
BETWEEN EARTH AND HEAVEN: THE POLITICS OF GENDER

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In this chapter, I will discuss the central issues surrounding gender in the contemporary post-conflict environment of Timor-Leste. Understandings of what it is to be a man or a woman are central to these issues and underlay the everyday experiences of people's lives. At the heart of the many challenges surrounding gender in Timor is how understandings of female and male in indigenous culture have evolved throughout Timorese history to shape the modern gender roles and relations that exist today. One illustration of indigenous understandings comes from a central myth of the Mambai people, who recount the beginnings of humankind from a union between Mother Earth, or Ina Lu, and Father Heaven, represented by the sun, the god-like Maromak, the Shining One.¹ In this myth, Ina Lu first gave birth to Tata Mai Lau, the highest and most sacred of mountains, and then to all other natural elements and living things. She came to rest with her feet firmly pressing back the waters in the north, calming and controlling the female sea but leaving her back to the unrestrained and wild male sea, which is feared and treacherous.² This and other such beliefs provide insight into the complementary relations between men and women that permeate indigenous Timorese thought and what this means for women and men today.

"GENDER" IS ABOUT WOMEN AND MEN

The concept of gender has been much misunderstood in Timor-Leste and is often perceived to be associated with aid and development programs that target and favor women, sometimes at the expense of men. The use of the word *culture* is similarly

¹ Elizabeth Traube, "Mambai Perspectives on Colonialism and Decolonization," in *East Timor at the Crossroads*, ed. Peter Carey and Carter Bentley (London: SSRC & Cassell, 1995), p. 46.

² Elizabeth Traube, *Cosmology and Social Life: Ritual Exchange among the Mambai of East Timor* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 39; Patricia Thatcher, "The Timor-Born in Exile in Australia" (master's thesis, Melbourne, Monash University, 1993), p. 64; Elizabete Lim Gomes, "Birth in the Great Mountain Tatamailau," in *Bitter Flowers, Sweet Flowers: East Timor, Indonesia and the World Community*, ed. Richard Tanter, Mark Selden, and Shalom (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), p. 105.

laden with confusion but, here, refers to the beliefs, customs, practices, and social behavior of a people, which are understood to change over time. Education is required to foster better understandings of “gender” as a term referring to the roles and responsibilities ascribed to men and women across different cultures and societies. To implement such an educational program will necessitate much debate and the addressing of different understandings about which human behaviors are “natural,” or biologically determined by sex, and which are learned and prescribed by family, society, culture, or religion. Within the field of gender theory, it is generally accepted that gender roles and relations between the sexes are socially constructed and negotiated in those specific environments. Many people will not even be aware of how much their behavior is learned and influenced by the unwritten rules of gendered behavior that influence their particular social group.

The term “gender relations” refers to the hierarchical relations of power between men and women that, all over the world, usually favor men. Social systems that privilege men are called patriarchal, and those that give women social and political power are called matriarchal (these are less common). Traditional gender roles and relations differ enormously throughout the world and across cultures and are forever changing and evolving. Traditions, described simply as “repetitive cultural patterns,” are “constantly prone to innovations reflecting specific presents and anticipated futures.”³ Some theorists believe traditions are, essentially, inventions and reinventions based on power hierarchies,⁴ and this is particularly true for gender relations. These ideas too need much wider discussion in Timor-Leste.⁵

The contemporary interest in the social construction of gender, both masculine and feminine, has largely been a consequence of the feminist movement and its attempt to make the world a fairer place for women. This interest in improving the lives of women has been broadened to focus not just on women and the inequities they suffer, but on gender roles more generally and how gender relations are created and reproduced. It takes conscious effort to entrench and maintain power and gender hierarchies and cultivate the preferred types of masculinity and femininity that accomplish this process of entrenchment. The success of these efforts can be measured by the outcomes, such as access to political power and resources. New studies, too, have not just focused on the negotiated relationships between men and women but also on those among groups of men and among women, and the crosscutting influences of class and race.

There is no universal form of masculinity or femininity—differences in what constitutes “the masculine” or “the feminine” are determined by a range of variables, including class, ethnicity, age, religion, disability, and sexual orientation. However, one important idea that has developed in this regard is the idea of a “hegemonic masculinity,” described as an idealized, dominant, heterosexual masculinity constructed in relation to women, and also in relation to subordinated masculinities such as those marking homosexual men or less powerful men. According to Raewyn

³ Jill Forshee, *Between the Folds: Stories of Cloth, Lives, and Travels in Sumba* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), p. 8.

⁴ Cf. Anthony Giddens, *Runaway World* (London: Profile Books, 2002), p. 40.

⁵ CEDAW, “Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women [CEDAW], Timor Leste, 44th Session,” July 20 to August 7, 2009, <http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=CEDAW/C/TLS/CO/1&Lang=E>, accessed June 13, 2012.

Connell, this idea of hegemonic masculinity has become a “significant critique of the often negative expressions of men’s power around the world.”⁶ It is understood that many men take their privileges (such as access to work and higher incomes, capacity to own land, access to domestic services from women, and decision-making power) for granted, ignorant that these privileges are not natural but are sustained through cultural practices.⁷ The analysis of such cultural practices is therefore crucial.

These analyses of gender relations and hierarchies within the broader dimensions of power and social difference are used as tools to challenge inequality. The overriding goal both of feminism and of gender and development programs is gender equity, whereby men and women have similar opportunities—equal access to resources, education, and work and the ability (and freedom) to direct their own lives. The establishment of gender equity usually requires reforms to legislation, equal opportunity advocacy, and programs and economic empowerment initiatives, but it also requires deep-seated changes to culture, a process that has proven much more difficult to induce. New approaches and interventions are more inclusive of men and multifarious, a condition that highlights the need to challenge existing hierarchies and relations and foster the empowerment of oppressed and marginalized groups.

GENDER IN POSTWAR SOCIETY AND TIMOR-LESTE

Observing that violence and war has profound social and psychological impacts on the survivors and the society that emerges from the conflict appears an obvious point to make. Yet these circumstances are now often forgotten in discussions about post-conflict Timor-Leste, as more than ten years have passed since the conclusion of the long and brutal Indonesian occupation (1975–99).⁸ It is clear from studies of post-conflict environments that violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, does not conform to “the timelines of peace treaties and ceasefires but endures past them.” Those who have fought and committed violence are rarely formally counseled nor are “the deep imprinting of violent masculinities ... and the effects of militarism on the society overall” charted or addressed.⁹ This is substantially the case in Timor-Leste.

⁶ R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender and Society* 19,6 (2005): 832.

⁷ Oxfam, *Gender Equality and Men: Learning from Practice*, ed Sandy Ruxton (Oxford: Oxfam, 2004), p. 8.

⁸ J. Modvig, J. Pagaduan-Lopez, J. Rodenburg, C. M. D. Salud, R. V. Cabigon, and C. I. A. Panelo, “Torture and Trauma in Post-conflict East Timor,” *Lancet* 356,9243 (2000): 1763. It is safe to assume that this type of trauma affects most families. A study carried out in 2000 documented that nearly all Timorese had experienced at least one traumatic event during the Indonesian occupation. Three-quarters had experienced combat and more than half had come close to death; 12 percent had lost children to political violence; 57 percent had been tortured; and 22 percent had witnessed the murder of relatives or friends. One-third of the population was classified as having post-traumatic stress, and 20 percent of these people believed they would never recover.

⁹ Naomi Cahn and Fionnuala Ni Aolain, “Gender, Masculinities, and Transition in Conflicted Societies,” *New England Law Review* (2010), George Washington University Law School, Public Law and Legal Theory Working Paper No. 481, pp. 116, 118, http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1516709, accessed June 13, 2012.

The Indonesian occupation of East Timor and the associated trauma have resulted in a brutalized and more violent society. One of the 2005 findings of the East Timorese National Commission for Truth, Reception, and Reconciliation (or Comissão de Acolhimento, Verdade e Reconciliação, CAVR) was a causal link between the period of armed conflict and current high levels of domestic violence and sexual assault: Male survivors of detention and torture, now perpetrators of violence themselves, reported this directly to the Commission.¹⁰ Henri Myrntinen too describes the “domestication” of the violence of the conflict.¹¹ Outbreaks of national-level violence will be discussed later.

While conflict has profound negative impacts on society and affects women and men differently, war has also often empowered women. The conflict in East Timor shifted women’s economic, social, and political roles, as war has done repeatedly around the world, and many women were challenged to act more independently than they had previously. In East Timor, the war forced many women to take up roles outside the domestic sphere for the first time. Not only did women lose husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons to the war, making it necessary for them to provide for their families by entering an economic sphere previously closed to them, but women also played a major part in the resistance fronts: military, political civil, and diplomatic.

In 2001, leading Timorese feminist Milena Pires explained that male combatants were returning home to a changed society. While they had been fighting and hiding in the mountains, Timorese women had been “holding the fort at home” and, in some cases, furthering their education overseas. She continued, “Women were involved at every level ... they helped run the camps, sent supplies, smuggled information. And now as men come out of hiding, the women don’t want to return to their traditional roles. It is a very traditional Catholic society which has been frozen by years of war.”¹² The war also meant that any modern ideas of gender equity were muted, although not altogether absent.

The pressure in postwar societies for women to return to their prewar status and roles often becomes a site of conflict between men and women, both privately and publicly. A pertinent example of this is the 1950s backlash against women in postwar America.¹³ Today in Timor-Leste, in the postwar environment, gender roles are now being renegotiated, creating a tension between the “traditional” role for women and ideas of a more modern, dynamic, and public role for women. This situation is complicated by the facts that the occupation lasted for so long and the population is

¹⁰ CAVR, *Chega! Final Report of the Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation in East Timor* (Dili: CAVR, 2006), <http://www.etan.org/news/2006/cavr.htm>, accessed May 1, 2012.

¹¹ Henri Myrntinen, “Masculinities, Violence, and Power in Timor Leste,” *Revue Lusotopie* XII, 1-2 (2005): 233. Henri Myrntinen also asserts that the post-conflict period has benefited women more than men, although this may be pure perception on the part of men. He argues that the availability of more jobs for women, in a climate of underemployment, has created men who are “jealous of the non-traditional role of a female breadwinner, or feel threatened in their masculinity as they are not able to fulfil their perceived duties as men.” Henri Myrntinen, “Poster Boys No More: Gender and Security Sector Reform in Timor-Leste,” Policy Paper No. 31, Geneva, Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2009, p. 13.

¹² Mary O’Kane, “Return of the Revolutionaries,” *Guardian*, January 14, 2001, www.guardian.co.uk/world/2001/jan/15/indonesia.gender, accessed June 13, 2012.

¹³ Cahn and Ni Aolain, “Gender, Masculinities, and Transition.”

so young, so that it is hard to define what this somewhat idealized “traditional” role for women was before 1975.

“Culture” is often given as the reason why women cannot participate in politics or why it is difficult to implement gender equity in Timor-Leste. Although women activists protest against this “cultural relativism,” the resistance to change is strong.¹⁴ Moreover, a portion of the senior male political leadership has patriotically promoted a “traditional” indigenous culture while denigrating international “gender equity” policies as foreign impositions.¹⁵ Regarding comparable post-conflict situations, some have argued that a desire for normalcy and healing can make “the certainties of patriarchal institutions and tradition seem therapeutic.”¹⁶ Carolyn Graydon documents similar processes of “retraditionalisation” and a backlash against women in contemporary Timor-Leste.¹⁷ One Timorese woman, who was part of the emerging women’s movement in the 1970s, states that the claim that the concept of equality for women arrived only with the United Nations in 1999 is simply “an attempt to discredit [gender equality] as a foreign and imposed notion.”¹⁸ The view that gender equity is incompatible with traditional culture is disputed not only by Timorese feminists, but also by cultural activists who are offended that some use Timorese culture to justify discrimination and violence against women.¹⁹

THE EVOLUTION OF GENDER IN TIMOR

Babel

The fixed, “traditional” role for women that I have cited bears closer examination, with an investigation of gender roles in indigenous society. Here an important observation was made in 1944 by the anthropologist Mendes Correa, who described the Portuguese colony of Timor as a “Babel ... a melting pot,” referring to the diverse mix of traditions that are still strongly apparent today. Original neolithic peoples were joined by waves of Papuan migrants and Austronesian migrants from Southeast Asia over a period of centuries, so that today approximately eighteen different languages are spoken in Timor-Leste. Although there are many cultural differences between the distinct ethnolinguistic groups—for example, various groups

¹⁴ Irena Cristalis and Catherine Scott, *Independent Women: The Story of Women’s Activism in Timor-Leste* (London: Catholic Institute for International Relations, 2005), p. 101–2.

¹⁵ Hilary Charlesworth and Mary Wood, “Women and Human Rights in the Rebuilding of East Timor,” *Nordic Journal of International Law* 71 (2002): 334–36; Nina Hall, “East Timorese Women Challenge Domestic Violence,” *Australian Journal of Political Science* 44,2 (2009): 309–12, 318–19.

¹⁶ Mike Kesby, “Arenas for Control, Terrains of Gender Contestation: Guerrilla Struggle and Counter-Insurgency Warfare in Zimbabwe 1972–1980,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 22,4 (1996): 561–84.

¹⁷ Carolyn Graydon, “Time to Get Serious about Women’s Rights in Timor-Leste: Wrestling Change from the Grassroots Up,” in *Timor-Leste: Challenges for Justice and Human Rights in the Shadow of the Past*, ed. William Binchy, Asian Law and Human Rights Series (Dublin: Trinity College 2009), pp. 386, 416.

¹⁸ Sofi Ospina, “Participation of Women in Politics and Decision-Making in Timor-Leste: A Recent History” (Dili: UNIFEM, 2006) p. 19.

¹⁹ Jose “Josh” Trindade, “*Feto Mak Maromak*: Traditional Concepts of Gender in Timor-Leste,” paper delivered to “Understanding Timor-Leste: Timor-Leste Studies Association Conference,” Dili, University of Timor-Leste, July 2–3, 2009.

may consider themselves as either autochthonous or migratory, or as favoring matriarchal or patriarchal systems—most share similar cosmological beliefs and social structures. According to the 2010 Timor-Leste Government Census, the largest Malayo- or Austronesian-language speaking groups are the Tetun Praca (385,269 individuals), Tetum Terik (63,519), Mambai (131,361), Tokodete (39,483), Kemak (61,969), and Baikenu (62,201). The main groups of Papuan or Melanesian mother-tongue speakers include the Bunak (55,837), Fataluku (37,779), and Makassae (101,854).²⁰

Timorese indigenous societies lived according to an ancient animist belief system referred to as *Lulik*. The local hereditary king, or *liurai*, was regarded as having divine attributes. Both women and men of the *liurai* class were, and still are, very powerful. Members of the *liurai's* extended family were part of the *dato*, the nobility; below them were the common farming people and, lower still, a caste of slaves.²¹ These kingdoms were linked in complex political alliances renewed by ritual exchange and marriage. A modern or hybrid patronage system that appears to operate in Timor-Leste today has been referred to as *liurai-ism*.²²

These indigenous societies share qualities, too, in their social and political organization, which revolves around concepts of complementary dualism such as *feto-mane* (male–female), *tasi feto–tasi mane* (north–south), *rai ulun–rai ikun* (east–west), *ema laran–ema liur* (insider–outsider).²³ These dualisms are woven through the hierarchical social system and a social order that establishes precedence and hierarchy. Social status is attributed in continually recurring patterns to persons and groups in relation to one another. In this way, women can be socially superior to men depending on the complementary category to which they are assigned. In cosmology, the visible and tangible secular world, *rai*, lies on the earth's surface and is dominated by men, while the sacred world, *rai laran* (the world inside), is dominated by female ancestral ghosts.

Anthropological accounts confirm the prominence given to women in ritual practices and the centrality of fertility as a powerful and sought after asset, with female symbology of womb and mother earth significant.²⁴ Jose Trindade highlights the sacredness accorded women across Timorese cultures and the prominence of the divine female element in much indigenous belief.²⁵ There is very little feminist analysis present in these anthropological works, and the characterization by

²⁰ "Population Distribution by Mother Tongue—Urban, Rural, and District," Timor-Leste Ministry of Finance, Timor-Leste Census 2010, Vol. 2, Table 13, pp. 205–6, www.mof.gov.tl/about-the-ministry/statistics-indicators/statistics-and-census/?lang=en, accessed June 13, 2012. Note that Tetun Praca is a local lingua franca. The full range of languages spoken in Timor-Leste is shown on maps in Frederic Durand, *East Timor, A Country at the Crossroads of Asia and the Pacific: A Geohistorical Atlas* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2006), pp. 46–48, 95.

²¹ Thatcher, "The Timor-Born in Exile in Australia," p. 48.

²² Geoffrey Gunn and Reyko Huang, *New Nation: United Nations Peacebuilding in East Timor* (Macao, Tipographica Hung Heng, 2006), p. 123.

²³ Jose 'Josh' Trindade, "Feto Mak Maromak: Traditional Concepts of Gender in Timor-Leste," paper delivered to Understanding Timor-Leste: Timor-Leste Studies Association Conference, Dili, University of Timor-Leste, July 2–3, 2009.

²⁴ James Fox, ed., *The Flow of Life: Essays on Eastern Indonesia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980); Traube, *Cosmology and Social Life*; David Hicks, *Tetum Ghosts and Kin: Fertility and Gender in East Timor* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2004).

²⁵ Trindade, "Feto Mak Maromak."

anthropologists of the roles of male and female as complementary does not imply symmetry. While myth and belief make up fertile ground for the imagining (or reimagining) of a powerful place for women in Timorese society, today roles are not equal or equitable as we understand these terms in a more prosaic, modern sense (see section on Women and Men's Contemporary Status). Furthermore, while a woman's fertility determines and can extend her social status within both family and society, it appears today that women are severely limited to and by that primary role.

The mythological inner world is feminine, maternal, and sacred, while the outer world is masculine, paternal, and secular, and, according to this indigenous logic, women and girls are consigned to this internal or domestic sphere rather than the external or public sphere. Therefore, women generally have not had a strong public or political voice in Timor but may hold power in a deeper, less obvious way, such as in social exchanges and rituals.²⁶ Domestic duties, including care of children and preparation of food for private and public events, are the sole domain of women, and men would suffer a loss of status if seen carrying out such tasks. While this may explain the formidable positions many women hold within households, it also means the full burden of domestic chores and childrearing falls to them.

Society in Timor-Leste remains very hierarchical and senior or elite women hold powerful positions, therefore any gender analysis with respect to Timor must be modified with this class awareness. Class, or caste, is so strictly observed in the more traditional sections of Timorese society that elite and middle-class women are invested with much more power and privilege than non-dominant men. Even though there are numerous powerful elite women in Timorese public life today, this does not mean that they all act to increase the power, rights, and authority of Timorese women more generally, or address the deeper structural patterns in society that oppress women. Further implications for political leadership and the women's movement will be discussed later.

Barlake

Indigenous kinship and alliances systems are maintained through marriage. These relations are focused in the Timorese ritual, or sacred, houses (*uma lulik*), which represent the social hierarchies of origin, ancestry, and descent.²⁷ Customary practices that regulate marriage and relations between the families or clans of the bride and groom are called *barlake* (or *barlaque*), and these are integral to a wider, complex system of social action and ritual exchange that creates social bonds and harmony. *Balake* customs demonstrate the central importance of women and their fertility in Timorese indigenous society and are another way of reimagining a powerful place for women in society.

Barlake creates relationships involving a lifelong commitment to provide mutual support between the families of the bride and groom and an ongoing exchange of goods and duties in the context of ritual life and death ceremonies. The value of the

²⁶ Sofi Ospina and Tanja Hohe, "Traditional Power Structures and Local Governance in East Timor: A Case Study of the Community Empowerment Project (CEP)" (Geneva: Graduate Institute of Development Studies, 2002), p. 110.

²⁷ Andrew McWilliam, "Houses of Resistance in Timor-Leste: Structuring Sociality in the New Nation," *Anthropological Forum* 15,1 (2005): 27-44.

barlake exchange is in accordance with the status of the *uma lulik* and that class of the families involved, and, more pragmatically, what they have the capacity to offer. Marked differences exist in *barlake* between matrilineal and patrilineal groups, with the value of exchanges and associated rituals being less in matrilineal communities.²⁸ Today there are significant changes to these practices, based in part on a shift in gender roles and criticisms that they contribute to domestic violence.

The exchange of goods between a bride's and groom's families is made up of a number of elements of equal value, but this appears, for the most part, to be on a symbolic level only (as the gifts from the bride's family are viewed as symbolically more valuable because they are associated with fertility). Nowadays the bride and groom's families can exchange money (of equivalent value) in place of goods.

Such commodification, along with an asymmetrical exchange of goods, favoring the bride's family, encourages the perception that women and their fertility are being paid for. A central criticism of *barlake* by the modern women's movement is that this exchange, often now reduced and referred to as a dowry, or bride-price, creates in the groom and his family a sense that they own the woman who has joined their family through marriage, a condition cited as a major factor in domestic violence and undue pressure on married women to produce children. These processes of commodification have happened in other parts of the world, such as India, and have had negative effects on women's lives. Yet many women in Timor still speak in favor of *barlake*; they say it values them and is an important part of their culture.²⁹ One hears women defend the *barlake* particularly in any context that notes its degradation during the Indonesian occupation—a period when women experienced a profound loss of security and status. A key distinction in this debate is between the use of the terms *value* and *price*, and this needs to be explored further. A focus on the original principles of *barlake*, rather than the amounts exchanged, may improve the outcomes for women.

Some recent research reports that domestic violence is as prevalent in matrilineal communities (where *barlake* exchanges are low) as in patrilineal communities, suggesting that *barlake* is only one of several factors that may lead to increased domestic violence.³⁰ A deeper analysis may be needed to disengage customary practices, like *barlake*, from entrenched socialized practices that have developed in Timor-Leste. However these factors are so interwoven that separating them out will be difficult. Allowing that cultural practices evolve and transform over time, a more fruitful approach may be to work with customary authorities to improve how women are regarded and treated within those systems.

Caravels

The process of studying and understanding what a "traditional" role for women is in Timor-Leste must also take into account the effects of Portuguese colonialism. Xavier do Amaral, one of the original leaders of FRETILIN, the modern nationalist

²⁸ Sofi Ospina, draft report with author, 2009.

²⁹ Alola Foundation, "Weaving Women's Stories," unpublished booklet, Dili, 2002.

³⁰ These findings are based on an August 2010 interview conducted in Dili by the author with a researcher from Fokupers (the local and oldest women's NGO in Timor-Leste), who carried out the research into the relationship between *barlake* practices and the prevalence of domestic violence. For various reasons the research report is not available.

movement of the 1970s, attributes a feminist agenda to the most famous rebel against Portuguese colonialism, Dom Boaventura.³¹ Boaventura led an armed rebellion against the Portuguese in 1911. While it was far too early in the century for Boaventura to have developed a fully feminist consciousness, Amaral argues that one of Boaventura's grievances was the sexual abuse and exploitation of Timorese women by the Portuguese. The idea of protecting women and keeping them safe at home must have become more firmly entrenched as a result of Portuguese colonialism and Timorese resistance to Portuguese abuse of women.

For most of the twentieth century, eastern Timor was ruled directly from Portugal by the fascist dictatorship of Salazar. The colony remained neglected and closeted from any modern liberal ideas. Colonial society was strictly hierarchically ordered, with the upper echelons peopled by the Portuguese military and civilian officers. Beneath them, Timorese society was ordered according to three main social classes: an upper class of the old, elite, mixed-race persons, *mesticos*, and the *liurai* families; a middle class of *mestico* and educated native Timorese; and a lower class of the mass of uneducated native Timorese. The colonial administration was overwhelmingly maintained by an urbanized and "Portugalized" *mestico* elite. These socially prominent, "white collar patricians" believed it was their duty and right to lead the community, and their attitude toward the native Timorese was "both aloof and paternalistic." One anthropologist commented that most in Timor had "what can only be described as an obsession with social rank."³² Education was key to class mobility and generally limited to a privileged minority, typically the sons of *liurais* and *mesticos*. However, elite girls too could be educated, typically by orders of nuns, with a heavy emphasis on the students' domestic skills.

Rosa Muki Bonaparte was another founder of FRETILIN and the only woman to hold a position within the central structure of a political party in the 1970s.³³ She was also leader of FRETILIN's Organização Popular Mulher Timorense (Popular Organization of Timorese Women, OPMT). A statement from her from the 1970s reads, "The creation of OPMT has a double objective: firstly, to participate directly in the struggle against colonialism, and second, to fight in every way the violent discrimination that Timorese women had suffered in colonial society."³⁴ Another OPMT member, Domingas Coelho, recollected in 1991 that "OPMT also encouraged the women to take part in meetings. The Portuguese never encouraged women to work outside the home—they were expected to stay at home all the time."³⁵ Current female parliamentarian Bi Soi recalled the early days of OPMT, "During Portuguese times and because of Timorese culture, East Timorese women were not allowed to express their ideas and say what they [wanted]. It was a challenge for me to contribute to and fight for women's rights."³⁶

³¹ Ospina, "Participation of Women in Politics," p. 16.

³² Thatcher, "Timor-Born in Exile in Australia," pp. 60–95.

³³ Ospina, "Participation of Women in Politics," p. 18.

³⁴ Helen Hill, "FRETILIN: The Origins, Ideologies, and Strategies of a Nationalist Movement in East Timor" (master's thesis, Monash University, 1978), p. 192.

³⁵ E. Franks, "Women and Resistance in East Timor: 'The Centre, as They Say, Knows Itself by the Margins,'" *Women's Studies International Forum* 19,1/2 (1996): 158.

³⁶ This comment was made in an interview held with Bi Soi by the author in 2010, in Dili. It should appear more fully in a forthcoming chapter, "Bisoi—A Veteran of Timor-Leste's Independence Movement," in the book *Nationalist Women in South East Asia*.

Catholicism also had an enormous impact on Timorese culture. The colonial society was heavily influenced by the missionary zeal of the Catholic priests who commanded “god-like” respect.³⁷ Harris Rimmer explains the nature of the Catholic Church in recent times:

The Church in Timor Lorosa'e was cut off from the outside world at the same time as the changes introduced by the second Vatican Council (1962–65) were beginning to percolate through the Church on a global level. Some trappings of the pre-Vatican II era still remain ... The Church is itself a patriarchal institution wedded to ideas of hierarchy and obedience and has supported the patriarchal structure of East Timorese society.³⁸

The paternalism of the Portuguese colonial administration, when combined with its attendant Catholic Church, has had a great effect on women's strength and power in East Timor.³⁹ No one can measure precisely to what extent Catholicism degraded women's sacred power within the Timorese indigenous religion and replaced it with its own, more demure, version of femininity. I would argue that the late colonial-era status of women, which OPMT was fighting to improve, was inferior to the status Timorese women commanded prior to the advent of the Portuguese and their influence; certainly it was not a better one.

Today Rosa Bonaparte and other women important to the early struggle seem like ghosts: They appear in documents and occasionally in photos but, mostly, they are invisible in the telling of East Timorese history. They do not make an appearance in the Resistance Museum in Dili, where women are startlingly absent. Most of the writing on East Timor is fully focused on the men: the leaders and guerrilla fighters.

War

During the Indonesian occupation (1975–99), the military and police deliberately used violence, including the rape and torture of women and girls, to achieve political and psychological advantage over the population.⁴⁰ Peter Carey goes so far as to say that some of these acts of sexual violence appear to have been ritualistic and “designed to eradicate the sexual potency of entire elite families.”⁴¹ These abuses have been methodically documented, most comprehensively by the national

³⁷ Geoffrey Hull, “East Timor: Just a Political Question?” Occasional Paper No. 11, North Sydney: ACSJC, 1992, p. 5.

³⁸ Susan Harris Rimmer, “The Roman Catholic Church and the Rights of East Timorese Women,” in *Mixed Blessing: Women, Religion, and the Law in Southeast Asia*, ed. Caroline Evan and Amanda Whiting (Leiden: Brill Press, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2005), pp. 164, 173.

³⁹ Cristalis and Scott, *Independent Women*, p. 24.

⁴⁰ Mario de Araujo, “Liberation for Everyone, Not Just Men’: A Case Study of the Men’s Association against Violence (AMKV) in Timor Leste,” in *Gender Equality and Men: Learning from Practice*, p. 141.

⁴¹ Peter Carey, “Challenging Tradition, Changing Society: The Role of Women in East Timor's Transition to Independence,” *Lusotopie* (2001): 258. See also Sara Niner, “Hakat klot, Narrow Steps: Negotiating Gender in Post-Conflict Timor-Leste,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 13,3 (2011): 413–35, for a discussion of how women who were sexually abused during the war have been rejected by communities and unrecognized in post-war programs; and Graydon, “Time to Get Serious,” pp. 389–91, on these same issues.

Commission for Truth, Reception, and Reconciliation.⁴² I have noted here previously the brutal effects of such armed conflict and will extrapolate further on how this can affect gender in a postwar society.

Few people have studied and documented a perhaps more surprising effect of the Indonesian occupation: how the Indonesian civilian administration also offered opportunities to women that had never existed under the Portuguese. More women were able to work under Indonesian, as opposed to Portuguese, rule: in the public service sector, a few women rose to senior positions and became involved in NGOs and state-sponsored women's organizations, such as the Dharma Wanita, for wives of civil servants, and the Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga, which worked to build the capacities of rural women and improve their living conditions. Many current female political leaders worked with the Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga, which also allowed them to disguise their work for the clandestine resistance. By the later years of the occupation, women also had greatly increased access to basic education and to tertiary education.⁴³

However, human rights abuses overshadowed any such development and the national women's council, Rede Feto, estimated that 45 percent of women lost their husbands during the Indonesian occupation, so women were also forced to head households.⁴⁴ Women also took up new roles in the resistance structures, with one reliable source quoting a figure estimating the percentage of women among resistance cadres as high as 60 percent.⁴⁵ The Rede Feto statement to the United Nations Security Council in 2000 reads:

From the invasion of 1975, Timorese women have contributed to all aspects of the resistance in the mountains: Timorese women were at once mothers, responsible for basic household duties and taking care of children. We assisted FALINTIL (the armed resistance of East Timor) in the preparation of food and other natural resources for combat rations, in the making of backpacks from palm-leaves for carrying munitions and for washing the clothes of FALINTIL as well as being fighters ourselves. Women functioned as a security watch in the free zones, taking combat rations in the free zones to be transported to the operational zones as well as taking munitions out of the operational zones into the free zones. Women also developed literacy campaigns and cultural interchanges in the free zones. In Clandestine Operations women acted as the link between the resistance inside and the Diaspora, we searched for means to obtain munitions from our husband or brothers to increase the munitions of FALINTIL; we wove *tais* and made sandals to sell them to Indonesian soldiers as a form of exchange for fatigues or shoes for FALINTIL, we prepared the combat rations to take to the armed resistance and during periods when there was no water, we looked for means to provide water to FALINTIL, and thus encountered dangerous

⁴² CAVR, "Timor-Leste Women and the Conflict: National Public Hearing, April 28–29, 2003," Dili, 2005, at http://www.cavr-timorleste.org/phbFiles/02_women_eng_WEB.pdf.

⁴³ Ospina, "Participation of Women in Politics," p. 21.

⁴⁴ Rede Feto, "The Role of Women in Maintaining International Peace and Security: Statement by Rede Feto," United Nations Security Council Special Session, Dili, 2000.

⁴⁵ Cristalis and Scott, *Independent Women*, p. 39.

situations. During the military sweeps under Indonesia, we hid members of the FALINTIL in our house and in difficult situations, took messages or urgent letters inside our clothing or hair to aid the leadership or FALINTIL. We contributed a monthly allowance and when captured by the Indonesian military, we resisted and thus suffered twice as much, either by being raped or by giving our life.⁴⁶

Women were prominent in the political campaigning around the independence ballot, and we can assume (as no gender-disaggregated data was forthcoming) that women made up approximately half of the 78.5 percent of East Timorese who voted for independence in 1999. The early years of the FRETILIN-led struggle explicitly worked toward the emancipation of women, but the subsequent more pluralist leadership did not give a high priority to this element. Women are proud of their role in the resistance, but for twenty-four years, the struggle for women's rights was subsumed by the broader national struggle for independence.

WOMEN AND MEN'S CONTEMPORARY STATUS

While most Timorese live in rural poverty—a life devoted to subsistence farming—indicators for the health and well-being of women and children are worse than for men. There is substantial gender inequity in Timor-Leste, illustrated by the 2004 Human Development Index (HDI) (0.426) and Gender Development Index (GDI) (0.369), which show that women had a 13 percent lower standard of living than men.⁴⁷ Disparity between men and women exists across the domains of land ownership, political participation, access to education and economic activities, and domestic, including reproductive, decision making.

Women, overall, are less likely to participate in the salaried workforce, representing around 36 percent of non-agricultural-sector employees and, usually, occupy lower-level positions, which means they earn lower salaries, receive fewer benefits, and are less likely to be promoted.⁴⁸ In 2005, women represented around 25 percent of the civil service but held only 2 percent of the highest positions.⁴⁹ The gender wage-gap is great, with women earning one-eighth of what men earn.⁵⁰ In 2010, Timor-Leste received a rating of 55 in the Gender Equity Index (GEI) published by Social Watch (higher than Indonesia, at 52, and South Korea, at 54). This reflected an improved rating in education for females, but, overall, Timor's rating was pulled

⁴⁶ Rede Feto, "The Role of Women in Maintaining International Peace and Security: Statement by Rede Feto," United Nations Security Council Special Session, Dili, 2000, at <http://etan.org/et2000c/october/22-31/24ther.htm>

⁴⁷ Vanda Narciso and Pedro Henriques, "Women and Land in Timor-Leste: Issues in Gender and Development," *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* 17,1 (2010): 58.

⁴⁸ Monica Costa, Rhonda Sharp, and Diane Elson, "Gender-Responsive Budgeting in the Asia-Pacific Region: Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste Country Profile" (Adelaide University of South Australia, 2009), p. 5, <http://w3.unisa.edu.au/hawkeinstitute/research/gender-budgets/documents/timor-lestes.pdf>, accessed July 3, 2012.

⁴⁹ Ospina, "Participation of Women in Politics."

⁵⁰ Asian Development Bank (ADB)/UNIFEM, "Gender and Nation Building in Timor-Leste: Country Gender Assessment," 2005, p. 23, at <http://www.adb.org/documents/gender-and-nation-building-timor-lestes-country-gender-assessment>, accessed June 2012.

down by low indicators for the economy and for women's empowerment due to the small percentage of women in technical, management, and government positions.

Women also face other problems: They have an average of eight children, with only 19 percent of those births being attended by a skilled health worker, meaning infant and maternal mortality is high, although this situation is improving.⁵¹ Children and growing families are very welcome in a country that has been through such a brutal conflict, and many more traditionally minded rural parents believe children are their greatest wealth and a valuable asset in their subsistence farming lifestyle. Nevertheless, the high mortality figures speak for the negative impacts of this birthrate on mothers and their children. Equally, considerable child rearing and domestic duties limit women's educational and economic opportunities and political participation.

Anecdotally, many women express a desire for fewer children, yet they commonly are given few opportunities to make decisions about their fertility and sexual health, for those choices are often dictated by husband and family.⁵² It is difficult for women to gain access to family planning services, and abortion is common, even though it now carries severe criminal penalties. The Catholic Church strongly opposes any changes to the abortion laws, even in cases of rape and incest, and the government is heavily influenced by church dogma. Women activists who speak out on these issues are fearful of being excommunicated.

Today the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Timor-Leste remains conservative, stressing women's roles as wives and mothers, roles characterized by maternalism and sexual purity. While the Vatican has opposed and attacked rights perceived to challenge traditional family structures by increasing women's control over reproduction and sexuality, this does not necessarily reflect the position of all church personnel, some of whom have more pragmatic strategies to assist the poor people they serve. Giving women the right to choose how many children they have and when they have them are life-and-death choices in Timor. Understanding the cultural and religious influences on women and men in this regard is crucial.⁵³

It is estimated that domestic violence accounts for 40 percent of all reported crime in Timor-Leste, yet a 2004 report found that formal justice systems dismally failed women attempting to pursue justice for such crimes.⁵⁴ Mild forms of domestic violence are viewed as normal and even as an educative tool in families. In response to these conditions, a concerted national campaign against domestic violence is well underway, which includes appearances by national leaders, suggesting a

⁵¹ Some preliminary figures released in 2010 by the Ministry of Health indicate that the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is decreasing and now may be as low as 5.7 children per woman (although an advisor to the Ministry of Health contends that this figure is based on statistics for a much wider survey group than used in previous surveys and includes unmarried women). Also reported are new figures for the maternal and infant mortality rates, and an increase in births assisted by health professionals. Presentation by Ministry of Health of the "*Strategua Nacional Saude Reproductiva Timor-Leste*," May 29, 2010, Baucau.

⁵² D. J. Soares, "A Gender and Generational Perspective on Disunity," seminar paper, Crisis in Timor-Leste: Options for Future Stability Seminar, Development Studies Network, Australian National University, June 9, 2006.

⁵³ Esther Richards, "'Not with Fear': Understanding the Role of the Catholic Church in Reproductive Healthcare in Timor-Leste," paper delivered to "Understanding Timor-Leste," Timor-Leste Studies Association Conference, Dili, University of Timor-Leste, July 2-3, 2009.

⁵⁴ JSMP (Judicial System Monitoring Programme), "Women in the Formal Justice Sector: Report on the Dili District Court" (Dili: JSMP, 2004).

countrywide dialogue on this serious issue has begun. The campaign has been driven by strong pressure from the Timorese women's movement; many of the women involved are ex-resistance veterans. Some critics have claimed that these women strategically used the post-conflict moment and the international presence to legitimate and fund this campaign. This illustrates the crucial need to create "a locally grounded discourse of gender equality" that does not prompt political elites to respond by claiming that such reforms are simply "a western imposition."⁵⁵

Every four years, beginning in 2000, the National Women's Congress in Timor-Leste has met to discuss priorities and concerns contained in a national platform of action. Out of the first congress emerged Rede Feto Timor-Leste, the national women's network. It has seventeen member organizations, including the oldest and largest groups—the OPMT, founded in 1975, and the Organização Mulher Timorese (Organization of Timorese Women, OMT), founded in 1998; both are nationally aligned to the two main political factions. Rede Feto's main programs are concerned with advocacy for gender equality and women's rights, and with strengthening members' organizational capacities. Rede Feto and its member organizations work together with the government and international agencies, such as the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to elevate and reinforce the status of women in Timor.⁵⁶ Much has been done, but considerable work remains.

The East Timorese women's movement has been particularly successful at advancing the more formal or "strategic" interests of women, while the more "practical," or grassroots, needs of women have not been dealt with so dynamically.⁵⁷ A tension between these priorities has been noted within the women's movement, indicated, in part, by a corresponding divide between middle-class, urban women, who are inclined to advocate a more feminist agenda, and less-educated, rural women.⁵⁸ Here we see, again, that class intersects with and has an impact upon gender. The elite women who, for the most part, form the leadership of the women's movement in the capitol of Dili have been responsible for advancing the "strategic" level initiatives (in partnership with international agencies) very successfully, while practical programs are less developed.

Political parties and campaign events are dominated by men due to women's low rate of public political participation. Women do turn out to vote in large numbers, however, which bodes well for the future. In the first National Parliament, an impressive 26 percent of members were women, yet this may not have much effect on decision making, as voting is broadly along party lines and parties continue to be dominated by men, although the UN-funded Women's Caucus and the Gender Resource Centre in the parliament are making inroads by supporting women parliamentarians. Women's inequality in Timor-Leste is also being addressed by programs of national government gender mainstreaming and budgeting. These programs have been held back by weak political will, poor technical skills, inadequate funding, and a generalized blindness, on the part of Timorese politicians,

⁵⁵ Hall, "East Timorese Women," p. 323.

⁵⁶ Cristalis and Scott, *Independent Women*; Ana Trembath and Damien Grenfell, "Mapping the Pursuit of Gender Equality in Timor-Leste," Globalism Institute, RMIT University, 2007.

⁵⁷ Helen Hill, paper delivered to the Australian Association for the Advancement of Pacific Studies Conference, Easter 2010, private correspondence with author.

⁵⁸ Hall, "East Timorese Women," p. 310.

to gender inequities. An essential resistance to change in the male-dominated hierarchies tend to marginalize gender equality concerns and reforms.⁵⁹

How a post-war society treats its female veterans is a significant indicator of the status and future of women in that society.⁶⁰ In Timor-Leste, women who served either directly in the guerrilla army FALINTIL as combatants or by filling military-support roles have not been recognized and rewarded as male veterans have. Many of the women engaged in armed conflict acted as the partners of their guerrilla-fighter husbands in carrying out duties in the military camps, and they sometimes took up arms if their husbands were disabled or killed. Some of these women have been rewarded by programs for widows, but no female combatants have been included in any formal demobilization programs. This pattern is common in other post-conflict societies.⁶¹ Sofi Opsina tracks the process:

[Women] did not hold positions of power in the revolutionary structure or in the male dominated Falintil hierarchy. Falintil's registers, created by two independent commissions established by the President of the Republic [Xanana Gusmão] in April 2003 (for veterans and ex-combatants, respectively), did not include a single woman among the 37,472 people listed. Women, it was reasoned, were civilian cadres not combatants. Women interviewed for this study said they wanted to register but were advised by the President of the Republic to wait for the third commission, listing civilian participants. This commission, established in September 2004, registered 39,000 civil cadres (*quadros civis*), political prisoners, and members of the clandestine front, 30 percent of whom were women.⁶²

Female ex-combatants were sidelined more or less completely.⁶³ The current veterans' law covers Timorese citizens who engaged in warfare full time for at least three years between 1975 and 1999. There are different levels of qualified veterans—one's level is assigned according to the length of one's proven service—and benefits include ceremonial recognition, medical assistance, education, access to social programs, and housing. In 2010, there were 12,540 beneficiaries, of whom only 392 are women.⁶⁴ This program discriminates against women because a veteran's military service needs to have been continuous and full time, while most women provided part-time or intermittent support due to pregnancies, and to their responsibilities for raising families and caring for the sick, injured, and elderly. Cynthia Enloe has critiqued how postwar societies so often define "veteran" in a manner that privileges male combatants, saying, "Assignments of significance or triviality—that is, visibility or invisibility—are typically based on the gendered presumption that what men did must have been more important than what women

⁵⁹ Costa, "Gender Sensitive Budgeting," p. 6.

⁶⁰ Cf. Cynthia H. Enloe, *The Curious Feminist: Searching for Women in a New Age of Empire* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004).

⁶¹ Cahn and Ni Aolain, "Gender, Masculinities, and Transition," p. 115.

⁶² Opsina, "Participation of Women in Politics."

⁶³ Myrntinen, "Poster Boys No More," p. 10.

⁶⁴ UNMIT (United Nations Mission in Timor-Leste), presentation on Women Veterans, July 2010.

did in determining how the war was fought.”⁶⁵ As female combatants did not serve the armed struggle in ways that have been recognized by male leaders, or by international agencies involved in postwar reconstruction, women became invisible in the demobilization process and were not recognized or rewarded for their service.

In what can be described as a campaign for the recognition of women’s actions during the struggle for independence, a series of documents has been published by Timorese women and their international supporters.⁶⁶ Like other issues of profound importance to women, this task has fallen to a few underresourced women who are “active in overworked local women’s groups,” allied with a “handful of feminists inside international agencies.”⁶⁷ This work is being continued today by women concerned that their experiences are unrecognized, crimes against them have gone unpunished, and their current needs and rights are unmet. In August 2010, OPMT launched a history project. Women organizers were able to co-opt the support of elite, male political leaders—the president, prime minister, and leader of the opposition—to leverage donations from the local business community (while also taking credit for bringing these estranged leaders together on this issue and strengthening their relations with one another). Due to these laudable efforts, this issue—that women must be acknowledged for their significant contributions to the resistance—has been receiving more attention, and the recognition of women’s roles is slowly progressing, though much more work is yet to be done.

In the contested world of modern Timorese history, the lack of acknowledgment of the crucial role of women in the resistance denies them a full and active role in the post-conflict society. This discrimination is being contested by women activists, but they need more assistance. Not only should female combatants be extended the same privileges as their male counterparts, but the categories of combatants need to be broadened to ensure that women who have provided unique support roles to military are included among those who have received acknowledgment and benefits.⁶⁸

MILITARIZATION AND MASCULINITY

The dominance of men in contemporary Timorese society has been examined here. This contemporary situation is reinforced by a continuing and persistent militarization that has endured even after the Indonesian occupation ended. Cynthia Enloe, a feminist international political analyst, argues that militarization in post-war

⁶⁵ Enloe, *Curious Feminist*, p. 196.

⁶⁶ Rebecca Winters, *Voice of East Timorese Women* (Darwin: East Timor International Support Centre, 1999); Micato D. F. Alves, Laura S. Abrantes, Filomena B. Reis, *Hakarek no ran: Written in Blood* (Dili: Office for the Promotions of Equality, Prime Minister’s Office, Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, 2003); Cristalis and Scott, *Independent Women*; APSC-TL (Asia Pacific Support Collective-Timor Leste) with SEPI and MSS (published in Dili, 2008), *Segredu: Xáve ba Ukun Rasik-an* [Secrecy: The Key to Independence] (Dili: Rede Feto [with Fokupers and APSC-TL], 2012); Rede Feto (with Fokupers and APSC-TL), *Hau Fo Midar; Hau Simu Moruk* [I give sweet; I get sour] (Dili: Rede Feto [with Fokupers and APSC-TL], 2007); and Jude Conway, *Step by Step: Women of East Timor, Stories of Resistance and Survival* (Darwin: Charles Darwin University Press, 2010).

⁶⁷ Enloe, *Curious Feminist*, p. 225.

⁶⁸ Cahn and Ni Aolain, “Gender, Masculinities, and Transition,” p. 120.

societies reentrenches the privileging of masculinity.⁶⁹ In East Timor, we can trace the militarization of society throughout the occupation by the Indonesian military and in the reactions of the armed and clandestine resistance organizations. Moreover, militarization did not stop at the end of the Indonesian occupation but continued with the arrival of around ten thousand UN peacekeeping forces. Vijaya Joshi describes this effect and also the “masculine nature” of the first UN administration.⁷⁰

The predominantly male leadership of East Timor’s armed struggle was engaged in a brutal and bloody war for most of their adult lives and suffered a variety of ill-effects, including displacement, imprisonment, torture, and loss of family and fellow soldiers, close friends, and colleagues. Just as disturbingly, their mothers, wives, and daughters have often been victims of sexual abuse at the hands of the Indonesian military or its militias, as Timorese women were often targeted because of their male associates, as noted. It is these male elites who now head up the government, military, and police, and the society they have shaped is heavily influenced by military thinking and behaviors and their own personal traumas. These influential men have become part of creating a dominant, or hegemonic, form of masculinity in Timor-Leste today that is not a positive one in terms of gender equity. Enloe reminds us that a militarized masculinity requires a “feminine complement” that excludes “women from full and assertive participation in post-war public life.”⁷¹ This analysis of gender relations applies accurately to Timor-Leste, as it does to many post-conflict societies.

An aggressive conflict within this male political leadership led to the 2006 national political crisis that shattered the process of reconstruction.⁷² Graydon attributes some of the conflict to the “testosterone-charged question of ‘Who is the biggest hero?’” and notes that local women commented that they wished male leaders could overlook their differences for the sake of the country.⁷³ While these events are common to post-conflict societies, such ongoing cycles of trauma, violence, and conflict are also attributable to persistent militarization in Timor-Leste. The fact that women played such a small part in the 2006 crisis—not only in causing it, but also in solving it—illustrates the reality that women lack an influential role in political and security affairs. Although it was largely members of the male political elite who caused this crisis, few analyses have held them responsible for it; security

⁶⁹ Enloe, *Curious Feminist*, pp. 217–18.

⁷⁰ Vijaya Joshi, “Building Opportunities: Women’s Organizing, Militarism, and the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor” (doctoral dissertation, Clark University, Worcester, MA, 2005).

⁷¹ Enloe, *Curious Feminist*, pp. 217–18.

⁷² The national political violence of 2006 can be explained by complex internecine conflicts between male political elites and their agents, including divisions within the army, F-FDTL (between ex-guerrilla commander brigadier-general Taur Matan Ruak and rebels ultimately led by “Major” Alfredo Alves Reinado), and between the army and police force, PNTL, led until 2006 by Interior Minister Rogerio Lobato. The politicization of both forces was the result of the inept processes of selection and training of candidates under the auspices of the United Nations. These disputes opened old personal and political divisions between the then-prime minister, Marí Alkatiri, and his FRETILIN political party and then-president (now prime minister) Xanana Gusmão and his supporters. These dynamics played out a further, and some hope final, chapter in February 2008 with armed attacks on President Ramos-Horta and Prime Minister Gusmão by the rebel forces of Reinado, which led to Reinado being fatally shot during the coup.

⁷³ Graydon, *Women’s Rights in Timor-Leste*, pp. 400–401.

and political analysts who are insensitive to gender issues rarely note the roles played by these leaders.

Another issue that is common across postwar societies with regard to demobilization is how it has failed to deal with the deep imprinting of violent masculinities in former combatants. We can see an illustration of this in Timor-Leste in the hypermasculine figure of deceased rebel leader Alfredo Reinado (see footnote 6), who was extraordinarily popular with young urban men, including some soldiers and police, many of whom aped his action-hero style. Connell highlights how this type of masculinity, shaped by and inclined to violence, is not just individualistic, “but is collectively defined or institutionally supported, whether in informal peer groups, formal armies, or militias or somewhere between the two.”⁷⁴ To combat the creation of future Reinados, the Timorese should focus on addressing the causes and consequences of such negative masculinities within institutions, particularly the police and armed forces. The continuing expansion of military and police forces (whose members perpetuate fierce attitudes developed under the occupation) and the substantial purchase of military arms and hardware since 2007 appear excessive in such an underdeveloped economy. The ceremonies marking the ten-year anniversary of the police—with celebrations of weaponry—were distasteful to many observers. Even more distasteful is a new national insignia featuring crossed guns.

Today, military-style marching groups and martial arts groups throughout East Timorese society are pervasive. Since the early 1980s, Indonesian military strategy included the establishment of civilian militias, which by 1999 had developed into the national network of armed militias that fought the resistance in the bloody battle for independence. This plethora of groups, gangs, and militias gained strength again in 2006, and it remains strong in Timorese society. James Scambary notes, “While the Indonesian army and the militias may have retreated back across the border, they left behind the volatile, living legacy of a deeply militarized society with multiple, highly organized militant groups.”⁷⁵ These gangs too must be engaged in programs that examine their own histories and related ideas, perspectives that underpin their actions today.

Yet the gender politics discussed here, particularly concerning perceptions of masculinity, are little monitored or addressed in contemporary gender programs. Most research on gender issues is instigated by donor agencies, while academics writing on Timor-Leste have shown less interest in gender than the NGOs have.⁷⁶ A national dialogue on masculinities and the legacy of the war is urgently needed, as is an affirmation of “a different and positive masculinity.”⁷⁷ One model for this kind of campaign is the Men’s Association Against Violence (AMKV), founded by twenty concerned Timorese men in 2002. They explain their work:

Using a popular education approach, we focus on domestic violence and problems related to the tradition and customs that influence our perceptions of gender. We use common situations that would be familiar to the participants, and we talk about our own personal experiences of change. We

⁷⁴ Oxfam, *Gender Equality and Men*, p. 9.

⁷⁵ James Scambary, “Trapped in the Legacy of the Past,” *Inside Indonesia* 96 (April–June 2009): 1, available at <http://insideindonesia.org/content/view/1193/47/>, accessed May 1, 2012.

⁷⁶ Costa, “Gender Sensitive Budgeting,” p. 6.

⁷⁷ Cahn and Ni Aolain, “Gender, Masculinities, and Transition,” pp. 120–21.

always promote examples of practical and realistic behaviour-change, so that on leaving the forums participants have the knowledge to make immediate change in their own lives. There are often heated debates during the discussions, but there is also a lot of humour and goodwill as participants reflect on the origins of their traditions, beliefs, and behaviour around gender differences. At the community level, there are men who are responsive and willing to be involved. However, at all levels of Timorese society, there is still a high level of disinterest and apathy around issues of gender and gender-based violence.⁷⁸

This small group of men and other individual men have begun to challenge the widely accepted norms of male privilege, power, and use of violence, but such an important job should not be left up to underresourced NGOs and a few individuals.

CONCLUSION

Veteran and parliamentarian Maria Paixao clearly stated in 2009, “Patriarchal systems and male-biased traditional power structures within our society that impede women’s leadership and equal participation in decision making still exist.”⁷⁹ We know that women are profoundly important within indigenous Timorese society, that women can be powerful within their own domestic sphere, and that elite women too wield power and are very privileged. These powers and types of authority that have been granted to women traditionally, and earned by women more recently, must be built upon to improve the social situation, health, and political status of Timorese women generally.

Understanding the status and power women hold in indigenous systems is crucial, first because such an understanding can help and guide those who seek to resist contemporary pressure for women to take on a more subservient traditional role. In addition, any improvements in status for the majority of women must be made through an engagement with indigenous, or traditional, society, as this model remains culturally dominant in Timor and continues to engender a sense of identity and meaning to most people.⁸⁰ We must seek to understand how, in a strong and resilient indigenous culture like that in Timor, women’s status, power, and income are maintained by traditional relations or customary practices, and how these relations can be strengthened. For instance, many rural women see *barlake* as protecting and valuing them within indigenous social systems, but the complexity and variability of the *barlake* system is little understood by scholars, international organizations, or Timorese politicians, and research about its everyday impact on women’s life is sorely inadequate. Graydon outlines some promising strategies that could be used in this regard.

⁷⁸ Araujo, “Liberation for Everyone,” pp. 143–44.

⁷⁹ Maria Paixao de Jesus da Costa, “Voices for Change: Women’s Voices in Politics and Decision Making in Post-Conflict Societies,” paper presented at the Second International Women for Peace Conference, Dili, March 5–6, 2009, sponsored by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Fundasaun Alola.

⁸⁰ M. Anne Brown and Alex Freitas Gusmao, “Peacebuilding and Political Hybridity in East Timor,” *Peace Review* 21,1 (2009): 61–69.

Issues of masculinity in Timor also remain unaddressed, and militarization as an ongoing social phenomenon is unmonitored. Enloe reminds us that “if we lack the tools to chart *postwar* militarization, we will almost certainly be ill equipped to monitor the subtle ways in which—democratic rhetoric notwithstanding—masculinity continues to be the currency for domination and exclusion.”⁸¹ Research on gender roles in Timor-Leste is sparse, and a locally grounded debate on gender roles and relations between men and women is still in its infancy. Most male academics and analysts have been gender-blind in their research on Timor, particularly in political and security analysis, and Enloe rates such analysis as not just incomplete but unreliable.⁸²

There are, however, reasons to be optimistic about gender equity in Timor-Leste: The statistics show a difficult situation for women but not a hopeless one, and the crucial indicators relating to women’s education and health have been improving over the last five years. The local women’s movement is strong and stoic, women are well represented in parliament and the cabinet, and the current campaign against domestic violence shows the strategic strength of Timorese women leaders and their international alliances who seek to spark a cultural transformation using locally grounded debate. Moreover, the young population is not as closely bound by the conservatism of the past.

Women and men must live and work within the patriarchal systems that dominate human societies all over the world, and, acknowledging this situation, we grant the last word to a man, Mario Araujo from AMKV.

AMKV recognizes that we have a long way to go both as an organization and as men working in the field of gender. We too are susceptible to the cultural norms of the society we live in, and it is a constant battle to be questioning long-held beliefs and customs against strong opposition. Even with the guidance and support of a Timor Leste women’s movement, it will be a long and difficult journey to be accepted by both men and women alike. However the history of resistance in Timor is strong, and in a new era of nationhood we are optimistic, and determined that liberation will be for everyone, not just for men!⁸³

In concert with every county and community around the world on the journey toward the ideal of gender equity, men and women in Timor have myriad perspectives that often jar and clash in a difficult post-conflict environment, making their journey a particularly difficult and bumpy one.

⁸¹ Enloe, *Curious Feminist*, pp. 217–18.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁸³ Araujo, “Liberation for Everyone,” p. 145.