Contested Belonging:  
East Timorese Youth in the Diaspora  

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of  
The Australian National University.
I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification. This work is my own unless otherwise stated.

All photographs were taken by the author, except those attributed to Toby Hiscox and Steve Cox.

Fiona Crockford.
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About three months into the fieldwork, I got nervous about whether I had bitten off more than I could chew in taking on multi-sited research in such an intensely absorbing, but highly challenging field. I dreamt I was among a large group of people being led, by Sister Kath O’Connor (of the Josephite Sisters in Sydney), to the top of a high tower where people were leaping off in front of a massive crowd below. But as we were ascending, a madman started up the stairs behind us and I had to wrestle with him while everyone else escaped. I emailed Sister Kath immediately to ask what it meant. She suggested it might represent my struggle with the fieldwork: that I wanted to throw myself into it but the madness of taking on such a task was taking all my energy. Ask yourself, she said, what part of yourself the madman and I represent and why you’re struggling with the madman. I did and have kept on asking that same question ever since.

This research is the result of a long and often difficult journey of incredible highs and lows, including a bleak and protracted period of very poor health when I thought I would have to abandon my studies altogether. That I did not is due to the support and friendship of many good people and the hopeless passion I had developed for East Timor.

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ABSTRACTU

Peskiza ida ne’e esplora Timorensianessa hanesan identidade ida mak komplexu no lao ba-oin ne’ebé ‘fronteira’ Timorensia, iha parte fiziku no psiko, ne’ebé marka tiha no marka fila-fali iha tempu bar-barak no fatin. Peskiza ne’e hare spesifikamente ho sensu dislokasaun no ambiguidade ne’ebé mak fó baze identidade sosial husi foin-sae Timorense sira ne’ebé mak hela iha Australia iha periode ida ho transformasaun politika iha Historia presente Timor-Leste nian (1997-1999).

Rekonhese diversidade esperiensia husi foin-sae diasfora sira, estudu ida ne’e fó atensaun liu-liu ba jerasaun ‘noventa’ nian husi foin-sae Timor-oan sira, katak sira ne’ebé mak iha sira nia tinan-joven ou hahu tinan rua-nulu wainhira sira husik hela Timor-Leste depois Massakre Santa-Cruz 1999. Estudu ne’e konsidera dalan sira ne’ebé foin-sae sira negosia sira nia esperiensia husi dislokasaun no imensidade husi identidade Timorensia ida ne’ebé mak politizada makás tebes, dala-barak foin-sae sira forma sira rasik ho sintidu ida husi moris ida mak ‘todan’ no klean, no dalaruma sinti todan liu ho sentidu moral ne’ebé mak iha. Iha diasfora, evokasaun ba memória traumátiku centraliza liu husi perservasaun identidade uníku Timorensia nian no nia konstitui fila hikas liu husi mundu violadu ida. Nune’e uza memória hodi justifika identidade Timorensia ida mak espesfíku no hanesan hotu no hodi rekonstrui liu husi ritual públiku sira. Maibe, determinasaun diskursu monólogu demais hanesan ne’e bele ameasa hodi hanehan tiha experiensia heterozenu no posibilidade mudansa ba foin-sae Timor oan sira no diversidade espresaun cultural Timor nian. Estudu ida ne’e esplora relasaun entre diskursu monólogu ida ne’ebé artíkula identidade públiku ida mak metin-los ne’ebé hamosu Timorensianesa ida mak ‘auténtiku’ no dirkursu dialózikal hodi hamosu identidade hibrida sira ne’ebé mak ambigu liu tan.

Hau hahu hodi buka-tuir sasan husi istória, kultura, mitos no poder ne’ebé hamutuk hodi hamosu representasaun tomak ida husi Timorensinesa no foin-sae hanesan patriota no kolektividade ba sakriffišiu-an rasik. Hau argumenta katak ezizensia husi luta ba independensia husi okupasaun Indonesia bazeia husi hari buat espesfíku ida husi foin-sae sira iha Timor-Leste laran ne’ebé mak halo foin-sae sira hetan potensialidade no papel heróiku. Maibe, potensialidade husi identidade politizada ida ne’e, iha rai-laran ka iha liur, dala-barak la estavél no provisóriu hela de’it. Nomós, identidade hanesan
ne’e belemos habelar no haklot foin-sae Timor tan sira-nia performa sempre kahur ho strutura poder no relasaun ne’ebé mak sosialmente no espasialmente kondisional.

Depois hau esplika prosesu ba formasun identidade no evalu fali entre foin-sae Timor disfora klean liu-tan. Muda-tiha husi luta imediata, ‘hahalok’ husi foin-sae Timorensia disfora inevitavél muda bazeia ba formasun konhesimentu ne’ebé mak forma no produz ‘foin-sae’ sira no partikularmente ‘foin-sae migrante’ iha nasaus sira ne’ebé mak simu sira. Dala-barak foin-sae Timorensia sira senti tama iha let entre práitika sira ho kontradisaun no konstrusaun foin-sae nian, no diskursu ne’ebé kontra ‘Timorensianesa’ no ‘Australiannesssa’ (nomós hanesan ‘Timoresianesa’ no ‘Indonesianssa’), maibe sempre iha fatin para truka-bamai. Nune’e, hau foti ezemplu husi sira nian kultura negosiasaun iha parte arte nian hodi hatudu oinsa foin-sae Timor sira buka atu envolve ho sentidu ida mak forte iha forma asaun sosial no hatudu forma testimonia oin-oinsa hanesan afirmasaun ba sira nia-an no identidade ida mak válida tiha práitika. Liu husi múzika, poezia no teátru, foin-sae Timor sira, tuir dalan oin-seluk no ho forsa oin-seluk, hatudu stratejia ne’ebé la sempre kontra ou la simpatia hasoru preokupasaun no importansia politika husi zerasaun tuan Timor nian. Maibe naratifu báziku husi foin-sae Timor, hatudu katak sira nian identidade kesi-an iha relasaun kompleksu husi relasaun divergensia no interdependensia dispozisaun estrutura balun: pesoal no koletivu; global no lokal; diferensia no kontinuidade; liberdade no limite. Jestaun ba tensaun sira ne’e, nomós laiha serteza ba sira nia estadu legal iha Australia no krize politiku iha Timor laran, izizi stratezia ba identidade ne’ebé bele foti husi ezistensia no referensia cultural no rekursu ne’ebé mak iha. Esperiensia husi foin-sae Timor oan diasfora sira hatudu dialéktika no karáter dependenti husi esperiensia kultural no identidade sosial.

Translated by Aderito Soares, ANU, December 2007
**ABSTRACT**

This research explores East Timoreseness as a complex and evolving identity in which Timorese ‘frontiers’, both physical and psychic, have been drawn and redrawn over time and through space. It deals specifically with the sense of displacement and ambiguity that underpins the social identities of young East Timorese living in Australia during a period of intense political transformation in East Timor’s recent history (1997-1999).

Acknowledging the diversity of experience among diasporic youth, the study focuses primarily on young ‘nineties’ Timorese, that is, those who were in their teens or early twenties when they fled East Timor in the wake of the Dili Massacre in 1991. It considers the ways in which they negotiated their experiences of displacement and the immensity of a highly politicised Timorese identity, often framed by young people themselves in terms of an embodied ‘weight’ and a viscerally deep, and occasionally overwhelming, sense of moral responsibility. In the diaspora, the evocation of traumatic memory has been central to the preservation of a uniquely East Timorese identity and its reconstitution in a breached world. Memory has thus been called upon to legitimate a very specific and homogenous East Timorese identity and to reconstruct it through public ritual. Yet an over-determination of such a monological discourse threatens to subsume the heterogeneous experiences and possible alterities of young Timorese and the diversity of Timorese cultural expression. This study explores the interplay between a monological discourse that articulates a cohesive public identity that implies an ‘authentic’ East Timoreseness and a dialogical discourse through which more ambiguous and hybrid identities emerge.

I begin by tracing the strands of history, culture, myth and power that combine to produce totalising representations of East Timoreseness and youth as patriotic and self-sacrificing collectivities. I argue that the exigencies of the struggle for independence from Indonesian occupation depended upon a very specific enactment of youth within East Timor through which East Timorese youth acquired a potent and heroic role. Yet the potency of this politicised identity has always been unstable and provisional, both within and outside of East Timor. As well, such an identity is both enabling and confining for young Timorese since its performance is always infused with power structures and relations that are both socially and spatially contingent.
I then explore processes of identity formation and re-evaluation among young diasporic East Timorese in depth. Removed from the immediacy of struggle, the 'doing' of youth among young diasporic East Timorese inevitably shifts according to the different knowledge formations that frame and produce 'youth' and particularly 'migrant youth' in host countries. While young Timorese often feel caught between apparently contradictory practices and constructions of youth, and discourses that oppose 'Timoreseness' and 'Australianness' (as well as ‘Timoreseness’ and ‘Indonesianness’), there is always room for slippage. Thus, I draw upon examples of their cultural negotiations in the world of the arts to show how young East Timorese sought to engage in meaningful forms of social action and deployed various forms of testimonial as a self-affirming and identity-validating practice. Through practices of music, poetry and theatre young East Timorese, in different ways and with varying force, deploy cultural strategies that are not necessarily inimical or unsympathetic to the concerns and political imperatives of older generation Timorese. The everyday narratives of young Timorese, however, reveal that their identities are entangled in the complex interplay of a number of divergent and interdependent structuring dispositions: the personal and the collective; the global and local; difference and continuity; freedom and constraint. The management of these tensions, as well as the uncertainties of their legal status in Australia and political upheavals within East Timor itself, required the creation of strategies of identity that drew upon both existing and new cultural referents and resources. The experiences of young diasporic East Timorese thus highlight the dialectical and contingent character of intercultural experience and social identities.
MAP 1

East Timor
MAP 2

Field Map of Sydney
Scale 1:182,000
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ABRI *Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia* (Armed Forces of Indonesia), now known as *Tentara Nasional Indonesia* (TNI).

AIEPTD The ‘All-Inclusive East Timorese Dialogue’ series, held in Austria under the auspices of the UN, provided a forum for discussion and confidence building among leaders from across the spectrum of Timorese political, including pro-autonomy advocates.

APODÉTI *Associação Popular Democrática Timorense* (Timorese Popular Democratic Association). Apodeti was the smallest and most conservative political party, consisting of only a few hundred supporters. They inclined towards integration with Indonesia and *Daerah Istimewa* (Special Region status).

ASDT *Associação Popular Democrática Timorense* (Timorese Popular Democratic Association). The democratic socialist ASDT party was formed in 1974 and claimed the immediate right to independence from the Portuguese colonial regime. It was reframed as Fretilin in 1975.

Assimilados (P) Descriptor conferred upon Timorese deemed to have attained an appropriate standard of civilisation (*civilizado*). Assimilados were granted Portuguese citizenship and voting rights.

**Bahasa Indonesia** Indonesian language.

**Bairros de palapa (P)** District of houses thatched with palm leaves.

**Balibo Five** The Balibo Five were a group of journalists working for Australian television networks who were killed in the town of Balibo, close to the East/West Timorese border, on 16 October 1975. They were investigating Indonesian incursions into East Timor prior to the Indonesian invasion on 7 December 1975. The group included two Australians, reporter Greg Shackleton, 27, and sound recordist Tony Stewart, 21; a New Zealander, cameraman Gary Cunningham, 27; and two Britons, cameraman Brian Peters, 29, and reporter Malcom Rennie, 28.

**Buibere (T)** Originally a Mambai term for “woman”; female counterpart of the iconic Maubere figure.

**Civilizado (P)** Civilised; Timorese eligible for Portuguese citizenship.

**CNRM** *Conselho Nacional da Resistencia Maubere* (National Council of Maubere Resistance). The CNRM was established in 1987 when resistance leader Xanana Gusmão resigned from Fretilin and declared the end of the politics of ‘party ID cards’ in favour of national unity or ‘non-partisanship’ (*apartidarismo*).
**CNRT  Conselho Nacional da Resistência** (National Council of Timorese Resistance). The CNRT was established in April 1998 as the peak body of the East Timorese people's resistance to the Indonesian occupation of East Timor. Its members were drawn from all political viewpoints, including the major political parties. It was formally established at a Convention of 200 East Timorese delegates in Portugal. Although held outside East Timor by political necessity, it was the first broadly representative gathering of East Timorese nationalists since 1975.

**Creados (P)** Young Timorese boys who assisted Australian commandos in WW2.

**CRRN** A National Conference in 1981 in East Timor led to the creation of the National Council of Revolutionary Resistance (CRRN). Xanana Gusmão was elected Political Commissar, President of CRRN and Commander of the armed forces of the independence struggle, Falintil.

**Degredado (P)** Banishees from various Portuguese colonies.

**Deportado (P)** Deportees, banished by the Portuguese administration to ‘Portuguese Africa’ for alleged subversive political activities.

**Estado Novo (P)** New Estate, Portuguese fascist regime established in 1933 under the dictator Salazar.

**ETCC** East Timor Cultural Centre (Sydney).

**ETRA** East Timorese Relief Association (based in Sydney and Melbourne), formed in 1992 at the behest of East Timorese resistance leader, Xanana Gusmão, and under the direction of his personal representative in exile, Dr José Ramos-Horta.

**Falintil  Forças Armadas de Libertação Nacional de Timor-Leste**, Armed Forces for the National Liberation of East Timor. Falintil was established in late 1975 as the military arm of the resistance movement against Indonesian occupation.

**Fence jumpers** The term refers to young Timorese activists who protested the occupation by gaining entry to foreign embassies in Jakarta in the mid-nineties.

**F-FDTL  Forças de Defesa de Timor Leste** (Timor-Leste Defense Force). The F-FDTL was re-constituted from the national liberation movement and guerilla army known as Falintil (Armed Forces for the Liberation of East Timor).

**Firaku (T)** Term believed to have originated in the Portuguese colonial era to refer to people from the east; stereotypically characterised as temperamental, stubborn, trouble-makers.

**Fretilin  Frente Revolutionária de Timor-Leste Independente.** The Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor was founded on 20 May 1974. It began as a resistance movement that fought for the independence of East Timor, first from Portugal and then from Indonesia, between 1974 and 1999. It was originally called the Timorese Democratic Association (ASDT). After East Timor gained its independence from Indonesia, Fretilin became one of several parties competing in a multi-party system.
**Gerasaun Foun (T)** Post-Indonesian invasion (1975) youth generation (*Geração Foun: P*).

**Hananu Kore A’an (T)** (Singing for Freedom) Sydney-based East Timorese youth choir.

**INTERFET** The International Force for East Timor was a multinational peacekeeping task force, mandated by the United Nations to address the humanitarian security crisis which took place in East Timor from 1999-2000 until the arrival of United Nations peacekeepers. INTERFET was commanded by Major-General Peter Cosgrove of the Australian Army.

**Kaladi (T)** Term believed to have originated in the Portuguese colonial era to refer to people from the west; stereotypically slow, quiet.

**Katupa (T)** East Timorese dish of woven palm leaves filled with glutinous coconut rice.

**Kore Metan (T)** Literally, the ‘release of the black band’ to bring closure to the period of mourning one year after the death of a relative.

**Lafaek (T)** Crocodile.

**LGA** Local Government Area.

**Litsus** The *penelitian khusus* (special research) screening test conducted by the Indonesian military. SMA (high school) and other graduates who sought *izin keluar* (exit permit) to attend university outside East Timor were obliged to undertake the test which took about three hours to complete. The investigation aimed to elicit details of personal and familial political affiliations and test loyalty to the Indonesian state.

**Loromonu (T)** West; people originating from the districts of Bobonaro, Covalima, Oecussi, Liquica, Ermera, Aileu, Ainaro, Manatuto, and Manufahi.

**Lorosa’e (T)** East; people originating from the eastern districts of Baucau, Viqueue and Lautem.

**Lulik (T)** Sacred rites or objects

**Malae (T)** Foreigner (also *malae Cina*, Chinese; *malae-metan*, Arab traders/African)

**Mambai** The largest East Timorese ethnic group, concentrated in the mountainous district of Aileu.

**Maubere (T)** *Maubere* was originally used by the Mambai, one of the poorest hill tribe people in Timor, to mean ‘friend’. The Portuguese used it to mean backward and primitive, as a way of denigrating the Timorese peasantry. Fretelin made the word a symbol of what their movement represented: to be a *maubere* (‘my brother or friend’) was to be a son of Timor. It came to symbolise the reassertion of Timorese culture and the struggle against poverty and colonial subordination.

**Mestiço/Mulatto (P)** Mixed heritage Timorese.
Não indigenão (P) Native Timorese eligible for Portuguese citizenship.

Operasi Komodo (BI) Operation Dragon: Indonesian military operation that initiated the civil war in East Timor in 1975.

Operasi Seroja (BI) Operation Blossoming Lotus: Indonesian military code name for the invasion of East Timor on December 7th 1975.

Pancasila (BI) The ideological basis of the Indonesian state. The five basic principles are: faith in one god; humanity; nationalism; representative government and social justice.

Pembangunan (BI) Official Indonesian Government development program

PIDE Portuguese colonial secret police (Polícia Internacional e da Defesa do Estado).

Portugalização (P) Process of Portuguese cultural assimilation.

Revolução dos Cravos (P) Carnation Revolution, 25th April 1974: a bloodless coup hastened by a left-turn in Portuguese politics that precipitated the decolonisation of Portugal’s “overseas provinces”.

TAC Timorese Australia Council, based in Sydney NSW.

Tais (T) Traditionally woven cloth from naturally-dyed thread using a simple hand loom and a wooden cross-bar.

Tasi Feto (T) Female (northern) sea.

Tasi Mane (T) Male (southern) sea.

Tetun (T) / Tetum (P) Lingua franca of East Timor.

Tuba Rai Metin (T) Firmly Gripping the Earth.

Topasse Mixed race class of Timorese traders, also known as Gente de Chapeo (People of the Hat); Larantuquiers (people from Larantuka); and Swarte Portugueezen (Black Portuguese).

UDT União Democrática Timorense, Timorese Democratic Union. A conservative political party established following the Carnation Revolution in Portugal in 1974. It originally advocated continued links with Portugal using the Tetun slogan Mate Bandera Hum (in the shadow of the Portuguese flag). UDT formed a fragile coalition with the leftist Fretilin party to work towards independence in 1975 but radically split with the onset of civil war. UDT and Fretilin again formed an alliance under the politically neutral umbrella organisation CNRT.

Uma Lulik (T) Traditional sacred house where ancestral bones are kept.

UNTAET The United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor provided an interim civil administration and a peacekeeping mission in East Timor. It was led by
Brazil’s Sergio de Vieira de Mello (United Nations Administrator) and the Philippine’s Lieutenant General Jaime de los Santos (Supreme Commander of the United Nations’ Peacekeeping Force). UNTAET was established on October 25, 1999 and abolished on May 20, 2002 with most functions passed to the East Timor government. The military and police forces were transferred to the newly created United Nations Mission of Support to East Timor (UNMISET).
PROLOGUE

Tuba Rai Metin: Firmly Gripping the Earth

I did not plan to do doctoral research on East Timor. I arrived at the Australian National University meaning to study the fishing industry in eastern Indonesia or perhaps, at the other geographical extreme, in the southwest corner of the Indonesian archipelago. My intention had been to explore the ways in which dominant discourses of nationalism and ethnicity within that context were being negotiated by migrant fisher communities and individuals on the peripheries of Indonesian state power. Such a project, I assumed, would require me to spend a lengthy and intensive period in ‘the field’; that is, within a well-defined and geographically remote site far from ‘home’, in keeping with disciplinary tradition. My twelve year-old son, however, entering a period of early adolescent anarchy, put his foot firmly down and flatly refused to take any further part in my plans. I could go if I liked, but he would not be moved. My parental powers of persuasion and logic, my attempts to cajole and spruik, thoroughly failed me. His stubborn refusal to entertain the possibility of life in an Indonesian fishing village thus caused me, somewhat reluctantly at first, to reconfigure my project and to consider the possibility of not only doing fieldwork closer to home, but of conducting fieldwork in a rather different way.

Needing to base myself in Canberra, I began to shift my thinking towards migrant experiences among Southeast Asian communities within Australia and more specifically within New South Wales. An accident of fate led me to an East Timorese art exhibition Tuba Rai Metin (Firmly Gripping the Earth) at the Canberra School of Art in September 1997 (Plate 1). There, I had the great fortune to meet a number of exiled East Timorese artists, performers and community leaders from Melbourne and Sydney, as well as a group of young East Timorese asylum seekers who were members of the Sydney-based choir Hananu Kore A’an (Singing for Freedom).
A multi-piece installation, *Tuba Rai Metin* was the collaborative project of two Australian-based East Timorese artists: a master weaver and senior member of Darwin’s East Timorese community, Dona Verónica Pereira Maia and a young Timorese artist and community arts worker, Albertina Viegas. Although others were involved in the production of *Tuba Rai Metin*, it was the creative alliance of these two women that formed the axis around which the exhibition turned. Their collaboration yielded an arresting depiction of East Timorese refugee experience, of cultural crossings and survival. Their work explored the often contradictory and ambiguous meanings of the familiar and of ‘home’ against a backdrop of violent displacement and socio-cultural disjuncture. The artists themselves insisted that the project was not explicitly political or ‘activist’ art but primarily a work of remembrance. It was, they said, a memorial to an unacceptable human tragedy. It also represented for them a quest for the reconciliation of political factionalism within the East Timorese diaspora.

The installation drew culturally and creatively from the traditional East Timorese crafts of building, weaving and food preparation. It involved the construction of an *Uma Lulik* – a sacred house where the bones of Timorese ancestors were traditionally kept (Plate 2). *Uma Lulik* constitute a powerful presence in the East Timorese imaginary, symbolically linking generation to
generation and heaven to earth. Some were hundreds of years old when they were destroyed in Indonesian bombing raids in the late 1970s to mid-1980s and only three are said to remain standing near Lospalos, at the eastern end of East Timor (Turner 1992:iv). Uma Lulik signify the sanctity of East Timorese connections to their land. For East Timorese living in the diaspora, they also symbolise their link to, and their yearning for, their ancestral home. Images of Uma Lulik commonly feature in the homes of diasporic East Timorese. They are reproduced three-dimensionally, in miniature, and two-dimensionally in paintings and woven into cloth and mats; they are inscribed on bodies, on the ultimate home, as tattoos. Along with religious memorabilia, Uma Lulik prevail as distinct and cherished icons of East Timoreseness for those who have been radically displaced.

Plate 2. Uma Lulik

The focal point of the exhibition was a series of tais1 (weavings) conceived and executed by Dona Verónica Pereira Maia (Plate 3). The tais she created for the

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1 Tais are traditionally woven from naturally-dyed thread using a simple hand loom and a wooden cross-bar. The work is painstaking and tais can be months in the making. They are intricately encoded with designs that reflect East Timor’s regional and ethnic diversity and they have long been part of the currency of kinship and marriage. In the complex and complementary routines of gift-giving and receiving that marriages entailed, tais were offered by the ‘wife-givers’, along with coral necklaces and cooked rice. As symbolic ‘female goods’, these would be reciprocated by the ‘wife-takers’ with ‘male’ goods, for example goats, horses, metal disks. They are also a means of documenting the past. There are tais the size of church altars depicting images of cornucopia-style horns, cherubs and grapes, that reflect East Timor’s Portuguese past and its Catholicised identity. During the ‘silent’ years of Indonesian occupation, tais became a
Tuba Rai Metin project record the names of the mostly young, unarmed East Timorese victims of the ‘Dili Massacre’ at Santa Cruz cemetery on 12 November 1991. Between each name she had woven a small crucifix which acts like a punctuation mark; a full stop; a question mark; an exclamation:

Julio C Real + Jose N Galhos + Jose Bibik + Jose Andrade + Chico Batavia + Celina Aileu + Carlos Soares + Domingas Oliveira + Domingos Costa + Duarte Acolito + Frederico Lospalos + Fransisco Fatima...

Plate 3. Dona Verónica’s tais memorial

Dona Verónica’s tais were a tribute to the memory of the young martyrs of the East Timorese struggle; a testament to the mass slaying of youth at the hands of the Indonesian military. Approximately 2,500 people had gathered that day to attend a Mass to commemorate the death of a young Timorese man, Sebastião Gomes Rangel, two weeks earlier. A demonstration had been planned to start immediately after the Mass, partly in frustration at the cancellation of a United Nations/Portuguese human rights delegation and partly in anger at Sebastião’s death. As the Mass at Motael Church ended, the crowd moved onto the streets and made its way towards Santa Cruz cemetery, the site of Sebastião’s funeral. By the time the procession reached the vehicle for resistance and weavers incorporated the language of resistance into their designs: Libertação; Viva Timor Lorosae; Viva Xanana! The slogan Recordação Timor Leste (Remember East Timor) was woven into a scarf-sized tais destined for the Portuguese delegation due to visit East Timor in 1991 on a fact-finding mission. It was an appeal as much as a gift. The visit, however, was abruptly cancelled and the tais, too politically provocative to be worn or displayed publicly in Indonesian-occupied East Timor, was buried (Jenni Kanaley pers comm). During the Indonesian occupation, weavers attempted to satisfy a fledgling tourist market with gaudy-coloured scarves bearing innocuous expressions in Indonesian language. Woven in cheap, gold-inflected thread, they cheerfully proclaimed Kenang kenangan Timor Timur (a souvenir of East Timor) – a remembrance of a different order.
cemetery, the crowd had swelled to five or six thousand. Young Timorese scaled the
cemetery walls unfurling Fretillín\(^2\) flags while others approached Sebastião’s grave to
pray and lay flowers. At the same time Indonesian military began to surround the
cemetery. There was no warning for the crowd to disperse. Many young people were
shot in the back as they tried to run away.

Like the majority, and especially women, of her generation, Dona Verónica has
never learned to write. The words she weaves are traced onto paper by younger
members of her family and the shapes are then translated by her into cloth. Her
tais, she said, were her way of relieving, and perhaps ‘reliving’, not only her
own grief, but the collective grief of Timorese in exile. Like the tais meant for
the Portuguese delegation, her tais also entreat the viewer to Recordação Timor
Leste (Remember East Timor), but they do so explicitly through the
memorialising of martyred youth:

These tais stand for the young people and their love for their homeland.
They cherish each other, they trust each other, they are united to show that,
dead or alive, helpless as they are, with limited resources and without
support of any kind, they set themselves against Jakarta’s forces but with
only one thought in mind - to defend their homeland...They haven’t spared
themselves, they have sacrificed everything to show their love of country.
This is no laughing matter, no! These tais are a record of these young people
and how they died for their country. These tais show they were not afraid to
die. They were not afraid of Jakarta’s military might because they were
defending what they knew was right...(Pereira Maia in Tuba Rai Metín
catalogue, August 1996)

Dona Verónica’s tais and the Uma Lulik were encircled by Albie Viegas’ lead
sculptures: twenty-two katupa soldados, marking the number of years since
Indonesia’s invasion of East Timor (Plate 4). The sculptures symbolised
munitions, inspired by the hand grenade, but they also evoked the shape and
texture of the popular Timorese dish katupa in which glutinous, coconut rice is
wrapped in young palm leaves. Mounted on tripods, the katupa soldados
initially appeared forbidding and sinister. The symbolic juxtaposing of lead and
rice represented a poisoning of nourishment and yet, the rice-stuffing also
suggested a softening; the possibility of something nurturing and hopeful.

\(^2\) Frente Revolutionaria de Timor-Leste Independente (Revolutionary Front for an Independent
East Timor)
The exhibition opening was accompanied by a series of cultural performances enacted over a three-day period by members of the Sydney-based East Timorese community. Returning daily to the exhibition space, I witnessed the snaking processions of Timorese women dancing to the solemn and rhythmic drum beat of *tebedai*, the older women leading, younger women following (Plate 5). Arcane purification rituals were conducted and prayers enunciated. The youth choir sang a repertoire of protest songs in English (*Stand Up and Fight Back! You've Got Nothing to Lose!*), and in Tetum, the *lingua franca* of East Timor (*Mate ka Moris! Ukun Rasik A’an; Kolele Mai*) (Plate 6). My response was visceral. This was no simple demonstration of East Timorese cultural retrieval and re-articulation: there was something far more complex going on. I felt as if I were watching a piece of theatre unfold. *Tuba Rai Metin*, it seemed to me, was a symbolically and emotionally charged performance in which specific social obligations were being produced and elaborated.

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3 *Mate ka Moris*: ‘Death or Life! Independence’ was written by Abé ho Aloz (Barreto Soares 1996:37). *Kolele Mai*: ‘What is the reason?’ This popular traditional Timorese song from the Baucau region uses a standard stylistic practice in which the story is punctuated by the story teller’s rhetorical questions to the audience (Joliffe 1976:49). The lyrics of *Kolele Mai* were reworked by the Timorese poet, Fransisco da Costa Borja, as part of Fretilin’s campaign of cultural revival in 1975.
East Timorese activists set up stalls selling political publications as well as East Timorese poetry: I purchased them all. The Timorese participants socialised and networked with exhibition attendees from a range of religious and community solidarity groups but critically, I think, they performed a social duty. The young choir members looked subdued and tired and, on this occasion, they sang slightly off-key. Yet, I was moved by their performance. Why was that? Albie Viegas, commented at the time: “The choir has been so good for these kids. It’s like they’re finding their voice; their voice is becoming stronger. When they first started singing, you could hardly hear them”.

Plate 5. Women performing tebedai (Timorese dance)

Plate 6. Hananu Kore A’an
This was the business of everyday life for East Timorese living in exile. It involved the articulation and amplification of a voice that needed to be heard, not only by the broader Australian public, nor indeed by an international audience, but by diasporic East Timorese themselves as an affirmation of their existence and as a palliative for their predicament. The exhibition was not so much concerned with the aesthetic expression of sacred art objects and traditions but with the complexity and tragedy of East Timorese lived experience. Indeed, the aesthetic preoccupation of Tuba Rai Metin and of the wider East Timorese community generally reflected that experience in expressly painful terms: grief for the dead; the pain of exile and the trauma of dislocation; the pain of survival and of suffering; the pain that comes from continually revisiting that suffering.

As a result of my accidental encounter with Tuba Rai Metin, my research took an unexpected and momentous turn. I took up an invitation to visit the East Timorese Relief Association (ETRA), a Timorese non-government organisation based in Parramatta in Sydney’s western suburbs, with whom I would soon work as a volunteer. That visit propelled me into a complex world of East Timor diaspora politics and activism and, most importantly, towards research that focused on youth identities. I was ‘in the field’ before I knew it and the fieldwork quite suddenly acquired a life of its own. My initial disappointment at not being able to do fieldwork in Indonesia quickly evaporated and I became fully involved with this most compelling, inspiring and challenging of research itineraries. My central interest in the cultural formations that result from displacement, migration, exile and diaspora remained constant, but the focus shifted away from inter-island migrancy and marginality within Indonesia, to the context of displacement and loss in the East Timorese diaspora.
Tuba Rai Metin began its journey in Darwin in 1996 and travelled to Sydney and Canberra in 1997. It was re-presented in Sydney, at the Djamu Gallery on Circular Quay, in February 1999 (Plate 7). By that time, the installation had been reconfigured according to the major political shifts of that time, including President Suharto’s resignation in 1998 and President Habibie’s pledge to hold a popular consultation on East Timorese autonomy. The exhibition opening in 1999 was a major event for Sydney-based East Timorese, coinciding with the visit of East Timor’s religious leader, Bishop Ximenes Filipe, Belo in Sydney. Both he and Dr. José Ramos-Horta, who shared the 1996 Nobel Peace prize, attended the exhibition’s re-launch in February 1999. The catalogue noted the upbeat yet still uncertain mood of the diasporic community: “As talk of independence gathers international momentum, and it must be said, generates daunting levels of confusion, there is real promise and optimism about the future. In the current configuration the Katupa Soldados lie deflated at the uma-lulik, inside of which is the Sumasu, 23 latex pillows stuffed with unhusked rice from a recent East Timorese harvest. In providing nourishment, comfort and rest, they offer hope.”