

Remembering the Past, Shaping the Future: Memory Frictions and Nation-Making in Timor-Leste



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Introduction

Among policy-makers working in the field of peace-building, there is growing interest in how initiatives to memorialise or commemorate the violent past might contribute to peace. Monuments, memorials, museums and commemorative rituals are now conceptualised as a form of ‘symbolic reparations’ that will contribute to victims’ healing (see Hopwood 2011). It is argued, too, that these sites and practices will help to strengthen bonds between groups and individuals and so contribute to social cohesion (see Jelin 2007, 139). An underlying assumption is that preventing future conflict, promoting peaceful coexistence and constructing a new national identity depends upon remembering and developing a common narrative about past atrocities (see Ibreck 2013, 165; Hopwood 2011).

Against this straightforward and linear narrative, recent social science studies of collective memory in post-conflict societies sound a note of caution. Their insights suggest that, although political leaders seek to produce and disseminate a sense of national consciousness through national memorial projects, these projects do not always unfold in the ways they are intended. Rather than producing an ‘agreed-to’ interpretation of the past, monuments and commemorative rituals may give rise to political struggles around the meanings of what occurred and may themselves become key sites of such struggles. These struggles are not just about interpretations of history, but, because they concern the fundamental question of *whose* version of events will be recognised within the narratives of national identity, are intricately entwined with questions of power, legitimacy and recognition in the present.

From this point of departure, this *Discussion Paper* examines the politics of remembering the 24-year Indonesian occupation in post-conflict Timor-Leste. Specifically, I am interested in what

memorialisation initiatives, and the debates that surround them, reveal about East Timorese experiences and ‘imaginings’ of the nation. Following a brief overview of recent literature on collective memory, I describe how state-sponsored memorialisation and commemoration of the 24-year period of the Indonesian occupation is becoming increasingly visible.¹ While on the one hand this suggests the growing reach and increasing effectiveness, of the government’s efforts to draw people into a common national community, there are also tensions as different groups and individuals question which events are remembered and how, and the processes through which memorials are planned. A number of alternative, civil-society-led documentation and memorialisation initiatives are also emerging, which to some extent challenge state-driven priorities and practices. I suggest that these dynamics, which illuminate the inherently frictional nature of memory politics, can be understood as part of the process of ‘nation-making’ — that is, the plural, contested and ongoing negotiation of national consciousness by a range of different groups and actors (Foster 1997, 5). While the extent to which these efforts will help to foster a more inclusive conception of national identity remains to be seen, what seems clear is that the political leadership’s attempts to shape official memory are, paradoxically, providing an impetus for a diverse range of alternative memory practices and debates.

Collective Memory and the Nation

While memory is often thought of as a function of individual cognition, scholarship on collective memory is in agreement that it is also *socially* produced, at least in part. In his still-influential analysis of collective memory, the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs helped to



show that individual memories operate in broader social and political frameworks; that it is within society that people ‘recall, recognise and localize their memories’ (Halbwachs 1992, 38). He demonstrated, too, that collective memory is *selectively* constructed, that past events are always interpreted in the light of present-day preoccupations and interests (Olick et al. 2011, 18). As vehicles of memory, memorials and commemorative practices become part of the ‘symbolic landscape’ (Ross 2013, 97), which helps to frame and communicate common narratives of shared events.

The relationship between memory sites and practices and the formation of *national* identity has been a particular focus of scholarly inquiry. Following Benedict Anderson, whose work powerfully highlighted the extent to which national communities are shaped by ‘imaginings’ that command the loyalty of citizens, scholars have observed how national narratives about the past act as ‘legitimising moments’ for new regimes (Norval 1998, 251), which help to preserve and reinforce dominant elites and ideologies (Ashplant et al. 2000, 8). They have described how, through acts of public remembrance, national elites seek to cultivate a shared understanding of the past in order to reinforce a sense of national identity, and, through this, their own legitimacy (Ibreck 2009, 330). These concerns are magnified in post-conflict societies where there is an acute need to give meaning to past experiences of grief and loss, and imagine a collective future (Ibreck 2009; Selimovic 2013). In such contexts, commemorative rituals, memorials and monuments ‘contribut[e] to illusions of stability and continuity and serv[e] as a glue to hold together communities’ (Ibreck 2009, 12). They also help to legitimise a new political order by signifying a definitive break between the past and present orders.

Studies have also highlighted that the state does not have a monopoly on the politics of memory. While political elites will reinforce memories and identities that are essential to their own legitimacy — and marginalise those that threaten to undermine it — official narratives do not always unfold as they are intended, and memory is under constant construction and reconstruction. Some studies have focused on the inherently ‘frictional’

nature of memory politics. The idea of ‘friction’ provides a useful conceptual lens to analyse the abrasive, sticky, and unequal ways in which different actors/agents, discourses and practices ‘rub up against’ one another, and, in the process, produce new power relations, ideas and practices (Bjorkdahl and Høglund 2013, 295).² Memory frictions sometimes lead to, or result from, the emergence of alternative or ‘counter memories’. Counter memories are often produced by groups who perceive their version of the past to be marginalised within official discourse, and may, at times, be channelled into claims for symbolic recognition, political representation and financial compensation (Graves and Rechniewski 2010, 2; see also Olick and Robbins 1998.) Friction may also be evidence of tensions between the modernising, homogenising nation-building project of political elites and local identities, value systems and beliefs (see Grenfell 2012).

This paper focuses principally on friction between ‘official’ and ‘local’ ways of remembering the past, while acknowledging that the distinction between official and local is itself not always clear cut. An examination of how political leaders and citizens differ in relation to goals, priorities and practices of remembering the past is important because this can reveal a great deal about peoples’ conceptions and experiences of the nation. For instance, it can shed light on which sections of society perceive themselves to be excluded within the nation and how they seek to address this exclusion. It can also shed light on how conceptions of national (and local) identity are changing. To extend this point a little further, we might view memory frictions as part of what Robert Foster refers to as ‘nation-making’. In contrast to the concept of nation-building, which traditionally connotes the instrumental process through which a small minority of state officials and intellectuals self-consciously promote and disseminate national consciousness, Foster uses the term nation-making to describe the more organic, unruly and contested process through which the nation, as a narrative, is negotiated by different agents with competing agendas in an ongoing way (Foster 2002, 5). Importantly, Foster’s conception of nation-making does not nec-

essarily imply a 'gradual acculturation of people to a set of shared, univocal systems' but, rather, recognises the various means through which the 'nation enters the lives of ordinary people as a frame of reference for thinking and acting reflexively.' (Foster 2002, 17–18). In other words, there are multiple, rather than singular, narratives of nation, and the nation is imagined as much by ordinary people as it is by political elites (Foster 2002, 5).

A final, important theme that emerges in the collective memory scholarship is the centrality of the dead. It is impossible to speak of memorialising the past without reference to the war dead who, in the aftermath of conflict, are transformed by political elites into symbols of martyrdom and nationhood. As Kwon (2006, 176) observes, vast memorial projects were initiated in Europe following the First World War in the name of the 'common soldier', which 'were later replicated in the new postcolonial states of the Third World.' These projects sought to transform the 'universal experience of bereavement into a positive force to strengthen national unity' (Kwon 2006, 176) by reframing death within a constructed, communal understanding of its significance (McEvoy and Conway 2004, 561). As Khalili describes, military and national cemeteries provide a focus for nationalist rituals, during which,

the state 'captures' its community's lost sons and daughters and transforms their deaths into willing sacrifices for the nation; in the process, the state also appropriates private rituals of grief and mourning in the cause of national unification and 'healing' ... it attempts to transform the suffering inherent in mourning for the dead into a heroic national narrative where no death is wasted, and all death eventuates in the glory of a unified nation (Khalili 2005, 32).

A number of excellent ethnographic studies have offered detailed explorations of the ways the dead are utilised by political elites during formative periods of nation-building.³ A particularly fascinating example is Heonik Kwon's (2006) study of commemoration in Vietnam, which examines how the postwar state hierarchy of Vietnam has

promoted the worship of the heroic war dead as symbols of 'the nation's unity and for its prosperous and enlightened future.' In this process, the 'unmarked graves that held the entangled bodies of village women and children' who died in the My Lai and Ha My massacres, and 'who were not a desirable object in this postwar construction of national memory' have been ignored (Kwon 2006, 2). Kwon's study also highlights how, within these constraints, local villagers have begun to explore their own ways of remembering the dead. These local efforts have worked against the state's attempts to 'consolidate and contain' the meaning of sacrifice and classify dead bodies into 'civilian' and 'soldier' (Truitt 2008, 259). As we shall see, similar struggles over the ownership of the dead — what they represent, how they should be dealt with, and by whom — are ongoing in Timor-Leste. Local involvement in state-sponsored reburial practices may also be subtly widening the parameters of who can be considered *funu nain* (heroes).

State-Sponsored Memorialisation and Commemoration

As is now well established, between 100,000 and 200,000 East Timorese lost their lives during the oppressive 24-year Indonesian occupation of the territory, from 1974–1999 (CAVR 2005). Some died as a direct result of military attacks (among them, members of Timor-Leste's tenacious resistance movement), while others died due to starvation and illness. Since Timor-Leste became independent in 2002, state-sponsored memorialisation and commemoration of this period of history has become increasingly visible. Since early 2014, international visitors arriving in the nation's capital, Dili, have been greeted with a glimpse of an imposing statue of Nicolau Lobato, one of the nation's founding fathers and military resistance leader, who was killed by the elite Indonesian commando force Kopassus in the early years of the occupation. The statue stands near the international airport (also named in Lobato's honour), at the intersection of the airport road with the main Comoro road into Dili. Lobato is represented in military fatigues, holding the Timor-Leste national flag in one hand and a gun in the other, his gaze directed at the nation's capital.



Nicolau Lobato statue, Dili. Humans of Dili Community facebook page. <www.facebook.com/humansofdili>, posted 8 June, 2014.

Other state-sponsored commemorative projects include the monument erected in 2013 outside the Motael church to commemorate the hundreds of mostly young people who died during the Santa Cruz massacre (or Dili massacre) that occurred at the Santa Cruz Cemetery in Dili on 12 November 1991.⁴ This monument, which depicts an image of a young man cradling his injured and bleeding friend, is a copy of an image that was made famous by the video footage of the massacre taken by journalist Max Stahl, which was smuggled out of the country and broadcast to the world.

Another prominent initiative is the 'Garden of Heroes' cemetery in Metinaro, where the remains of FALINTIL⁵ fighters are now buried. The gravesites are generic and uniform in character, constructing a narrative of the 'common soldier' that attempts to bring the dead into connection with one another due to their deaths for the nation's liberation. As

Damian Grenfell observes:

The gravesites are standard concrete formations laid out in equally placed distances from each other, each carrying the remains of former FALINTIL fighters and activists who are connected to one another through the sacrifice of national liberation, rather than genealogical connection or faith (Grenfell 2012, 99).

While most of the government's memorialisation activities have been confined to the nation's capital (or nearby areas such as Metinaro), recent initiatives suggest an increasing reach into the rural areas. Particularly prominent are the *osuario* (ossuaries) that are being constructed in each district alongside a series of uniform, abstract, monuments to commemorate the three 'fronts' of the resistance.⁶ The ossuaries, which are identical in design, and painted in garish pink, purple and white, are intended to hold the remains of those killed by the Indonesian military in that district during the 24-year occupation. The eventual aim is to conduct official state burials of the dead in the grounds outside the ossuaries. Families of the dead are thus being encouraged to either collect the remains of their dead (where locations are known) or, in cases where private burials have already taken place, exhume remains and inter them to the ossuary. In cases where bodies are not able to be recovered, some families have substituted rocks, *tais* (woven cloth) or photos for bodies, which are placed in empty coffins.

In connection with the newly constructed ossuaries, officially sponsored commemorations are increasingly being held outside of Dili. For instance, the 2014 commemorations of the 6 April Liquica church massacre were held in tandem with a state-funded process to collect the remains of those killed by the Indonesian military and inter them in the ossuary. The process was initiated by a group of local veterans who organised themselves into the *Komisaun Hodi Rekoilla Restus Mortais* (Commission to Recover the Remains of the Dead) and applied to the state secretary for veterans affairs for funding. These funds were used to organise a ceremony at the ossuary of the 6 April, and to provide coffins (and RDTL⁷ flags and black *tais* to



Santa Cruz monument, Dili. Photo: Lia Kent.

drape over them) to family members. The ceremony consisted of a procession of family members carrying coffins, who marched from the Liquica church to the ossuary, where the prime minister, the chief of Cabinet, and the secretary of state for veterans affairs, delivered speeches to honour Liquica's heroes.

Another state-sponsored commemorative ceremony was held in Kraras, Viqueque district, in 2013. Kraras is the well-known site of a series of massacres in 1983 of up to 300 civilians that had taken place in retaliation for FRETILIN⁸ attacks on an Indonesian military post (CAVR 2005, Part 3 and Part 7.7). Rather than taking place on the anniversaries of the actual massacres in September 1983 the commemoration was timed to coincide with Timor-Leste's 'Restoration of Independence' day on 28 November, thus linking this local massacre to the nation's story. The ceremony included speeches by Timor-Leste's president and prime minister, a performance by an Indonesian singing group, and a fireworks display.

Imagining the Nation

These rituals of commemoration and reburial demonstrate how the state is self-consciously seeking to draw personal experiences of death and grief into a national imaginary. Deaths that were previously mourned by families through private rituals are being appropriated into national rituals, and reinterpreted as part of a collective, national story.

It is arguable that in Timor-Leste, memorial projects might be a particularly powerful means of fostering a sense of national consciousness. In contrast to Benedict Anderson's classic account of modern nation formation, which highlights the significance of print capitalism, literature and literacy in enabling the 'fictional unity of the nation-state to take root in the minds of the people as a given reality' (Kwon 2006, 104), it may be that in Timor-Leste, ritual will play a more important role than literature in this regard. There are a range of reasons for this, including the primacy of oral forms of transmission of knowledge and the significance of ritual within East Timorese society generally, as well as more prosaic factors such as continuing low levels of literacy and the sheer lack of access to the written word amongst rural populations (Kwon 2006, 104).⁹ The extent of community involvement in these rituals — in Liquica, 271 bodies were collected and interred in the ossuary during the 2014 ceremony — suggests the growing reach of this project.¹⁰ The role played by prominent local individuals (for instance, in forming committees, seeking government funding and organising ceremonies) also indicates that they should not be simply characterised as 'state-driven', and that a range of other actors assert their agency in this process.

By the same token, it is also worth reflecting on the extent to which people's willingness to partici-



Liquica ossuary. Photo: Lia Kent.

pate in the performance of state-sponsored commemoration rituals is necessarily increasing their connection to, and faith in, the *state*. As Damian Grenfell (2009, 190–91) writes, state-building in Timor-Leste — in the sense of the development of practices and processes of governance through centralised institutional forms — has lagged far behind the development of a sense of national consciousness. For much of the 80 per cent of the population who live in rural areas and rely on subsistence agriculture, kinship-based ties and structures retain a primary function in the organisation of social and political relationships, and the state remains a remote presence (Brown 2013; Grenfell 2009). State institutions, observes Anne Brown, ‘have little reach beyond the capital, and there remains a deep disconnection between urban and rural life’ (Brown 2013, 20). Moreover, the institutions of state that have been created have ‘little or any reference to the systems of social order or value actually in operation for the majority of people’ (Brown 2013, 21). Where rural regions and communities are included in the process of state-building, they are treated ‘reductively’, as passive recipients of (hoped for) services, rather than as active participants in political life (Brown 2013, 21).

Given these constraints, the general attitude of most East Timorese towards the state is pragmatic;

people do not understand themselves to be ‘citizens’ in the sense of being equal members of a national polity (see Douglas 2000) but, rather, view the state as a source of wealth and benefits which can be tapped into if the right means are employed and the right connections are made (see Jacobsen 1998; Grenfell 2009, 191). For those who have been unable to tap into the state’s largesse, there is a pervasive sense of disappointment, one that is often expressed as a lament that the *po’vu ki’ik* (small people/ordinary people) who gave their lives for the nation’s liberation, have not yet been recompensed for their sacrifices (Traube 2007; see also Kent 2011). While popular participation in state-sponsored commemorative rituals may be high, then, and these rituals may even be fostering a sense of national consciousness, this is not necessarily strengthening people’s connection to the *state* and its instrumentalised nation-building agenda.

The selective narrative of national identity promoted by the political leadership and expressed in state-sponsored memory projects also means that not all East Timorese can find a place in it. While the 24-year resistance struggle arguably forms a strong basis for a common East Timorese identity, since the nation’s independence there has been a progressive narrowing of this narrative towards a privileging of the roles and contributions

of the FALINTIL forces. In the process, the contributions of other sectors of society to the independence struggle are marginalised, among them members of the Clandestine resistance — the network of civilians based in the towns and villages that far outnumbered the FALINTIL forces — and women, young people and diaspora East Timorese who were not part of formal resistance structures yet contributed in informal ways. In the drive to construct a ‘heroic’ national identity, there is little place for those whose family members died at the hands of the East Timorese resistance movement and who are considered ‘traitors’ or ‘collaborators.’ Nor is there space for recognition of ordinary civilians who were not directly involved in the resistance struggle and, because of their experiences of violence and the ongoing ramifications of these experiences in the form of poverty, marginalisation, disability or poor health, perceive themselves to be the *povu ki’ik*.

It is not just that the heroic narrative of national identity is depriving these groups and individuals of *symbolic* recognition. For those who can successfully claim the status of ‘veteran’ of the resistance (according to criteria that favour the armed struggle), there are very tangible material benefits in the form of substantial annual veterans’ pensions and preferential access to government contracts.¹¹ All of this suggests that the heroic narrative is fostering a narrow conception of citizenship, one that is based around narrow, militarised, male, resistance identity (Kent and Kinsella 2014) and is inscribed through the state’s allocation of significant public resources to former combatants.

Memory Frictions

Despite the increasing encroachment of the state into the sphere of memorialisation, political elites do not have a monopoly on how the past is remembered. Frictions are evident between different actors, discourses and practices. The remainder of this paper focuses on the frictions between official and local ways of remembering the past; specifically, it examines what this friction reveals about the differences of opinion that exist in relation to *which* events should be remembered and *how* they should be remembered.¹²



Interior of Liquica ossuary. Photo: Lia Kent.

Local dissatisfaction with official memory discourses and practices is rarely articulated overtly in the form of public protests or conflict. It is more commonly conveyed in private conversations or embodied in subtle forms of disregard for certain events or monuments. These expressions of dissatisfaction also allude to the existence of a range of interrelated tensions. One set of tensions highlights the ways in which certain sections of society perceive themselves to be excluded from the heroic national narrative and seek to address this exclusion by engaging in struggles for recognition (see Leach 2008). A second set of tensions highlights the ambivalence that is felt by some citizens about the ways in which local ways of remembering, local identities and customary belief systems are perceived as being in the process of creating a ‘modern’ nation-state.

An example of the first kind of tension can be seen in the diversity of views expressed about the Nicolau Lobato statue. For a key member of the 12 November Committee and former Clandestine leader, the statue is not a good likeness of Lobato and is too ‘militaristic.’ East Timorese resistance

leaders such as Lobato ‘gave instructions, they made plans, they didn’t carry guns’ he explains. There is, therefore, no need to present Lobato carrying a gun like an ordinary soldier; he should be portrayed speaking to the people, holding a microphone. These views, echoed by other former Clandestine leaders, are symptomatic of the dissatisfaction that is felt about the primacy given to the armed struggle over other fronts of the resistance.¹³

The 2013 commemoration of the Kraras massacre provides an example of the second kind of tension, in that it highlights how community members have been unhappy with the perceived instrumentalisation of local ways of remembering the past for a broader nation-building agenda. Prior to 2013, commemorations of this massacre had been organised by a local Kraras victims group with support from the national human rights non-government organisation (NGO) Yayasan Hak. Both groups were critical of the 2014 state-organised commemoration, which, they argued, was centrally planned and administered, with very little community consultation or involvement (even the food, I was told, was prepared in Dili rather than by the local community.) The fact that the ceremony focused on acknowledging Kraras’s ‘heroes,’ and ignored the suffering experienced by Kraras’s many widows whose husbands were killed during the massacres, was also criticised, highlighting that the first kind of tension was also evident. These women, many of whom are ineligible for veterans’ pensions because their husbands were not members of FALINTIL, have no place in the heroic narrative.

A similar combination of tensions was evident in Liquica where, with the assistance of national human rights NGOs, local families have traditionally organised their own commemorations of the Liquica church massacre of 6 April 1999. In 2014, due to the involvement of the *Komisaun Hodi Rekoilla Restus Mortais* and national political leaders, this commemoration had a different flavour. Families of victims of the 6 April massacre usually organise a mass in the church followed by a visit to the nearby ‘Angel’ monument — built by the local community to remember those civilians who were killed that day — to place flowers and light candles. In 2014, those involved in the *Komisaun* did not invite the community to visit the Angel monument; instead,

following the mass, they led the procession of coffins carrying the dead directly from the church to the ossuary. Families of those killed during the 6 April massacre felt this was disrespectful.

The monument of the two young men caught up in the Santa Cruz demonstrations outside the Motael Church is another site where both kinds of tensions have been evident. As Michael Leach (2013) observes, a key issue is that the monument was only established in 2012, despite the fact that the Santa Cruz massacre is widely perceived as a hinge point in the campaign for independence, a moment when the outside world finally became aware of Timor-Leste’s plight. The delay is significant in that it seems to imply the older generation’s lack of regard for young people’s contributions to the resistance. The lack of government consultation with the 12 November committee — the organisation that represents and advocates on behalf of families of victims of the massacre — prior to building the monument, is perceived as another instance of this disregard and disrespect.¹⁴ During the 2013 ceremonies to mark the anniversary of the massacre, members of the 12 November committee expressed their dissatisfaction about this state of affairs by deliberating bypassing the monument. As a consequence, the monument has yet to be officially inaugurated.

The fact that both the young men represented in the Santa Cruz monument are still alive has been a further source of tension. Neither of the men were consulted prior to the monument’s construction, and one of the men, who lives in the Dili suburb of Becora, has reportedly written to Prime Minister Gusmao requesting it to be demolished.¹⁵ This expression of dissatisfaction, while a reflection of the government’s poor consultation process, also highlights the extent to which deeply held beliefs about, and responsibilities to, the dead (and indeed customary belief systems and practices more generally) have been overlooked in the government’s forward-looking and ‘modernising’ project of nation formation (see Grenfell 2012; Brown 2013, 4; Bovensiepen 2014).

In Timor-Leste, as in many other kinship-based societies, maintaining harmonious relations between the living and their ancestors depends critically on conducting proper burials. Mortuary

rituals and their associated beliefs are constantly evolving, and should, therefore, not be understood as static or 'traditional' (Grenfell 2012; Sakti 2013). Nonetheless, a number of common features can be identified among these practices that, as many scholars have noted, remain surprisingly resilient in present-day society (see Hohe and Nixon 2003, 57). A key purpose of these rituals is to 'separate' the spirit of the dead body from the world of the living, and to lead the spirit to rest so that it will not torment the living. In cases where 'unnatural' or violent death (sometimes known as 'red' death) has occurred, these rituals are even more important as without them, it is believed that a person's *klamar* (spirit) may seek vengeance on the family and the whole community, causing death or ongoing conflict. In cases where the whereabouts of bodies are unknown (a common experience for those whose family members died during the conflict), this can cause acute anguish. It is believed that in these cases, the dead are condemned to wander, unable to enter the spirit world (Field 2004, 207–8); Rawnsley 2004). While special rituals can sometimes be conducted in which a rock taken from the site of death is used as a substitute for the body, families continue to go to great lengths to try and locate and exhume the bodies of their dead.

Catholic belief systems add another important dimension to death rituals, and it is usual for prayers to be offered, for crosses to be placed on gravesites, and for a mass to be conducted in a church (Grenfell 2012). It is also common for people to visit the gravesites and memorials of the dead on significant Catholic holidays such as *Loron Matebian* (All Souls Day) in order to light candles, spread flower petals on coffins and offer prayers to the dead. A key reason some have expressed unhappiness with the Santa Cruz memorial is that they interpret it as dangerous according to customary beliefs to burn candles before images of people who are still alive. This may curse them, causing those whose image is represented to sicken and die; in effect, it is a process of wishing them dead. The fact that political leaders appeared to give little thought to these issues as part of the monument planning process highlights both the shallow and selective nature with which the current political elite treats

customary belief and practices, as well as the extent to which the process of nation formation itself, which abstracts communities into a national polity, leaves little space for local beliefs and value systems.

Tensions between the nation-building demands of the political elite and customary belief systems were also evident during the process to inter the remains of the dead in the Liquica ossuary. A key issue concerned the request for families to exhume the bodies of their dead. For those who had already buried their loved ones and had undertaken private, familial, rituals in accordance with the demands of *adat* (custom), exhuming those bodies was not a straightforward process; complicated rituals were required, involving significant financial output, to ensure the ancestors are not displeased.

Maria, for instance, explained how, before exhuming the body of her husband, a former member of the Clandestine network who was killed by militia in 1999, she first consulted her local priest.¹⁶ After being reassured that it was permissible to do this, and that it was important for the state to 'put the dead together in one place', she then consulted her family's *Lian Nain* (customary leader), also asking him for permission and requesting information about the required rituals. Maria then organised two separate rituals — one at her 'lower' house (house of residence) and the other at her *uma foho* (mountain house/traditional house) — which involved the slaughtering of two goats (one to allow her to 'open' the grave, the other to close it). Maria's extended family participated in the ritual, which involved a wake for one night in the house, and another night at the *uma foho*, during which prayers to the ancestors (*hamulak*) were made. While Maria was pleased that her husband would be dignified by the state, she was disappointed that she was not provided with funds to help her cover the costs of these expensive rituals. She also explained that she still feels *todan* (heavy) because her husband's remains are no longer close to her house and she is unable to visit him regularly.

Nonetheless, the fact that so many families were willing to exhume their dead highlights the degree to which there is flexibility, pragmatism and innovation within local sociocultural belief systems and rituals (Sakti 2012, 449).¹⁷ It also highlights that the nation,

while not replacing local ways of remembering or forms of identification, has become a key frame of reference through which ordinary people are negotiating the private and political meanings of the past.

The economic benefits provided through the veterans' valourisation scheme have undoubtedly given added impetus to families' decisions to participate in state-sponsored reburial rituals. In a context in which many families have yet to receive veterans' payments and there is a backlog of some years for the assessment and processing of veterans claims, some believe that the recognition provided by the state to their dead may give their claims added weight.¹⁸ Recent discussions within the parliament about revising the veteran's law (and restricting the number of pension beneficiaries) and presidential statements that the process of giving 'projects' to veterans will soon stop is further incentivising people to benefit from existing schemes while they can.¹⁹

Nevertheless, many questions remain about the effects of the ossuaries and state-sanctioned reburial rituals. In his forward to Kwon's book on commemoration in Vietnam, Drew Faust observes that 'to change the actual location of a body through reburial is actually to shift its place in understanding, to reinterpret as well as to reinter' (Faust 2006, xii). In the context of Timor-Leste, it remains to be seen whether the state-sanctioned reburial of bodies in the ossuaries will change the meanings given to those bodies. It is possible that claiming the dead for the state, reinterpreting them as heroes, might remove them from the web of special relationships with their communities and extended families (see Faust 2006, xii). It seems more likely, however, that state-sponsored memory practices will not subsume local practices and that memory will continue to be distributed across many places (Kwon 2006, 152). It is also possible that, as Kwon found in Vietnam, state-sponsored practices may be a catalyst for the vitalisation of local ways of remembering (Kwon 2006, 152) and that local engagement in state-sponsored reburials may work to subtly broaden the categories of the dead who officially count as 'heroes.'²⁰ To view these dynamics through the lens of nation-making, it seems that while the idea of the nation may be

gaining traction through state-sponsored reburials and people are seeking the recognition of their dead as *funu nain*, this is not necessarily fostering the 'gradual acculturation of people to a set of shared, univocal systems' (Foster 2002, 17). Rather, a more fluid, evolving and frictional process is underway in which there is considerable tension between national and local goals, priorities and practices.

Alternative Memory Initiatives and Interventions

While East Timorese reactions to state-sponsored monuments and rituals reveal a number of subtle memory frictions, alternative, civil-society-led, memory projects illuminate them in a more overt way. These projects, which are co-ordinated by a small number of Dili-based intellectuals and activists, remain relatively small in scope, and are less visible than the well-resourced state-driven initiatives. Nonetheless, their emergence shows that some efforts are underway to challenge the ways in which state-driven commemorative initiatives are planned, and to broaden the kinds of events that are remembered, and the ways they are remembered.

A prominent example of an alternative memory project can be seen in the work of the 12 November committee. As noted earlier, the committee organises its own annual commemorations of the Santa Cruz massacre, which deliberately bypass the state-constructed monument outside the Motael Church. These commemorations generally involve a march to the site of the massacre itself, the Santa Cruz cemetery, where speeches are made by various groups. The committee has also begun its own program to 'animate' the new generation of Timor-Leste's young people through educating them about the roles of youth in the struggle for national liberation. As part of this program, they have organised a series of workshops for young people, both in and beyond Dili, which involve the presentation of musicals/plays about the 12 November massacre followed by discussions. Max Stahl's famous documentary about 12 November is also shown.

The advocacy efforts of members of the 12 November committee and other civil society leaders have led also to a more inclusive planning process for the transformation of the Santa Cruz

cemetery into a memorial site. This site has been a source of tension between civil society organisations and the government since the decision to initiate a nationwide design competition for its reconstruction. After selecting the winning entry, the government devised an ambitious plan that involved the widening of the road next to the cemetery, the shifting of a number of existing gravesites to make more space for pathways, and the destruction of the cemetery wall. Concerns were expressed by some civil society leaders about the unrealistic nature of the plan, the lack of community involvement, and the degree to which families of the dead would resist requests to rebury their dead due to the demands of *adat*. There were also concerns that the government's plans would impose a particular, 'fixed' meaning to the massacre, which would not make space for individuals own interpretations of events.

The government's plan was eventually abandoned and a new steering committee involving representatives from the 12 November committee has been established to develop an alternative plan for the use of the site. The proposed new plan will involve spaces for commemoration, civic education, a theatre site for use by community groups, and a simple, abstract memorial. Space will be made available for people to write the names of loved ones on the wall, and families will be permitted to make daily visits to light candles for their dead. Agreement has also been reached that the site will be managed by the 12 November committee, the historic cemetery wall will not be demolished and that, in recognition of families' customary responsibilities to the dead, gravesites will not be moved. These developments are significant because they show that, while the state will attempt to devise monuments that assign fixed meanings to past events, there is some scope for influencing these plans (at least if powerful individuals are involved). Although the outcome of the committee's negotiations remains to be seen, it is possible that the new plan for the Santa Cruz cemetery will allow spaces for private ways of remembering and, by providing venues for popular theatre and education, allow for expressions of multiple truths and new interpretations of past events. These developments suggest that national and local forms of

remembering may not need to be oppositional but can coexist, and that there are ongoing processes of mutual transformation at work.²¹

Other organisations involved in projects to remember the past include Yayasan Hak (Rights Foundation) and the Association Chega! Ba Ita (ACBIT). In contrast to the 12 November activities, these projects are explicitly tied in to an advocacy agenda that seeks to raise awareness of civilians' experiences of violence during the conflict in order to support a campaign for justice and reparations. Yayasan Hak, for instance, has recently recruited young people around the country to interview their family members about their experiences of the conflict. These interviews have been produced in a book entitled *Lian husi pasadu: pengalaman povu balu iha konflitu Timor-Leste 1975–1999* (Words From the Past: The Experiences of Some of the Population About the Conflict in Timor-Leste 1975–1999). ACBIT has begun a project focused on documenting women's experiences of violence, including sexual violence, during the conflict. Through a series of gatherings to enable women to share their experiences, the project has produced a book about women's experiences that has been distributed throughout Timor. Another documentation program initiated by OPMT²² is writing a history of women's contributions to the resistance through a nationwide interview process. This project, which can be seen as challenging the narrow and gendered way in which the 'hero' identity is defined in Timor-Leste, is explicitly geared towards fostering understandings of women's roles as active participants (rather than passive victims) during the conflict.

These diverse initiatives and interventions by local civil society leaders demonstrate the extent to which, in Timor-Leste as elsewhere, collective memory — and conceptions of national identity — is under constant reconstruction, and will evolve as new generations invest new meanings in the events of the past (see Young 2000). It is also important to note that these initiatives do not challenge the idea of the 'nation' itself. In fact, they often evince a high degree of pride in East Timorese history and identity, and endorse the centrality of the resistance struggle within this. What they implicitly question is who gets to define the narrative of national identity,

and whose experiences are included and excluded within it.

A positive reading of these initiatives suggests that over time, they may help to broaden the kinds of publicly acceptable narratives of the occupation, potentially leading to more inclusive understandings of national identity. The reach of these projects, and their contribution to imagining different visions of the nation, should, nonetheless, not be overestimated. They remain small scale and under-resourced in comparison to state-sponsored initiatives. They also rely on the efforts of a relatively small group of well-connected, Dili-based, intellectuals, and are often linked to particular advocacy agendas, suggesting that they should not necessarily be understood as 'popular' expressions of memory.

Conclusion

The East Timorese government's use of memorials and commemorative rituals to foster national consciousness is increasingly visible. Because these rituals and monuments tap into the desires of ordinary people for recognition of their dead as *funu nain* there is, generally speaking, widespread support for them. Given that the state has significantly more resources at its disposal for memorialisation than other groups, and that, for those who can claim recognition as a war hero, there are economic benefits at stake in the form of access to veterans' pensions, we are likely to see more support for these kinds of projects. It is possible that this may lead to a further narrowing and 'fixing' of the ways in which the past can be publicly remembered, the continued exclusion of those who are unable to claim a place within the heroic national narrative, and a marginalisation of diverse, local, ways of remembering.

Nonetheless, it seems unlikely that local ways of remembering are being swept aside in the process of modern nation formation. Just because the state is increasingly exerting ownership over the (heroic) dead does not mean that people are not remembering them in other ways or engaging in state-sponsored rituals to meet their own needs. Moreover, given that both state-sponsored and local ways of remembering the past are constantly negotiated,

each is likely to reshape the other to some extent (although of course, there are significant power imbalances). As the recent debate over the use of the Santa Cruz cemetery site suggests, it is possible that with some encouragement from local memory civil society leaders, state-driven memorialisation projects might become more consultative, rather than treating the population as mere 'recipients' of those projects. They might also become more attuned to customary belief systems and more receptive to multiple narratives about the past. It is also possible that local engagement in state-sponsored memorialisation will subtly work against the state's efforts to 'consolidate and contain' the meaning of sacrifice (see Truitt 2008, 260) and delineate those whose lives count in the national narrative.

The fact that local civil society leaders are leading alternative story-telling and memorialisation initiatives provides further evidence that the state does not have a monopoly on remembering the past and imagining the nation. These initiatives call attention to the paradox of state-sponsored memorialisation; while the political elite may seek to construct an 'official' version of the past, the very attempt to shape understandings of the Indonesian occupation (and promote selective 'forgetting') may be prompting alternative memory practices. The friction that is evident as civil society groups and ordinary people negotiate, and seek to expand the ways in which the past is remembered should not be viewed in negative light, as an impediment to the building of cohesion. Rather, it should be understood as part of the contested, uneven and shifting process of nation-making by groups and individuals with varying degrees of power and influence. While the trajectory of this process is by no means certain, it is possible that, over time, it may help to create space for the recognition of those who have been historically marginalised in the imaginings of the nation and for a greater acknowledgement of local and customary ways of remembering. What seems clear is that close attention to locally grounded and civil-society-led memory practices might provide important insights into how the nation is experienced, imagined and contested by a diversity of Timor-Leste's citizens.

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Endnotes

- 1 The analysis in this paper draws on observations made during fieldwork in Timor-Leste in July 2014 and July 2011. The author would like to thank Sinclair Dinnen, Sue Ingram, Damian Grenfell, Amy Rothschild and Nuno Rodriguez Tchailoro for valuable comments on an earlier version of this paper.
- 2 The friction metaphor was introduced by Anna Tsing (2005) to describe the ways in which universal concepts, such as human rights, justice, democracy, and capitalism 'travel' and are charged and changed within particular locations (see also Shaw 2007, 18; Bjorkdahl and Høglund 2013, 292). While the concept of friction is often used to explore how international concepts play out in local contexts, in this paper I use to explore how different actors, concepts and narratives *within* a particular society can also 'rub up against' each other and, in the process, generate new power relations, ideas and practices.
- 3 See, for instance, Katherine Verdery's fascinating study of Eastern Europe following the collapse of the Soviet Union. She shows how state-sanctioned practices of reburial of revolutionary leaders,

heroes, artists and other luminaries have served to 'collectivise and nationalise dead bodies hitherto mourned by families as their individual dead' (Verdery 1999, 101). These practices, she suggests, have been an integral part of forming new Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian states.

- 4 The church is significant in the story of the Santa Cruz massacre as, in the weeks leading up to it, young activists, in preparation for a visit from the Portuguese parliament, painted banners protesting the Indonesian occupation in the church grounds. An altercation with the Indonesian military took place on 28 October, during which a young East Timorese, Sebastião Gomes, was shot and killed. The Clandestine movement organised a funeral service at Motael Church on the morning of 12 November, after which a march took place to the Santa Cruz cemetery as part of a demonstration to commemorate Gomes' death (see CAVR 2005, Part 3).
- 5 *Portuguese*: Forças Armadas da Libertação Nacional de Timor-Leste; *English*: Armed Forces for the National Liberation of East Timor.
- 6 The East Timorese resistance movement is commonly described as having been organised into three 'fronts': an Armed front, a Clandestine front, and a Diplomatic front.
- 7 *Portuguese*: República Democrática de Timor Leste; *English*: Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste.
- 8 *Portuguese*: Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente; *English*: Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor.
- 9 See Kwon (2006), who observes this phenomenon in Vietnam.
- 10 Similar processes are underway in other districts. See for instance media reports about Ainaro (Restus Mortais Ainaro Tau iha Osuárioj Resin Ona/ Many remains have been placed in the Ainaro Ossuary already, *Suara Timor-Lorosae*, 25/6/2014, and the village of Quelacai where a local 'intellectual' has formed a 'committee eventual' to recover the bones of resistance members and FALINTIL in that area. The community meeting to discuss this involved almost 200 people (Atu Halo'ot Restu Mortais: Intelektual Hari'i Komisaun Eventual/Intellectual creates a commission, *Timor Post* 23/6/2014).
- 11 See the *Statute of the National Liberation Combatants* (2006).
- 12 This is not to suggest that there are not diverse views held by different members of the political elite about what constitutes the official narrative of the past. The growing focus of the armed front within memorialisation initiatives, for instance, reaffirms Xanana Gusmao's legitimacy *vis a vis* that of FRETILIN's, and asserts his ownership of the narrative of the resistance. An examination of these tensions is however beyond the scope of this paper.
- 13 Nonetheless, some of those with a vested interest in the militarised, masculine, narrative have also expressed dissatisfaction with the statue. Complaints are heard, for instance, that Lobato is depicted holding his gun in the manner of a civilian rather than a combatant (suggesting that the statue is perceived not to be militaristic enough).
- 14 The decision to construct the monument was apparently made unilaterally by Xanana Gusmao because he liked the image.
- 15 Interview with civil society leader, Dili, 16 June.
- 16 Interviews in Liquica, 26–27 June 2014.
- 17 Questions remain about whether the process will be as straightforward in other districts. For instance, I was told that in Los Palos, it is very difficult to exhume the dead because of the strength of customary belief systems.
- 18 Interview with 'Lucia', Liquica, 27/6/2014.
- 19 Interview with civil society leader, Dili, 17/6/2014.
- 20 For instance, I was told by some Liquica residents that not all of the bodies interred in the ossuary were the bodies of former resistance members killed by the Indonesian military or East Timorese militia and that some had died from 'natural' causes, including famine.
- 21 See Grenfell (2012, 104), who makes this argument with reference to the Maupitine monument.
- 22 *Portuguese*: Organizacao Popular de Mulher Timor; *English*: Popular Organisation of East Timorese Women.



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