Claiming the dead, defining the nation: contested narratives of the independence struggle in post-conflict Timor-Leste¹

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Introduction

Timor-Leste's struggle for independence (1975–99) cost the lives of more than 108,000 people, the majority of them unarmed civilians. Throughout the period of the Indonesian occupation, a small armed resistance movement, the Falintil (*Forças Armadas de Libertação Nacional de Timor-Leste*) fought militarily against the occupation forces, supported by a civilian resistance network.

With independence, a new national narrative has emerged in which the 'valorisation' of the resistance takes a central place and is anchored in the constitution. Among the living, this has meant the payment of pensions and compensation to veterans, public recognition, medals, public holidays and ceremonies. For the dead heroes of the Falintil, national monuments have been erected and a central heroes' cemetery built. The official narratives stress heroism, sacrifice and above all unity, a term that resonates strongly in a society where various fault lines came violently to the fore in 2006 in a crisis that shook the foundations of the new nation-state.

The supposedly unifying narrative of the nation struggling as one for independence, of which the claim of the nation over the remains of the dead heroes is one manifestation, is however not uncontested. The chapter will focus on three aspects of this socially, culturally and politically complex debate. Following a brief historical outline, it will look at (1) the role of the dead in narratives of the state, (2) the role

of narratives of continued struggle and (3) competing efforts of state and non-state actors to collect the remains of the fallen and demand recognition. While none of the groups questions neither the narrative of the struggle nor the state *per se*, they see them as imperfect and demand revisions, in part with the help of the spirits and bodies of the dead.

Politics of the dead and the independence of Timor-Leste

The village-level conflict resolution workshop had been running for well over an hour, consisting mainly of the mandatory long-winded official speeches by dignitaries, when the villager raised his question to the East Timorese workshop facilitators with a note of worried urgency in his voice: 'Sir, since you come from Dili [the capital city of Timor-Leste] and are more educated than we are, can you please tell us – is it true that Nicolau Lobato is still in the mountains and that he will return to save us in this situation?'

The question jolted me, as Nicolau Lobato, the first prime minister and later president of Timor-Leste and the guerrilla commander who was being referred to, had at the time (in early 2007) been dead for close to thirty years. The whereabouts of his remains are however unknown, and the East Timorese government has repeatedly demanded that Indonesia release relevant information (Murdoch 2009).

Though I was aware that the spirits of the dead are more present in the lives of the living in Timor-Leste than my Northern European experience allowed, this was the first time that I was confronted with the complex politics of the dead and their implications for defining the newly independent nation. The question posed gained additional poignancy from the fact that the small village in question lay in the foothills of Mount Matebian, which was not only one of the major battlegrounds during the initial years of the independence struggle but is also – as the meaning of its name ('All Souls') in Tetum indicates – the spiritual home of the souls of the East Timorese deceased.

Over the years I would encounter this belief in the return of Nicolau Lobato and other 'un-dead' figures, especially from the early years of the independence struggle time and again.³ Kammen (2009: 400–5) for example notes the adherence of one of the spiritual leaders of Colimau 2000, a ritual/martial arts group, to this

belief. On New Year's Day 2005, several members of the group had announced the reappearances of Lobato and of another dead, legendary independence fighter, Vicente 'Sahe' dos Reis, in the Central Manatuto District, leading to public unrest and their subsequent arrest (UNMISSET 2005).

The dead and their spirits play a central role in Timor-Leste cosmologies, with some regional differences between various ethno-linguistic groups (see for example Hicks 2004; Therik 2004; Traube 1986). Invariably, however, in all of the various cultural groups, the dead remain present in the lives of the living as spirits.⁴ As such, they demand attention and compensation and can have either a malevolent or benevolent role in the lives of the living. Improperly buried dead and/or those who have not been properly ritually compensated remain restless and potentially dangerous, causing loss of livestock, illness or death among the living (Sakti 2012; Schlicher and Tschanz 2011). This spiritual dimension has in the past not always been fully recognised in dealing with the dead of the long independence struggle, especially in international transitional justice efforts.⁵

The independence struggle began after the Carnation Revolution in Portugal in 1974, when the territory which had been Portuguese Timor for around four centuries was thrust into a series of cataclysmic events. The brief period of rapid decolonisation led to a brief but bitter civil war in 1975, followed by the proclamation of independence. This proclamation was made under the shadow of a looming Indonesian invasion, and nine days later the morning calm over the capital city Dili was shattered by the growl of Indonesian air force planes dropping paratroopers into the city.

The invading forces met with the stiff resistance of the Falintil. Supported by a network of civilian supporters, the guerrillas were able to continue their armed struggle, albeit to a very limited scale, until a political solution was found in the form of a United Nations-organised referendum on independence in 1999. When the referendum results heavily in favour of independence were announced, pro-Indonesian militias and Indonesian security forces went on one last rampage, killing upwards of 1,500 civilians. The international outcry over the violence led to the deployment of an international peacekeeping force and the establishment of a temporary UN administration, the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET). After two and a half years under UN tutelage, Timor-Leste regained its independence on 20 May 2002.

According to the estimates of the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation of Timor-Leste (*Comissão de Acolhimento,*

Verdade e Reconciliação de Timor-Leste – CAVR), the conflict between 1975 and 1999 had cost the lives of upwards of 108,000 people, the majority of them unarmed civilians (CAVR 2005).

The complex politics of remembrance has led to competing readings of the nation and the struggle. Whereas others have done an excellent job exploring complexities between national, NGO and personal-level narratives (Harris-Rimmer 2010; Kent 2011; Sakti 2012) I will focus on alternative narratives of the nation and the independence struggle as articulated through the dead by the state, non-state actors and individuals. The three processes I will focus on are the ways in which the nation is narrated by the state by valorising certain dead; how the dead are summoned as part of narratives contesting the end of the struggle; and how exhuming the dead is used as a contestation of state narratives.

The nation and the dead

As noted in the introduction above, the link between nationalism, the nation, the dead and their sacrifice is often a very intimate one, especially if the independence and sovereignty of the nation was achieved and/or defended through violent struggle.⁶ As outlined by Anderson (1991), Hobsbawm (1990) and others, the concept of the Westphalian nation-state has been adopted globally as a blueprint, especially following the post-Second World War wave of decolonisation in Africa, Asia and Oceania as well as the post-cold war break-up of Czechoslovakia, the USSR and Yugoslavia. Although some elements of the languages of stateness, as Hansen and Stepputat (2001) name it, are easily recognisable in all nation-states (e.g. national symbols such as flags, coats of arms, anthems; the rituals of protocol; presence of a state bureaucracy), the local variants of the languages and their understandings, as it were, may differ greatly. These are in part contingent upon the local historical, social, economic and cultural contexts. Although, for example, mourning and honouring those who fought and died for the nation plays a central role in re-affirming the nation-state both in Timor-Leste and my native Finland, the meaning given to the dead is different. While in Finland the dead live on either as the abstract dead of monuments and historical narratives or in personal memories and fading photographs, in Timor-Leste they can additionally be active agents affecting the everyday lives of the living through their presence as spirits.

Governing the dead thus also needs to be seen in the context of the local understandings of statehood. Verdery (1999) points to the

symbolic power of memorials and reburials, to show how these can be used to legitimise or delegitimise certain narratives, political structures and processes, and how the 'aura of sanctity' of the dead can be used to sacralise the otherwise mundane (or even 'dirty') world of politics. Similar processes are undoubtedly at play in Timor-Leste as well, as I will discuss below. However, the local understanding of the dead as, in a sense, 'un-dead', means that they are not merely symbols but also agents in their own right. Here, Fontein's (2006) examination of spirits and war veterans in Zimbabwe, despite the very different political, historical and social settings, bears in many ways on Timor-Leste. In addition to being mobilised on a symbolic level, the spirits of the dead can be actors in their own right and be invoked to legitimise either state authority or resistance to it. Also, in Timor-Leste as in Zimbabwe, summoning these spirits allows the living to connect their struggles to seemingly nobler struggles of the past.

Valorising the dead, narrating the nation

I wish to greet the relatives, widows, orphans of our dear brothers and comrades in arms killed during the struggle for independence, our Heroes. We all shared a dream: to achieve the independence of our country. They shed their blood, sacrificed their lives so that today, we could live the independence we all yearned for. We will never forget your husbands, brothers and fathers. (Brigadier-General Taur Matan Ruak, Commander of the F-FDTL: farewell speech, 6 October 2011)

Like the leaders of other postcolonial nations that fought for their independence, the political leadership of Timor-Leste has been heavily dominated by figures who played key roles in the struggle. The Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste makes explicit reference to the resistance and its martyrs, both in the preamble and in Article 11, calling for the 'valorisation' of those who participated in the independence struggle, including 'rendering of tribute to the national heroes' (Leach 2002; RDTL 2002).

In practice, this 'rendering of tribute to the national heroes' has taken various forms for the living and for the dead. For the living, the main forms of recognition have been medals, official commemorations and pensions as well as in 2011 a special uniform. The process has, however, been highly politicised and fraught with controversy (Fundasaun Mahein 2011; International Crisis Group 2011; Roll 2011). Several commissions have looked into the veterans' issue and currently there are around 200,000 people claiming

veteran status, an unlikely number given the fact that the nation has a population of around 1 million, more than half of them too young to have participated in the struggle. Powerful lobby organisations of the veterans have blocked legislation in parliament that would have led to compensation being paid to victims of political violence during the occupation or to their kin before the veterans' demands have been met.

While the living heroes of the struggle have, in part, been compensated, the valorisation of the dead has taken on other forms. A central 'heroes' cemetery' has been established at Metinaro, a few kilometres east of the main army base of the country. This 'heroes' cemetery' is to become the centralised final resting place of dead Falintil, whose remains have been brought there from across the country (for a discussion of official memorials in Timor-Leste, see for example Leach 2008).

The proximity of the cemetery to the main army base is no coincidence, for the new armed forces (F-FDTL – *Falintil-Forças de Defesa de Timor-Leste*) explicitly draw their legitimacy from the narrative of the struggle, including the deaths of the martyrs (Rees 2004). It is not only in their name that the new armed forces see themselves as the mantle-bearers of the guerrilla force. Political slogans from the struggle are taken up by the F-FDTL and the lines between Falintil and F-FDTL are often deliberately blurred (International Crisis Group 2011).

The 'martyrs of the fatherland' (*mártires da Patria*)⁷ or martyrs of the national liberation (*mártires da libertação nacional*) are also regularly evoked in official speeches and commemorations by the civilian leadership. Although the Constitution explicitly mentions the various arms of the resistance movement (i.e. the armed struggle, the clandestine civilian front and the 'diplomatic front' in exile), it is above all the members of the armed struggle – living and dead – who are at the centre of the narrative. Prominent living and dead figures of the armed struggle and their kin have been the first to receive government support, while financial and political recognition of members of the unarmed resistance movement or civilian victims has not gone much beyond lip service.

Though non-combatant deaths formed the vast majority of casualties during the independence struggle, their memorialisation has received less official attention than that of the members of the Falintil force. Of the civilian dead, the ones who receive the most attention in the official calendar are the more than 200 killed in the Santa Cruz cemetery massacre on 12 November 1991. As they were

mostly young members of the civilian clandestine front, the anniversary of the massacre is commemorated as 'Youth Day' in the country and candles are lit not only for those killed in the massacre but for the conflict dead in general. On occasion, government figures have made public appeals to the Indonesian government to make information available on the whereabouts specifically of the Santa Cruz dead, but these calls have not been pursued very forcefully (Suara Timor Loro Sa'e 2010). Further official memorials have been built at the sites of other massacres, such as the church in Suai and in the village of Kraras (Kent 2011; Leach 2008).

Remembering the civilian dead has also, however, been problematic for post-independence East Timorese governments. As the UN and civil society organisations, among others, have repeatedly pointed out, the Indonesian government has not lived up to its own national or international obligations to persecute those allegedly responsible for serious crimes, war crimes and crimes against humanity during the occupation. In the interests of maintaining good neighbourly relations with Indonesia, successive Timor-Leste governments have not only stopped short of demanding justice but have at times actively undermined efforts to bring perpetrators to justice.⁸ The memory of the civilian dead implicitly raises questions of how and why they died, questions that are troublesome to the 'forgive and forget' *realpolitik* of the living.

Demands by East Timorese and international civil society organisations for a change of policy have been met with increasing irritation by the government of Xanana Gusmão. While in office, the former president, José Ramos-Horta, also repeatedly expressed his dissatisfaction that the United Nations Serious Crimes Investigation Team (SCIT) continued to be active in the country (author's interviews, Dili 2011; Ottendörfer 2011). In spite of occasional calls, the Timor-Leste authorities have also not actively pressed the Indonesian side to be more forthcoming with information on the whereabouts of the remains of the missing dead and forcibly disappeared (author's interviews, Dili 2010; Magalhães 2011; UN Human Rights Council 2011).

Ottendörfer (2011) points to another possible reason for a reluctance to deal with the civilian dead, and that is the fear of being made accountable for one's own killings. Among the most sensitive topics in the country are the brief 1975 civil war and killings within Falintil during purges, as well as other killings of East Timorese by the guerrilla force. While the bitter civil war was discussed publicly in the CAVR process, internal purges and killings have not been

broached (CAVR 2009). Internal splits in the guerrilla movement also led to the creation of organisations of disaffected ex-combatants, such as the CPD-RDTL (*Comité Popular pela Defesa – República Democrática do Timor-Leste* – Popular Committee for Defence – Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste) and *Sagrada Familia*, to whom I shall return later.⁹

The valorisation of the resistance struggle has *de facto* meant a glorification of the living and the dead Falintil fighters (especially those close to the current national leadership) at the expense of all other sections of society – the civilian resistance, those who remained neutral, those purged for being deemed ideologically unreliable, those who collaborated with the Indonesian occupation or supported integration, the victims of the violence and their kin as well as those who fled into exile. Though this preferential treatment of the dead Falintil over other sections of society is not spelled out directly, and as such would contradict the official mantra of national unity (*Timor Ida Deit* – There is only one Timor), it is occasionally unofficially admitted (Ottendörfer 2011).¹⁰ It is those who fought, prominently, gun in hand, for an independent Timor-Leste who are valorised, be they living or dead (Roll 2011).

The central place given to the ‘martyrs’ in the state narrative serves multiple purposes. As Klaus Schreiner (2002: 203) notes for the case of Indonesia, ‘hero worship as a means of politics is rooted in the fields of historical consciousness, religious practices and political legitimisation ... Hero worship is a means to create and to maintain national cohesion.’ In Timor-Leste, the state narratives valorise the dead fighters and select civilian victims (especially of the 1991 Santa Cruz massacre) but draw the line when dealing with the civilian dead becomes politically inexpedient. The sacrifice of the martyrs is seen as the foundation upon which the nation was built and in whose memory central state institutions, above all the armed forces, legitimise themselves. While remembering the sacrifices of the past, however, the state narrative is a forward-looking one: the struggle is now over; it is time to build a unified, developed state. Not all, however, agree.

Summoning the dead, continuing the struggle

‘Be careful. It is not necessary to do anything about them, we must love them, it is not necessary for us to be angry with them, because often people dream of Jesus who will also return to save the world, even

though they do not know when Jesus will reappear. Therefore, if in this group they dream that Vicente Reis will reappear, then it is because they only want the best for this country. Therefore it is not necessary to be angry with them,' warned [President] Ramos-Horta.¹¹ (*Jornal Nacional Semanário*, 27 October 2007)

The interplay between the dead, their spirits and the East Timorese body politic is a complex one, which needs to be seen in the cultural context of the region. In Timor-Leste, as in many neighbouring societies, there is a strong tradition of venerating ancestral spirits, who can play a benevolent or malevolent role in the lives of the living. The delineation between dead and living is thus not as categorical as in Western thought, and the dead are seen to have a very real degree of agency from beyond the grave. Hierarchies also exist among the dead with some ancestral spirits being more powerful than others, a potency that the living may tap into.

Aside from looming large in the historical narratives of liberation and the official commemoration politics, the fallen heroes of the resistance, both against the Portuguese colonisers and the Indonesian occupation, are both politically and spiritually 'potent dead', to borrow a phrase from Chambert-Loir and Reid (2002). The potent dead are ancestors, the veneration of whom confers power and potency to the living, either in an abstract sense (e.g. political legitimatisation by conjuring up the memory of the deceased) or a very 'real' sense of passing on mystical powers to the living.

A well-publicised example of this was the daring escape of renegade Major Alfredo Reinado, leader of a group of armed mutineers, which also took place in 2007. When surrounded by the Australian Special Air Service (SAS) troops close to Same who were seeking to arrest him, he summoned the spirit of Dom Boaventura, leader of the 1912 Manufahi uprising against the Portuguese colonial power. With the aid of the spirit, Reinado gained invisibility and escaped past the SAS (Agence France-Presse 2007; Nygaard-Christensen 2011: 220–1). Various other groups, such as the martial arts groups (MAGs) and ritual arts groups (RAGs) that have mushroomed in the country but also allegedly the *Sagrada Família*, regularly use ancestral worship in rituals to give them supernatural strengths and skills (Myrntinen 2010; Scambary *et al.* 2006).

The powerful spirits of Dom Boaventura, Nicolau Lobato, Vicente 'Sahe' dos Reis and other prominent, dead fighters of the initial years of the independence struggle share an aura of purity unsullied by what is often seen as the 'dirty' politics of the post-conflict years.¹² By summoning their spirits, a link can be established between the

struggles of today and past, seemingly purer and nobler anti-colonial struggles, thus adding to the legitimacy of the contemporary cause. Similar dynamics can also be seen in Fontein's (2006) narratives from Zimbabwe, and in Southeast Asia as in southern Africa the spirits can not only legitimise (or delegitimise) what is occurring today; summoning the spirits and memory of the dead also brings the inherent obligation to remain pure and true to the cause. In all three cases, however, the intervention of the spirits can also be of a very practical nature, ensuring escape from near-death situations or occasionally even victory.

Returning to the opening scene of this chapter and the agitated expectation of a return of resistance heroes from the realm of the dead, another form of the agency of the deceased becomes visible. Beyond merely interacting with the present spirits of the heroes, there are also messianic expectations of their reappearance to save the nation in times of need and usher in a radical, new transformation of the social order.¹³ The question raised by the villager for example was made in the midst of the most severe political crisis of the newly independent nation. Messianic saviour figures are not uncommon in the country or in the greater Southeast Asian and Melanesian regions which Timor-Leste straddles (see for example Kammen 2009; Traube 2007). Timor-Leste's former colonial power Portugal and occupying power Indonesia also have long political histories of messianism, with Sebastianism in the former and legends of *ratu adil* in the latter. Messianic beliefs in which figures presumed dead or lost in the mists of time return bring with them, as is also the case when summoning un-dead spirits, an understanding of time that is radically different from mainstream Western conceptualisations. The past is present in the now, not only in the form of vestiges and memories; rather, the boundary between a past and present time has been lifted. The messianic moment itself not only ushers in a new era, but can further lift the boundaries between past, present and future, marking the end of time.

The summoning of the anti-colonial hero Dom Boaventura or the messianic wait for a return of fallen independence fighters has potential political dimensions. The sub-text implicit in both is one of *a luta continua* – that the struggle is not over, that the promised 'real' independence has not yet been achieved and that the spirits of dead resistance fighters are needed to help in the struggle, to help fulfil this promise. The past, present and expectations of the future flow together. The notion of the struggle not being over was articulated time and again in my interviews with members of martial and ritual

arts groups and veterans' organisations, and this notion was intertwined with deep-felt disappointment with the post-independence settlement from which they had not received what they felt was their due (Myrntinen 2011a, 2011b; Traube 2007).¹⁴ These sentiments are further strengthened by the silent but heavy shadow of obligation seemingly cast upon the living by the fallen resistance heroes and victims of the occupation to make their sacrifices worthwhile.

The feelings of frustration with the unfulfilled promises of the post-conflict settlement and of continued struggle also flow into the various disaffected MAGs and RAGs (such as the above-mentioned Colimau 2000) and veterans' organisations such as the CPD-RDTL and *Sagrada Familia*. Though in part very different in their respective outlooks, forms of organisation and age of membership, these groups all share a strong sense of disaffection, demands for 'real independence', for recognition, and have an ambivalent relationship with the political elites of the country (Myrntinen 2010, 2011a; Scambary *et al.* 2006; Shoesmith 2011). Among these groups, the *Sagrada Familia*, however, has most focused on the dead.

Collecting the dead, demanding recognition

In our culture it is obligatory for us to honour the dead and to remain in contact with them. If this is not possible, it will have concrete ramifications on the lives of the living. In order for us to be able to live, we must bury our dead properly. (Januario de Jesus of the victims' organisation, 12 November (quoted in Schlicher and Tschanz 2011: 112))

The East Timorese state, as discussed above, has an ambivalent attitude towards the dead – on the one hand 'valorising' the dead and celebrating the fallen independence fighters at Metinaro, but on the other refraining from pushing the former occupying power Indonesia to be more forthcoming with information on the remains of the fallen and disappeared. The state also has a very limited capacity in terms of exhuming and identifying remains. While some NGOs have carried out searches and exhumations of remains (Schlicher and Tschanz 2011), it is a veterans' organisation, the *Sagrada Familia*, which has been the most active.

The *Sagrada Familia* was founded around its charismatic leader Cornelio 'L-7' Gama (alias *Eli Foho Rai Bo'ot*) towards the end of the independence struggle. Following disputes between L-7 and the Falintil leadership in the Aileu cantonment area, the group split off (Fundasaun Mahein 2011: 7). The group grew in size in

the post-independence years, drawing especially upon those ex-combatants who felt sidelined by the official veterans' compensation programmes. It has taken on a semi-religious character, mixing animism and Catholicism under the spiritual leadership of L-7, though it also has business interests. The movement is also partially congruent with the *União Nacional Democrática de Resistência Timorense* (UNDERTIM) party, for whom Mr Gamasat in the National Parliament from 2007 to 2012. The party has made veterans' issues one of its main concerns (Shoesmith 2011: 72).

The *Sagrada Familia* and UNDERTIM have repeatedly called for more government attention to be paid to the living and dead heroes of the struggle (Timornewslines 2010). Out of a sense of frustration at a perceived lack of interest by the government, *Sagrada Familia* has begun collecting the remains of fallen Falintil on its own, which is illegal under Timorese law. Over 400 sets of remains are now held in temporary storage in the eastern village of Laga, their future uncertain. L-7 has demanded that the government compensate him financially for the efforts and pay due respect to the fallen by giving them an appropriate burial in the central heroes' cemetery in Metinaro, but this had allegedly been blocked.¹⁵ The possibility of an alternate heroes' cemetery in the eastern part of the country has been raised as well and the *Sagrada Familia* plans on continuing its efforts. A possible compromise solution is to inter the remains within ossuaries which the state is currently constructing in all district capitals, thus, in a sense, leading to a public-private partnership of sorts (author's interviews, 2011–12). As a faction which split from the mainstream Falintil, the *Sagrada Familia* has maintained an ambivalent stance vis-à-vis the state and its institutions, and its exhumation and reburial efforts can be seen as a challenge to the state on numerous levels.

In addition to the symbolic political meaning ascribed to reburials by Verdery (1999) in which the reburiers stand to benefit directly, the dead themselves can also be seen as benefiting, a benefit that then also reflects well upon the reburiers. As Klaus Schreiner (2002: 193) notes for Indonesia, 'reburials aim at strengthening the ritual position of the deceased by transferring his or her remains to a site of higher and more appropriate dignity'. While the collecting of the remains of fallen comrades by *Sagrada Familia* can be seen in part as an understandable humanitarian gesture and as part of fulfilling cultural and spiritual duties, it is thus not without its political agenda. On the one hand, it is an indictment of the state, which is seen as not

doing enough for the dead. On the other hand, it is also a concrete attempt to physically gain control over a key part of the narrative of the struggle and thereby the nation, especially if plans for an alternate memorial or memorials go ahead.

For the veterans' organisations such as *Sagrada Familia*, a dignified reburial of the fallen Falintil at a centralised location is also part of their demands for more societal recognition for their contribution to the nation. The issue of recognition and compensation has become constitutive of the identity of the various disaffected groups and their members (Myrntinen 2011b). Attempts by political parties such as Fretilin or UNDERTIM to use reburials as platforms for highlighting their particular role in the independence struggle also go in this direction. What would require more research, though, is in how far groups such as *Sagrada Familia* seek to harness the spiritual power of the dead in addition to seeking control over the narrative of the dead.

Other disaffected organisations such as the CPD-RDTL or RAGs have been less extravagant in their claims on the dead but demand that the government both press Indonesia for more information on the missing dead and pay suitable respect to the dead comrades (author's interviews, Dili 2010). The issue of collecting the remains of the dead has also been politicised in the sphere of party politics. Presidential candidate Taur Matan Ruak took up the topic as part of his 2012 electoral campaign (TVTL 2011), while the opposition Fretilin party has sought to link reburials of the remains of those who died in combat to its role in the independence movement (*Diario Nacional* 2011b).

While the various groups – be they MAGs, RAGs, veterans' organisations or political parties – present a challenge to the state narrative and the manner in which the dead are memorialised, it is important to note that none of the groups challenge the legitimacy of the notion of the state or the national narrative *per se*. It is rather that they challenge their current forms, which they see as insufficient.

The attention given to the fallen Falintil is, in a sense, a replication in the realm of the dead of what is happening among the living. In both cases, powerful veterans' organisations dominate the debate, be it over the reburial of remains or over compensations to the living. Seeing their contribution to the struggle as legitimising their claims, these organisations have been successful at prioritising the remains of the fallen Falintil over those of civilian victims and the demands of veterans over those of survivors of violence.

Discussion

It is a Mambai [ethnolinguistic group in central Timor-Leste] commonplace that the nation was won through suffering and sacrifice; it was 'purchased', the saying goes, 'not with silver or gold, but with the blood of the people' (*ba los nor os-butin nor os-meran fe al, mas nor povu ni laran*). (Traube 2007: 10)

The official narrative of Timor-Leste, as enshrined in the Constitution, reifies the role of the independence struggle as being constitutive of the nation. Although the narrative makes note of the contributions of the civilian clandestine front, the so-called 'diplomatic front' and the Catholic Church, in practice it has been the fighting men – and to a far lesser degree, women – who have been most valorised.¹⁶ The sacrifices of the martyrs, which the official narratives exhort the people to remember, legitimise the state, its independence and its institutions. The narrative of joint national sacrifice and ultimate victory in gaining independence are meant to create and preserve national unity – *Timor Ida Deit*.

This official narrative of the struggle and the nation, manifested in monuments, pension payments, memorial days and speeches, is, however, not uncontested. In fact, ironically, the supposedly unity-building narrative leads to increased disunity. Many of the young state's citizens and well-organised pressure groups consider the struggle as not being over and 'real' independence as not having been achieved. As outlined above, these narratives of the continued struggle can find an outlet in messianic expectations of the returning (un)dead. The potency of the heroic dead can also be harnessed directly for the continuing struggle against current political elites and foreign interference, as was the case for Major Alfredo Reinado when he summoned the spirit of Dom Boaventura, and is the case on a smaller but more quotidian scale with the MAGs and RAGs.

The end of the struggle and the 'realness' of independence is questioned not only through the dead, however, but also through the state's politics of recognition. As I have argued elsewhere (Myrntinen 2011b), for the disaffected groups, and for example Traube (2007), who has argued for the community she researched in central Timor-Leste, the national narrative that the blood, sacrifice and deaths redeemed the nation is not questioned. Rather, what the various groups demand is recognition and compensation for their particular role in the struggle. Sacrifices were made, and now dues are demanded. For the dead, this has on the one hand meant calls for the compensation of their descendants and on the other the proper

reburial of the remains. As discussed above, the reburial serves both a political and spiritual function. Politically, it bestows the reburied dignity and recognition, while spiritually the proper reburial of the body places the restless spirit at ease, lest they cause mayhem in the lives of the living. For now, however, the spirits and remains of the dead continue to be restless, playing their part in numerous ways in the ongoing debates over defining the nation.

Notes

- 1 I am heavily indebted to Victoria Kumala Sakti of the Languages of Emotion cluster, Free University Berlin, for her invaluable insights and comments without which this chapter would not have been possible. The chapter is based on the author's fieldwork and interviews conducted during numerous visits to in Timor-Leste between 1999 and 2012.
- 2 'The situation' (*situasaun*) was a common euphemism for the political and military crisis that gripped Timor-Leste from April/May 2006 until April 2008.
- 3 It should be noted here that the semantic categories of 'alive' and 'dead' are not as strictly delineated in the Timor-Leste context as in the Western context.
- 4 While Timor-Leste is predominantly Catholic, local Catholicism is heavily imbued with animist traditions and ancestral worship.
- 5 These efforts have included the work CAVR and the joint Indonesian–East Timorese Commission of Truth and Friendship, an Indonesian '*ad hoc*' tribunal, investigations by the UN Serious Crimes Unit, individual court cases against perpetrators of serious crimes during the occupation as well as local-level reconciliation proceedings (see for example Harris-Rimmer 2010; Kent 2011). With the exception of local-level proceedings and, to an extent, the work of the CAVR, the procedures remained very much within the limits of Western-style formal justice with little room for local belief systems.
- 6 In interviews, some veterans would contrast East Timorese independence and nationhood with that of other neighbouring nations, for example in the South Pacific, who, as they disdainfully put it, 'were handed independence on a gold plate', i.e. were decolonised in a peaceful manner. The fact that Timor-Leste had fought and suffered for its independence thus made it 'worthier' in a sense.
- 7 This is also the name of one of the main avenues in Dili.
- 8 The most blatant case of this was the arrest of Maternus Bere in 2009, suspected of having played a key role in the Suai massacre ten years previously. Mr Bere was arrested by East Timorese and UN police in Suai after crossing from Indonesian West Timor on family business. After being transferred to prison in Dili, President Ramos-Horta and Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão intervened, allegedly at the behest of the Indonesian

foreign minister. Mr Bere was then transferred to the Indonesian embassy, which got him out of the country.

- 9 A leading member of *Sagrada Familia*, whom I interviewed in Dili in August 2012, called the prospect of raising questions over civilian deaths caused by the resistance 'dangerous ... very dangerous' for society.
- 10 The slogan, which came into use after the outbreak of the severe political and military crisis of 2006, relates only to Timor-Leste, however. There are no aspirations on either side of the border to unify Timor-Leste and Indonesian West Timor.
- 11 Author's translation.
- 12 Although the official narrative of the independence struggle tends to stress this 'purity', the reality was more complex, with bitter internal feuding in which Nicolau Lobato was also centrally involved. See Walsh 2012.
- 13 The cult of personality surrounding Major Alfredo Reinado during the crisis years also took on messianic dimensions. He was, somewhat paradoxically, expected to save the nation from the crisis that he had done much to bring about in the first place (Myrttinen 2008; Nygaard-Christensen 2011).
- 14 The notion that the struggle is not over was apparent also in the threat by CPD-RDTL and *Sagrada Familia* to take action against a demobilisation ceremony for F-FDTL and Falintil members in August 2011 (although the Falintil had actually been demobilised a decade earlier). As Cornelio 'L-7' Gama of the *Sagrada Familia* stated: 'We [are] totally against this demobilisation program, because it is not the time to demobilise veterans or FALINTIL' (*Diario Nacional* 2011a).
- 15 Given the widespread importance of maintaining contact with ancestral spirits in Timor-Leste society through grave sites, it remains far from clear whether family and kin members are as enthusiastic as the state or *Sagrada Familia* about having the remains of loved ones transferred to centralised resting places, which tend to be far beyond the geographical horizon of most Timor-Leste citizens, especially in rural areas.
- 16 While the predominance of male narratives in Timor-Leste seemingly confirms Cynthia Enloe's (2000: 44) observation that 'nationalism typically has sprung from masculinised memory, masculinised humiliation and masculinised hope', it should not be forgotten that East Timorese women's organisations have very consciously and with partial success brought women's narratives into the public debate (Cristalis and Scott 2005; Harris-Rimmer 2010).

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