in the political elite and not the members of his gang. Using it in the context of this study however, I do not intend to pejoratively label the men involved as being merely petty thieves or thugs, but use it rather as a historical and cultural masculine role model which fits, in certain senses, well with the way the East Timorese militias acted out their violent enactments of masculinity. The trope of the *preman* can also be seen as a form of protest masculinity, going against the accepted norms of society. This does however

not foreclose a degree of co-operation between protest and hegemonic masculinities through networks of patron-client relationships.

### 7.5.3. Eurico Guterres, militia leader

Eurico Barros Gomes Guterres, ‘the most prominent militiaman’ (Tanter et al., 2006, 91) was the chief of the Dili-based *Aitarak* (Thorn) militia and deputy head of the co-ordinating body of the militias in East Timor. Whether by design or accident, the militias and their Indonesian backers were able to recruit a gallery of somewhat eccentric characters to lead the various groups, leading to an elaborate and lethally brutal good cop/bad cop-game vis-à-vis the local population, the Indonesian public, the UN and the international community. The most visible and flamboyant of these was Eurico Guterres.

Guterres kept a high profile and was the darling (or *bête noire*) of the Indonesian and international media, readily giving interviews and embarking on media stunts, evidently basking in his notoriety. He was easily recognisable by his long hair, paramilitary outfits and penchant for using shades, consciously displaying an air of hyper-masculinity. His pronouncements would swing from the conciliatory to the fiery, giving him an air of dangerous unpredictability (Cristalis, 2002, 155; Martinkus, 2001, 128; O’Shea, 1999, Tanter et al., 91-96).

This media prominence reinforced and amplified his image. He became the international face of the militias and thus stood for the ‘stereotypical’ militia member - leading, by way of a self-fulfilling prophecy, to other hardcore militia members seeking to emulate his style, thus becoming an interesting case for studying of how this particular enactment of ‘militia masculinity’ came to be. The characterisations of him by outside observers describe him as ‘swaggering’ (Greenless and Garran, 2002, 143), a ‘fighting cock’<sup>48</sup> (Cristalis, 2002, 141), or as being inspired by Rambo (Nordholt, 2001, 51). MacDonald (2002) describes him as ‘more a street fighter who followed the money than a political player.’ He thus became a modern re-incarnation of the *jago* and *preman*, but also paying attention to cast himself as a *pemuda*-style fearless patriotic fighter.

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<sup>48</sup> See also Chapter 9 on the meanings of *jago*, the term being used historically both for fighting cocks and bandit leaders

Figure 14. Eurico Guterres (centre) and his cavalcade at a pro-autonomy rally in Dili, August 1999 (AP Photo/Firdia Lisnawati)



While described by Nobel Peace Prize Laureate José Ramos-Horta as a ‘tragic figure’ (Ramos-Horta, 1999), the image he conveyed of himself publicly was one of strength and power. Aged 28 at the time, he would pose for the media in black t-shirts, combat fatigues, shades, and a red beret or baseball cap from underneath which his characteristic long black hair flowed. With his bodybuilder’s physique, martial posturing, grand gestures and incendiary speeches constructed an image of potential violence - which would often lead to actual acts violence by his followers, such as on 17 April 1999, when his speech in the capital Dili was followed by a rampage by the Aitarak militia that left 13 civilians dead (Tanter et al., 2006, 91-92). In his appearance, he thus also integrated the more current and globalised ‘look’ of irregular fighters known from media images of young fighters and war lords in the ‘new wars’ in Africa, Latin America, Asia and Oceania, thus giving his mix of traditional Timorese warriorhood and of Indonesian *preman*- and *pemuda*-enactments a contemporary, globalised component.

The details of Eurico Guterres’ life are sketchy and at times contradictory. He was born in Uato Lari, Viqueque district, in 1971 in the same area where the 1959 uprising had taken

place. In fact, he is the nephew of António Metan, one of the key figures of the insurrection and when Guterres formed the Viqueque branch of the militia in April 1999, he linked it to the history of the uprising (and to either the civil war, independence proclamation or invasion by/integration with Indonesia) by naming the group ‘59/75’ (Gunter, 2007, 37).

He is reported to have been a pro-independence activist in his youth, following the witnessing the killing of his father (or both parents) by Indonesian security forces - though he himself has later stated that his pro-Indonesian stance stemmed from his parents being killed by Falintil forces<sup>49</sup>. The latter explanation is not wholly improbable, as numerous so-called ‘traitors’ (i.e. those seen as not adhering to revolutionary principles enthusiastically enough or suspected of pro-Indonesian sentiments) were indeed killed in the area by Falintil in internal purges in the mid-1970s. Guterres’ family history may have made his parents’ allegiance to the Falintil cause suspect. After the death of his parents, he was brought up by an Indonesian civil servant. A high school drop-out, he allegedly was one of the more radical members of the pro-independence, millenarian and semi-religious Santo António ‘clandestine front’ active in Dili, and had allegedly been involved with in a plot to assassinate Suharto (Tanter et al., 2006, 91-96).

After being arrested either in 1988, 1990 or 1991 – or possibly twice – he switched to the pro-Indonesian side. Guterres himself has not commented on his reasons for changing sides. Timorese and outside observers have speculated on whether it was due to a genuine change in his political convictions, due to torture or out of economic opportunism (Cristalis, 2002, 134, 146; Ramos-Horta, 1999, Tanter et al., 2006, 91-96).

Having switched to the Indonesian side, he was taken under the wings of the influential commander of the local *Kopassus* Special Forces, Lt.-Gen. Prabowo Subianto. Under the guidance of Prabowo, the forerunner of the militias, the *Gadapaksi* was formed and Eurico Guterres became its head. In a sense, Prabowo became the *bapak* for his militia ‘*anak buah*,’ Eurico Guterres. At the time, Guterres earned his living through activities on the fringes of the official economy, e.g. at the Dili cock-fighting arena and other gambling venues, including a gambling hall in Tasi Tolu, just outside of Dili (Cristalis, 2002, 146; Tanter et al., 2006, 95).

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<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, I was told by villagers during my research visit to Uato Lari in 2007 that his mother was still alive and living in the vicinity of the village

The militia career of Guterres took off in early 1999 when the *Gadapaksi* became the *Aitarak* militia, bankrolled by the military and with a direct connection to the regional military command in Bali. He thus rose from being a small-scale hustler and military informant from the outer fringes of society to a respectable political leader, a patriotic fighter with a cause. In April 1999 he was named deputy commander of the PPI. His public appearances, public incitements to acts of violence and the brutal activities of his *Aitarak* increased his notoriety over the next few months, boosted by the media coverage of himself. Though boasting of his good connections to the Indonesian military and political establishment, he did occasionally publicly express his fear that he would be eliminated once he was no longer useful to his masters (Greenless and Garran, 2002, 134).

After the razing of Timor-Leste by his militias and the installing of the UNTAET administration in the country, Eurico Guterres continued serving the murkier networks of patronage within the Indonesian security services, reportedly setting up militias at least in Papua but possibly also elsewhere (TAPOL, 2003a). In 2006, he became the only militia leader to be tried for crimes against humanity in Indonesia and was sentenced to 10 years in prison in 2006 but was pardoned and released pre-maturely in 2008. Guterres has cast himself as a wronged patriot (Martinkus, 2001, 416; Cristalis, 2002, 283) and to my surprise I also encountered former resistance fighters during my field research in Timor-Leste who absolved Eurico Guterres of any wrong-doing. He has sought to gain respectability as a political leader by unsuccessfully running for Indonesian parliament for a moderate Muslim party in 2009 in a West Timorese constituency. Following his unsuccessful bid, he has sought to set up an organisation which seeks to draw attention to the difficult conditions in which the majority of former East Timorese refugees subsist in the West Timorese resettlement areas.

The persona and biography of Eurico Guterres highlight some of the elements which contributed to the construction of what could be termed violent militia masculinity – young men, on the margins of society, are given the ‘carrot’ of temporary power over the lives – and also importantly the sexuality – of others, economic benefits (direct financial benefits and indirect benefits through looting and extortion), social prestige and – for the leaders – national and international attention. Behind this was the ‘stick’ of torture and possible death at the hands of the Indonesian security apparatus. Guterres may also been influenced by his family history, which potentially placed his family and clan at the wrong side of history from the perspective of the pro-independence camp. His was also a personal patron-client relationship

to the charismatic and powerful Prabowo, to whom he owed his own career and power. After being sentenced as the only one of those charged with war crimes in 1999, he has repeatedly cast himself as a wronged and misunderstood patriot, and as a scapegoat sacrificed to protect those higher up. Subsequent to his release, he has been seeking to build up a respectable image of himself, far removed from the wild, dangerous, murderous Eurico of ten years previous.

## 7.6. Conclusion

In this Chapter I have described the history, structure and activities of the pro-Indonesian militias which were, together with the Indonesian security forces, responsible for the wave of violence surrounding the 1999 referendum on independence. The men who I returned to interview several years later had all been actively involved in this violence. Though the militias were proxies of the Indonesian security forces and many members were forced or coerced to join, I have also explored other motivations for young East Timorese men to join these groups. Though often cast as criminal thugs and misguided rabble by outside observers, educated and well-placed East Timorese joined the militias as well. As already noted in the interviews, many of the former militias stressed in retrospect the political nature of their choice while down-playing the violence and their own role and/or responsibility for it. In the interviews, they were seeking to reassert their respectability and the legitimacy of their (violent) political project but also remained, in many ways, trapped in their identity as former militias. That a return to violence remained an option for them even after losing the referendum vote and relocating to Indonesian West Timor was underlined in the years following the vote by repeated armed incursions by militias into Timor-Leste and the mob killing of UNHCR workers in Atambua. Since 2006, though, the former militias have increasingly turned their disaffection towards the Indonesian government who they feel has not treated them with the proper respect, leading to occasional violent protests.

The militia groups drew on a combination of masculine role models, including traditional East Timorese warrior masculinity, imported Indonesian role models of the *preman* and *pemuda*, militarised masculine models passed on by the Indonesian security forces and also role models and styles taken from further abroad. They mixed local tradition, be it in terms of ritual or traditional modes of warfare with modern military training and equipment received

from their Indonesian mentors. The resulting amalgam combined tropes of traditional Timorese warrior masculinities, historical Indonesian protest masculinities, modern militarised masculinities and globalised images of hyper-masculinity. The militias were therefore a much more complex phenomenon than what popular depictions of them as being merely hired thugs doing the Indonesian military's bidding would allow for.

## **8. Street-fighters, mystics and malcontents – The Gangs, MAGs and RAGs**

The breakdown of key state structures in April-June 2006 in Dili brought to the fore a phenomenon that had been observed with some trepidation already for the previous five years – that of disaffected groups of mostly young men participating in acts of public violence. Some of the groups claimed to be following a political agenda, others were fuelled by a more diffuse feeling of resentment and frustration. Local law enforcement specialists and those from the UN, along with local and outside observers had already been alarmed by the rapid expansion and visible presence of these groups, some of whom described themselves as martial arts groups (MAGs), some as traditional or ritual arts groups (RAGs), some as gangs and some as veterans' groups (for the most comprehensive overview of these groups, see Scambary et al., 2006).

These groups seemed to embody all that is uncertain in the lives of young East Timorese males: an Australian PKF officer described them as displaying a mixture of 'naïveté and Machiavellianism' (Interview, Lt.-Col. Bradford, 2004). The gangs, MAGs and RAGs were a source of repeated but localised instability, with riots erupting in conjunction with their gatherings (White, 2004). Rumours circulated of MAGs/RAGs being manipulated by one political group or another and of their having been involved in the large-scale riots in Dili in December 2002 and in subsequent acts of possibly politically orientated violence, perhaps in collusion with discontented ex-Falintil such as the quasi-religious veterans' organisation Sagrada Familia or CPD-RDTL (Belo, 2004; Bradford, 2004, Kingsbury, 2009, 140). In the light of these developments, the emergence of groups of armed, young, angry men burning and looting in Dili in May 2006 and rumours of their links to one political group or another did not come as a complete surprise. The subsequent and persistent violence involving the various groups has led to well over 100 deaths (Scambary, 2009a)

The violence perpetrated by the various groups usually been cast as the work of young, uneducated, unemployed, marginalised and frustrated men (see for example Kostner and Clark, 2007; Niner, 2008). Others, such as Sousa-Santos (2009, 3-5), see the key motivation behind the groups as stemming from disaffected former members of the clandestine resistance front. More sensationalist views, often echoed in the Australian media (for example ABC

News, 2006, The Australian 2006 and 2009), put the groups in to the context of a failed state-discourse. In a similar vein, New Zealand-based commentator Phil Howison placed the gangs, MAGs and RAGs in a regional context of urban violence, seeing the various groups as manifestations of Manwaring's (2005, 10-12) 'third-generation gangs' turned into 'mutated urban insurgencies.'

*“Third-generation” street gangs have been called a “mutated form of urban insurgency”. If a third-generation street gang has political links and transnational connections, then the gangs of East Timor, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands would qualify. In those countries, it is difficult to distinguish between gang violence and insurgency. Port Moresby, capital of PNG [Papua New Guinea], is consistently ranked as the worst city in the world due largely to murders, rape and robbery committed by heavily-armed and politically connected “raskols”. Urbanisation and the growth of squatter settlements provide fertile ground for raskol recruitment, and the lawless Highland areas are a source for guns and drugs, which can be traded across the Torres Strait with Australian gangs. As for East Timor, gangs are a frequent source of political violence as illustrated in David Axe’s “War is Boring” comic, and one report lists 107 such groups.’<sup>50</sup>*

In this section, I will argue that the social phenomenon of the gangs, MAGs and RAGs goes beyond relatively simplistic explanations of young, marginalised men venting their frustration. Nor are they, as suggested by Howison and in the Australian media, the harbingers of a failure of the East Timorese nation state-building project or – even of a more sinister, transnational force. Rather, I argue, they are a way, a violent and disruptive way, for young men to try to make sense of their lives and find their place in post-independence East Timorese society.

I will first outline a classification of the various groups, in which I will include the various veterans' organisations for the sake of completeness and because some groups have on occasion been classified or have classified themselves as veterans' organisations, even though I did not include any of the veterans' organisations in my field research. In the following section, I will outline the history of the phenomenon of these disaffected groups, after which I

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<sup>50</sup> The 'War is Boring' comic referred to is Axe and Bors, 2007, and the report referred to at the end of the section is Scamby et al., 2006. It should be noted that this report also includes peaceful youth and neighbourhood groups amongst the 107 listed, not only gangs, MAGs and RAGs

will examine their structure and membership. I will then outline some of the striking features of the MAG/RAG/gang phenomenon, such as their ways of carrying out acts of violence, the use of identity markers, ritual and magic as well as their political and economic motivations. The final section of this chapter will then look at role models, especially at the role played by the late Major Alfredo Reinado. Though he was not personally involved with any group, he was, between April 2006 and February 2008, a controversial source of inspiration to many young men in Timor-Leste.

Some of the material in this chapter have been published previously in other articles, such as Myrntinen, 2007; Myrntinen, 2008a-b, Myrntinen, 2008d; Myrntinen, 2009b; Abdullah and Myrntinen, 2009 and Myrntinen and Stolze, 2007. Many of the unaccredited observations included in the chapter are based on unpublished personal observations from my visits to Timor-Leste between 2004 when the gang, MAG and RAG-phenomenon first began to capture the attention of the public and of the national and security apparatus until my latest visit in June-July 2010.

### **8.1. Classification and structure of the groups**

The potentially violence-prone groups can be divided into roughly four categories: martial arts groups, ritual arts groups, gangs and veterans' groups. I have classified them depending on how the groups' members classified themselves to me. These classifications of any one group have changed over time and place. While many international observers initially used (and on occasion still use) the term 'gang' to refer to all groups, this label has been angrily rejected by some for its seemingly pejorative ring. Others, however, have embraced it initially for exactly this 'bad boy'-connotation but have later been more reluctant to use it due to its negative image in the eyes of wider society (see for example interviews with G4-G6 and G22-G28).

The use of MAGs or RAGs also carries some political and 'ideological' (to use a term used by interviewee G16) baggage with it. I have put the terms in quotation marks as they are the exact terms used by some of my interviewees to describe the differences between groups, though none of the groups can really be said to possess a coherent and developed political

ideology. There is however, an imagined or felt divide, with MAGs being associated with imported martial arts skills and RAGs associated with East Timorese traditions. Depending on which side of the divide one stands, the MAGs can thus be seen as either foreign-influenced (this being a mostly negative connotation) or, with an assumed positive connotation, as more modern, urban and developed; RAGs can be seen as either backward, rural and less developed or as being more in touch with the ancestral roots (Interview, James Scambary, 2008).

I have reserved the label of ‘veterans’ organisation’ for groups consisting mostly of older-generation ex-combatants and clandestine supporters of the independence movement. This is also a politically charged issue, as explained below.

**Table 3:** Some of the main MAGs, RAGs and Gangs in Timor-Leste at the time of the field research (based on Scambary et al., 2006 and field research)

<b>Name</b>	<b>Type of Group</b>	<b>Area of operation</b>	<b>Estimated number of members according to the groups themselves<sup>51</sup></b>
PSHT	MAG	Country-wide	Over 10 000
7-7	RAG	Country-wide	Around 10 000
KORK (or, on occasion, Korka)	RAG	Country-wide	10 000
Kung Fu Master	MAG	Country-wide	7 700
Kera Sakti	MAG	Country-wide	6 700
Colimau 2000	RAG	Country-wide (with a stronger base in the western part of the country)	Several thousand
PLUR	Gang/Youth group	Bairo Pite	Several dozen

<sup>51</sup> N.B.: It can be assumed that the number of members given by the gang members in the interviews may well have been inflated and to include passive members in addition to active ones. They should thus be treated with some caution

Choque	Gang/Youth group	Becora	Several dozen
Sinto Kulau	Gang	Dili	Several dozen
Lito Rambo	Gang	Dili	Several dozen

### *Martial arts groups (MAGs)*

These groups derive their common identity from practicing a particular form of martial arts, such as karate, *pencak silat* (a martial arts form originating in Indonesia), judo, kung fu or taekwondo. While some groups concentrate strictly on practicing martial arts for sports, others have taken more interest in ‘extracurricular’ activities such as street fighting, assault, murder, arson and extortion. There is quite a distinctive split between these two groups, and in I will leave out the exclusively sports-oriented groups, such as the Timorese Judo Federation or Taekwondo Federation. The main MAGs which have been involved in the violence in Timor-Leste are the *Persaudaraan Setia Hati Terate* (PSHT – The Faithful Brotherhood of the Lotus Heart<sup>52</sup>), Kera Sakti (KS – The Sacred Monkey) and Kung Fu Master. These groups have often been fighting each other for influence and control of territory. PSHT is the largest and most influential MAG in Timor-Leste.

Many of the MAGs started up during the years of the Indonesian occupation and learned their martial arts skills from Indonesian teachers, often members of the military. This does not however mean that they were tied to the Indonesian security apparatus in the same way that the pro-Indonesian militias of 1998-99 were. Rather, the connections tend to have been of a personal nature and some of them have survived over the years. PSHT in Timor-Leste, for example, is at least theoretically a branch of the Indonesian (and, as many members claim, global) PSHT ‘brotherhood.’ While the claims to membership in transnational networks need perhaps be taken with a grain of salt, there is undoubtedly an ‘international’ character to these groups, as they often have not only been originally taught by outside teachers, often members of the Indonesian security forces during the years of the occupation. The MAGs however also often draw on martial arts icons and iconography popularised by global media culture, i.e. figures such as Bruce Lee, Jet Li or the Shaolin monks, in their iconography and identity markers.

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<sup>52</sup> PSHT is also on occasion said to stand for *Perguruan Silat Setia Hati*, the [Pencak] Silat Teachings of the Faithful Heart

Figure 15. PSHT Grafitti in Dili (Henri Myrntinen, 2009)



### *Ritual Arts Groups (RAGs)*

Unlike the MAGs who the RAGs see as drawing on ‘imported’ skills and arts, these groups claim to base their identity of traditional Timorese rituals, though it seems highly likely that many of these traditions and rituals are ‘invented traditions.’ At the time of the field research, many of the RAGs had joined something of an informal, loose coalition called ‘Rai Na’in’ (Owners of the Land or Lords of the Land)<sup>53</sup> which was in conflict with the MAGs, especially PSHT. However, this has not prevented RAGs of fighting each other as well. The main RAGs are 7-7 (pronounced either as ‘Sete-Sete’ or ‘Seven-Seven’<sup>54</sup>), 5-5, Colimau 2000 and KORK or Korka (*Kmanek Oan Rai Klaran* – ‘Wise Children of the Land’), though at times Colimau

<sup>53</sup> According to Hicks (2004, 34-40), the term *rai na’in*, which literally means lords or owners of the land, stands both for aristocratic rulers and for nature spirits

<sup>54</sup> Interestingly, though 7-7 draws heavily on its image of being an organisation deeply rooted in East Timorese custom, it is referred to and refers to itself mostly either by a Portuguese name (‘sete-sete’) or, more commonly, in English (‘seven-seven’ – or plain ‘seven’), rather than a Tetum version (‘hitu-hitu’). This can also be seen as an indication of how the groups mix local tradition with imported influences.

2000 is considered to be a veterans' organisation and KORK is seen as an MAG rather than as RAGs. I have chosen to classify them as RAGs as the members I interviewed classified themselves as ritual arts groups as opposed to martial arts or veterans' organisations.

*Figure 16. Seven-Seven and anti-PSHT graffiti in Dili – exactly opposite the graffiti of Figure 15 (Henri Myrntinen, 2009)*



Many of the RAGs tend to draw their following from disaffected former members of the 'clandestine front' who felt left out by the post-conflict DDR process which tended, at least in their eyes, to favour ex-Falintil combatants over other members of the resistance movement. The RAGs are arguably also more political in their outlook than the MAGs in general and stress the need for 'real independence,' perhaps unconsciously echoing the calls of Indonesia's radical *pemuda* during the 1945-48 for '100 % *merdeka* (independence)' (Anderson, 2006, 290).

According to Scambary et al. (2006, 16), the 5-5 group has reportedly evolved from the Santo António group, which in turn has been described as being 'a religious-mystic-revivalist Catholic movement,' members of which attempted to assassinate Suharto in 1988, a conspiracy which included Eurico Guterres, who was later to gain notoriety as a pro-Indonesian militia leader in 1999 (Gunn, 1999, 282).

More than the MAGs or the gangs, the RAGs claim to have access to magical powers, endowed upon them by their connections to ancestral spirits, the use of amulets and magic powders. As outlined in more detail below, while much of this is based on traditional East Timorese beliefs, there are definitely elements in these beliefs which have been imported via outside popular culture. In the formation of their ostensibly anti-PSHT alliance *Rai Nain* (Rulers of the Land), the RAGs are also trying to play the nationalist card, underscoring their Timorese rather than foreign-imported skills.

### *Gangs*

In the East Timorese, context, the term ‘gang’ can refer to a range of groups, mostly based in and organised around a certain neighbourhood. Some of them consist merely of a group of juveniles who hang around a certain corner in the afternoons playing guitar while others have a more clearly criminal intent.

A number of the gangs are led by former members or supporters of the clandestine front during the Indonesian occupation and their illegal activities were in part seen as supporting the independence struggle. Others have been formed in the post-independence years and especially during the early days of the crisis in 2006 it almost became a trend for small, mostly harmless, neighbourhood groups to call themselves gangs and gain more ‘street credibility.’ Once gangs became, in the public mind, connected with disrespectability and pointless violence, a number of the gangs chose to recast themselves as youth groups. For many of the non-criminal groups, this tends to be a much more apt definition.

The gangs tend to be named either after their leaders or after the particular part of town they hail from. Examples of this are the Lito Rambo gang named after its leader or the Green House gang (taking its name from a simplified English translation of the Vila Verde neighbourhood of Dili). Others, however, have adopted more descriptive names, in part imported, such as Gang Hitler, PLUR (which can either be interpreted as Peace, Love, Unity and Respect or as the title of an eponymous song by the popular Indonesian band Slank), Blok M (which can be read as either referring to a lower-class neighbourhood of Jakarta or, in reference to its *clandestino* roots as ‘independence block,’ with M standing for *merdeka*) or Fudidu (literally ‘the fucked ones’).

The influence of international and Indonesian pop-culture is perhaps the most visible in the case of the gangs. Gang houses and streets controlled by gangs are often painted in graffiti referring to popular musical idols seen as icons of (male) rebellion, especially Bob Marley (often with marijuana leaves), Che Guevara or the above-mentioned Indonesian band Slank, but occasionally also to heavy metal bands.

### *Veterans' organisations*

Previous to the 2006 crisis, one of the major sources of potential instability were the veterans' organisations, which consisted of disenchanted former Falintil fighters and members of the clandestine opposition movement who felt marginalised by the way the DDR-process was carried out by the East Timorese government and UNTAET. These groups include the Sagrada Familia, CPD-RDTL and SF-75 (Gunn and Huang, 2006, 126-127; Scambary et al., 2006, 4). They are reported to have connections to various RAGs and MAGs, especially to those with high numbers of former *clandestinos* and they have been suspected of involvement in several incidences of public unrest in Timor-Leste between independence and the 2006 crisis, especially the December 2002 riots. These connections, however, remain vague and some of the older veterans active in RAGs and the veterans' organisations have sought to distance themselves from the activities of the younger and more volatile members (Scambary, 2008).

The term 'veteran' is in and of itself a highly contested term in Timor-Leste. In addition to the respect and honour which the classification is expected bestow upon the bearer for her and his role in the struggle for independence of the nation, it is also linked with direct material benefits. As argued by Sousa-Santos (2009, 3-5), it is the combination of a feeling of not being recognised by the state and society and simultaneously not being compensated for the contribution to the struggle which is a leading driver for the disaffection amongst former combatants and *clandestinos*, leading them to join pressure groups. The Falintil DDR process was not comprehensive and the definition of who was classified was seen as being highly politicised – and highly biased against female ex-combatants and supporters, though this issue has not gained much prominence with the male-dominated disaffected groups. The classification of 'veteran' was later expanded by the Fretilin government with a new pension scheme for 350 veterans who had served 15 years getting USD 407 a month, while veterans

with eight to fourteen years of service being eligible only after the age of 55, leading to resentment especially amongst the younger veterans and *clandestinos* (Sousa-Santos, 2009, 3-4).

## 8.2. History of the MAGs, RAGs and gangs

Although the phenomenon of the MAGs, RAGs and gangs has existed by now in East Timorese for a much longer time than the militia groups (with the exception of the *Halilintar* militia), it is much more difficult to give a comprehensive and clear history of the various groups. While the militias were a clear political and military project set up by the Indonesian security forces to serve as proxies with a clear agenda and goal, there is no over-arching political goal between the various MAGs, RAGs and gangs. Furthermore, the groups' own mythology of how they came about makes drafting a historical narrative difficult.

An example of this myth-making with its inherent internal inconsistencies, idiosyncracies and paradoxes is the history of the Colimau 2000 ritual arts group. It is worth quoting here at length as narrated in Douglas Kammen (2009), followed by the narrative reproduced in Scambary (2007), by members of the group:

*'The organisation and at least some of its beliefs have their origins in a religious group called Sagrada do Coração de Jesus (Sacred Heart of Jesus), formed in the mid-1980s by a man named Martinho Vidal in the Hatu Builico area of Ainaro District. In addition to Martinho, there were initially 12 members in the group.*

*Over time, three of the members became involved in clandestine activities: one based in Colimau village in Bobonaro, one in the central sector, and one in the east. While other clandestine groups drew on magic, the members of Sagrada do Coração de Jesus placed their faith in one God and took Jesus as their symbol and protector. In 1994 or 1995, the Bobonaro District Military Command began to use the name Colimau to refer to people involved in the clandestine resistance. Drawing sustenance from their belief that there is only one God, the members of SCJ increased their activities. At some point in the 1990s, Martinho allegedly had a dream that in the year 2000 Timor-Leste would win its freedom from Indonesian colonialism. After this*

*dream, Martinho called a meeting at a cave in Ai Turi Laran, on the outskirts of Dili, to which he invited his 12 followers and a number of market vendors. Those present believed that the dream was a prophecy. Word spread in Dili's markets. The prophecy and millenarian dream of independence in 2000 also spread back to the village of Colimau and beyond. In November 1998, one of the SCJ-Colimau organisers played a central role in a highly controversial attack on the Indonesian military in Alas, in which a number of weapons were stolen from the Sub-District Military Command. At the time of the attack in Alas, SCJ members gathered to pray in the cave at Ai Turi Laran.*

*There are many competing accounts of the origins and development of Colimau during the Indonesian occupation. According to one of these versions, there were three founding members, the most important of whom was staunchly pro-American. This individual is alleged to have been present at the 1983 cease-fire agreement when Falintil commander Xanana Gusmão met with Governor Mario Carrascalão. The leaders and followers of Colimau are good people, it is said, because they want justice. What makes this call for justice unique is that it is a demand that justice be served to all parties that have committed crimes or violated rights — the Timorese parties to the conflict in 1975 (UDT, Fretilin and Apodeti), Indonesia, as well as Australia. This focus on justice gave rise to the name Colimau Lia Loos — True Colimau or Colimau for Truth.*

[...]

*Bruno explains that in 1986 he was the head of a Catholic youth group close to Bishop Belo. He says Americans and Australians posing as missionaries came to East Timor to help the resistance. One of these Americans provided a five-volume set of books written by the Israeli intelligence agency Mossad that was used as the basis for building the clandestine resistance. Like the apostles, groups were formed with 12 members, each of which then established another group of 12 and within three years, the resistance had spread throughout the territory; all just in time for the 1989 visit of Pope John Paul II. The resistance groups, Bruno explains, were called *Commando Libertasaun de Povo Maubere* (the Maubere People's Liberation Command),*

*abbreviated Colimau, and Organização Resistencia Sosial Nacional Cooperativa, better known by the acronym Orsenaco. ' (Kammen, 2009, 400-401; 404)*

The account given by Scambary (2007) is similar but different:

*'Led by Osorio Mau Lequi, Gabriel Fernandez, and Dr. Bruno da Costa Magalhaes (who attained a Masters in Theology in Indonesia) Colimau was founded in 1987 as a clandestine group to fight for independence. Its followers have been characterised as poor, illiterate peasants from rural areas and some ex-guerrillas. Colimau has strongest local support in its power base around the Kemak suco of Leimea Kraik in Hatolia, in the District of Ermera. It also has branches in the neighbouring district of Bobonaro, where Mau Lequi was born, and in Turiscaí, Manufahi District, where Dr. Magalhaes was born, and maintains a presence throughout all the western districts. According to anthropologist Mathew Libbis, doing field work in the Manufahi area, Colimau is a Kemak expression meaning to hate each other, but is also the name of a Bunak suco in Bobonaro. Although itself a distinct group, Colimau also claims to have members throughout the other clandestine groups such as Seven-Seven, Five Five, Bua Malus, and ORSNACO (which claims to be an umbrella organisation for these groups). [...]*

*One of Colimau's leaders Dr. Bruno Magalhaes espouses such a view, claiming that in 1982, Xanana lied to Bishop Belo that Nicolau Lobato was dead. According to Dr. Magalhaes, Lobato was seen as a communist, so if the US thought he was dead it would take their planes back, and would support Timor-Leste in the post independence period. According to Dr. Magalhaes, Nicolau Lobato is still alive and hiding in a secret mountain city, bigger than Dili, with an international airport, waiting until the time is right for his re-emergence. [...]*

*Osorio Mau Lequi, however, dismisses the idea that Lobato or any other dead resistance heroes will come back to life. Mau Lequi distinguishes between the old animist Colimau 2000 by referring to it as the 'Old Testament Group' and the new Colimau 2000 as the 'New Testament Group'. He says the new, 'official' Colimau 2000 members wear Crucifixes, that they support the Church, and no longer practice*

*the kind of syncretic ritual belief systems of their past. They now call for 'peace, love and unity'. (Scambary, 2007, 15-17)*

Thus, even based on the narratives of the two main leaders of the group, Bruno Magalhaes and Osorio Mau Lequi, we have differing accounts of what the group believes in, what its genesis was, what its aims are and what its name means.

Other groups, however, have a much more mundane history of genesis, and this may be the more common pattern of how groups emerged. According to the interviewees G4-G6 their small neighbourhood gang grew more or less organically, with no divine intervention, around a nuclear group of young men who would sit around in the evenings, playing guitar and drinking beer and *tuak*. Other youth from the neighbourhood gravitated toward this nuclear group and briefly before the outbreak of the 2006 *krize* the informal group 'officially' became a gang in its own right, marking its club house and vicinity with its own graffiti. When the violence of 2006 reached their neighbourhood, the gang, in its own words, remained neutral but defended its territory against larger the groups fighting in their part of town, which were mainly PSHT and 7-7. Once the worst of the violence had died down, the gang began re-inventing itself as a youth group, partially due to the negative image gangs had gained through the crisis but partially, and with external assistance and encouragement, in an effort to find more productive outlets for their energy and creativity.

#### *A simplified historical trajectory of the MAGs, RAGs and gangs*

Therefore, without going into the various, often conflicting and self-contradictory, myths of creation of the groups, I will sketch here a generalised and simplified historical trajectory. The existence of gangs has been traced back to conflicts over access to markets in the post-World War II years of the Portuguese era when urbanisation began in earnest in Dili, while the first MAGs and RAGs started appearing during the years of the Indonesian occupation (Babo-Soares, 2003, 270; Scambary et al., 2006).

In general, it is the RAGs which claim a longer lineage, tracing themselves back to pre-colonial or colonial era warriors' associations and often stress their roles as part of the resistance against the Indonesian occupation, though these claims can not always be verified

or are, as seen in the case of Colimau 2000 above, unclear and contested. MAGs, as mentioned above, were often formed around Indonesian teachers, often members of the security forces, who imported these martial arts skills to Timor-Leste. Though the teachers may have been serving members of the Indonesian security forces, this was however not an attempt to form pro-Indonesian proxy forces as in the case of the militias. Rather, they were intended as leisure-time activities but also served to instil military-style discipline in the young men (Interview, Luis Akara, 2004; Scambary, 2009c, 2).

While gangs have existed around the markets of Dili since the Portuguese colonial era (Babo-Soares, 2003, 270), those active today are of more recent origin. This is mainly due to the fact that gangs, more than MAGs and RAGs, tend to be bound to the persona of charismatic leaders. Some of the gangs in Dili were formed by former members of the clandestine front, for example by João Becora, and engaged in pro-independence activities to a degree. The explosive growth in size and number of the disaffected groups however took place in the years after the 1999 referendum.

The martial arts groups were the first to start making headlines, as their annual meetings in which participants would match to reach the next level of their martial arts started becoming catalysts for small, but violent clashes from approximately 2001 onwards. At the same time, discontent was spreading amongst the veterans and ex-clandestinos. Veterans' organisations such as Sagrada Familia and groups such as Colimau 2000 began agitating against the government (Rees, 2004, 50). The first major violent incident were the riots in December 2002 in Dili in which a western supermarket and Prime Minister Alkatiri's house was burned down. The rioting also was also driven by a strong anti-UN sentiment.

The widespread disappointment with the DDR process of the former combatants was a major factor in fuelling the discontent which led to the outbreak of violence in 2006. Furthermore, the fact that the new security forces, both PNTL and F-FDTL, were creations of the international donors which were then in part hijacked by local political elites (or seen to be hijacked by the disaffected groups), meant that there was no locally accepted, locally organised, impartial state security apparatus which could now stand up to the gangs, MAGs and RAGs. In fact, these groups had already infiltrated the security forces and private security companies (PSCs) before the breakdown in law and order due to various cross-cutting

political, social, personal and economic ties between members of these groups, their backers and members of the security apparatus (TLAVA, 2009, 2).

An initial defining feature of the meltdown of the security forces and the communal violence which followed was that regional allegiance, with regional origin, either east (*loro sa'e*) or west (*loro mono*), becoming the dividing line. The conflicting allegations between 'easterners' and 'westerners' accusing each other of having gained more from the post-independence situation at the expense of the other group took place in a situation where the already poor state of the country's economy had had gotten gradually worse, as testified by the UNDP's annual report (UNDP, 2006).

At the time of the 2006 crisis, the contest for the limited jobs, such as the ones in the security forces, was intense and was seen as a 'zero-sum' game. Large sections of the East Timorese society were and are living below the 'dollar-a-day' poverty limit. Especially those living in the peri-urban areas around Dili, in Becora, Comoro, Delta or Bairo Pite, who have left their traditional villages in the countryside to seek – but not find – a better life in the capital city feel marginalised. Not surprisingly, it has been these areas which have been the breeding ground for the youth gangs, where frustrated and marginalised young men vent their anger at each other, claiming that the 'others,' hailing from another part of the country, have gotten the better deal. According to James Scambary (2009b, 265-288), the east/west divide became an easy identity marker for these groups especially as group membership and living in a particular neighbourhood tended to overlap with regional origin. The 'east/west'-divide however melted into the background almost as quickly as it emerged, with new political and economic 'justifications' being given for the continued violence (Myrntinen, 2008b).

Between May 2006 and February 2008, the fighting in Dili and environs led to approximately 100 deaths, forced tens of thousands to flee their homes for the tenuous safety of IDP camps and triggered an outside intervention by the Australian-led ISF (International Stabilisation Force) and a beefed-up UNPOL (United Nations Police) force as part of the UNMIT (United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste) mission. Though the majority of the fighting has been confined to the impoverished outer *bairos* of Dili such as Comoro, Delta and Becora, as well as the IDP camps, sporadic fighting has also taken place in the centre of the city and in other urban areas around Timor-Leste such as Baucau, Ermera, Liquiça, Maliana and

Viqueque. The various groups have spread their influence across the country, down to small rural villages.

During their main period of activity, from mid-2006 to early 2008, the enmities, allegiances and alliances between the various groups were continuously shifting and the 'official' reasons for fighting change as rapidly: from 'ethnic/regional' (i.e. 'east'/'west') to political (mostly Fretilin vs. CNRT); from group A vs. group B to riots due to a lack of rice over to grievances against activities of the peacekeeping forces (ISF and UNPOL). In the latter case, even sworn enemies such as the two main rival gangs 7-7 and PSHT could and would co-operate politically and practically on temporary basis, against the common foreign 'enemy' before taking up arms against each other again. Often however, upon probing, the fighting turned out to be motivated more by personal issues (e.g. perceived disrespect, family feuds, fights over girlfriends), turf wars over who gets to control a particular neighbourhood or 'social jealousy' (*keceburuan sosial*) rather than by the more grandiose political or economic agendas pronounced publicly (Interviews Francisco da Costa, José Trindade and João Maupelo, 2007; Myrntinen, 2008a; Scambary, 2009b, 265-288).

Following the incidents of February 11, 2008, when Major Alfredo Reinado and his follower Leopoldino Exposito were killed, and President Jose Ramos-Horta severely wounded, the MAGs, RAGs and gangs started taking on a much lower profile than before, though small-scale violent incidents continued, for example in Maliana in April 2009. While the structures of the various groups and the underlying socio-economic reasons have not disappeared, several reasons seem to have contributed to a reduction of their activities. With the events of February 11, 2008 rattling East Timorese society, the acceptability of public violence as a tool for addressing political and socio-economic grievances was reduced. The East Timorese security forces increased their presence on the streets of Dili and were quick to intervene in stopping MAG, RAG or gang violence. Simultaneously, efforts by the government, national and international NGOs and church organisations to find alternatives for young men involved in the groups have begun bearing some fruit (International Crisis Group, 2009, 1).

### **8.3. Membership in and structure of the MAGs, RAGs and gangs**

For the overwhelming part, the members of the disaffected groups are men and boys, with a wide age span within the groups, ranging from boys in their young teens to leaders who can be in their 50s or even 60s. Veterans' organisations, by and large, tend to have an older membership base than the MAGs, RAGs and gangs.

Though almost all groups interviewed claimed to have some female members, I did not come across any girls or women who were active members over the course of my research, a finding that is mostly echoed by other studies such as Streicher (2008) and Scambary et al. (2006). An interesting and rare exception is the female-headed 0-0-1 gang in Hudi Laran described by Scarpello (2007), but this is definitely the exception rather than the rule.

In general, the hierarchy in the groups tends to be based on age, with the majority of the 'foot soldiers' who make up the bulk of the groups being in their early-mid teens. Younger members may act as hang-arounds, carrying out minor tasks for the older members such as fetching cigarettes, acting as look-outs and on occasion participating in rock-throwing. The operational leadership running activities at the street level tends to be in their 20s and older, more senior leaders in their 30s or 40s. Often, especially in the case of the MAGs and RAGs, there may be one or more older 'godfather' figures or spiritual leaders in the background, who would be in their 40s to 60s, would not participate in the day-to-day running of activities but would provide guidance, patronage and protection. Many of the leaders are considered to be endowed with magical powers. The mid-level leaders who are in their twenties as well as the higher-up leaders have at times 'respectable jobs' and secondary, in some cases even tertiary educational degrees, disproving the general assumption of the members of these groups being 'foot-loose, prowling, and predacious adolescents who herd and hang together, after the manner of the undomesticated male everywhere' to use Park's (1927, ix) classic description of gang members.

Regardless of their historical background, many of the groups include former members of the clandestine front, ex-Falintil guerrillas and former or current serving members of the security forces (PNTL, F-FDTL and PSCs). These would mainly be the older members, the younger ones naturally not having had the chance to participate in the independence struggle or to

enter the security forces. The membership of former pro-Indonesian militias in the various groups was the source of some degree of speculation and rumour during the field research but could neither be wholly proved or disproved (Scambary et al., 2006, 4).

In Timor-Leste, many of the major groups have very formal membership systems, including at least in the case of PSHT actual laminated plastic membership cards, while others use more traditional gang membership markers such as tattoos or embroidered cloths. Many of the smaller (and newer) gangs do not have similar, formal membership insignia. Multiple membership in different groups is possible, especially if one is in a gang and a MAG or RAG at the same time. Being in a MAG and RAG simultaneously, however, does not tend to happen due to the differences between the groups.

### *Structure of the groups*

Many of the MAGs and RAGs claim a nation-wide presence, and some even boast of their international presence. Gangs tend to have a local character and those with genuine international criminal connections tend not to boast about them. While the claim to a more or less national network may be the case for some of the larger organisations such as PSHT or 7-7, it is not the case for the smaller organisations. Even with the larger organisations, a strong identification of the group with a particular region (e.g. the west of the country in the case of Colimau 2000) or a political party (e.g. KORK and Fretilin) often reduces their potential for setting up national networks. Though many of the groups' members claim to be able to call upon these networks for support in the case of a fight with an opposing group, this is unlikely to happen given the long distances and difficult access to transport in the country. Furthermore, the fights are more often than not the cause of highly localised conflict drivers and the communications networks between the various chapters of the groups are weak.

Figure 17. Members of Potlot Gang take a break from painting murals to pose for the camera (Henri Myrntinen, 2008)



Scambary (2009b, 272-276) points to a high degree of symmetry between membership in a particular gang, MAG and RAG with membership in a particular clan or extended family. These also tended to overlap with settlement patterns in the city, with ‘an *aldeia*, a sub-section of a *bairro* (suburb), by most accounts, largely consist[ing] of one extended family’ (Scambary, 2009b, 275). The various groups therefore not only mobilise along membership in that particular group, but also along kinship lines and their geographical location. Party membership is a further mobilising factor, though this may override or be subsumed by other loyalties, such as belonging to a particular ethno-linguistic group, clan, gang/MAG/RAG or living in a particular neighbourhood. The resulting mosaic of overlapping and competing networks of loyalty and patronage led to shifting alliances and complicated patterns of conflict (Myrntinen, 2008b). As noted in TLAVA (2009, 2-4),

*'Much of the violence of the 2006 period, however, was not organised through cohesive, monolithic gangs, but through personal, family, political and clandestine networks. Most gangs do not have names and have no static membership, being more like patronage networks associated with a particular figurehead. Frequently, these figures are ex-clandestine activists or leaders, or heads of family networks.'*

Thus, more often than not, the MAG and RAG chapters or gangs are formed around charismatic, older leaders. These are by and large older males, though one gang (0-0-1) in the Dili neighbourhood of Hudi Laran was formed around a charismatic widow and mother of seven children (Scarpello, 2007).<sup>55</sup> It is the neighbourhood-level unit which tends to be the most important peer group and unit of social cohesion, especially in the case of the gangs, which, as mentioned above, mostly lack a reach beyond the immediate *bairo*.

Nonetheless, in spite of the local rooting of the groups, identity markers of the various larger groups, especially PSHT and 7-7 graffiti are visible across the country, down to the smallest villages. National-level feuds between any two given groups often translate to local-level feuds, fuelled by local grievances. This is, however, not necessarily the case if there are other bonds tying the two groups together, be it kinship or other shared networks of patronage and allegiance.

The claims of the larger groups being genuinely able to demand international support from their networks are even more tenuous at best. The exceptions here are East Timorese abroad, especially students, who may well have a previous connection to a given group and/or particular local conflict. Thus, a fight between two East Timorese students both hailing from Baucau and belonging to competing MAGs (PSHT and Kera Sakti) but studying in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, had direct ramifications in Baucau when news of the fight were relayed back by telephone text messages. In retaliation for the initial attack by PSHT in Yogyakarta, a PSHT member was attacked a few days later in downtown Baucau by machete-wielding KS members (see also interviews G7-G9). One of the major functions of the claims to being part of a nation-wide, let alone international, network is to increase the members' sense of belonging to a greater, national project while also countering claims of sectarianism.

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<sup>55</sup> Even in this somewhat exceptional case, though, there is a certain degree of male leadership. The 0-0-1 gang was established by Maria Ana Pereira's husband who, according to her, was killed by black magic. The spirit of her late husband – together with Jesus Christ – continued to give her guidance though (Scarpello, 2007).

The intermingling of national and local level politics as well as the reciprocities between the urban and rural networks of allegiance of which these groups are a part of can lead to either local-level flare-ups of national conflicts or, vice-versa, of local-level village feuds being replicated in the capital city Dili and on the national level. An example of the former was the flaring up of communal tensions in Uato Lari in August 2007 which was triggered by national level politics in Dili, i.e. the swearing in of the new AMP (*Aliansa Maioria Parlamentar* – Parliamentary Majority Alliance) government under Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão (see also interviews G10-G12). An example of the latter is described by Scambary (2009b, 272-274), in which a local village dispute between PSHT and Colimau 2000 in the village of Estado, in the western district of Ermera, first escalates to a district-wide conflict and then a national-level split between PSHT and Colimau 2000, echoed by street fighting in Dili.

This interplay between rural and urban conflicts, in which conflicts in the ancestral home region of city-dwellers is replicated in the urban context is also visible in other post-colonial societies, such as Papua New Guinea. Michael Ward (2000, 223-238) described in his study of young Highlands men in a Port Moresby, the conflicts in the ancestral home region are reflected and replicated in the city, even in the case of second- or third-generation migrants who might never even have been to their ‘home’ region. These obligating ties to the ancestral region tend, however, to be stronger in Papua New Guinea than Timor-Leste. It is more common in Timor-Leste for conflicts to arise locally in the city rather than be imported from the rural areas.

#### **8.4. *Modus operandi* of the MAGs, RAGs and gangs**

While previous to the outbreak of the 2006 crisis the disaffected groups had made occasional local headlines due to small brawls between members, the political crisis greatly increased their size, their presence, their political clout as well as their access to weaponry. In this section I will outline some of the characteristics of the groups, such as the way in which they staged their violent acts, their weaponry, their political and economic connections, the role of ritual and magic as well as use of identity markers.

## *Spectacle*

Similar to the militias and to depictions of traditional Timorese warfare, the attacks by and stand-offs between the various MAGs, RAGs and gangs often have a very dramatic and spectacular character. Preceded by rituals aiming to increase the participants' prowess and invincibility, the spectacle of the attack or stand-off is often more important than the actual fighting. In an echo of traditional Timorese warfare, the spectacle of the stand-off itself may well be enough and the groups may retreat without fighting.

*Figure 18. Young man running with slingshot in hand during fighting on Comoro Bridge, Dili (AAP Image/Dean Lewins, 2006)*



In a stand-off, the opposing sides will assemble in groups opposite each other, looking as martial as possible, wielding *katana* (samurai-style swords) shouting taunts and throwing rocks or firing arrows and *rama ambon*,<sup>56</sup> but usually at a distance. If shots are fired, it is usually into the air. The arrival of security forces more often than not leads to a dispersal of the groups, though often after another round of stoning. Attacks when they are carried out are also reminiscent of de Castro's (1864, 402-404) descriptions of traditional Timorese ambushes – opponents are attacked by a group when they are alone and beyond a safe area. On occasion, the victims have been beheaded or attempts were made to hack off a limb. Especially during the initial outbreak of the violence in 2006, arson was widespread. Interestingly, the attackers tended to be more interested in destroying property of those they saw as being in a (marginally) better socio-economic situation than themselves in an act of social levelling rather than acquiring it for themselves.

### *Weaponry*

In their attacks and fights, the East Timorese gangs, MAGs and RAGs have mostly traditional weapons such as machetes, *rama ambon*, spears and swords. During the high-point of the crisis between 2006 and 2008, it was also very common to throw (or, on occasion, catapult) rocks and stones, not only at rival gangs and security forces but also at passing cars (especially UN vehicles), IDP camps and rival neighbourhoods.

From interviews with law enforcement officials, gang members and from personal experience, it was however also clear that that these groups also gained, since the breakdown of the state security apparatus in April-June 2006, access to state-of-the-art SALW, such as assault rifles, sub-machine guns and automatic pistols (The Australian, 2006). This is also corroborated by the 2006 UN enquiry into the breakdown of order in the country (UN, 2006b, 41).

*'According to the UN, 2006a "219 PNTL weapons remain outside PNTL custody and control. These weapons comprise 190 Glock 9 mm pistols, 13 Steyr semi-automatic assault rifles, 10 HK33 semi-automatic assault rifles, 2 FN-FNC semi-automatic assault rifles and 4 12-gauge shotguns. [...] 45 M16, three FN-FNC semi-automatic rifles, three SKS semi-automatic rifles and two Uzi weapons previously within the custody and control of F-FDTL are missing.'*

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<sup>56</sup> Steel arrows or flechettes shot with slingshots, allegedly occasionally dipped into battery acid for additional effect

Over the subsequent two years, the majority of these weapons was retrieved by UNPOL and ISF, with UNMIT sources interviewed during my field research estimating the number of SALW which were unaccounted for at a few dozen by the end of 2007, including those in the hands of renegade Major Reinado and his men who were still in hiding in the mountains at the time.

One reason why the gangs, MAGs and RAGs have been willing to hand over weapons to the security forces may be that due to their connections to these forces, they can be sure of having access to firearms if and when they are needed. Based on interviews both with gang members and UNPOL, a relatively high number of members of the East Timorese police force are involved with major gangs, MAGs and RAGs such as PSHT, Colimau 2000 and 7-7. Several PNTL officers have in fact already been arrested by the international security forces as suspects in cases of serious crimes, including for gang-related murders. In addition, the groups have access to home-made handguns (*rakitan*) capable of firing standard ammunition and hand-grenades.

However, in spite of having access to this arsenal, the groups were very reluctant to display the weapons, let alone put them to use (at least during daylight hours), even during the worst of the fighting in 2006. Guns would on occasion be fired into the air, especially during the night, for purposes of intimidation but there were no full-scale shoot-outs. One of the motivating factors behind this may be the UN-promulgated weapons legislation (UNTAET, 2001) which guided the UNPOL and East Timorese security forces. The law differentiated between ‘offensive weapons’ (such as machetes, swords and *rama ambon*) and firearms. While unregistered firearms could be immediately confiscated and the person carrying them charged with unlawful possession of firearms, there was far more of a grey area in terms of the ‘offensive weapons,’ which were not, *per se*, illegal and did not need to be registered. Confiscating offensive weapons was only possible in situations in which there are used or displayed in an ‘aggressive’ manner. Other factors contributing to the reluctance to use SALW widely may have been fear of an escalation of the violence and more practical concerns, such as access to ammunition.

In addition to the PNTL and F-FDTL, further actors in the security sector are the private security companies (PSCs). Similar to the police force, the PSCs are not without their

connections to the disaffected groups. The major Timorese PSC in the field is Maubere Security, which has had strong links to PSHT (Belo, 2007 and Maupelo, 2007). Maubere provides the security staff for most major INGOs as well as the UN mission. The other major Timorese PSC player, Seprosetil, was bought up by an American ex-FBI officer and has become APAC, and was also alleged in interviews of having connections to various disaffected groups. Arguably, many of the MAGs, RAGs and gangs are also directly involved in the 'private security business' as well, as the dividing lines between private security, community-based security and extortion are rather blurred. The businesses protected by gangs, MAGs and RAGs include gambling halls, cockfighting rings, brothels but also legitimate businesses such as shops and kiosks (TLAVA, 2009, 4).

#### *Political connections, economic aims*

One of the most common reasons given in discussions with locals and *malaes* for the gang violence that has raged in Dili and the districts since the end of May 2006 has been 'political manipulation,' with the category of the '*ema bo 'ot*' (i.e. the social, economic and political elite) seen as being the manipulators (see also Grove et al., 2007; Scambary, 2007 and Streicher, 2008). Many of the groups have political affiliations but these often change over time and/or are inconsistent, with one regional chapter leaning towards one party and another towards the rivalling side.

There are numerous connections between various members of the political elite and different gangs, MAGs and RAGs. An indication of the close relationship between political parties and these groups was when I asked a well-connected East Timorese researcher as to how I could best contact a well-known gang leader and a well-known leading member of an RAG. I was told by the researcher that I should contact the parliamentary office of the PD (*Partidu Demokratiku*) to get the contact details of the gang leader (or simply meet him there) and the Fretilin party secretariat for the contact details of the RAG leader. Other leading members of these groups have, for example, been members of the current president José Ramos-Horta's campaign team. Some of these groups have made official alliances with parties (e.g. KORK with Fretilin) while others tend to keep their connections more hidden. It is not uncommon for these groups to switch their allegiances or for these political connections to lead to breaks inside the groups (see also Scambary, 2009a).

In looking closer at the issue of ‘manipulation’ of these groups by the political elite, it thus soon becomes obvious that manipulation is a two-way street or a symbiotic relationship: the political elite has not shied away from using these groups as a kind of ‘electoral muscle’ but are therefore also reliant on them and susceptible to pressure from them. The various groups, on the other hand, benefit from the financial largesse and the indirect political clout they gain, thus making their own complaints about being manipulated sound somewhat disingenuous.

A striking feature of the violence-prone groups in Timor-Leste during my primary field research in 2007 was the fact that many groups did not seem to be striving for any obvious, tangible economic benefits. This view was confirmed by researchers, law enforcement officers and gang members themselves. The various groups did of course get financial support from somewhere – for how else could young men spend their days driving around in cars, chatting into their cell phones, smoking and drinking all day, as both law enforcement officers and gang members themselves asked rhetorically during my interviews. Scarpello (2007) quotes Father Martinho Gusmão who claimed that during the political violence in 2006-2007, unnamed financial supporters would pay members 20 USD for throwing stones, 50 USD for burning down a house and 100 USD for a murder.<sup>57</sup>

Members of the gangs, MAGs and RAGs interviewed for this study did not divulge information on their own financial resources, but did insinuate that rival groups were being funded by political parties and other ‘*ema bo’ot*’ who were ‘manipulating’ them. The various groups have also sought to monopolise access to providing manual labour to the port of Dili and to various construction projects (interview, Luis Esteves, 2008; The Australian, 2009). A traditional source of income has been control and protection of local markets (Babo-Soares, 2003, 270; Scambary et al., 2006, 5.). As mentioned above, other possible sources of money are gambling rackets, including cock-fighting, and being paid by for providing protection to legal and illegal business or to local neighbourhoods for protection against attacks by rival groups (TLAVA, 2009, 4).

The line between extortion and genuine neighbourhood-based security services paid for voluntarily by the community is of course a thin one, but many of the MAG, RAG and gang

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<sup>57</sup> I was neither able to prove or disprove these figures in my own research

members interviewed drew a sense of legitimisation from this sense of protecting the community. This sentiment was also reflected in the interviews carried out by Ruth Streicher (2008) with members of the Sinto Kulau gang in Dili, but also in the studies of Brown and Wilson (2007) on gangs in Jakarta and Tajima (2004) in Lampung, Indonesia. The gangs, MAGs and RAGs see themselves as providing a service to the community which the state apparatus is not able to provide, or, as one gang member quoted by Tajima (2004, 62) put it, ‘if the police and army were able to provide security [...] we wouldn’t have a purpose or role.’

The Australian media (e.g. ABC News, 2006) have also raised the spectre of methamphetamines (referred to locally by its Indonesian term *sabu-sabu*, referred to often in the Australian media as ‘ice’) as being an additional factor in the violence in Timor-Leste. This is not necessarily far-fetched, as *sabu-sabu* has long been the drug of choice in Indonesian provincial towns and, based on field research interviews, is not wholly unknown in Timor-Leste either. Based on my own investigations in Dili would however seem to indicate that the drug issue seems to have been exaggerated by the Australian media at the time with not all that much evidence for it on the streets, though this may of course change over time. Thus while drug use may still be an issue in Timor-Leste at some, relatively low level, (and may in all likelihood become a larger issue in the future), it seems that palm wine and beer are enough at the moment to help the young men involved in the violence tap into their personal and social frustrations. Some respondents (e.g. G4-G6, G25) did mention hearing about or witnessing drug use, though this was characteristically always done by some group other than the respondent’s peer group. For the most part, the respondents took a negative view of drugs and drug use.

In the aftermath of the February 11, 2008, coup attempt, links between Alfredo Reinado, individual gang members and criminal members of the East Timorese diaspora in Indonesia and Australia have emerged. One of the people mentioned in the various rumours and conspiracy theories which emerged following the coup attempt was Lino Lopes<sup>58</sup>, who has been involved in the ‘ice’-business in Australia’s Northern Territory. Another who has been mentioned is Jakarta-based, East Timorese gangster Hercules, who was also involved in militia activities and is now a major investor in the construction business in Dili. Thus it is possible that East Timorese gangs, MAGs and RAGs have or are building up connections to narcotics networks internationally through diaspora connections. The veracity of the rumours

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<sup>58</sup> Lino Lopes is in turn the brother of Rui Lopes, who was the former leader of the Dadarus militia in Suai and is also reported to have had connections to Major Reinado, as well as to the PD (República Banana, 2007)

could however not be determined. According to TLAVA (2009, 4), various groups have been involved in providing protection to brothels in Dili which employ mostly sex workers trafficked into the country from PR China and run by Chinese triads.

### *Ritual and magic*

A very visible but under-researched aspect of gang violence in Timor-Leste is the use of ritual and magic. Many of the MAG and especially RAG insignia have a ‘magic’ (*lulik*) or ritual meaning and magic amulets (*biro*) and spells are called upon for supernatural skills and protection before confronting other groups or the security forces. PSHT members, for example, often carry a piece of embroidered cloth with protective powers. As related to me by a Portuguese UNPOL officer I interviewed as part of the field research, he witnessed this cloth being used in a last rites ceremony by other members of the group to apparently help transfer the spirit of a comrade killed in a fight (Interview, Antonio da Silva, 2007).

*Figure 19. Ritual scarification on the arm of a Seven-Seven member (Courtesy of James Scambary)*



The RAGs, as the name implies, place an especially high value on ritual. Rituals are carried out for initiating members, for seeking the blessing of ancestral spirits, for transferring magical powers and ensuring good fortune in battle. These rituals often involve the sacrificing of animals – chickens for smaller ceremonies and pigs or even water buffalo for larger rituals. The members of the ‘*kakalok*’ or ‘numbers groups,’ i.e. the RAGs with number combinations (e.g. 5-5, 7-7, 9-9, 12-12) as their names, are supposed to have a corresponding number of scars cut into their arms, with powder giving them allegedly magical powers, such as invincibility and invisibility.

The relatively common Timorese habit of mixing pagan rituals, symbols and beliefs with Catholic influences is also visible in many of the groups, especially the RAGs such as 7-7 and Colimau 2000 and some veterans’ groups, especially Sagrada Familia. The leader of Sagrada Familia, the former Falintil commander Cornelio Gama, also referred to by his *noms de guerre* of L-7 (Comandante Elle Sete) or Eli Foho Rai Bo’ot (The Great Snake of the Mountain), is purported to have especially strong magical powers. He is also widely rumoured to be one of the godfathers of 7-7 and a source of their magical power. Maria Ana Pereira, the female gang leader interviewed by Scarpello (2007), claimed that she drew her power directly from Jesus Christ and guidance from the spirit of her dead husband, and used holy water to protect the houses of her neighbourhood from attack. Members of MAGs and RAGs who I interviewed saw no inherent contradiction between their Catholic faith and adherence to what are essentially animist beliefs.

As illustrated by the myths of origin of Colimau 2000 related above, the mixing of Christian and animist beliefs can also take on messianic traits. Another RAG, KORK, has developed its own language and alphabet which combines ‘traditional’ Timorese influences with ‘universal’ influences taken from other languages and which is revealed to the members as they advance through the ranks.

As is common for myth and ritual, a lot of their perceived power rests on having an ancient or timeless pedigree. There seems however to be a certain degree of ‘invented tradition’ at work in some of the rituals of the MAGs, RAGs and gangs and the respective magical powers they are supposed to give. The influences of imported martial arts movies from China, Hong Kong and Indonesia occasionally shine through in the descriptions given of the ‘magical powers,’

such as flying, invisibility, disappearing in puffs of smoke, firing off lightning bolts or being impervious to bullets, spears or arrows.

### *Identity markers and graffiti*

The walls of the *bairros* of Dili have for years been covered with slogans and graffiti. I do not know whether this already occurred during the Portuguese colonial days but at least during the last part of the Indonesian occupation both pro-independence and pro-Indonesian slogans were visible on the walls – not only in Dili but also in other population centres such as Baucau and Liquiça. During the independence years, various kinds of new graffiti kept emerging, often linked to global male cultural icons (such as Che Guevara, Bruce Lee and Bob Marley) and occasionally to gangs, MAGs and RAGs, though I for one did not register this as being directly linked to a brewing violent crisis at the time. But the writing was, literally, on the wall for those who chose to see it.

With the social, economic, political and quasi-ethnic (or rather: regional) crisis that began unfolding in March 2006, the amount of graffiti in Dili multiplied, often referring to the various groups, thus acting as their territorial markers. At times these were augmented with a derogatory, anti-‘easterner’ or, far less commonly, with ‘anti-westerner’ message or with inflammatory political slogans. As the crisis continued, the gang identity markers have spread across the country and are now visible even in very remote villages.

Over the course of 2006/2007, the *loro monu/loro sa’e*-graffiti began taking on a life of their own. The Iraq war has also brought its own new phraseology into the violence – possibly as a way of a pun on the term *firaku* (easterner) and possibly as a reference to the Arab heritage of former Fretilin Prime Minister Alkatiri, western gangs began calling easterners ‘Iraqis’ and, taking things a step further, adopting Stars of David and pro-Israel slogans to demarcate westerner-controlled areas. This imported dichotomy was ‘supported’ by perceived anti-Fretilin sentiment of the Australian peacekeepers that simultaneously had also been deployed to Iraq. A further imported ‘pun’ was calling *firakus* ‘Figos’ in reference to the Portuguese footballer Luis Figo, as the Portuguese FPU contingent was perceived at least initially as being more pro-Fretilin and hence, in accordance with the reductivist logic, more pro-eastern (see also Prüller, 2008, 38 and Scambary, 2007, 39-40).

## 8.5. Role models

Compared to the more straight-forward case of the militias who drew mainly on militarised Indonesian and Timorese warrior masculinities as well as the existent role models of *preman* and *pemuda*, the identities in the MAGs, RAGs and gangs are more complex. In part, this reflected the higher degree of heterogeneity of these groups but also the higher degree of heterogeneity of post-independence Timor-Leste. Though a number of the interviewees and even more so Timorese civil society members interviewed for the background interviews tended to see a lack of role models as one of the reasons for gang-based violence, my own research would seem to indicate that this is not entirely the case, at least as far as the quantity and diversity of role models is concerned

### 8.5.1. The local meets the global, the real the imaginary

Many of the immediate role models for the members of the MAGs, RAGs and gangs are the charismatic leaders of the particular gang or local chapter of the MAG/RAG around whom the group is locally organised. These gangs and local chapters then act as a small-scale network of support, patronage and loyalty. Other role models are drawn from a repertoire of local East Timorese (*asuwain*) and global heroes and icons. These may be specifically tied to the particular nature of the group (e.g. kung fu film heroes for martial arts groups) or of a more, general and diffuse nature, reflecting for example images of rebellion or national resistance. These role models and idols are in part real-life figures but can also be wholly imaginary products of mythology or of the media industry. They act as idealised models of masculine behaviour, as repositories of dreams and symbols of agency.

Some of the globalised icons popular during my field research in 2007 were Che Guevara, Bruce Lee and Bob Marley. They are, however, often removed from their original context and meaning: a Che t-shirt and a virulently anti-Communist<sup>59</sup> attitude are not necessarily seen as

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<sup>59</sup> The epithet 'Communist' as signifying something evil, sinister, God-less and generally detestable came into fashion around the time of the protests organised by the Catholic Church in 2005 against a proposal by the Fretilin government to make religion an optional rather than mandatory course in school. The Catholic Church was not above renting youth groups as mobs for hire who then vilified left-of-centre, Muslim Prime Minister

incompatible, nor is wearing a Bob Marley shirt emblazoned with 'One Love' while throwing rocks at the makeshift shelters of an IDP camp full of unarmed, terrified neighbours. Some of the gang leaders adopted western media-influenced *noms de guerre*, such as Aileu van Damme or Lito Rambo. Notably, in addition to having a preference for imported military fatigues from various nations, for designer shades, bandanas and an abundance of military-style gear, youth idol Major Alfredo Reinado also sported the 'xXx'-logo of Vin Diesel's action movie as a tattoo on his neck. In general, these imported icons tended to be figures symbolising masculine resistance, some more violently than others (Myrntinen, 2005, 240-241).

To a degree, the international security forces also became a kind of foil for the gangs, MAGs and RAGs. Especially the Portuguese paramilitary GNR (*Guarda Nacional Republicana*) unit, responsible for security in Dili and known for its 'hard' approach to policing and displays of militarised masculinity has been seen by gangs, MAGs and RAGs as a favoured sparring partner during riots and other forms of street violence (Myrntinen, 2009a, 87-88).

The East Timorese heroes may be more locally known or nationally recognisable heroes, dating from 'the old days' or from the more recent years of the resistance struggle. East Timorese resistance heroes such as Nicolau Lobato and Koni Santana also act as icons and symbols of a struggle for 'real' independence and justice. These idolisations take at times messianic proportions, as noted by Kammen (2009, 405). An expectation that the 'real' heroes of the struggle, as opposed to the compromised and compromising former heroes now running the country, did not actually die during the struggle but are waiting in the mountains for the right time to return and rescue the nation is not uncommon, as I was able to witness at several village-level conflict resolution meetings I participated in 2007. One of these East Timorese symbols of a struggle for justice was Major Alfredo Reinado, who after his defection from the army in 2006 became an idol for many East Timorese young men.

### 8.5.2. Major Alfredo Reinado

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Alkatiri as a 'terrorist' and 'communist,' labels later pinned on 'easterners' in general (Grainger, 2007). In addition to the influence of the Catholic Church the view of Communism as a force of evil is also a relict of the propaganda of the Suharto era.

Though not directly linked to any gang, MAG or RAG, the figure of ‘Alfredo’ or ‘*O Major*’ (‘The Major’), as he was commonly called, became an idol for many of the members of these groups. He was an iconic figure, a symbol for a vague sense of a struggle for justice and equality, as well as a repository of hopes and dreams for a better future. His personality and biography, with all its seeming contradictions, encapsulated many of the paradoxical aspirations of ‘the youth,’ i.e. the disenchanting, mainly urban, young men for whom he became an idol. He was a fugitive from justice, accused of murder and insubordination, yet became symbol of justice (or as a graffiti-slogan in Suai put it, ‘the Father of Justice’). For many (but definitely not all) of the young men he was a unifying figure to identify with, drawing on East Timorese traditions, yet at the same time displayed a high degree of male individuality, agency and urban modernity free from the trappings of traditional obligations of a patriarchal society. His ‘look’ was emulated by the young men in the various groups. Wearing a kind of hair net, for example, was fashionable for a while after a picture of Alfredo wearing one had circulated in Dili. He effortlessly bridged the two worlds of summoning the spirit of Dom Boaventura and discussing it on YouTube (Agence France Presse, 2007). As Australian journalist Jill Jolliffe put it,

*‘...his moods and discourse swung through rapid extremes. As did his appearance, which went beyond the need for disguise. He dyed his hair in the latest styles, grew it long, then shaved it off, and constantly rearranged his facial hair and wardrobe, as though searching for his real self. He and his young band strutted around with their big guns, seemingly frozen in adolescence.’* (Jolliffe, 2008)

Born in 1966 in Ermera, western Timor-Leste, and thus a young boy at the time of the Indonesian invasion, he was separated from his parents during the flight from the advancing Indonesian occupation forces. According to his own testimony to the CAVR, quoted by Niner (2008), Reinado was deeply affected by his wartime experiences:

*‘On that journey I witnessed immense suffering: people dying of hunger, parents killing their children because they were making too much noise and they were worried they would alert the Indonesian military; children leaving their aged parents to die; decaying corpses; and members of political parties killing other Timorese because of political differences. The men who killed for political reasons were very cruel. Their faces were like robots or machines.’*

After being captured by Indonesian soldiers, he was forced to help the military as a civilian auxiliary (*Tenaga Bantuan Operasi – TBO*) before being taken to Sulawesi by the Indonesian sergeant who ‘adopted’ him. At the age of 18 he escaped and made his way back to Dili to live with his mother and uncle, and also allegedly became involved with the clandestine resistance networks (Niner, 2008).

His first brush with fame came in 1995 when he organised the escape of 17 East Timorese civilians on a leaky fishing vessel to Australia, and after spending half a year in detention pending the asylum request he then became a worker in the Perth shipyards. Following his return to Timor-Leste after the 1999 referendum, he joined the newly-formed F-FDTL where his shipyards experience was seen as constituting enough of an expertise in naval matters to take over command of the armed forces’ naval unit (Niner, 2008). Disciplinary problems, such as getting into fights with police officers, using duty weapons for hunting trips and an alleged affair with a female officer led to him being downgraded to commanding the military police (International Crisis Group, 2006, 9-11; Niner, 2008).

It was, however, the 2006 crisis which catapulted him to national and international notoriety when he and his men refused to follow government orders and joined the petitioners. On 23 May, 2006, he and his men ambushed several F-FDTL and PNTL officers, killing five and wounding 10, leading the UN Commission of Investigation to call for his arrest for desertion and suspicion of ‘crimes against life and person’ (UN, 2006b, 30-32, 47-48). Reinado was indeed arrested on 26 July 2006 by international peacekeepers but was able to walk out of Becora prison more or less unhindered with 50 of his followers on 30 August 2006, increasing his standing in the eyes of his followers. For the next year and a half, he remained mostly in the mountains apart from appearances on Indonesian TV shows and alleged undercover visits to Dili (Niner, 2008).<sup>60</sup>

The botched attempt on 4 March, 2007 by Australian SAS Special Forces to capture Reinado led to widespread rioting by his youth followers in Dili and again worked to increase his quasi-mythical status, especially as he claimed to have used magic and been guided by the spirit of Dom Boaventura during his escape. He thus combined his own struggle against the

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<sup>60</sup> According to local rumour at the time of my field research, this included numerous visits to several Chinese-run brothels, such as the *Mayflower* and *Moonlight*, in downtown Dili

national political elite and the presence of foreign troops with the fiercest anti-colonial uprising of Timorese history.

*Figure 19. Alfredo Reinado giving a TV interview while hiding in the mountains, 2007 (AAP Image/Nine)*



Negotiations between his group and the government continued for the next eleven months, facilitated in part by a shadowy group called the Movement for National Unity and Justice (*Movimento da Unidade Nacional e da Justica* – MUNJ), which in its protests carried posters of Reinado in a Che Guevara-like pose. In circumstances yet to be fully clarified, what was possibly supposed to be a further round of negotiations ended tragically on 11 February 2008 with the deaths of Alfredo Reinado and his supporter Leopoldino Exposto as well as the wounding of President José Ramos-Horta.<sup>61</sup>

Like the youth who idolised him, Alfredo Alves Reinado had been shaped by a history of violence and a deep sense of betrayal by the powers that be. In this, his biography bears some striking similarities to that of militia leader Eurico Guterres, including loss of parents, temporary adoption by an Indonesian military officer and involvement in clandestine networks. Similarly to Guterres, Reinado had been elevated by local Timorese elites and with foreign support (in Reinado's case, he was given training by the Australian Defence Force),

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<sup>61</sup> A court case against the men and women allegedly involved in the events of 11 February, 2008, concluded in 2010 and did little to shed light on the events of that morning. In fact, several new, disturbing possibilities were raised, such as that Alfredo Reinado was not killed in a shoot-out but shot, execution-style, at extremely short range.

only to be dropped and betrayed – at least in their own eyes and in those of their followers. Both saw themselves as having fought for a just cause and for the good of the nation.

## **8.6. Conclusion**

In this section I have outlined the structure, the history and activities of the martial arts and ritual arts groups as well as gangs which have played such a prominent role in post-independence East Timorese society, and especially since the 2006 crisis. I have outlined some of the influences and motivations behind these groups, but also real and imaginary masculine role models, local traditional influences and imported globalised icons which have been amalgamated in the appearance and ideologies of the groups. The various groups can be seen as a complex, communal effort by the men involved to address, often by means of violence, the challenges they are facing. Unable to return to traditional Timorese forms of ‘being men’ in a rural subsistence farming society yet not able to become modern, urban male breadwinners in the formal economy; deprived, as they see it, of recognition for their role in the independence struggle and frustrated with the political elites, the various groups offer a way out of these grievances. Though incorporating various imported elements, the groups also are also reflective of traditional East Timorese networks of loyalty and patronage that are central to defining one’s position in society.

## **9. Hierarchies, transitions, violence – gender roles in Timor-Leste**

Gender identities as well as the gendered social hierarchies they are tied into are ‘work in progress,’ in Timor-Leste as much as in other societies. They consist of constant, iterative processes of becoming which are different for each individual yet embedded in a larger socio-cultural context. They are thus constructs which change over time and adapt themselves to different situations and social power constellations. With these caveats in mind, I will nevertheless attempt some broad generalisations about the respective roles of women and men, girls and boys in East Timorese society today.

I will first examine the concept of patriarchy in East Timorese society, which I argue is not a fixed, monolithic system but rather a patchwork that has evolved over the various historical periods into what it is today – where it continues to be contested and re-constituted. Next I will look at two of the most visible implications of patriarchal practice, that of the social subordination of women and the issue of gender-based violence. I shall then examine hierarchies between men, looking at the roles of patron-client networks, of age and of class in defining these hierarchies. In the final part of this Chapter, I will then examine the intersections of masculinities and violence in Timor-Leste.

### **9.1. A patchwork of patriarchies**

Gender roles in Timor-Leste tend to be described by Timorese and outside observers as being ‘traditional’ and marked by patriarchy, i.e. a social system which is based on the dominance of men over women, both in the public and private sphere, underpinned ideologies which legitimise male supremacy. These ideologies may for example be based on tradition, on religious precepts, or more subtly on political and economic dominance. A common description of gendered power relations is given by the prominent women’s rights activist Manuela Leong Peirera (2001, 5)

*‘In East Timor, patriarchal values and culture are very strong. Patriarchy views women as inferior to men. It leads to parents prioritizing sending their sons to school*

*as daughters can lead to a high bride-price if they are married young. As a wife, a woman is expected to obey her husband, without asking questions or expressing any disagreement. Women are expected to do all the work in the house while the men are heads of households and look for money outside the home.'*

While men are generally speaking socially in a dominant position vis-à-vis women, a closer examination of East Timorese society reveals a more complex picture than merely one of straight-forward male dominance over women. Not all women or girls are automatically in a subaltern position towards the broad category of men or boys, especially in those cultures in Timor-Leste which are matrilineal. Also, echoing Kimmel (1997, 189), not all men and not all masculinities are created equal. While gender plays a key role in social hierarchies, other factors such as class, ethnicity and age can not be overlooked. These hierarchies are also not static and uncontested, but are fluid and contradictory. They are constantly challenged by individuals or groups and renegotiated in society.

Massive social and cultural process of change such as colonisation, violent conflict, urbanisation and globalisation have disrupted traditional power relations in society and created new ones. Echoing Lindsay and Miescher (2003, 3) argument for African societies, I would argue that the combined impact of similar experience has left East Timorese society not with one form of patriarchy but a 'patchwork of patriarchies' mixing local and imported attitudes and notions of gender-appropriate behaviour.

I will briefly outline some of the historical influences which have shaped notions of gender in East Timorese society. While different traditional beliefs are strong in Timor-Leste, traditional East Timorese society and its views on gender roles have not been left untouched by the momentous social upheavals of the past 35 years. Portuguese and Catholic influences; the ideals of equality inspired by socialism and espoused by Fretilin; Indonesia's modernisation programme; increasing urbanisation; the influences of globalised western and Indonesian popular cultures brought in by the media, returning exiles, the UN and international NGO community or students studying in Indonesia; and above all the cataclysmic violence of the war have all combined to challenge, modify, erode, or reinforce through backlash, traditional notions of gender-appropriate behaviour (Cristalis and Scott, 2005, 80-82; Koyama and Myrntinen, 2007, 40). Furthermore, it should be kept in mind that around three-quarters of the East Timorese population was born during or after the Indonesian

military occupation which lasted from 1975 to 1999 – and thus has no first-hand experience of traditional, pre-invasion East Timorese society (Wigglesworth, 2007, 52).

### *Traditional influences*

Given the wide range of ethno-linguistic groups in Timor-Leste, it would be incorrect to speak of one unified Timorese culture. While many of these groups have traditionally been organised along patrilineal lines, some, such as the Bunak and Tetum-Terik-speaking communities have traditionally been matrilineal. Some of the matrilineal societies in the western parts of the country have on occasion had female rulers, *feto ferik*, but this tended to be the case mainly when there was no male heir (Cristalis and Scott, 2005, 19).

Traditional divisions of labour and of social power have differed between various communities, between rural and urban dwellers and between different social classes. In general however, traditional society has tended to cast men and women as dualistic opposites with attendant opposite characteristics, a fact which is reflected in traditional ceremonies but also for example in the Tetum language<sup>62</sup> (Babo-Soares, 2004, 22; Hicks, 2004, 46-47; Loch, 2007, 184-185). Labour in the home and in the fields as well as ceremonial roles were often divided strictly based on gender (Trindade, 2007).

Perhaps one of the strongest traditional elements influencing gender relations to this day in Timor-Leste is the payment of a bride price or dowry (usually referred to in Tetum as *barlaki*, *barlake* or *barlaque*). It has traditionally been a key element of defining not only relations between husband and wife but between their two respective families. Through the marriage-process and attendant payment of *barlaki*, the relationships between the two families involved are re-defined as those of the ‘wife-givers’ and the ‘wife-takers’ (*umane* and *fetosaan*) in a complex system of mutual obligations (Loch, 2007, 172-176). If the husband is unable to pay the full price himself, the debt is passed on to his offspring or siblings. The price system is differentiated geographically and along class lines, with women from certain regions (e.g. Los Palos) and from certain families (e.g. *liurai* families) seen as necessitating a higher bride

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<sup>62</sup> A simple example of this are the Tetum terms for ‘north’ and ‘south’ – the term for north is *tasi feto* or ‘the female sea,’ as the northern sea (the Ombai-Wetar Straits) is seen as calm and therefore cast as feminine, while south is denoted by *tasi mane*, ‘the male sea’ reflecting the ‘masculine’ roughness of the southern Timor Sea

price. The dowry is usually paid in livestock (especially water buffalo, horses or goats), even in today's urban settings (Cristalis and Scott, 2005, 20; Hicks, 2004, 98).

*Figure 20. An East Timorese man in traditional outfit in honour of the declaration of independence on May 20, 2002, Maubisse (Henri Myrntinen, 2002)*



While there has been a move away from the *barlaki*-system especially amongst urban middle classes, the tradition is still seen by many as being binding. Increasingly however, young men are unable to pay the traditional dowries, adding to a sense of frustration amongst them. While East Timorese women's rights activists tend to see *barlaki* 'as one of the underlying reasons for the problems many married women are facing (Cristalis and Scott, 20), a survey by the International Rescue Committee (2003, 19) on the other hand found that only 9 per cent of the women polled saw the dowry payment as having a negative impact on the way the husband treats his wife.

### *Colonial experience*

The Portuguese colonial presence spanned more than four centuries but affected most East Timorese only in the final decades of this rule. As Anne McClintock (1995, 5) has pointed

out, colonial occupation is always a complex experience which has long-lasting impacts even after the end of the colonial experience on the post-colonial society's internal power relations in terms of gender, class and ethnicity. The society was reorganised according to new categories of hierarchy and power based on the imported colonial value system, opening possibilities for some and closing them off for the majority of the colonial subjects. In the case of Portuguese Timor, for example, society was divided racially into the *indígenas*, *assimilados*, *mestiços* and *brancos*. East Timorese men were often drafted for colonial troops and women drafted into domestic service, and both forced into corvée labour, especially after the Second World War (Hill, 2002, 13-15, Schlicher, 1996).

In the colonial discourse, the indigenous population was often infantilised or exoticised (see for example Brown, 2003, 157; Shire, 1994, 149-150). This was also the case in contemporary European descriptions of Portuguese Timor and its people, such as (de Castro, 1864; Fiedler, 1929; and Studer, 1878). Access to education in the colonial language was therefore limited to a select few who were considered to be capable enough of receiving a European-style education. For the most part these were young men of European or *mestiço* descent, a selection process which still has its repercussions on the composition of the East Timorese political elite today (Hill, 2002, 60-68)

One of the darker chapters of the colonial period was the temporary occupation of Portuguese Timor by the Imperial Japanese Army between 1942-1945. An estimated 70 000 East Timorese died during this period and thousands of women were forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese troops. They were assisted in this by the Portuguese colonial authorities who thus wished to protect European women in the colony from sexual abuse (Cristalis and Scott, 2005, 13-15)

There is, however, no one way of summarising the gendered nature of the colonial experience of East Timorese men and women. In some areas of the country – such as the capital Dili and the coffee-growing areas around Ermera – the presence of the Portuguese was a vivid, daily presence while in more remote areas the colonial administrators would rarely if ever be seen. A male day-labourer at the coffee plantations of the Portuguese SAPT (*Sociedade Agrícola Patria e Trabalho*) had a completely different experience from that of a female Timorese-Chinese shopkeeper in Baucau; a male slave captured in a traditional raid had a completely

different experience from that of the wife of a Portuguese-appointed liurai; the *mestiço* daughter of an exiled Portuguese socialist from that of their elderly male gardener.

### *Indonesian occupation, resistance and modernisation*

Much of the narrative of the independence struggle of the East Timorese focuses both on the men and boys who fought against the Indonesian occupation, be it as members of the Falintil guerrilla or as members of the clandestine resistance. As is evident from the interviews and also the demands put forward by veterans' organisations for compensation and recognition for their role in the struggle, the struggle years are an important source of identity formation in East Timorese society. According to several East Timorese and Indonesian interviewees, the Indonesian occupation years were also more generally marked by a militarisation of society, especially of young men (Abdullah, 2006, Alves, 2004, Rodrigues, 2007). This took on the form of drills in school but also the encouraging of young men to join martial arts groups, the precursors of today's MAGs. The most extreme form of this militarisation of masculinity was visible in the pro-Indonesian militias in 1998-1999.

The Indonesian occupation and the struggle for independence impacted women and girls in a multitude of ways, some of which were similar to the experiences of their male compatriots, and others which were radically different. Women and girls played active roles both in the civilian and military resistance and were often left with added responsibilities and workloads when their husbands, fathers, sons and brothers were killed, arrested or disappeared (Cristalis and Scott, 2005, 27-43; Siapno, 2001, 283-288).

During the conflict, women and girls were more exposed to sexual violence and exploitation than men, though men were also targeted. Sexual violence included sexualised torture of men and women (including inflicting pain on the genitals, rape and castration), sexualised mutilation and public display of castrated corpses, and sexual slavery of civilian women, including forcing wives of suspected independence fighters into marriages with Indonesian soldiers. Rape was used widely as a weapon of war by the Indonesian military and also by the militia groups in 1998/99 and afterwards in the militia-run camps in West Timor (CAVR, 2005, 116-123; Cristalis and Scott, 2005, 96).

The conflict however also transformed gender roles and expectations. Especially in the early years of the struggle when much of the territory and population was under their control, the Falintil guerrilla movement initially sought to promote gender equality based on socialist ideals. This involved campaigning, amongst others, against polygamy and the *barlaki* or dowry system (Hill, 2002, 160-162; Pinto and Jardine, 1997, 47-48).

As the armed resistance came under increased military pressure from the Indonesian armed forces, these educational campaigns ended. Women active in the Falintil as well as the civilian resistance have also often felt that while there was rhetorical support for gender equity within these movements, this did not necessarily translate into actual concrete steps being taken to improve the position of women (Cristalis and Scott, 2005, 73-89).

Indonesian rule also had its more benign and less obvious impacts on gender power relations. East Timorese society became more urbanised and modernised, the role of the Catholic Church grew and access to education became more widespread. Men and women also became more politicised, be it through the struggle for independence or by becoming active in the limited space that was available to civil society organisations in the Suharto years. Interestingly, from a gender perspective, this was also the time when the first women's organisations were established and East Timorese women participated in the 1995 UN Conference on Women in Beijing (Cristalis and Scott, 2005, 48-57).

### *Post-independence*

In spite of the partially emancipating impacts of the years of the independence struggle, increased education opportunities under the Indonesian occupation and increased political and socio-economic opportunities during the UNTAET administration and after independence, women's roles in society still tend to be rather circumscribed (Cristalis and Scott, 2005, 39-42). As in many post-conflict societies, Timor-Leste has seen a kind of roll-back in terms of gender politics, whereby the spaces which had opened up for women and girls during the conflict are diminished again, as I will examine in more detail in the following section.

While women thus tend to be relegated again mostly to the domestic sphere, the public sphere, from politics to street corners, tends to be a male domain, increasingly so after the outbreak of the 2006 crisis. What was often termed the 'youth crisis' was however mostly a

crisis involving young males demanding recognition and a greater say in society. Their sisters, wives and daughters and their respective problems and needs were not visible during the crisis. The ‘securitisation’ of the government’s and international community’s approach to the instability, i.e. the increased reliance on riot police and military forces to deal with gang violence and the mutinying soldiers, has meant that male members of the security forces have been at the forefront of these efforts, reinforcing the homosocial nature of East Timorese political space and legitimising the use of violence as an approach to solving political, social, economic and personal conflicts.

As in other similar societies which are caught in the transition from a rural, tradition-based society to an uncertain, mostly urban modernity, men in Timor-Leste are caught between two types of role expectations. On the one hand, they are bound by tradition to fulfil certain traditional obligations while not being able to reap the benefits of the old system (e.g. respect, sense of belonging, identity). On the other hand, they feel bound by and strive to fill the expectations of an imported modernity, in which they, the men, are the breadwinners and gain prestige through wage labour in the formal economy. Un- and underemployment was repeatedly given as one of the reasons for continuing frustration and violence, both in my interviews and in other studies (see for example Grove et al., 2007; Scarpello, 2007, Streicher, 2008, 28). A further catalyst for frustration has been the immense and highly visible economic discrepancy between the foreign *malae* working for the UN mission or other international organisations and the local population. It was not by mere coincidence that the main target of the December 2002 riot was a supermarket catering mainly to the internationals and that during the street violence in 2006-2008 the four-wheel drives of the internationals made for popular stoning targets.

### *Impact of the international presence*

The international presence in Timor-Leste, be it the UN system or international NGOs, has taken an active stance in terms of seeking to change the gender dynamics in East Timorese society in order to increase gender equity. Together with the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), the UNTAET mission was the first one to have a Gender Affairs Unit and a gender mainstreaming policy. The stated aims of the UNTAET Gender Affairs Unit were:

*‘[...] raising awareness on promoting gender equality in policies, programmes and legislation of the East Timor Transitional Administration. Specific gender orientation sessions have also been conducted for the Peacekeeping Forces, Civilian Police and East Timor Police Service, on cultural awareness of gender roles and the different impact of conflict and post-conflict reconstruction on the women and men of East Timor.’ (UNTAET, 2002)*

The actual impacts of the UN missions and other international actors on gender hierarchies have however been relatively modest, especially outside of urban centres. Though these gender-mainstreaming efforts have created certain spaces for women’s political and socio-economic participation, e.g. in parliament, these spaces remain limited and women remain, for the greater part, marginalised in decision-making processes, including in many tradition-based processes (Cristalis and Scott, 2005, 82-83; Koyama and Myrntinen, 2007, 29-30).

*Figure 21. Portuguese GNR on patrol in Dili (GNR, 2007)*



Although the new spaces created are still relatively small – e.g. in spite of the gender mainstreaming efforts 74 percent of the newly elected parliament members in the first Timorese parliament and 87 percent of local staff of the UNMISSET mission were men – it is not uncommon to encounter the sentiment in Timor-Leste that the immediate post-conflict situation benefited women more than men. Unfortunately, in a climate of un- or under-

employment, this has led to increased tensions between women workers and their husbands who are jealous of the non-traditional role of a female breadwinner, or feel threatened in their masculinity as they are not able to fulfil their perceived duties as men. It is not uncommon to hear men describing the concept of gender equity as being a western import and unsuitable to Timorese culture (Cristalis and Scott, 2005, 3, 162; Dewhurst, 2008, 55; Koyama and Myrntinen, 2007, 40-41)

The international presence has also had an unintended collateral effect in gender relations, and particularly in freedom of sexual expression. A nascent gay, lesbian, bi- and transsexual scene has developed, although still keeping a low profile. Furthermore, the more liberal post-occupation atmosphere and the support of foreign funding agencies allowed new women's and men's movements to emerge. These have taken up themes previously not discussed in society, such as rights of sexual minorities, gender-based violence including human trafficking, and working with marginalised groups such as sex workers (Koyama and Myrntinen, 2007, 43).

The different historical phases which Timorese society has passed through have thus had a range of impacts, often contradictory, on social power relations. Spaces are created and closed, certain groups privileged and others disadvantaged. There is therefore no fixed system that could be labelled 'East Timorese patriarchy,' even though the overall pattern of the 'patchwork' does privilege, as a general trend, men over women and certain groups of men over other men. In the following sections of this Chapter, I will therefore examine some of the practices of patriarchy in more detail. I will first examine the social position of women and the issue of gender-based violence in East Timorese society after which I will look in more detail at the various hierarchies of masculinity and how they are constructed.

## **9.2. Patriarchal practices: Women's position in society and gender-based violence**

Though the norms traditional society and the historical processes outlined above have often created significant spaces for women in East Timorese society, male dominance has been the overall pattern. In this section I will outline some of the processes which maintain male

dominance, firstly through social structures and practices and secondly through gender-based violence.

### 9.2.1. Social position of women

In general, whether in rural or urban Timor-Leste, women and girls tend to be relegated to the domestic rather than the public sphere. From a young age onwards, girls are expected to take part in domestic work and childcare. As girls are not generally expected to take up careers outside of the home, they on average receive 1.5 years less schooling than their male counterparts (UNDP, 2006). School attendance is especially low for low-income families and in rural areas. Women, for the most part, do not participate in the formal economy, with women's average incomes a fraction of male average incomes. However, even women working in the formal economy will mostly be expected to carry out unpaid domestic duties considered women's labour, such as taking care of the household, cooking, raising children, taking care of the elderly and so on.

As Wigglesworth (2007, 56) points out, it is still often frowned upon for young women to engage in social activities, such as in clubs or NGOs, as they are expected to stay at home and help with domestic activities. Young women's lives tend to be controlled by other family members, including the women's brothers. There are also far fewer young women than men migrating into the capital city or into district capitals, let alone going abroad to study (Wigglesworth, 2007, 57). Marriage, especially in rural regions, is still often seen as a matter of practicality rather than romance. A survey on gender-based violence of 254 East Timorese women carried out by the International Rescue Committee found that 56 per cent of the women polled had not wanted to marry their husbands (International Rescue Committee, 2003, 19).

Femininities, like masculinities, are not in equal positions of power in society and women in patriarchal systems will find themselves in sub-ordinate positions not only to men but also other women. As Hanne Hovde Bye (2005, 50) has argued,

*'In a culture such as the East Timorese, there exists a hierarchical division between women within families according to generations and in-laws. Newly-wed women are on the bottom of the hierarchical ladder, and are thus subjected to subordination not*

*only by men, but also by older women. Traditionally, increased status and rewards accrue to women later in life when their sons get married and their new daughters-in-law move into the family. Then they come to dominate the young women, and finally can exercise power over someone. This tradition can result in compliance from the older women to the patriarchal system, since they finally are in a position of power of privilege, while the younger women comply because they know that one day it will be their turn.'*

A striking feature of East Timorese society is the fact that the country has one of the world's highest, if not the highest birth rates. The population is expected to double to over 2 million by the year 2025 (UN, 2006a). The high birth rates are sustained by a wide-spread belief in maternalism, i.e. the perception that women's main role in society is to bear and rear children, in part to 'compensate' for the loss in life incurred by the Indonesian occupation. This is in part due to traditional views of women's role in society, which are not uncommon in subsistence agriculture-based societies, but have also been given strong backing by the highly influential Catholic Church and large sections of the political elite. This was evident in the first half of 2009 in the debate surrounding a new law on abortion, which pitted women's organisations and health NGOs against the Catholic Church and leading politicians. As in other traditionally agricultural societies, child-bearing, child-rearing and the endurance required from women to achieve this in the most difficult of circumstances are also seen as a major source of honour and respectability for women (compare for example Iliffe, 2005, 3).

As mentioned above, the years of Indonesian occupation and resistance both wrought immense hardship on women but also created new social spaces and opportunities. In post-conflict societies, women's experiences from the conflict are often marginalised as the role of women in the struggle is played down in society or even completely forgotten (Farr, 2002, 15-17). Even though women supported the Falintil guerrilla in a number of ways, from logistics to participation in combat, female ex-combatants were sidelined more or less completely in the post-conflict settlement:

*'Male FALINTIL fighters were offered the option of joining the new Timor-Leste Defence Force; those who chose not to, received the equivalent of \$US100 along with language and computer training. Nothing comparable was offered to the women who*

*had occupied support functions throughout the struggle.’ (Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002, 117)*

The violent political crisis which erupted in 2006 has also had different impacts on women and girls. The appearance of the various violent, disaffected groups has reduced women’s and girls’ mobility in Dili and in the IDP camps it is they who are more exposed to sexual abuse and exploitation. While women and girls often suffer disproportionately from the public violence of these groups, and even more so from gender-based violence in the private sphere, women and girls are not merely passive victims. Many women ‘buy into’ the violent enactments of masculinity, be it involuntarily or, in some cases voluntarily. Mothers, sisters, wives and girlfriends provide what can be seen as logistical support for the young men, washing their laundry, cooking them food, caring for the wounds and giving them emotional support. At times, women from the communities have actively and publicly urged their young men on to attack UNPOL in Dili and protected them from police searches (interviews with Samoan and Filipino UNPOL, Dili, November 2008). In a sense, women and girls also form, wittingly or unwittingly, the ‘audience’ for which many of the displays of masculinities is ultimately meant.

### 9.2.2. Gender-based violence (GBV) in Timor-Leste

While the public violence perpetrated by the various violence-prone groups has been seen as the main security challenge in Timor-Leste since the outbreak of the 2006 crisis, a more hidden form of violence, domestic and gender-based violence, has been and continues to be one of the main societal challenges and greatest threats to human security in the country, especially for women and girls.

Though I will focus mostly on GBV against women and girls here as the majority of cases reported in Timor-Leste fall into this category, it is important to note that both men and boys can be victims of GBV. A useful definition is given by Jeanne Ward (2002, 8-9):

*‘Gender-based violence is an umbrella term for any harm that is perpetrated against a person’s will; that has a negative impact on the physical or psychological health, development, and identity of the person; and that is the result of gendered power*

*inequities that exploit distinctions between males and females, among males, and among females.'*

Based on UNPOL/PNTL statistics previous to the 2006 crisis, GBV was the most common recorded crime in Timor-Leste, accounting for example for close to 40 per cent of all cases reported in Dili (UNIFEM, 2003, 3). Other reports place the prevalence at around 25 per cent of the households (Hynes et al. 2004, 294) while in another survey 51 per cent of women stated that in the last 12 months they had felt unsafe in the presence of their partner (International Rescue Committee, 2003, 6).

As several UNPOL and East Timorese civil society activists pointed out in interviews carried out by me on the topic, these statistics show only the tip of the iceberg. GBV is notoriously under-reported the world over and in the PNTL statistics many crimes which should have been classified as GBV were classified in other categories such as assault and battery or murder. There is no central database for GBV, few if any gender disaggregated statistics and a range of different methodologies used to track cases of GBV. Both PNTL and UNPOL lack trained staff to deal with the issue (Koyama and Myrntinen, 2007, 30-31; UNSC, 2008).

A sense of ownership of women by men was and in part still is also reinforced by the *barlaki*-system and is seen as a major factor in domestic GBV, be it either through the sense of the husband 'having bought' the wife or due to frustrations caused by the high *barlaki*-demands of the wife's family (Hovde Bye, 2005, 50-56). Other reasons put forward for the high levels of GBV are a cultural acceptance of violence as a disciplining technique, especially if the female partner is seen as having been negligent in what are perceived as her domestic duties; male frustration; pressures from the extended family; long-term psychological impacts of violent conflict but also behaviour which is seen as almost exclusively male activities and often lead to a loss of money and aggressive frustration – drinking, gambling and cock-fighting (Dewhurst, 2008, 63-65; Hovde Bye, 2005, 53-58, Schroeter-Simao, 2003, 5; Streicher, 2008, 45). However, as the quote by Hovde Bye (2005, 50) above also points out, there can be a certain degree of 'buy-in' into GBV by other, hierarchically dominant women who see the violence as a justifiable disciplining technique.

According to Hicks, rape was traditionally not seen as primarily a crime against the female victim but rather against her husband or, in the case of unmarried women, against her father

or brother (Hicks, 2004, 102). Rape of males is not mentioned. Indeed, the issue of sexual violence perpetrated against men is still very much a taboo topic in East Timorese society, as in many other societies, as it is often discounted or seen as even more shameful than female rape (Abdullah and Myrntinen, 2009, 188; Bourke, 2007, 240-243, Zarkov, 2001, 80-81).

Police attitudes towards GBV have also often been dismissive and the judiciary has often taken a lenient stance towards perpetrators of GBV. A prominent example was the case of former Minister of Health Sergio Lobo who was indicted for repeated cases of domestic violence against his wife was acquitted by the Dili District Court for ‘cultural reasons.’ The Catholic Church has also been reluctant to take a strong position against GBV, stressing the ‘private’ nature of the violence and the need to protect the sanctity of the family (Hovde Bye, 2005, 57). Often, cases of GBV are settled outside of formal court structures, a procedure which tends to disadvantage women (Swaine, 2003, 66-67).

Gender-based violence is often seen as one of the most stark, visible and extreme manifestations of patriarchal power. It can however also be a ‘passing down’ of violence, of subordinated men taking out their frustrations on those in a more vulnerable position than themselves, though it would be wrong to ascribe GBV only to the lower rungs of society, as the case of Minister Lobo shows. In the following section, I will examine the hierarchies between masculinities in Timor-Leste followed by an examination of the intersections between masculinities and violence.

### **9.3. Hierarchies of masculinities**

East Timorese society tends still to relatively strongly and hierarchically stratified, with the general category of the ‘*ema bo’ot*’ (literally ‘big people’) at the top of the social pyramid, wielding power through networks of patronage. Masculine role expectations in Timor-Leste tend to be closely linked to hierarchies based on age, and membership in (and thus loyalty to) various, at times competing, networks of patronage. Furthermore, the young men forming the core of the disaffected groups described here find themselves trying to navigate a complex web of expectations – those of society as well as their own. By joining the disaffected groups, they are on the one hand protesting against traditional, hegemonic expectations of masculinity, but simultaneously creating new forms of hegemonic masculinities, at least on the local level. Through their violent enactments of masculinity they are also evoking images

of warrior masculinity, drawing on traditional Timorese warrior imagery but also on imagery imported from Indonesia and via the globalised media networks.

### 9.3.1. Patrons and clients

One of the features of East Timorese society which is similar to phenomena in Southeast Asia such as Indonesian *bapakism* (Anderson, 2006, 236; Geertz, 1961) or the Melanesian ‘big-man’ phenomenon (Sahlins, 1963, 285) is the patron-clientist system which Gunn and Huang (2006, 123) call *liurai*-ism, adding the significant qualifier that the ‘*liurai*’ may or may not be a genuine *liurai*, i.e. traditional ruler or ‘king’ in the traditional sense (see also section 5.5.).

This can be linked to what is mainly a male problem in the security forces, namely the ties of numerous security force members to either political parties and/or MAGs, RAGs and other potentially violence-prone groups. These include high-ranking members of the security forces, such as a former PNTL district commissioner for Baucau district. This has severely undermined public confidence in the security forces and in their neutrality and furthered impunity, as key patrons of these networks can rely on their support networks to evade justice.

A key reason for this is that like in many other countries with relatively new or weak state institutions, male identity is socially constructed through complex loyalty networks. Rather than merely having a lack of loyalty to the state institution in question, this loyalty competes with other, often stronger ties and obligations which form the basis of society. As Sinclair Dinnen (2000, 8) has argued for a number of Melanesian societies, rather than ‘anarchy,’ i.e. the lack of authority being the driving force behind conflicts, there are ‘many competing sources of authority and allegiance at local levels, with the claims of the state being merely one among many.’ Thus, in a sense especially male identity (and the range of responses available to an individual in any given situation) becomes ‘over-determined’ by obligations to clientist networks of patronage controlled by ‘the big people’ (*ema bo’ot*).

The various networks of patronage and obligation include the extended family/clan, party membership, regional or ‘ethnic’ origin, belonging to a certain neighbourhood, membership in the Catholic Church or other religious organisation, previous or continuing membership in a gang or martial/ritual arts group, membership in a veterans’ organisation or employment in state structures/private enterprises. As these networks of allegiance and loyalty are often

overlapping and contradictory, they pose dilemmas both for the individuals as well as for the networks, including for the security sector institutions.

As an example, one need only imagine a police officer, who as one of the few members of the extended family is working in the formal sector, called into his own neighbourhood to quell a fight between two gangs, one which he or a member of his extended family might be or has been a member of. The situation leads to an immediate conflict of loyalties – and even if the officer in question would be able to overcome his/her connections and obligations to the various networks, the officer's family living in the area would remain vulnerable to intimidation or direct attack. Thus the cleavages caused by these mainly male networks of patronage are reflected at all levels of society, including the security sector. And for often obvious reasons, loyalty to the state institutions, which tends to be seen as booty for the competing networks rather than impartial service providers, often occupy a low priority.

While these clientist networks of loyalty and patronage can be seen as problematic from a 'western' perspective in which they can be seen as undermining the functioning of the state as an even-handed service provider, they can on the other hand also be seen as the traditional basis of society and as a coping mechanism for individuals and groups trying to bridge the gap from being a rural society based on subsistence agriculture to the necessities and demands of a new, 'modern' society (Goddard, 2005, 12).

In looking at patron/client relationships within the violence-prone groups, the two terms which came up in the interviews both with gang, MAG and RAG members and former militia members which need some more exploration are the Indonesian terms '*jago*' and '*anak buah*.'

*Jago* refers both to fighting cocks as well as traditionally to charismatic male gang leaders, mostly involved in illegal or semi-legal activities. More recently, *jago* in colloquial Indonesian has also taken on the meaning of 'macho.' Anderson (2006, 157 and 169) describes the traditional *jago* as he appeared in traditional Javanese society and during the Indonesian revolution. In this description, the *jago* is well-versed in martial arts such as *silat*, surrounded by a 'lore of invulnerability,' and in possession of magic amulets, charms and daggers. He traditionally sports long hair and is dressed in black, 'the colour traditionally

associated with the *jago* in Java and most of the Outer Islands.<sup>63</sup> Henk Schulte Nordholt (2002, 39-40) defined the *jagos* of old as ‘entrepreneurs of violence,’ often putting their skills and manpower to use on behalf of the rural and Dutch colonial elite. In a similar vein, Robert Cribb (1991, 19-20), describes the *jago* as being

*[...] typically an individual who had mastered some skill which enabled him to survive on the fringes of society. Most commonly this skill involved one of the martial arts (silat), which might be as complex as judo or as simple as hitting people over the head. Their repertoire often also included more magical skills. Many jago were magicians (dukun), who could produce charms (jimat) which would bring their bearer strength, safety or success. There were also charms and ritual to increase sexual power and attractiveness [...] particularly common, however, were charms and rituals designed to reinforce skill in the martial arts, and it was these that enabled the jago to maintain the loyalty of his followers.’*

These aspects of *jago*-ism – the non-conformist dress and hair-style, knowledge of martial arts skills and black magic, have also been ingredients of militia, gang, MAG and RAG masculinity.

The second term, *anak buah*, refers to the other side of a patron-client equation, that of the subordinate client:

*‘Anak buah is a key phrase, describing a man or a boy who is in moral, financial and social subordination to another. The relationship of the bapak (father; patron; leader) to the anak buah is a complex one, involving strong mutual claims. The anak buah are expected to give full public support to their bapak, carry out his instructions faithfully, and follow his ideological lead. In return, he is expected to support them financially (at least in part), shelter them, protect them from punishment, and give them moral and intellectual guidance. The relationship normally, though not inevitably, implies a difference in generations between the bapak and the anak buah.’* (Anderson, 2006, 43)

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<sup>63</sup> The ‘Outer Islands’ are commonly regarded as the islands of the Indonesian archipelago outside of the most densely-populated ‘Inner Islands’ of Java, Bali and Madura.

As the term '*bapak*' in Timorese usage tends to refer to Indonesians (including Indonesian 'patrons'), I find it is more useful to use the term *jago* to refer to intra-Timorese patron-client relationships involving a charismatic male leader, e.g. militia or gang leader.

In addition to the gangs and militias, the attraction which the late Major Alfredo Reinado had for many East Timorese youths can be seen as a *jago/anak buah*-phenomenon: the renegade, macho, fugitive from justice with his magical powers (he claims to have made himself invisible to avoid capture by Australian SAS in March 2007) and eye for militarised fashion accessories clearly fits into the classic description of the *jago* while his direct followers and supporters were often referred to in interviews and conversation as his '*anak buah*.'

### 9.3.2. Masculinities and age

In the fragile setting of post-conflict or transitional societies, the volatile 'youth demographic' is often cast as a major potential instability factor either to peace processes or to societal peace as such (see for example Kaplan, 1994 or Koestner and Clark, 2007). 'The Youth,' often taken implicitly to mean young, un- or underemployed men of the lower social strata, is commonly seen as an instability factor, an uncontrollable force, dangerous and brooding, contemptuous of existing mores and lacking respect for elders. A central point I here is that in Timor-Leste the discourse on 'youth' and their problems is increasingly almost implicitly taken to mean young males, with young women fading into the background (Wigglesworth, 2007, 62). Without wanting to continue to marginalise young women in the youth discourse, I shall also be mostly referring to young men and their issues as they do form the focus of my research.

In post-conflict societies, many of these young men will have had combat experience of some sort, possibly may still have access to weapons and may be integrated into clandestine networks of other ex-combatants, often under the leadership of their former mid-level field commanders. While they may have been physically and legally demobilised, their mindsets often are not. The qualities which had been inculcated into them during the years of the conflict such as readiness to use violence, sworn secrecy or risk-prone behaviour are, in the post-conflict context, seen as liabilities. Often especially the lower ranking (and therefore younger) members of fighting forces feel a sense of loss and resentment at the post-conflict

settlement: they may feel that they do not receive the societal recognition they feel they deserve for having sacrificed their lives ‘for the cause,’ there is resentment at their former superiors reaping economic and political benefits from the post-conflict settlement while they themselves feel socio-economically marginalised, or they may feel lost in the mundane drudgery of everyday civilian life, having lost the sense of purpose (and adventure) which they had felt during the struggle (see also Grove et al., 2007; Sousa-Santos, 2009, TLAVA, 2009 and for similar experiences from South Africa, Xaba, 2001).

As de Silva noted for constructions of masculinities in Sinhala society in Sri Lanka,

*[...] While deference is to a code of seniority, senior members will also defer to others defined as somehow ‘more’ senior, even as they receive the deference of those construed as ‘younger’ or ‘social inferiors. Still, a withdrawal of deference creates anxiety and unvoiced rage. It implies an – unspoken – challenge to one’s status. [...] hegemonic masculinity requires constant displays of deference from ‘lesser’ masculinities and femininities, even while it defers to authority or others seen to be ‘more’ senior.’ (de Silva, 2005, 28)*

Similarly, in traditional East Timorese society, more senior members of society have automatically expected deference from younger men and from women. The experience of a quarter century of war, coupled with the twin processes of urbanisation and modernisation, as well as the influx of new, globalised ideals and idols has changed this situation greatly. Many of the young men active in the disaffected groups do still abide by codes of seniority within the organisations and vis-à-vis respected elders, but this is perhaps more out of a sense of propriety (in the case of venerated elders) than an indication of subjugation to a code of seniority. On the contrary, ‘to the man’ all of my interviewees were scathing in their views of the older *ema bo’ot*, who traditionally would have been expecting the deference of the younger ones. Similar sentiments were aired in a survey carried out amongst East Timorese youth by the NGO Plan Timor-Leste (Grove et al., 2007).

In carrying out my research, I was often struck by what kind of people would describe themselves as youth (or *joven* in Tetum). The official cut-off age for youth leaders according to East Timorese law has been set at 35 years of age. In addition to those who were obviously in the ‘youth’ category due to their age, many people in their late 30s even would describe

themselves as ‘youth,’ even if they had steady jobs, families and children. In one of the village-level meetings I participated in, for example, almost two-thirds of the participants described themselves as ‘youths’ even though the average age of the participants was in the mid-30s. Furthermore, the participants who were in their early 20s described themselves *not* as ‘youth’ but as NGO staff, students, members of martial arts groups and, in one case, as a traditional leader.

The three possible explanations that I have been able to come up with for this very expansive definition of youth is that it tends to be either seen as a catch-all category for those who have no other official position in society, such as one defined by formal employment or a leadership position. A second possible explanation is that the usage follows the Indonesian *pemuda*-concept dating back to Indonesian revolution of youth being seen more as a mind-set than a particular age (Anderson, 2006, 1-15). This is also echoed by Wigglesworth (2007, 52), who quotes ‘youth’ leaders in their mid-30s as ‘claim[ing] to have the ‘spirit’ of young people, and see [the youth] organisations as appropriate avenues to contribute to development.’ A similar phenomenon was observed by van der Werf (2008, 9) amongst *raskols* in Papua New Guinea, where ‘the gang members [...] called themselves *yut* (youth), a more general and less stereotypical title for the group that they felt themselves to be a member of.’

A third possible explanation for the peculiar East Timorese definition of youth is to see it in the context of the age pyramid and the division of political power in Timor-Leste. Most of the key positions in society and government remain in the hands of the original founders of the independence movement in 1974-75. The next-younger generation of 30-45 year olds, which includes the likes of Fernando ‘Lasama’ de Araujo and Major Alfredo Reinado, has its way to power blocked by the ‘74/75’-generation which is in a dominant social and political position. Below them, the next generation of 20-somethings is already pushing for jobs and positions while the largest section of society, those below 20, are yet to make their push for the scarce jobs and positions. The expansive youth definition, thus allows those of the older generation to ‘park’ their younger contenders in political posts to represent the youth without giving up their own positions of power.

### 9.3.3. Masculinities and class

Social class plays an important role in the construction of gender roles and expectations. Both the militia violence and the violence perpetrated by the disaffected groups during and after the 2006 crisis has often been cast, at times somewhat pejoratively, as involving mostly socio-economically marginalised young men (e.g. Niner, 2008; Kostner and Clark, 2007, 2).

All of these groups undoubtedly recruit many of their members from what Karl Marx might have termed the *lumpenproletariat*, but they also have strong links to members of the economic and political elite as well as the security forces. Many high profile members of the political elite actively took part in the violence in 1999 and in 2006, urging their supporters to fight and at times publicly posing with weapons themselves, such as in the cases of the murderous militia leader and former district head João Tavares in 1999 or, less nefariously, the Member of Parliament Leandro Isaacs in 2006 who was posing for the media with police-issue assault rifles. Furthermore, as outlined by Scambary (2006 and 2008), many of the leading figures of the various groups have jobs in the formal economy and a good educational background, an observation also made by Goddard (2005, 117-118) and van der Werf (2008, 83) about the *raskol* gangs of Papua New Guinea.

In Timor-Leste, as in other post-colonial and rapidly urbanising countries such as India (Jeffrey, Jeffery and Jeffery, 2008, 201-204) or Zambia (Ferguson, 1999), men often tie their socio-economic expectations to particular visions of modernity. According to Wigglesworth (2007, 53-55), educated youth in rural areas do not consider mainly manual agricultural labour as being appropriate for someone with an education. There are, however, very limited employment opportunities beyond subsistence farming in the rural areas, causing many educated, even minimally educated, youths to seek their fortune in district capitals or in Dili. Expectations for 'proper' jobs, i.e. salaried office jobs rather than what is considered temporary work (e.g. driving a taxi or employment in the informal sector), are often not fulfilled (Ostergaard, 2005, 28). This tends to be more of an issue for young men rather than young women, given the fact that women are often married and have children rather early on in life and are also expected to carry a sizeable part of domestic work from an early age onwards (Wigglesworth, 2007, 57).

As noted in the previous section younger men's possibilities of advancement into social, political and economic positions of power are on the one hand blocked by members of the current ruling elite and on the other hand the 'push' from younger generations is increasing with the extraordinarily high birth rate. Only few new employment opportunities are created in the country and many of those are not necessarily considered desirable by the men. Traditional positions of social prestige important in the rural society of the past are now also inaccessible to them in the new urban environment.

One path, however, which has been open to young men has been to seek to gain social acceptance through enacting a new form of warrior masculinity. In the traditional past, this had been possible through actual tribal warfare while during the independence struggle supporting the resistance or the militias had provided this possibility. During the years of the struggle, the ones who are now the younger members of the groups would have been too young to participate personally in the resistance, though the mid-level members as well as a number of the leaders actively participated in the resistance. All will, however, have been imbued with the tales of heroic warrior masculinity of the *asuwain* of yesteryear, both from the independence struggle and earlier revolts against the Portuguese colonial power, especially by Dom Boaventura. In the post-conflict settlement, however, heroic warrior status is of course far more difficult to achieve. Caught between these unattainable tropes, the disaffected groups offer an avenue for simultaneously asserting one's masculinity as being apart from these two unattainable visions, as a source of identity and respect (if only through instilling fear) and as a way out of the tedium of everyday life.

#### **9.4. Masculinities and violence**

In a number of the primary and background interviews of this research, the issue of violence, especially domestic violence, perpetrated by Timorese men was characterised as being part of a 'Timorese culture of violence.' This is a theme which is also echoed in much of the recent research on Timor-Leste (for example Dewhurst, 2008; Hovde Bye, 2005; Streicher, 2008), though with slightly different stresses on what this culture of violence entails, how it came about and what its impacts are.

A culture of violence refers to a culture in which there is a marked socio-cultural space or acceptance of violence and its use; a space which is created by both men and women, by

acquiescence and active support, by participation and symbolic support. In patriarchal societies, it tends to be men, especially young men, who are often given a certain degree of social licence to address legitimate social, political and economic concerns by violent means, be it through officially sanctioned violence (e.g. conscription-based armed forces) or community-sanctioned violence in the absence of a functioning state apparatus (Brown and Wilson, 2007, 11; Tajima, 2004, 40).

Although cultural factors undoubtedly shape both a society's and an individual's views on the legitimacy of the use of violence, placing the blame for violence solely on culture is an easy, yet unsatisfactory way out. On the one hand, it leaves out other factors, such as power and class relations. On the other hand, it also presupposes a monolithic culture, as Robert Cribb (2002, 234) put it, one which 'prescribes that [people] would behave in a certain way because of their culture, rather than seeing culture as offering a vast repertoire of actions.'

*Figure 22. Young boy with fighting cock, Uato Lari (Henri Myrntinen, 2007)*



Traditionally, expressions of masculinity in Timorese society have been tied to men's potential to use violence, if only at a symbolic level. At puberty, attaining a fighting cock has traditionally been seen as a rite of passage to manhood and as in other societies in the region, cockfighting (*futu manu*) is imbued with gendered and sexualised symbolism and is, in Timor-Leste, considered a male domain (Hicks, 2004, 105-108; on similar phenomena in Bali, see Geertz, 1973, 412-453). It is, however, worth remembering that, as in other cultures in the region, conflict resolution or avoidance rather than violent and public settling of conflicts has been an important part of Timorese culture (Babo-Soares, 2004, 15; Hicks, 2004, 102).

Both Timorese and Indonesian observers have argued that the militarisation of society, and especially of males, during the Suharto dictatorship, both through state indoctrination and the 25 years of war, has created generations of men who feel that violence is the only tool at their disposal to confront and attempt to solve problems, whether of a personal, social or political nature (Interviews Luis Akara, Donatus Marut, and Nuno Rodriguez, all 2004).

A number of researchers have argued that the apparent paradox between the high degree of violence in Indonesia and the premium placed in Indonesian cultures on non-aggressive problem solving can be partially explained by the existence of a 'cultural space' for certain kinds of socially sanctioned violence (See for example Colombijn, 2001, 38-40; Nordholt, 2002, 52-54 and van Dijk, 2002, 277-298). The space is given mainly to young males to use violence against a perceived Other for an often vague notion of common good. This perception of legitimate uses of aggression would definitely cover militia violence, where the common good was the authoritarianism decreed by Indonesian authorities. In the post-conflict period, such violence involves organised groups of males ready to behave aggressively for a group's benefit. While offering us an explanation for public displays of violence, this argument does not, however, deal with the cultural space given to or tolerance of violence in the private sphere, such as domestic violence.

The social, economic and personal dimensions of male violence echo experiences from other countries, such as the examples of Fiji, South Africa, Uganda and Papua New Guinea (Dinnen and Thompson, 2009, 143-176; Monsell-Davies, 2000, 209-222; Salo, 2006; van der Werf, 2008, Yeung, 2009, 390-418) where young males resort to violence in order to gain the prestige or status that they do not seem to be able to gain through other means. This can be

seen as a kind of violent, protest masculinity. Many men, especially the young and the unemployed – it is worth remembering that the average age in Timor-Leste is less than 18 years and unemployment levels are high (UNDP, 2006) – have been drawn to violent enactments of masculinity in the absence of other, less destructive, alternatives.

Traditionally, most of the heroes (*asuwain*) of East Timorese history, especially warriors such as Dom Boaventura, have been men. While women fought in the ranks of the Falintil and supported them logistically, the heroes and icons of Timorese resistance were also male. These were both local, such as Nicolau Lobato, Sahe or Xanana Gusmão, and imported icons seen to be representing the struggle against the Indonesian military occupation, such as ‘Che’ Guevara, Bob Marley or Nelson Mandela.<sup>64</sup> These were idolised in street graffiti and on banners, with the idolisation of imported icons acting as a way of showing clandestine support to the resistance. Bob Marley, for example, was likened to the Falintil guerrillas who also often had long, ‘natty’ hair (Myrntinen, 2005, 240-241). Amongst the young men involved in militias, gangs, MAGs and RAGs, numerous imports from globalised media culture are also visible, with one Dili gang leader going by the *nom de guerre* of Rambo, another by Van Damme and the late Major Alfredo Reinado sporting the ‘xXx’-tattoo of Vin Diesel’s ‘Triple X’ – Hollywood action movie on his neck.

The younger generations, through the years of resistance and the years of instability following independence, have learned the lesson that violence pays, that committing violent acts has become the most effective way of achieving results for what are often legitimate socio-economic or political grievances and for airing one’s frustrations. This legitimisation of violence as a tool to gain respect and to achieve one’s goals is visible both on the streets as well as at home – as shown by the high levels of gender-based violence in the country.

While violent enactments of masculinities open up pathways to various benefits such as social status, economic gains and a relative position of power, it often does not automatically ensure social respectability. On the contrary, the ‘bad boy’ image may well be counter-productive for those seeking a position in society where they will not only be respected because they are feared.

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<sup>64</sup> Xanana Gusmão, for example, was depicted in poses similar to the iconic picture of Che Guevara and likened to Mandela in street graffiti along the lines of ‘Xanana is the Mandela of Timor-Leste’

## 9.5. Conclusions

I began this Chapter by examining what I have chosen to call the patchworks of patriarchy in Timor-Leste and how they have developed through the influences which East Timorese society has been exposed to over the course of its modern history. Colonialism, conflict, modernisation and the influence of the Catholic Church have all shaped the gender role expectations and gendered hierarchies of traditional Timorese societies. I subsequently examined two manifestations of patriarchal practice, the prevalence of a social, economic and political subordination of women in East Timorese society as well as the issue of gender-based violence. Next, I turned to the hierarchies of masculinities and different influences which help determine them in Timor-Leste: complex patron-client relationships, age and class. Lastly, I examined, on a more general level, intersections between masculinities and violence in East Timorese society.

The resulting picture of gender relations in Timor-Leste in which power relations tend to favour men over women, but also consists of men subordinate to other women and men as well as women subordinate to other men and women. These power relations are not static but are negotiated and re-negotiated on a daily basis. Violence, unfortunately, is often a part of the processes of contesting or reaffirming gender hierarchies, be it in the public or domestic sphere. As this violence tends to be, for the greater part, being perpetrated by men, a problematic symbiotic relationship between violence and notions of masculinity becomes visible. Without a reassessment of masculinities and their relationship to violence, it will be difficult for East Timorese society to become a society at peace.

## **10. Violence and masculinities – revisiting the research questions**

The two questions guiding my research were:

1. What is the role of violence in young men's lives in Timor-Leste?
2. What is the role of violence in constructing masculinities in Timor-Leste?

I have sought to find answers to these two questions through the primary and background interviews and contrasting these with theoretical discussions on violence, masculinities and East Timorese society. Before returning to a discussion of the two questions, I will return to the key theoretical concepts of this study – violence and masculinities – and examine my findings from the theoretical perspective.

### **10.1. Revisiting the theoretical frameworks**

In this section, I will return to the key theoretical concepts of violence and masculinities and consider the intersections between them and the results of my field research. I will first look at issues of violence/non-violence, followed by concepts of masculinities and lastly the intersections between masculinities and violence.

#### 10.1.1. Violence

In terms of the conceptualisation of violence, I chose to focus somewhat narrowly on direct violence rather than looking at broader concepts such as structural and cultural violence. Based on my interviews, the understanding of violence by my interviewees was not radically different from the definition I used or theoreticians such as Jeff Hearn (1998) or Jan-Philipp Reemtsma (2008) have used, focusing on various forms of direct physical violence but also psychological coercion. Amongst my respondents, but also in East Timorese society as a whole (Myrntinen, 2008b), there seemed to be a high degree of tolerance for using physical violence in retaliation for real or perceived psychological violence, or 'terror' as it was often

referred to locally.<sup>65</sup> Violence was also regarded as justified for pay back, for disciplining in the domestic sphere or when cast as legitimate self-defence in the public sphere and for addressing social, economic or political grievances (compare also Hovde Bye, 2005; Grove et al., 2007; Streicher, 2008).

With the notable exception of the gang drop-out G18 almost all interviewees refused to take full personal responsibility for their violent acts. Returning to Hearn's (1998, 115-135) classifications of the various ways of talking about violence, the interviewees used different forms of partial denials, excuses and justifications or partial confessions when I addressed their past violent deeds. This denial of personal agency and responsibility means on the one hand that there is an unwillingness to bear the consequences of the violent acts. On the other hand, it however also is an indication that the use of violence was not seen as something that is entirely and always justified – for in that case *ex post facto* legitimisations would not have been necessary.

In a number of the interviews, there was a strong sense of letting bygones be bygones and of stressing one's own position as a victim of circumstance at the time and of societal misunderstanding now. While it is possible to speculate that these discourses are indications of a deeper sense of guilt and denial on the part of the respondents, it is at least as plausible to see these answers as a genuine feeling of victimisation. The process of casting oneself as a victim does not necessarily entail the 'emasculating' impact one might for example expect in western societies. Rather, the position of being a victim legitimises claims for recognition and compensation, as well as legitimising future violence. The discourses of victimhood can also have possibly been an unconscious effort (though in some cases rather obvious effort) on the part of the interviewees to improve their and their respective groups' standing in my eyes.

The violence perpetrated in Timor-Leste by the militias, gangs, MAGs and RAGs, shared some commonalities, as noted by other outside observers, such as Gonzalez Devant (2008, 34) and Streicher (2008, 52-53). Their attacks and public shows of strength incorporated elements of traditional Timorese warfare, as did their recourse to rituals and magic. The traditions of using ritual magic, of sacking and razing of villages as well as the limited

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<sup>65</sup> This psychological 'terror' can be as innocuous (in my eyes) as expressing a party political affiliation not in line with the prevailing majority opinion (as in the case of the 2007 communal violence in Uato Lari (Myrntinen, 2008b) or the perceived association with black magic (as in the case of three 'witch' burnings in Liquiça (Wright, 2009)).

severing of heads and display of bodies – instances of both have also happened during the militia violence in 1998-1999 and the gang-related violence since 2006. The characteristic of ‘cutting down to size,’ fuelled by ‘social jealousy,’ by destroying property rather than usurping the wealth also would fit into these traditional patterns, at least if colonial sources are to be believed (such as de Castro, 1864, 401-404; Studer, 1875). As discussed by Knauff (1999, 144), rumour and fear play a central role in triggering violence in the Highland communities of Papua New Guinea. This was also echoed by Gonzalez Devant (2008, 22-23) and Pedro Rosa Mendes (Interview, 2007) for Dili, with the contemporary addition of telephone text messaging as the medium of transmitting the rumours.

While the killings, mutilations, burnings and other acts of violence were very real, the violence also had elements of spectacle and intimidation which went beyond the actual act itself. As outlined, the spectacular aspect of the violence and its amplification by rumour served to increase its potential to spread real terror amongst the population. In 2006-2008 as well as during the initial phase of the Indonesian-sponsored militia activities in 1998/99, the public spectacle of ‘controlled mayhem,’ of bringing a large, frenzied yet relatively disciplined group of young men displaying their readiness to use violence onto the streets, seemed was a more common occurrence than actually using this potentially violent force. This coincides with Hardtmann’s (2007, 23) assertion that in the occupation of public space in a spectacular manner by young, violence-prone males, the psychological rather than the physical aspects and impacts of the act of occupation gain more importance in terms of gaining control over other members of society.

The use of violence by the various groups can thus also be seen as a kind of return to older, traditional models of Timorese warrior masculinities, albeit mixed in with elements of mostly imported modernity as well as Indonesian, western and other imported East and Southeast Asian cultural elements (e.g. martial arts skills and movies). East Timorese society’s reaction to these neo-traditionalist warrior masculinities has however ranged from ambivalent in the case of the gangs, MAGs and RAGs to mostly negative in the case of the militias, necessitating *ex post facto* explanations and justifications on the side of the perpetrators.

The interviews and my personal observations also opened up more positive perspectives on non-violence, findings which are also underlined by literature on reconciliation processes. An interesting finding from the interviews in this respect was also the way in which practically all

respondents, in spite of their histories of violence, nonetheless cast themselves as being essentially peaceful men. This had the negative aspect of being a statement of denial of personal responsibility, but simultaneously potentially a sentiment upon which a more peaceful East Timorese society could be constructed.

Furthermore, reconciliation processes such as the ones described by Babo-Soares (2004, 15-17) and Loch (2007, 208-209) have been successful in allowing some former militias to return to their former villages in Timor-Leste. As far as the gangs, MAGs and RAGs are concerned, the various schemes and projects organised by the East Timorese government, by the Catholic Church and local and international civil society organisations have played a positive part in reducing street violence and channelling energies into more creative and productive uses. Reconciliation and the re-establishment of peace and justice in East Timorese society have repeatedly come up in my interviews and in other studies on Timor-Leste as the stated goals of many of the perpetrators of violence as well as of society as a whole. Getting there, however, in a way which ties in the perpetrators but neither unduly rewards them for their violence nor ignores their victims is a challenging task.

### 10.1.2. Masculinities

Both the emergence in the militias in 1998-1999 and in the gangs, MAGs and RAGs in the post-independence period and the respective performances of masculinities within them are linked to particular historical, political and social circumstances. Looking more specifically at issue of the construction of masculinities, the participation of East Timorese men in these groups can be seen as an attempt to address collectively the double challenges of finding one's place and space in the patchwork of patriarchies as well as of the challenge of bridging the gap between traditional expectations on masculinity with new, modern ones.

The application of concepts such as hegemonic and protest masculinities which have been mostly developed in and for use in western, industrialised society to Timor-Leste proved challenging at times. Concepts based on, say, working poor males in Australia (e.g. Connell 1999 and 2000) whose main network of loyalty is their loose network of 'mates' do not transfer easily into a situation such as in Timor-Leste where men, socially marginalised or not, owe different degrees of loyalty and patronage to their family, clan, their wife's uncles, their former resistance comrades, their political party, their regional grouping, the Church,

their ancestral spirits and the martial arts group they used to belong to, to name a few of the obligations.

Furthermore, there was very little in the way of other literature on the topic of East Timorese masculinities to contrast my findings with. Based on my interviews and observations, I consider protest and hegemonic masculinities in the Timor-Leste context to be relational and dependent on the frame of reference. While the notions of masculinity embodied by, for example, a given former militia leader or head of a gang may be the hegemonic norm within his immediate surroundings, they might well be seen as being indicative of a kind of protest masculinity by society at large. Hegemony is dependent on the acceptance of dominance by the ones who are in a subordinate position. In the context of an individual *bairo*, the hegemonic position of the masculinities displayed by male gang or martial arts group members may well be unchallenged. However, from the point of view of East Timorese societal norms as a whole as defined by more bourgeois hegemonic cultural norms, the ‘uneducated, unoccupied, unemployed and excluded’ males to use Kostner and Clark’s (2007, 4) terms, present an open challenge and protest.

The relationship between hegemonic and protest masculinities is further complicated by the clientist nature of East Timorese society. As is evident from a number of the interviews, patron-client relationships are important elements in constructing East Timorese masculinities. When one recalls the often scathing critique offered by the interviewees against the *ema bo’ot* and contrasts this with the strength of the patron-client networks which form the basis for the militia-, gang-, MAG- and RAG-groups in which the interviewees live out their masculinities, there is an interesting juxtaposition between hegemonic and protest masculinities. While the gang or militia leader’s hegemonic masculinity is ensured by the buy-in of the clients of his network of patronage into his project of hegemony, a key way of defining this is through his open stance of protest, not just against the particular *ema bo’ot* or their policies, but also to a degree against the social norms they stand for. Paradoxically, this protest and critique does not foreclose the possibility of an existing and working patron-client relationship between the group leader and the very same *ema bo’ot* he is criticising. Hence, protest masculinities, which define themselves in part through their opposition to the hegemonic order, are also tied into this order through these networks of patronage. The projects of constructing hegemonic and protest masculinities are thus complex and often

contradictory processes of negotiating, contesting and re-negotiating power relations in the gendered hierarchies, the patchworks of patriarchies of East Timorese society.

The political project of maintaining East Timorese hegemonic masculinities also requires the buy-in of other subordinate masculinities and femininities, as also noted by Hanne Hovde Bye (2005, 50). To paraphrase Gramsci (1996, 1584), the ruling group needs to reconcile itself in a concrete manner with the general interests of the subordinate groups (i.e. subordinate masculinities and femininities in this case) and that the interaction is a continuous process of forming and overcoming unstable equilibria in which the interests of the ruling group remain prevalent. The political project of hegemonic masculinity therefore provides, as Beasley (2008, 99-100) points out, a way for 'bonding together of different masculinities in a hierarchical order' and works as a legitimising discourse for the existing patriarchal order. Because of this process of establishing hegemony through this buy-in, the complex web (or patchwork) which is the patriarchal order is thus able to accommodate subordinate masculinities femininities without needing to radically change its overall nature.

The relationship between hegemonic and protest masculinities in East Timorese society to violence defies easy delineation as well. Similarly to hegemonic masculinities in Sinhala society described by de Silva (2005, 27), violence is seen as an acceptable recourse and used as a tool for 'carrying out the project of hegemonic masculinity,' the actual use of physical violence, at least in the public sphere, is left to subordinate masculinities. In the East Timorese context, these subordinate men are the militias, gang, MAG- and RAG-members. While they can thus be seen as being 'manipulated' by the elites, they have themselves chosen to let themselves be 'manipulated' in this way and, while doing the violent bidding of the elites, also simultaneously defining themselves against this very elite and its norms as well as trying to build up their own personal economic, social and political power positions along with the social acceptability of their notions of masculinity.

In defining their masculinities, the men interviewed drew, like other members of the groups in questions, on a range of idealised masculine role models, be it the East Timorese *asuwain*, the imported Indonesian *jago*, *pemuda* or *preman*, or imaginary global icons. As discussed previously, militia masculinities, having been actively constructed in a literally militarised fashion over a relatively short time and in a much more closed and repressive environment, did not develop similarly hybrid forms of performing masculinities as the gangs, MAGs and

RAGs have had. Nonetheless, in spite of the vast array of potential idealised role models to choose from, it has tended to be the more violent ones or ones which are seen as signifying resistance against existing social order and the promise of a more just world which get adopted, for example in the names of gangs or the *noms de guerre* of prominent leaders. These hybrid identities creatively combine elements from East Timorese tradition, invented traditions, imported Indonesian and other East and Southeast Asian influences and globalised images of ‘modern’ masculinities.

A relatively minor but interesting detail in the interviews with older gang, MAG and RAG members was the way in which the interviewees, all with impeccable pro-independence credentials and involved in the violent struggles of 1998/99 against the militias saw their erstwhile opponents as men of honour, patriots and unfairly treated victims of big power politics, i.e. echoing the self-description of most of the former militias themselves. This discourse, which I found very puzzling at first, can be seen as being a kind of ‘hero/villain’ discourse in which the two sides consisting of ‘men of action’ recognise, respect and re-affirm each others’ masculinity and legitimacy, underlined by their willingness and ability to use violent force to achieve their goals, with little space for the victims. The political impact of this collusion between the ‘heroes’ and ‘villains’ of Timor-Leste’s recent history has been the sidelining of victims’ concerns, impunity for perpetrators of violence and, to a degree, the welcoming back of former ‘villains’ as respectable political or economic partners to Timor-Leste. The practical and political upshot of this discourse of masculinities is a further entrenchment of impunity for acts of violence and a perpetuation of accepting violence as a legitimate tool for men to achieve personal, political, social or economic goals in East Timorese society.

### 10.1.3. Masculinities, violence, respect and respectability

Three elements which are often seen as being central to notions of masculinity are those of honour, respect, and respectability. In the public discourse, members of the militias as well as of the gangs, MAGs and RAGs have been often labelled as being social outcasts, as young, ‘stupid,’ economically marginalised, frustrated men prone to alcohol abuse and violence. This rhetoric which is common to discourses on youth (or young male) violence in general tends to obscure the high degree of societal complicity in this violence, be it by the local neighbourhoods, family members both male and female or by social, economic and political

elites. A similar observation is made for example by Goddard (2005, 19-22) regarding the public discourse surrounding *raskols* and informal settlements in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. The interviews brought to light a high degree of resentment amongst a majority of the men I interviewed (and echoed generally for East Timorese youth in Grove et al., 2007) against what they feel is an unfair scape-goating by the rest of society.

The responses of the interviewees can also be seen as being used strategically by them in order to increase their social standing both in my eyes as the outside researcher and more generally in the eyes of East Timorese society. One way of interpreting the tendency of most respondents to cast their acts of violence as having been carried out in self-defence, in defence of the community or as part of a political project is to see this less as a form of denial than as a way of maintaining one's honourable reputation intact. The same goes for the former militias stressing the political nature of their decision to join and for the gang, MAG and RAG members who reiterate that their membership is voluntary and is motivated by the positive characteristics of their group. These strategies of maintaining or regaining one's honour and respectability in the light of real or perceived societal scape-goating underlines the importance that the respondents attach to their reputation as a key function of negotiating their place in the gendered hierarchies of East Timorese society.

*Figure 23. A pertinent question. Grafitti in Dili, 2007 (Henri Myrntinen, 2007)*



Jeff Hearn (1998, 144) underlines that the discourses on violence, as much as acts of violence themselves, are linked to gendered hierarchies of power. Denying, down-playing, justifying and excusing violence is however not only about maintaining dominance and power over victims, but is also linked to the societal processes with which the men interviewed seek to position themselves in the patchworks of patriarchy. The denial of having acted with indiscriminate violence is also part of restoring one's masculine honour and respectability, as is the assertion of acting on behalf of a higher cause by being a member of the various groups examined. Furthermore, as Walzer (2005, 13-15) points out, the justifications of violence as being bound to a certain time and space (e.g. by locating it into 'a kill or be killed'-situation, 'a war' or 'a time of madness') allows for a degree of separation of the violent acts perpetrated from the persona of the perpetrator, though as Owusu-Bempah, Kwame and Howitt (2000) rightly point out, one needs to be careful in transposing western psychological concepts into non-western environments.

In terms of the issue of respect, it was obvious that a large number of the respondents from both sets of interviews clearly felt that they were unfairly being given a 'bad name' and thus were not receiving the respect and societal recognition, not to mention compensation they felt entitled to. The young men had thus reached the limits of the kind of respect they could obtain through their (violent) activities in their respective group. As a young male jailed for a gun offence in the USA quoted by Harcourt (2006, 132) put it,

*'Guns get you the wrong kind of respect... Scared respect. That's not the respect you want. People respect you cause they're scared of you, and that's not the kind of respect people want.'*

Given the fact that by the time of my interviews with the ex-militias there was relatively little to gain in West Timor for the former entrepreneurs of violence following the winding down of the conflict by continuing with violent activities, a move into the more civil spheres of state bureaucracy, NGOs and political office was strategically wise, not only in terms of respectability but also economically. Similar considerations have also started to become visible with gang, MAG and RAG leaders in Timor-Leste, who are increasingly also getting involved in legal business activities in Dili or expanding the illicit business-oriented side of their organisations (Scambray, 2009b, 270, TLAVA, 2009, 4).

For less senior members, these avenues were not open. Other strategies which have been utilised instead include the improving of the image of the being or having been a members of these groups by stressing their new-found peacefulness by participating in public peace marches, by recasting themselves as community-oriented groups and by participating in activities for the public good. Especially MAGs and RAGs have been encouraged (including by prominent martial arts movie star and UNICEF goodwill ambassador Jackie Chan on a visit to Timor-Leste in 2008)<sup>66</sup> to use their skills for personal development rather than street fighting (see also Whande and Gallant, 2007). As seen in the case of the construction of Christmas nativity mangers by gangs, MAGs and RAGs, the latter could be seen as being concrete manifestations of another way open to those seeking respectability, namely that visible religious piety. The latter was also employed by several of the ex-militias who stressed their Catholic credentials and by a prominent RAG leader in Dili who in late 2008 made it known that he was seeking to become a priest. Opting for publicly visible piety as a route to regain social respectability by ridding oneself of one's 'bad name' is also mentioned by van der Werf (2008, 41-47) as a strategy employed by repentant *raskols* in Papua New Guinea.

However, the economic sustainability of piecemeal projects such as organising martial arts exhibitions or building Christmas nativity mangers is minimal at best meaning that even with the best of intentions, poverty may limit the ability of men to develop new, peaceful, models of masculinity if they lack the necessary skills and are used to resorting to violence to get their way, as also pointed out by Xaba (2001, 119). This has, for example, been visible in the case of the Atambua killings in 2000 and the food riots which have turned violent in the resettlement camps for the former militia members and their families in 2008 and 2009 (The Jakarta Post, 2008 and 2009). The former militias have not been able to integrate themselves properly into West Timorese society and resort, like in the past, to public demonstrations of violence to press for their demands. On the other hand, men with access to money and power, i.e. former militia and present gang, MAG and RAG leaders are able to move into respectability and economic success even if they do not actually embrace peace, social equity and non-violence. A sustainable solution to the phenomena of the former militias, gangs,

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<sup>66</sup> Jackie Chan's message to 3 500 East Timorese martial arts group members who turned out to see him at the National Stadium in Dili was: "It does not matter what school of martial arts we are from as long as we are united. Training for martial arts helps you to strengthen your eyes, your mind and your body. When you have a good body and mind, let's help people. Don't harm them." (Quoted in UNICEF, 2008) and "If you use martial arts to help somebody, you're the hero. If you use martial arts just on the street to fight somebody, even if you win you're not the hero - you're nobody." (Quoted in Williamson, 2008)

MAGs and RAGs must also include realistic economic opportunities for the men involved – a theme which was raised repeatedly in the interviews.

An interesting and recurring theme was that of victimhood. Whereas in many western gang sub-cultures victimhood can often be seen as being emasculating (see for example Tertilt, 1996), the status of victimhood did not seem to carry any negative, gendered stigma with it for the men I interviewed. In a sense, it was even seen as an empowering status, fanning in the young men a righteous anger upon which they could act with a justified reason as well as feeding their sense of entitlement to compensation and recognition.

For the interviewees the position of the victim of circumstance, fuelled by righteous grievance, was a more favourable way of describing their role as men in East Timorese society than that of casting themselves as (violent) men of action. The status of the aggrieved victim was more respectable than that of the perpetrator of violence and also had the added benefit of putting oneself into a position from which one could demand recognition and compensation from the rest of society. In a similar vein, Brown and Wilson (2007, 13-14) use the term of the ‘illusion of the virtue of the victim’ which ethnic gangs in Jakarta draw upon to justify their violent actions and underline their economic and political claims by casting themselves as wronged victims of outside forces. Both in the cases of the former militia and the gangs, MAGs and RAGs, these claims of victimhood and associated calls for compensation have led to outbursts of public violence and threats thereof.

#### 10.1.4. Masculinities and violence in the post-conflict, post-colonial context

As mentioned throughout the text, the masculinities of the men at the centre of this study need to be seen in the context of the post-colonial and post-conflict moment in Timor-Leste. Through their enactments of masculinity, the men in question seek to find their place in the patchwork of patriarchies they live in, mixing modernity with tradition, reinforcing and challenging existing norms of masculinities. A comparison with three case studies from other post-conflict and post-colonial societies helps in the understanding of how these challenges to the existing norms were dealt with in East Timorese society. In the cases of South Africa (Xaba, 2001), Sri Lanka (de Silva, 2005) and Uganda (Dolan, 2001 and 2002), challenges to the current patriarchal order by young men were met with extreme violence. In South Africa, extra-judicial killings by police and vigilantes targeted former combatants who were unable to

find themselves an acceptable role in the post-conflict order. In Sri Lanka, real and perceived challenges to hegemonic masculinities by student activists were met with torture and death. In Uganda, on the other hand, the militarisation of society both underpinned the strength of and perpetuated notions of hegemonic masculinity while simultaneously undermining any possibilities of fulfilling these ideals.

While the situation in Timor-Leste bears similarities to all three cases, there are also important differences. The obvious similarity to the case studies outlined by Xaba (2001) is the difficulty which the former ‘young lions’ in South Africa and *clandestinos* in Timor-Leste have had in de-mobilising their ‘struggle masculinity’ and finding their place in the post-conflict order. In Sri Lanka as in Timor-Leste, traditional notions of deference to age and social class are increasingly being eroded by economic, social and political changes, while, as de Silva (2005) asserts, notions of respectability and its opposite, shame, remain central in defining hierarchical power relations. Dolan’s (2001 and 2002) concept of ‘collapsing masculinities’ also reverberates strongly in Timor-Leste, where conflict has served to strengthen violent models of masculinity and reduced men’s de facto possibilities to live up to normative notions of masculinity.

A key difference between Timor-Leste and the three other cases has been however that though the challenges to authority have been met with force to a degree, no similar use of death squads, extra-judicial killings, torture or male-to-male rape has been made in Timor-Leste as in the three other cases.<sup>67</sup> Rather, strategies of co-optation and impunity for past violence have been employed to try and bring the challengers back into the fold. As resorting to violence in Timor-Leste has nonetheless been insufficient for the militia, gang, MAG and RAG members to gain full social respectability, other strategies have to be employed. For some, especially the more senior members of the various groups, this has often meant getting involved in what could be broadly termed the political sphere. This has included becoming active in organisations seeking to improve the socio-economic position of the members of the peer group, running for a political office, supporting electoral campaigns of prominent political figures or assuming a position as an up-and-coming youth leader. The latter option was openly and actively supported by international donor organisations seeking to find

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<sup>67</sup> The East Timorese security forces have, however, been repeatedly accused of using excessive physical violence against ‘deviant-looking’ young men who they see as ‘trouble-makers’ – including members of gangs, MAGs and RAGs but also non-members (see for example Asosiasaun HAK, 2010)

peaceful solutions to the 2006-2008 violence by integrating the leaders of the various groups into political structures and dialogue processes.

## **10.2. Revisiting the research questions**

The two research questions of my study raise the issue of two linked yet different interplays of violence and masculinities:

1. What is the role of violence in young men's lives in Timor-Leste?
2. What is the role of violence in constructing masculinities in Timor-Leste?

Though the questions are relatively straight-forward, they defied simple answers.

### 10.2.1. Role of violence in young men's lives

All of the men interviewed have both a personal history of violence as well as been exposed collectively as members of East Timorese society to repeated, extreme bouts of violence, such as the Indonesian occupation of the country, the militia violence and displacement in 1999 and the violent political crisis of 2006-2008.

However, it should be recalled that the interviewees themselves have all participated actively in at least one of these violent conflicts as agents of politically or otherwise motivated public violence. At one level or another, they were all both victims and perpetrators of violence. It should also be noted, at the risk of repetition, that the majority of East Timorese men did not choose the same path of becoming active members of the militias, MAGs, RAGs or gangs in spite of having lived under the same military occupation and lived through the same violent crises. The men interviewed on the other hand did choose this path.

As argued for example by Sarah Dewhurst (2008), Hanne Hovde Bye (2005) or, slightly differently, by Ruth Streicher (2008), exposure to and use of violence have become normalised in East Timorese culture and society to a degree where it is an integral, even invisible part of everyday life. Based on my personal observations and also the field research interviews, violence in the way I have defined it for the purposes of this thesis, is still

recognised in East Timorese society as being violence, also by the past perpetrators who I interviewed. Though no interviewees boasted of their violent exploits and in fact tried rather to down-play them, there was also, with the exception of G18, little sense that any of the interviewees would categorically *not* resort to violence as a tool to address grievances, be they in the public or private sphere.

The experience of violence has been an integral part of the formative years of the men interviewed and in a number of the cases interviewed pre-determined their course in life. For some, especially interviewee M3 but also to a lesser gang drop-out G18, the experience has been extremely traumatic. For others, though, the membership in a group that has participated in violent activities has seemingly not caused any great moral or emotional qualms – or if it has, this was kept from me during the interviews.

The personal histories of Eurico Guterres and Alfredo Reinado, respectively, give insights in an exemplary fashion into how the violence of the Indonesian occupation and war of resistance can shape the trajectories of young men caught up in the conflict. The traumatic experiences of the conflict had driven both to join the clandestine front, both had found ‘father figures’ in the Indonesian military (though Alfredo Reinado escaped from his more literal father figure who adopted him) and both ended up in uniform and as masculine role models for other young men in their respective eras. Both sought to reach political goals through their violence, sought national and international media attention and seemed to enjoy the spectacle of their own notoriety, bravado and fame. Neither, however, was able to turn their flashy, militarised, protest masculinity into a more respectable form of masculinity – though Eurico Guterres might yet be able to. A number of the various elements of the two personal biographies of two prominent men of violent action are reflected in the lives of former militias, MAG, RAG and gang members – histories of violence, displacement, rebellion against but also participation in networks of male patronage.

The men who have in the past or are currently involved with the various groups examined in this study have used violence to for their own gain in different ways but are also trapped by this history of violence. This is most concretely visible in the case of the former militias, many of whom physically remain in resettlement camps constructed for them in the aftermath of their exodus to West Timor in 1999 and identify themselves through their ex-militia identity. As a result of their past violent actions, they are also fearful of returning to Timor-

Leste, a fact which a number of the interviewees lamented without visibly giving any further thought as to why it is that East Timorese society might be unwilling to take them back with open arms. For the gang, MAG and RAG members during the period of primary field research in 2007, violence remained very much a part of everyday life. However, during my visits to Dili in 2008 and 2009, many of the groups and individuals were seeking to clear their name in the eyes of society. Nonetheless, violence remained a legitimate recourse in their eyes, and a masculine recourse at that, as public violence remains very much a male domain in Timor-Leste.

### 10.2.2. Role of violence in constructing masculinities

When considering the categorisations of masculinities I have used in my thesis, those of hegemonic, protest, warrior and militarised masculinities, the relationship to violence is different for each. All four categorisations can but do not necessarily have to involve the participation in violent acts, though especially for warrior and militarised masculinities it often is an intrinsic element.

Here it is important to note that violence played a different role in the construction and enactment of masculinities for the militias than for the other groups examined in this thesis. Because of their role as armed proxies for the Indonesian security forces, who trained, indoctrinated and armed them with the explicit purpose of committing acts of violence, their militarised masculinity was much more inherently violent than the other groups examined. Though the degree of violence used by gangs, MAGs and RAGs is on a very different scale from the militias, it nonetheless plays a central role in their activities as well. In all groups, aspects of traditional East Timorese warrior masculinities, whether they are real or invented traditions, are combined with imported ideals and aspects of militarised masculinities.

The relationship between hegemonic and protest masculinities is complex, fluid and often contradictory. Violence plays a role in renegotiating these relations, be it to strengthen them, e.g. in the case of a well-established patron hiring a gang to do his bidding, or undermine them, e.g. when a group decides to 'cut down to size' a economically better-off member of society by burning down his house and forcing him to flee into an IDP camp. In the East Timorese context, the relationships between men are often defined by a complex web of loyalties and dependencies which can act to quell or lead to violent conflict. The relationships

between masculinities, ideals of honour, respect and respectability and the use of violence in the public sphere remain ambiguous and complex.

However, as the interviews underline, violence is not always seen as a sufficient or legitimate enough tool for renegotiating power relations. Resorting to violence does not automatically lead to the wished-for status of respect and respectability and needs to be justified through various strategies of legitimisation.

Through the acts of violence, the men sought to renegotiate their position in society by addressing what they felt were legitimate political, social or economic goals. In this, they also showed active agency. However, when it came to revisiting the acts of violence in the interviews, this active agency was denied. Instead, powers beyond the control of the individual male were blamed for the violence.

### **10.3. Revisiting the methodological and ethical challenges**

In Chapter 4, I outlined some of the numerous practical, theoretical and ethical challenges of a university-educated, middle-class, European male carrying out research on socially marginalised men in a post-colonial, post-conflict society – men who either had been or were at the time of the research still associated with groups carrying out illicit, often violent activities. While I feel that I was able to address some of the challenges, especially the more practical ones, to what I felt comfortable with as being an acceptable degree, some challenges I needed to accept as insurmountable. In the latter category fall, for example, my relative position of privilege or my position as an ‘involved outsider’ rather than as an ‘insider’ in East Timorese society – let alone an insider in the militias, gangs, MAGs or RAGs. Nor did I gain ‘deep knowledge’ as to what it means to commit the acts of violence which the men had participated in. Also, though the process of conducting this research has naturally had an impact on the way I now view the world as opposed to when I embarked on this project, many of my core values remain in place (or have indeed been strengthened), such as non-violence, gender equity and tolerance. From my interviews and my experience in living through situations in Timor-Leste defined by the violence of the militias, gangs, MAGs and RAGs, I am not entirely certain that my core values were fully shared by all of my respondents – though this of course is a personal value judgement based on my very personal experiences.

Of perhaps more serious academic concern is that much of the research presented here rests to a great part on my own personal observations and interpretations, with little critical interaction with other similar research on the topic. The reason for this is relatively simple – there have not been very many studies on the whole on masculinities in Timor-Leste, on gender and violence in Timor-Leste (with the notable exception of research on GBV), nor on the militias, gangs, MAGs or RAGs. While studies on comparable phenomena in other countries have given me valuable insights, they are of course not translatable one-to-one to the very specific social, cultural, political and historical moment in Timor-Leste which I have been examining. I therefore sincerely hope that this is one particular concern I will be able to address better in the future when more studies become available and when there is more of a social and academic debate on these issues. I would hope for this research to contribute to that debate and also hope that this debate will increasingly involve more East Timorese in addition to outside observers such as myself.

#### **10.4. Conclusions**

In this chapter, I have brought together various parts of the thesis, combining my field research with background interviews, literature on the topic and theoretical analysis. The result is a picture of the intricate and often contradictory links between acts of violence and constructions of masculinities.

While the militias were clearly tied to a historical political project (i.e. preventing Timor-Leste's independence from Indonesia, the other groups examined in this thesis are a more complex phenomenon. However, rather than see the groups discussed as harbingers of the 'coming anarchy' of Robert Kaplan (1994) or even as the 'mutated urban insurgency' as which Howison (2007) describes the gangs of Dili, or as merely the product of the social and economic marginalisation of young men in the outer districts of Dili, I view the groups as a complex, gendered social phenomenon. The creation of the gangs, MAGs and RAGs, and to an extent also the membership in the militias, can be seen as a way of coping with the bind in which many young men in post-colonial and post-conflict countries find themselves in: they are unable to go back to traditional village life, yet are unable to gain a foothold in urban modernity. By resorting to violence, perceived feelings of marginalisation and powerless can be overcome and their demands will be heard. The various groups have also become new power structures which combine the old (such as rituals, magic, copying the old gendered

hierarchical structures with *liurai* leaders, *matan do'ok* ritual specialists, and *asuwain* warriors), with the promise of the new (globalised icons, access to modern material wealth, political and social status). They draw in part on old networks of loyalties and create new ones in their attempt to carve out spaces and positions in the gendered hierarchy of East Timorese society.

The gangs, militias, MAGs and RAGs were vehicles for addressing grievances, and violence was often the tool. While viewed by society as marginalised, dangerous and misguided, the interviewees cast their membership in a more positive light, be it by stressing the political nature of their project, their patriotism, the protection they provide to their neighbourhood, their purported goals of peace and justice or the maintaining of Timorese rituals and traditions. Various justifications for use of violence were given by the interviewees but one's own responsibility and agency were mostly denied. In their attempts to find and improve their respective places in the gendered, patriarchal social, economic and political order of Timor-Leste, resorting to violence was seen a legitimate choice, though if only partially so.

The almost total absence of any discourse questioning the legitimacy of their resorting to violence does not bode well for future efforts to build a more peaceful, just and equitable East Timorese society. Given the fact that both public and private violence in Timor-Leste tend to be perpetrated by men, the nexus between masculine roles and role expectations and use of violence has to be problematised. As mentioned previously, this does not mean to say that all or even the majority of East Timorese men are violent. Furthermore, violence, as also stated repeatedly, is a choice. Given the entrenched nature of masculine role expectations and the challenges of poverty, continuing conflict, and the frustrations of patriarchal domination and marginalisation, not succumbing to the lure of joining violent pressure groups is not an easy task for young men growing up in Timor-Leste. As the case of interviewee G18 shows, it is possible for the men to escape the pull of these groups and try to redefine their masculinities in non-violent ways. However, as the case also shows, it is not a simple process and requires support.

The examples of the men examined in this thesis highlight the on the one hand the challenges presented by persistent violent notions of masculinities to the creation of more peaceful and just societies in the aftermaths of conflicts but on the other hand also the difficulties of developing new, more peaceful forms of masculinities in the face of the continuing impacts of

a history of conflict, poverty, marginalisation and rigid communal gender norms and expectations. In addition to the respective historical and political reasons which led to their emergence, membership in the militias, gangs, MAGs and RAGs can also be seen as a communal attempt by East Timorese men to renegotiate their position in the gendered hierarchy of East Timorese society, including by resorting to violence. Furthermore, the hybridisation of different local, Indonesian and globalised models of masculinity in these groups and the affirmation of identity gained through membership provide a new, 'third' way of being men in a society where the traditional avenues to respected masculinity are no longer available and the 'modern' masculinities are not accessible.

## **11. Outlook – Overcoming the Histories of Violence and States of Denial?**

The recent history of Timor-Leste has been marked by extreme levels of violence. From the beginning of the decolonisation process which started with the 1974 Carnation Revolution, the country experienced a brief civil war, an Indonesian invasion and brutal military occupation which led to upwards of 100 000 deaths as well as another massive bout of violence during the 1999 referendum on independence. The independence years have been marked by communal tensions and sectarian violence as well as widespread acts of violence perpetrated by disaffected men who have joined various kinds of groups such as martial and ritual arts groups as well as gangs. The violence has led to upwards of a hundred deaths and to the temporary displacement of over a tenth of the nation's population. Meanwhile, levels of gender-based violence remain high, mainly perpetrated by men against women. Thus one of the unsurprising findings of this thesis is that there is a problematic and symbiotic relationship between violence and masculine role models and expectations in East Timorese society, both in the private and public spheres.

The men interviewed for this thesis have all been marked by this history of violence, but they themselves also all have their own histories of violence. As members of militia groups, MAGs, RAGs and gangs, as well as in some cases as part of the clandestine resistance front, they have also played active roles in perpetrating this violence. At the same time, they also for the most part remained, to some degree, in a state of denial in the interviews regarding their role in the violence. The denial is echoed on the state levels, where both the Indonesian and East Timorese authorities have been conspicuously reluctant to address past violence or persecute those responsible, be it former members of the militias, their backers in the Indonesian security forces or key perpetrators of the 2006 crisis. Though in some aspects the various groups examined in this study are similar, it should be remembered that the militias stand apart from the other groups in as much as they were specifically set up and trained by the Indonesian security forces to commit acts of violence against unarmed civilians. For the other groups, acts of violence have been part of their activities but not the central focus.

In my research questions, I asked what role violence played in the lives of the men interviewed and how violence plays a role in constructing masculinities. I have approached these questions by drawing on theories from peace studies and gender studies. The basic

starting points of my research were that neither violence nor the ways in which men enact their masculinities are somehow biologically or culturally pre-determined. Resorting to violence is always a choice and enactments of masculinity are products of the social and cultural framework in which they occur at a given time. Therefore, at the risk of repetition, it needs to be pointed out that there is nothing intrinsically East Timorese or intrinsically male about this correlation, although through the choice of my topic and my focus groups, consisting as they are of East Timorese men with histories of violence, drawing this simplified correlation might seem vindicated. It is worth remembering that the majority of East Timorese have not joined groups such as the ones examined in this thesis and of those who have joined, only a minority have committed acts of violence.

The answers to the research questions are neither straight-forward nor clear. The violence of the conflicts in Timor-Leste has shaped the men examined in this study and the society in which they live. Violence has come to be seen in East Timorese society as a partially legitimate tool, especially for men, to address real or perceived social, political and economic grievances. This cultural space is maintained by men and women, actively and passively. The partial nature of this legitimacy of violence is however reflected in the ways in which the interviewees sought to justify or relativise their violent actions, distance themselves from the violence and counter social perceptions of the various groups being little more than violent, uneducated thugs. For the men interviewed, displays of violence have become part of their repertoire of enacting their masculinities. Legitimisations such as political reasons, self-defence and various forms of *force majeure* were given in the interviews to justify resorting to violence but also in an attempt to reclaim their masculine honour and respectability in the eyes of society.

Many of the men tended to cast themselves as victims of circumstance rather than as active agents. The status of victim was thus seen as more respectable than that of a man of violent action – and had the benefit of putting one into a position to demand compensation and recognition from society. The men also attempted, in different ways, to dispel common stereotypes of militia, gang, MAG and RAG members as being from the uneducated, unemployed, and, in the context of the stereotype, ‘inherently’ violent margins of society. Seen from a point of view of enactments of masculinity, the participation of the men in these groups showed up the constant tension between hegemonic masculinities, both as a social and political project and in the sense of dominant versions of manhood, and protest masculinities,

mediated through the patron-client relationships which are central to East Timorese notions of manhood. The attitude to violence remains ambiguous, seen at times as a legitimate recourse and at others as dishonourable, necessitating strategies of justification. The relationship between violence and masculinities is not a simple, linear one but rather a complex interplay in which the men seek to find their place in the gendered East Timorese social order and gain respect and respectability.

While the cultural background of the actors does play an important role in helping to understand their actions in given situations, one should approach cultural analyses with a certain caution. Cultural backgrounds offer the actors a certain familiar script or repertoire of actions but do not predetermine the course of action – and certainly do not absolve the actors from their responsibility for choosing a particular course of action. Some ‘cultural explanations’ for the violence are often little more than self-serving excuses which can be employed to deny personal responsibility.

Drawing on studies from other post-colonial and post-conflict societies, I argue that in Timor-Leste society is largely defined by a shifting and constantly renegotiated ‘patchwork of patriarchies,’ influenced amongst other things by traditional cultural values, the long-term impacts of the colonial experiences and of violent conflict, the modernisation project of the Indonesian government, imported media influences and Timor-Leste’s marginal economic and political position in the global order. Though economic and social marginalisation of young men was seen as a general contributing factor to the violence, it was not stated by any of the interviewees as a primary reason for themselves to join the groups. It is in this web of gendered political, social and economic hierarchies that the hegemonic, protest, and militarised masculinities of the men were and are enacted.

I have argued that the militias, gangs, martial and ritual arts groups have been used by the men involved in part as an attempt to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity in which the men find themselves, being neither able (or willing) to return to the traditional ways of ‘being men’ nor being able to fulfil their expectations of what it means to be a ‘modern man.’ The various groups give a sense of belonging and purpose for the men and help them in creating political, social and to a certain degree economic spaces for themselves. In the groups, traditional elements such as warrior traditions, magic, ritual and patron-client relationships are mixed with modern, mostly imported, elements and imagery, creating hybrid

identities. Given their primary role as proxies of the Indonesian security forces, these other aspects were the least pronounced in the militia groups but nonetheless present. Membership in the groups afforded an answer to two key challenges faced by the young men – defining their place in the gendered hierarchical order of Timor-Leste and defining masculine identities beyond traditional and ‘modern’ notions of masculinity. Violence, however, remained a key feature in these hybrid enactments of masculinities.

The challenge for the future of East Timorese society will be whether or not this skill displayed by the young men in forming their identities by hybridising different influences in post-colonial, post-conflict society can be put to use more constructively to create new, creative, non-violent models of being men. Can positive elements of the various influences, be it for example the centrality of establishing harmony in East Timorese culture, the sense of community and belonging within the groups, the importance of balancing mental and physical strength stressed in martial and ritual arts or the advancement of gender equity, be brought together in these new enactments of non-violent masculinities? The answer lies and must lie with East Timorese men and boys themselves, as well as with their mothers, sisters, daughters, lovers, and wives.

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## Appendix 1 – List of Primary interviews

<b>Militia Interviews</b>				
<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Location<sup>68</sup></b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Age at the time of the interview</b>
M1	30.11.2007	Atambua, NTT	Presumed mid-to low-level member	Mid-30s
M2	30.11.2007	Atambua, NTT	High-level former <i>Aitarak</i> member	Mid-40s
M3	30.11.2007	Atambua, NTT	Low-level militia ‘hang-around’	Late 20s
M4	30.11.2007	Atambua, NTT	Former policeman, off-duty militia supporter	Late 30s
M5	01.12.2007	Besikama, NTT	Presumed mid-to low-level member	Mid 40s
M6	01.12.2007	Besikama, NTT	Presumed mid-to low-level member	Mid 50s
M7	01.12.2007	Besikama, NTT	Presumed mid-to low-level member	Late 40s
M8	16.07.2009	Atambua, NTT	Mid-level member	Late 30s

<sup>68</sup> NTT: Indonesian province of Nusa Tenggara Timur, East Nusa Tenggara

M9	19.07.2009	Kupang, NTT	High-level member	Late 30s
M10	20.07.2009	Oebelo, NTT	Mid-level member	Mid 30s
<b>Gang, MAG and RAG interviews</b>				
<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Age at the time of the interview</b>
G1	19.04.2007	Dili	High-level RAG member (7-7)	Late-50s to early 60s
G2	03.11. and 13.11.2007	Dili	High-level gang member	Late 30s
G3	05.11.2007	Dili	Senior member, small local gang	Late teens
G4	05.11.2007	Dili	Senior member, small local gang	Early 20s
G5	05.11.2007	Dili	Senior member, small local gang	Early 20s
G6	05.11.2007	Dili	Senior member, small local gang	Late teens-Early 20s
G7	08.11.2007	Baucau	Senior member, MAG (PSHT)	Early 30s
G8	08.11.2007	Baucau	Mid-level member, MAG (PSHT)	Mid 20s
G9	08.11.2007	Baucau	Mid-level member, MAG (PSHT)	Mid 20s
G10	09.11.2007	Uato Lari, Viqueque District	Mid-level member, MAG or RAG	Mid 20s

G11	09.11.2007	Uato Lari, Viqueque District	Mid-level member, MAG	Mid 20s
G12	09.11.2007	Uato Lari, Viqueque District	Mid-level member, MAG	Early 20s
G13	13.11.2007	Dili, Jardim IDP camp	Mid-level member of gang, MAG or RAG, affiliation unknown	Late 20s
G14	13.11.2007	Dili, Jardim IDP camp	Mid-level member of gang, MAG or RAG, affiliation unknown	Late 20s
G15	13.11.2007	Dili, Jardim IDP camp	Mid-level member of gang, MAG or RAG, affiliation unknown	Late 20s-early 30s
G16	15.11.2007	Zumalai, Cova Lima District	Mid-level member of MAG (Kung Fu Master)	Early 20s
G17	15.11.2007	Zumalai, Cova Lima District	Mid-level member of MAG (Kung Fu Master)	Early 20s
G18	18.11.2007	Dili	Former medium-high level gang member, affiliation	Early 20s

			unknown	
G19	21.11.2007	Dili	High-level member, RAG (KORK)	Late 20s
G20	22.11.2007	Dili	High-level member, RAG (Colimau 2000)	Late 30s
G21	22.11.2007	Dili	High-level member, MAG (Kera Sakti)	Early 40s
G22	9.12.2008	Dili	Mid-level member, gang (PLUR)	Early 20s
G23	9.12.2008	Dili	Mid-level member, gang (PLUR)	Early 20s
G24	9.12.2008	Dili	Low-level member, gang (PLUR)	Late teens
G25	11.12.2008	Dili	High-level member, local gang	Late 20s
G26	14.12.2008	Dili	Mid-level member, local gang (Potlot)	
G27	14.12.2008	Dili	Mid-level member, local gang (Potlot)	
G28	14.12.2008	Dili	Mid-level member, local gang (Potlot)	

## **Appendix 2 – Selected Background Interviews**

Abdullah, Saleh, 2004. Researcher, Indonesian Society for Social Transformation (INSIST), INSIST, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 30.05.2004

Akara, Luis, 2004. Researcher, Associação Mane Contra Violencia (Association of Men Against Violence), Dili, 28.04.2004,

Alves, Ubalda, 2004. Chairperson, Fokupers (a prominent local women's organisation), Fokupers office, Dili, 06.05.2004.

Austin, Kathi, 2007. Political Affairs Officer, UNMIT, Obrigado Barracks, Dili, 02.11.2007

Babo, Danilo, 2007. Project Officer, SCCP Ermera, Renetil Office, Dili, 07.11.2007

Barradas, Jorge, 2007. Commander, GNR Contingent of UNPOL, GNR Barracks, Dili, 20.06.2007

Belo, Elizabeth, 2005. Researcher, Alola Foundation, Dili, 07.11.2005

Belo, Francisco, 2007. Co-Ordinator, Support for Civil Society Conflict Prevention Platform (SCCP) Project, Renetil Office, Dili, 17.04.2007

Bere, Maria Agnes, 2008. Project Co-Ordinator, Women's Access to Justice Programme, Judicial Sector Monitoring Programme (JSMP), Berlin, 15.09.2008

Bradford, Lt.-Col., 2004. Australian PKF spokesperson, UNMISSET PKF Headquarters, Dili, 26.04.2004.

Carvalho Cabral, Antonio, 2007. Community representative, Jardim IDP camp, Dili, 19.11.2007

Da Costa, Francisco, 2007. Project Co-ordinator, Foundasaun Belun, Dili, 23.11.2007

Da Silva, Antonio, 2007. UNPOL Dili District Commander, Hotel Timor, Dili, 20.06.2007

Do Rego Guterres, Sebastião, 2008. National Adviser, Ministériu Solidariedade Sosiál, Dili, 08.12.2008

Esteves, Luis, 2008. IDP Support Project Co-Ordinator of IOM, IOM Office, Dili, 05.12.2008

Goto, Lt., 2004. Japanese PKF spokesperson, Japanese PKF Headquarters, Taci Tolo, 28.04.2004.

Grainger, Alex, 2008. Researcher, London School of Economics, LSE, London, 10.09.2008

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Loch, Alexander, 2007. Researcher, InWent, DOTG Conference, Cologne, 09.-10.02.2008

Marut, Donatus, 2004. Director, INSIST, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 20.03.2004,

Maupelo, João, 2007. Project Officer, SCCP Maliana, Renetil Office, Dili, 08.11.2007

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Negrão, Sara, 2006. Project Co-Ordinator, CARE Timor-Leste, Dili Beach Café, 26.10.2006

Oliveira, José Luis, 2007. Chairperson, Asosiasaun HAK, Dili, 24.11.2007

Pires, Milena, 2005, Programme Director, UNIFEM Timor-Leste, 07.11.2005

Prüller, Vanessa, 2007. Researcher, GTZ Timor-Leste/University of Passau, Dili Beach Café, Dili, 15.06.2007

Reefke, Lisa, 2004. Project Co-Ordinator, RESPECT, UNDP Office, Dili, 03.05.2004.

Rees, Edward, 2007. Project Co-Ordinator, Peace Dividend Trust Fund, Hotel Timor, 18.04.2007

Rodriguez, Nuno, 2004. 06.05.2004, Sahe Institute, Dili, East Timor

Scambary, James, 2008. Researcher, University of Melbourne, Hotel Turismo, 03.12.2008

Schlicher, Monika, 2008. Researcher, Watch Indonesia!, Berlin,

Soares, Clementina, 2007. IOM Community Relations Officer, Dili, 13.11.2007.

Streicher, Ruth, 2007. Researcher, Freie Universität Berlin, Hotel Timor, Dili, 05.11.2007

Trindade, José, 2007. Researcher, GTZ, Hotel Timor, Dili, 28.10.2007

Tuft, Eva Irene, 2008. Political Secretary of Norwegian Embassy, Dili, 06.12.2008.

Wilson, Ian, 2008. Researcher, Murdoch University, Jakarta, 27.12.2008

# Appendix 3 – UKZN Ethical Clearance Form

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

## ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPLICATION FORM

Aug 2005

(HUMAN AND SOCIAL SCIENCES)

Inquiries:

Ms Phumelele Ximba

Tel: 260 3587

Email: [ximbap@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ximbap@ukzn.ac.za)

PLEASE NOTE THAT THE FORM MUST BE COMPLETED IN TYPED SCRIPT; HANDWRITTEN APPLICATIONS WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED

### SECTION 1: PERSONAL DETAILS

- 1.1 Full Name & Surname of Applicant : \_\_\_\_\_
- 1.2 Title (Ms/ Mr/ Mrs/ Dr/ Professor etc) : \_\_\_\_\_
- 1.3 Student Number (where applicable) : \_\_\_\_\_
- Staff Number (where applicable) : \_\_\_\_\_
- 1.4 School : \_\_\_\_\_
- 1.5 Faculty : \_\_\_\_\_
- 1.6 Campus : \_\_\_\_\_
- 1.7 Existing Qualifications : \_\_\_\_\_
- 1.8 Proposed Qualification for Project : \_\_\_\_\_  
(where applicable)
2. Contact Details
- Tel. No. : \_\_\_\_\_
- Cell. No. : \_\_\_\_\_
- e-mail \_\_\_\_\_
- Postal address (in the case of students and external applicants) : \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 3. SUPERVISOR/ PROJECT LEADER DETAILS

NAME	TELEPHONE NO.	EMAIL	DEPARTMENT / INSTITUTION	QUALIFICATIONS
3.1				
3.2				

3.3				

# SECTION 2: PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Please do *not* provide your full research proposal here: what is required is a short project description of not more than two pages that gives, under the following headings, a brief overview spelling out the background to the study, the key questions to be addressed, the participants (or subjects) and research site, including a full description of the sample, and the research approach/ methods

**2.1 Project title**

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**2.2 Location of the study** (where will the study be conducted)

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**2.3 Objectives of and need for the study**

(Set out the major objectives and the theoretical approach of the research, indicating briefly, why you believe the study is needed.)

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**2.4 Questions to be answered in the research**

(Set out the critical questions which you intend to answer by undertaking this research.)

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**2.5 Research approach/ methods**

(This section should explain how you will go about answering the critical questions which you have identified under 2.4 above. Set out the approach within which you will work, and indicate in step-by-step point form the methods you will use in this research in order to answer the critical questions. For a study that involves surveys, please append a provisional copy of the questionnaire to be used. The questionnaire should show how informed consent is to be achieved as well as indicate to respondents that they may withdraw their participation at any time, should they so wish.)

**2.6 Proposed work plan**

Set out your intended plan of work for the research, indicating important target dates necessary to meet your proposed deadline.

STEPS	DATES
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### SECTION 3: ETHICAL ISSUES

The UKZN Research Ethics Policy applies to all members of staff, graduate and undergraduate students who are involved in research on or off the campuses of University of KwaZulu-Natal. In addition, any person not affiliated with UKZN who wishes to conduct research with UKZN students and / or staff is bound by the same ethics framework. Each member of the University community is responsible for implementing this Policy in relation to scholarly work with which she or he is associated and to avoid any activity which might be considered to be in violation of this Policy.

All students and members of staff must familiarize themselves with AND sign an undertaking to comply with the University's "Code of Conduct for Research".

#### QUESTION 3.1

Does your study cover research involving:	YES	NO
Children		
Persons who are intellectually or mentally impaired		
Persons who have experienced traumatic or stressful life circumstances		
Persons who are HIV positive		
Persons highly dependent on medical care		
Persons in dependent or unequal relationships		
Persons in captivity		
Persons living in particularly vulnerable life circumstances		

If "Yes", indicate what measures you will take to protect the autonomy of respondents and (where indicated) to prevent social stigmatisation and/or secondary victimisation of respondents. If you are unsure about any of these concepts, please consult your supervisor/ project leader.

#### QUESTION 3.2

Will data collection involve any of the following:	YES	NO
Access to confidential information without prior consent of participants		
Participants being required to commit an act which might diminish self-respect or		

cause them to experience shame, embarrassment, or regret		
Participants being exposed to questions which may be experienced as stressful or upsetting, or to procedures which may have unpleasant or harmful side effects		
The use of stimuli, tasks or procedures which may be experienced as stressful, noxious, or unpleasant		
Any form of deception		

If “Yes”, explain and justify. Explain, too, what steps you will take to minimise the potential stress/harm.

### QUESTION 3.3

<b>Will any of the following instruments be used for purposes of data collection:</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
Questionnaire		
Survey schedule		
Interview schedule		
Psychometric test		
Other/ equivalent assessment instrument		

If “Yes”, attach copy of research instrument. If data collection involves the use of a psychometric test or equivalent assessment instrument, you are required to provide evidence here that the measure is likely to provide a valid, reliable, and unbiased estimate of the construct being measured. If data collection involves interviews and/or focus groups, please provide a list of the topics to be covered/ kinds of questions to be asked.

### QUESTION 3.4

<b>Will the autonomy of participants be protected through the use of an informed consent form, which specifies (in language that respondents will understand):</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
The nature and purpose/s of the research		
The identity and institutional association of the researcher and supervisor/project leader and their contact details		
The fact that participation is voluntary		
That responses will be treated in a confidential manner		
Any limits on confidentiality which may apply		
That anonymity will be ensured where appropriate (e.g. coded/ disguised names of participants/ respondents/ institutions)		
The fact that participants are free to withdraw from the research at any time without any		

negative or undesirable consequences to themselves		
The nature and limits of any benefits participants may receive as a result of their participation in the research		
Is a copy of the informed consent form attached?		

If not, this needs to be explained and justified, also the measures to be adopted to ensure that the respondents fully understand the nature of the research and the consent that they are giving.

**QUESTION 3.5**

<b>Specify what efforts been made or will be made to obtain informed permission for the research from appropriate authorities and gate-keepers (including caretakers or legal guardians in the case of minor children)?</b>		

**QUESTION 3.6**

<b>How will the research data be secured, stored and/or disposed of?</b>

**QUESTION 3.7**

<b>In the subsequent dissemination of your research findings – in the form of the finished thesis, oral presentations, publication etc. – how will anonymity/ confidentiality be protected?</b>

**QUESTION 3.8**

<b>Is this research supported by funding that is likely to inform or impact in any way on the design, outcome and dissemination of the research?</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>

If yes, this needs to be explained and justified.
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**SECTION 4: FORMALISATION OF THE APPLICATION APPLICANT**

**APPLICANT**

I have familiarised myself with the University's Code of Conduct for Research and undertake to comply with it. The information supplied above is correct to the best of my knowledge.

**NB: PLEASE ENSURE THAT THE ATTACHED CHECK SHEET IS COMPLETED**

.....

.....

**SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT**

**DATE**

**SUPERVISOR/PROJECT LEADER**

**NB: PLEASE ENSURE THAT THE APPLICANT HAS COMPLETED THE ATTACHED CHECK SHEET AND THAT**

**THE FORM IS FORWARDED TO YOUR FACULTY RESEARCH COMMITTEE FOR FURTHER ATTENTION**

**DATE:** .....

**SIGNATURE OF SUPERVISOR/ PROJECT LEADER**

**:** \_\_\_\_\_

**RECOMMENDATION OF FACULTY RESEARCH COMMITTEE/HIGHER DEGREES COMMITTEE**

**FULL NAME :** \_\_\_\_\_ **(CHAIRPERSON)** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE :**

.....

**SIGNATURE :** \_\_\_\_\_

**RECOMMENDATION OF UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HUMAN AND SOCIAL SCIENCES)**

**FULL NAME :** \_\_\_\_\_ **(CHAIRPERSON)** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE :**

.....

SIGNATURE : \_\_\_\_\_

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL  
RESEARCH OFFICE

ETHICAL CLEARANCE : HUMAN AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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CHECK SHEET FOR APPLICATION

PLEASE TICK

1. Form has been fully completed and all questions have been answered	
2. Questionnaire attached (where applicable)	
3. Informed consent document attached (where applicable)	
4. Approval from relevant authorities obtained (and attached) where research involves the utilization of space, data and/or facilities at other institutions/organisations	
5. Signature of Supervisor / project leader	
6. Application forwarded to Faculty Research Committee for recommendation and transmission to the Research Office	

## **UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

### **GUIDELINES FOR DRAWING UP AN INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT**

The Informed Consent document could either be

1. in the form of a letter to the participant, containing information on the items listed below and concluding with a declaration allowing for the name of the participant, signature and date, or
2. drawn up as a declaration with a separate information sheet containing information on the items listed below

Note: in the case of 1 above, a copy of the signed consent has to be given to the participant.

#### **INFORMATION TO BE INCLUDED IN THE INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT**

- . The project title understandable by the lay person.
- . A statement of the projects aims, in terms understandable by the lay person,
- . The names, affiliations and contact details of the investigator/s, with qualifications where appropriate,
- . Name, contact address or telephone number of an independent person whom potential subjects may contact for further information, usually the project supervisor, team leader or school director,
- . A brief explanation of how the subject was identified,
- . A clear explanation of what is required of the subjects who agree to participate, including descriptions of any procedures they will undergo and any tasks they will perform, together with an indication of any possible discomfort or any possible hazards involved. The estimated total time of involvement and the number of occasions or duration of time over which this involvement is spread should be stated.
- . Potential benefits to be derived from participating in the study should be stated,
- . An indication of payments or reimbursements of financial expenses incurred by subjects,
- . A statement on the use of any written, audio or video recordings made,
- . An indication of how and when the gathered data will be disposed of,
- . A statement assuring confidentiality or anonymity as appropriate,
- . A statement that a decision not to participate will not result in any

form of disadvantage,

- . A statement that participation is voluntary and that subjects are free to withdraw from the study at any stage and for any reason.

**EXAMPLE OF DECLARATION**

I.....(full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

**SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT**

**DATE**

.....

**NOTE:**

Potential subjects should be given time to read, understand and question the information given before giving consent. This should include time out of the presence of the investigator and time to consult friends and/or family.