Remembering the dead from the customary to the modern in Timor-Leste

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Introduction[1]

Remembering the dead is central to the order of the living in Timor-Leste. This may seem a self-evident statement to say of a society that has witnessed the wide-spread violence and destruction of a twenty-four year occupation. Yet the dead continue to frame day-to-day life in ways that may not be immediately evident to the outsider but which are integral to sustaining social life. Not only does the spirit world continue to reverberate on the fortunes of the living, but the actual acts of remembering—the ritual and commemoration that follows the death of a person—have the effect of reconstituting social connections in quite fundamental ways. In a post-conflict scenario, the need for proper commemoration sees otherwise scarce resources mobilised; bodies are returned to origin villages, familial ties activated across often-dispersed communities, material possessions drawn into the demands of ritual obligation, and graves built. Through such acts death becomes constitutive of social life, as a moment of connection both between those still alive and also between the living and the dead, and as such tends to be one of the most important and deeply social moments in the lives of East Timorese.[2]

A major preoccupation of written academic inquiry on Timor-Leste since 1999 has been the period of the occupation itself and in turn the post-independence consolidation of the national-form. The literature has thus tended to focus on the trappings that come with the fulfillment of sovereignty: a state and a system of governance; development; justice and security; and all the associated institutional, regulatory and cultural forms deemed necessary to support these objectives. In this context, discussions of death have tended to be addressed in several different ways that sit within these broader frameworks of state- and nation-building. For instance, accounting for those killed during the Indonesian occupation has been the basis for debates on justice, reconciliation and human rights. Alternatively the dead have featured as markers of the lack of 'development progress', for instance as statistical indicators of infant or maternal mortality rates or of life expectancy. Whether it is the testimony in the former, or the numerical abstraction of the latter, both provide a harrowing read. While this essay continues an interest in the process of nation-formation, and draws to some degree from literature on justice and reconciliation, its focus is much more

on how in a socio-cultural sense death comes to regulate social life through different modes of remembering. As such it draws on anthropological analysis as it is here that the rituals associated with death tend to be discussed in most detail. In addition, this essay draws on field encounters that have tended to come 'by the way', meaning that while learning about commemoration has not been the explicit intent of field work in Timor-Leste, given its ritual importance it inevitably weaves its way into one's work. Together then, ideas from these various sources, drawn into combination with a set of more theoretically framed arguments on social formation, will be used to consider death in the context of the abstracting processes of nation-formation.

Moving across different patterns of social life, the key argument for this essay is that remembering the dead occurs at the intersection of the 'customary' and 'traditional' in Timor-Leste, though at times this can be overlain with a modern pattern of remembrance. In order to make this argument, the essay draws on a schema of different patterns of social integration, notably the customary, the traditional and the modern, which will be discussed in detail in each of the sections of the essay. In terms of structure, the first section of this article establishes what is meant by 'remembering' and also the terms 'customary' and 'traditional'. Building on this, the second section argues that remembering the dead in Timor-Leste occurs at the intersection of the customary and the traditional as part of ensuring respect for the spirit and for a form of balance between the living and spirit worlds. The third section of the article argues that, in the case of those killed during the Indonesian occupation, it is possible to see a more outwardly directed pattern of remembering occur which in turn is suggestive of a modern ontology. In the final section it will be argued that through patterns of remembering it is possible to see both contestation, as well as pathways for sustainability, in the way people negotiate their relationship to different forms of community. Even with their differences, these forms of remembering are taken as constitutive of social life, namely that they provide a point of connection and definition for the living, even as forms of community change, evolve and adapt in a post-independence period.

In an article such as this one thing needs to be stated clearly from the start. Writing academically on the subject of death is never meant to take away from the fact that the subject of discussion here are people who were loved as part of families and whose death has caused acute sadness and grief.[3] The visceral effect of the sound of mourning is next to impossible to capture in such writing as this. Moreover, the arguments here respect the fact that the dead in East Timorese culture often live on for people in a way that I can only begin to comprehend. Nevertheless, I still consider it important to write this essay as not only are key elements of social life in Timor-Leste too often treated as some kind of cultural ephemera as the 'real business' of development and state-building move ahead, but that the very sustainability of those modernising processes often silently depend on the continuation of the vitality of customary forms of social life.

Remembering the dead in Timor-Leste

In this article the term 'remembering' is used to delineate *collective* material and discursive practices based on contemporary interpretations of a past. While recognising that 'memory' can be discussed in more individualistic psycho-social ways—as in terms of a person's own consciousness—even this has an intense sociality to it.[4] As an outward articulation of memory, the dimensions of remembering that are drawn into consideration here are those that carry the dead forward in ways that continue to frame and regulate social life for the living; they encompass mourning, commemoration, ceremony, tribute and ritual, and built markers such as gravesites, memorials and monuments. Collective memory scholars[5] often stress aspects of remembering that are taken as important to this essay, notably the qualities of embodiment and sociality, as for instance Anne Whitehead summarises while reflecting on the work of Jan Assmann and Paul Connerton:

> In arguing for the importance of habit to social forms of remembering, Connerton accordingly seeks to emphasize the ways in which collective memory, too, is reliant on the body. For Assmann, the incorporated practices which could transmit cultural memory from one generation to the next comprised commemorative ceremonies and rituals. Connerton, too, sees these social practices as essential to the preservation of group memories. All rituals are characterized by the bodily performance of set postures, gestures, and movements, which are highly formalized, easily predictable, and readily repeatable. Their power arises from their habituation, so that they form an automatic sequence of movements that can readily identify those who are members of a particular group. Commemorative ceremonies are distinguishable from other rituals because they explicitly refer to prototypical persons or events, which are understood to have a historical or mythological existence. Rites of this sort accordingly possess a characteristic of ritual re-enactment, which is central to the shaping of collective memory. An image of the past is, then, not simply conveyed and sustained by ritual performances; it is also brought to life in the present and relived through direct embodiment and gestural repetition.[6]

While posed in more general terms by Whitehead, when the idea that remembering is constitutive of the present is applied to the practices of commemorating the dead in Timor-Leste, we see how death comes to both sustain social relations of the living and provide an interpretive frame for the condition of their lives. Before this is discussed however, a further element of remembering worth identifying is its political character, treated in the following quote by Jelin and Kaufman in terms of how it can mobilise people:

> When seen in a collective light, as historical memory or tradition, as the process of searching for the roots of identity, the space of memory becomes a space of political struggle. It alludes to the

capacity of preserving a past, a capacity that inevitably implies the participation in the struggle for meaning and for power. Collective remembrances become then politically relevant, as an instrument for legitimizing discourses, as tools for drawing boundaries or for enlarging communities of belonging, and as justifications for the action of social movements.[7]

While I want to draw the political quality of remembering to the fore, it is not until the last part of this essay that it carries the quality of contestation that Jelin and Kaufman speak of here. Rather, in this essay at least, the political dimensions of remembering are seen in the way it connects people together, integrating them in a way that manifests in material and discursive commonalities through which social priorities are legitimised, not just in the use of resources but in the hierarchies of meaning. It is this political basis of remembering that *in turn* allows for forms of contestation to occur. Moreover, it is worth noting that the above quote by Jelin and Kaufman serves well for remembering in modern-abstract communities, as their use of the terms such as 'discourses', 'boundaries', 'communities' and 'belonging' seem to imply—let alone the idea of a 'preservation of the past'. What happens, however, when the dead are remembered within a social context where they are as much a part of the present as the living? This will be answered in turn, but first it is important to briefly begin laying out the social schema that this remembering is mapped against, starting with the customary and the traditional.

In making the central claims of this essay it is important to be clear what is meant by terms such as 'customary' and 'traditional'. Firstly, I am using a sociological framework that assists with mapping patterns of social integration across communities and societies by setting out separate ontological categories of customary, traditional, modern and post-modern relations.[8] This system helps orient research towards 'different ways of being in the world', from the point of conjunction between modes of production, exchange, communication and organisation, to more abstract sets of categories of epistemology, spatiality and temporality. As such, the frequently used terms of 'modern', 'tradition' and 'custom' are here being placed within a social schema that, if not used in an over-deterministic way and with due recognition of its own modernity, helps considerably in delineating basically different socio-political conceptions of the world in subjective and objective terms.

A key benefit of this schema (known as 'constitutive abstraction') is that it allows for an examination of the shifts and points of intersection between ontological forms. Rather than 'reading' societies into hard and rigid categories, this approach enables analysis to show the ontological complexity of different societies. For instance, no society is simply 'modern', though it does become possible to argue that one ontological form may be more in dominance than another. As an extension of this, this analysis does not suggest that one ontological category simply and fully transcends

another; the modern for instance does not sweep all aside. Rather, while the customary, traditional and the modern may appear contradictory in an objective sense, there is not always conflict between them and, as will be argued towards the end of this essay, there are ways in which different ontological formations can sit in sustainable relationship with each other. Such an approach undermines the assumption of an inevitable 'clash' between different social formations. A third feature is that this schema challenges the typical dichotomy between 'the modern' and all other social practices (the 'pre-modern'). Rather, and as will be explained, the traditional and the customary are held to be as distinct from each other as they both are from modernity.

In terms of this schema then, here it will be argued that patterns of remembering the dead in Timor-Leste overwhelmingly sit at the intersection of the 'customary' and the 'traditional'. Treating these categories firstly in isolation (and in more rigid definitional terms) from each other, the 'customary' here refers to a form of social integration that is at the subjective and objective levels the most embodied, and in the inverse, the least abstracted. Social life is integrated in dominance at the embodied 'face-to-face'. Social organisation is affinal, through genealogy and kinship relations. The 'oral' is the dominant form of communication. Food production occurs through hunting, gathering and into basic forms of subsistence agriculture (while some evidence of the former remains now in Timor-Leste, there is a greater emphasis on food production moving towards traditional forms of production and into the modern[9]), with barter and reciprocity a dominant form of exchange. Working at the categorical level, epistemologically the customary tends to be underpinned by a mythological sense of origin or destiny specific to a grouping of people, and the spirit and the human world are taken to be in coterminous relation. In terms of Timor-Leste, *lulik* (sacred) and *lisan* or *adat* (custom including the laws that govern the spiritual), or leaders such as *lia-na'in* (literally 'the owners of the word' as interpreters of regulation) are typical manifestations within a customary ontology, especially in their exclusive application to specific groups and in the connections between the world of the spirits and the living.

Sitting in relation to the customary is what we refer to here as the 'traditional', whereby customary patterns of social integration, genealogy and kinship can be seen to be overlaid by more abstract forms of social relations (that nevertheless still carry forward a strong subjective sense of the embodied). For instance, 'traditional' authority structures within this schema tend to rely on merit in relation to the learning and utilisation of knowledge rather than affinal connection; the Priest gains legitimacy within a parish because his authority comes from an institutional form underpinned by a relationship with a universal god. Hence, and unlike a *lia-na'in*, he can be placed into a community from which he has no familial connection (though, and importantly, is still called 'Father'). In other respects, the willful manipulation of nature can result in surplus agricultural production that

is traded through more abstracted exchange systems, typically monetary in form (though notably still carrying a sense of the embodied via images of people, including in the period of Portuguese colonialism images of particular *liurai*, Timorese kings). Epistemologically, and keeping to the relevant example of Catholicism, there is a move from the customary specificity of mythological origin and destiny to a cosmologically-based universality of humanity which is bound to a common fate.

Writing such as this suggests that the customary and the traditional have a more rigid form than actually is the case subjectively; people would rarely think on their own lives in terms of such categorisation. Nonetheless, laying out such categories does still help us to understand basic differences, such as how the coterminous spirit world of the customary is distinct from the notion of a 'heaven above', or how, and at least in a Catholic sense of the world, we are all bound into a messianic destiny (with the etymology of Catholicism as *katholikos* as 'universal': '*kata*' in respect, '*holos*' for the whole).[10]

Motael Church, Dili, April 2012

In this context, the figure of Christ on a globe is an impossible claim within customary society. Disasters become 'acts of God' under the 'traditional' rather than the reprisal of ancestors as they might be within a customary worldview, or equally explained in scientific terms within modernity (as will be explained later in this article).

While all this could be explained with more detail, the term 'customary-traditional' is here used as a shorthand device to describe the ways ritual practices of remembrance tend to occur at the intersection of two quite distinct ontologies. In other words, and as will be argued in the next section, commemorating the dead in Timor-Leste sees *adat* and Catholic beliefs drawn

into the one set of practices at the time of mourning; yet this does not mean that they become one and the same. As the following description by an East Timorese suggests, the different ontologies (here typified by the ancestral domain on the one hand, and the conception of heaven on the other) can be held together in a sustainable way by one being given a relational dominance:

> Yes, the spirits can create problems [for us living], because they can ask God—the ancestors are second and God is first—and so the sprits can ask 'can God open the door for me or not?' And then if God opens the door for the spirits they can enter the world and create problems if the living did not give them [at their burial] *tais* (traditional woven cloth), or contribute money, and so this way the dead can cause problems.[11]

This is one articulation of how a traditional conception of God is held in connection to a customary notion of the ancestral domain. Another example of this holding together of multiple ontological formations simultaneously can be seen in how modern forensic anthropologists worked with local customary leaders in attempts at finding the remains of massacre victims[12]; though in this example the different ontologies are across groups of people rather than being held together by particular individuals. As will be discussed in the next section, the combination of *adat* and Catholic practices is typical of how remembering the dead occurs in Timor-Leste. Rather than being syncretic as such, remembering is taken to be framed by the drawing together (rather than a fusion) of two ontological formations that recognise the spirit world around us and of God above.
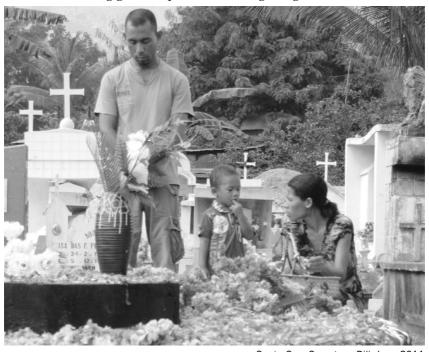
Remembering across the customary and the traditional

In Timor-Leste there is variation in *adat* both across and within different ethno-linguistic groups, in essence particular to the members of an *uma lulik* (sacred house), and so in the case of death there will also be differences depending on who and how a person has died. It is common that East Timorese will preface an explanation of ritual with 'In our *uma lulik*…' or 'Following our *adat*…' in order to convey clearly that their custom is distinct from others, even within their own immediate community.[13] As a consequence it then needs to be recognised that writing in a generalised way on rituals of death is to only give an indicative sense of practices, and equally that through writing people are being treated as if they are one group when on such issues they do not *necessarily* see themselves as connected with one another.

Following death, there is typically a set time period in which a body is to be buried, in some instances only two or three days after a person has died. The deceased are often placed in coffins in either the *uma lulik* and/or the house of the family. Before burial, family members will begin the process of mourning (*lutu*) typically sitting with the body around the clock, grieving, burning candles, saying the name of the deceased, and praying. In carrying forward reciprocity from the world of the living, the good deeds of the deceased will be

spoken of at the time of death as a way of ensuring that the *klamar* (spirit) can properly leave the body without hindrance and enter the spiritual domain.

While practices relating to the remembrance of the dead vary following burial, they commonly encompass periodic visits back to the gravesite where flower petals are spread (*kari aifunan*), candles lit and prayers made, together giving sustenance to the spirit (as in food and light). Initial visits are often marked by 'bitter flowers' and 'sweet flowers', the former representing the 'sorrow' and the heaviness (*todan*) of the loss, the latter as a time to celebrate the letting go of the person as a living being.[14] Other common acts

Santu Cruz Cemetary, Dili, June 2011

of mourning include the wearing of black, which can be small black patches pinned to people's clothes, or black wrist ties and scarfs across the head. If parents have died, it is common for people to wear entirely black, and a year after the death the mourning ceases with *kore metan* (literally 'untying the black') where the black clothes of mourners are burnt.

In rural areas the dead are often buried in small familiarly-connected groups of graves on customary land, though in both rural and urban areas it is not uncommon to see grave sites in the front yard of people's homes. This makes it easier to tend to the grave and also importantly reduces the risk of assault against those venturing beyond the immediate vicinity of their homes (for this reason graves were often constructed as close to a house as possible during the Indonesian occupation).

Grave site, Bidau Lecidere, Dili, April 2012

It is worth noting that it is common to see graves that are in front of houses treated with great informality; young men lounging on the sides, soccer balls kicked by children against the headstones and so forth. This is no mark of disrespect. Rather, such acts demonstrate that rather than having a permanent sacrosanct quality as a cemetery tends to, such graves become sacred at the point of ceremony and via the connection with the ancestral domain.

The nature of the graves often depends on a whole range of different factors, not least the position of the person within the family as well as the financial circumstances at that time. Graves are sometimes barely noticeable; the simplest cross made of sticks and the site marked out with gravel. At other times the grave sites are substantial cement structures and for important or wealthy people are often elaborate structures ordained with tiles, photos and inscriptions. Whether scrawled or engraved, the Latin epitaph '*aqui jaz*' (here lies) marks almost every grave. It is not uncommon that graves remain simple for many years until there is enough money to build far more developed structures of remembrance, and this will often take place with a repatriation of a body if it is being moved from a temporary site of burial.

In contrast, in urban centres such as Dili people tend to be buried in designated cemeteries, a point that helps clarify how the 'customary' and the 'traditional' can shift in their relationship to each other.[15] In the instance of a cemetery such as Santa Cruz in Dili, strangers are buried side-by-side by the virtue of their shared fate as Catholics, an act that would appear virtually impossible to imagine where the customary holds greater sway over social life. Following burial in a formal cemetery where a body is not repatriated

to a birth-village, a stone from the grave site may be taken and placed with the graves of ancestors in the origin village. Through custom, the rock carries the spiritual connection between the deceased and the ancestors in the origin community. Moreover, cemeteries such as Santa Cruz have generic crosses at which people can pray to dead relatives buried in origin villages.

Apart from the grave, the place in which a person has died often becomes an important site for commemoration, referred to in Tetun as the *monu-fatin* ('fallen place').[16] Prayer vigils are held in the belief that a person's spirit may still reside at the site of death and as such the site is treated as sacred.[17] *Loron Matebain,* the Catholic day for remembering the dead, sees people visiting cemeteries *en masse*, and graves are often cleaned and rehabilitated at this time.

Through the ritual of death, the *adat* and Catholic elements of practices of remembrance are brought together in different ways. In terms of custom, the *tais* that accompanies the body in the process of burial will be given by set people within the extended family, often differentiated in terms of the status of the living in relation to the deceased and depending on the *adat* of that house (*uma*, akin to clan). Animals will be killed, and different sections of the carcass will be given to different people within the *uma lulik*, again according to their status and role within the larger group. The saying of prayers and use of candles, the placement of a cross, and blessings by a priest or catechist, or a mass, each mark in a different way the Catholic elements of the ceremony.

Following ritual appropriately and as per the *adat* of a given *uma lulik* is given an extraordinary importance, significantly due to customary conceptions of a spirit world that see the dead in coterminous relationship with the living. Any wrongful interpretation of ritual can be taken as disrespecting the dead which can lead to reprisals for the living where ancestral spirits can '*bo'ok*' the living, appearing in dreams or causing illness and even death. The following quote is an extremely common form of explanation in terms of the role of the dead and their ability to impact the living:

> Yes [there were problems], his spirit was appearing and made problems before we did the ritual but there were no problems again with his spirit after we did the ritual. […] the spirit of our ancestors also will not be angry with us again. His spirit also will not be angry with us because we have sent him to the spirit of our grandfathers through the traditional process.[18]

A customary form of remembering is in one important sense framed by a need to keep balance with a sacred-spirit world which encompasses *beiala sira* (ancestors). This is quite distinct from the role of ritual within a modern world-view where, for instance, a secular notion of 'closure' places the emphasis on the living victim and their ability to re-establish themselves in the absence of a deceased relative. As Babo Soares writes, in Timor-Leste there is an incredible importance placed on keeping equilibrium between the material world of living humans and the sacred world of the spirit:

Among the Timorese, this real life/non-physical life is translated into their view of the world, their cosmology and the world where they live (Fox 1989), whereby the secular is inhabited by living things and the cosmos by the sprits and the ancestors (Traube 1986; Hicks 1972). For life to proceed there should be a balance between the two worlds. Failure to observe appropriate rituals leads to an imbalance, which might result in negative consequences to those living in the secular world. In customary thinking, the failure of the harvest, starvation, illness, floods, earthquakes and other natural disasters are believed to be the result of the disequilibrium.[19]

The significance of proper forms of commemoration can be most apparent in the acute stress caused when they cannot be adhered to. This is particularly the case when the remains of a person cannot be found, or a person has not been buried according to custom; frequently (and often deliberately) a characteristic of the Indonesian occupation. In recounting an attack on her home by militia in 1999, the testimony of a young girl as part of a submission to the CAVR gives a clear sense of how important it is that the remains of the dead are buried according to custom:

An hour later our neighbours came back to rescue us, the badly wounded, and recover the bodies of mother, father and Lucia. That night we were able to 'hader mate' (stay with the deceased until the following morning), but towards morning, the militia and TNI suddenly attacked again. We locked all the corpses in a room and ran outside. Then we left for Mt Lour. When we got there Falintil treated our wounds with traditional medicine. After a while, we came down from the mountain and found that the militia and TNI had destroyed the house and the corpses had been dragged away and eaten by dogs and other animals. For four months we have been trying to collect the remains of their bones. As a daughter I feel that I must help my older brothers to recover our parent's bones, which are not yet complete. I don't know about our future, as we are still young and who will look after us? Even though my parents are dead, I believe that their spirits are still with us.[20]

For all the things that could be given priority in the wake of such trauma and destruction, for this girl it was the collection of her parents' bones that was most important. In this manner, remembering across the customary can be seen as making a claim on the living who must ensure that ritual is followed accordingly. Remembering at the traditional maintains an emphasis on the spirit but, in contrast, this is much more emphasis in terms of its transcendence to heaven or to prevent it from entering hell.[21] In both cases, the practices of remembering then become a key to understanding the condition of the living, not least of how and why they may prosper or achieve good health, or otherwise.

As discussed earlier, rather than folding the customary and traditional religious practices into one form of remembering, the argument here is that they are two distinct forms held together, albeit where one is seemingly given dominance over another. The following description by anthropologist Andrea Molnar gives a sense of this ordering in her discussion of the Kemak in Atsabi. Here she argues that in the instance of a secondary funeral the apparent universality of Catholic practice can in fact only be made sense of from within a specific indigenous context:

> While the form of Catholic rites may appear universal, the value that the Kemak attach to certain acts and to certain symbols is only comprehensible through the lenses of their indigenous cosmology; thus, it is localized Catholicism. While the deceased are buried in Christian graves, even in secondary rituals, the secondary treatment of the dead incorporates Catholic rites at the stage of the inauguration of the new grave, when a commemorative mass is said. During the secondary funerary rites the bones are dug up, and are cleaned and placed in state in the origin source house of the deceased. There, after extensive animal sacrifices, the traditional sacred man of the group performs a more than twelve-hour chant (*toli*) that will guide the soul to the village of the ancestors, and thus transforms the deceased into an ancestor. The bones then are ready to be re-interred. Only at this stage is a Catholic mass performed.[22]

To come back to the discussion on remembering at the start of this essay, the embodied and deep sociality of the forms of remembrance across both customary and traditional ontologies provides a connection between people as they are integrated discursively and materially through rituals of death. In this sense, death is constitutive of social life, framing how the living are drawn into connection with one another. Moreover, in a post-conflict society that has suffered acute rupture and loss, such forms of remembering can play an important role in terms of reconnecting people and restoring social meaning. In such situations, as in where people have been killed in a nationalist liberation struggle, as will be discussed in the next section it is possible for patterns of modern remembrance to come to the fore in ways that impact, but do not extinguish, the customary-traditional.

Remembering the dead across the nation

The Indonesian occupation of Timor-Leste resulted in horrific human rights abuses and the loss of life. With so many people killed and displaced the knowledge of where people are buried or what constitutes the appropriate rituals can be disrupted or lost entirely.[23] Despite this, in the political space created by independence, and connecting into a period of broader revitalisation of customary processes, there have been a significant number of re-burials and the construction of new graves.[24] The burial of such victims are imbued with a deep importance, in part because groups of people were often killed together at the one time and in horrific acts of murder, and moreover because the dead

are seen to have paid for the independence of the nation while the living are reaping the benefits. In such cases it is possible to see patterns of remembrance continue across the customary-traditional—as they would for those not killed in war—but also begin to be overlaid with forms of remembrance that are projected more overtly outwards to the nation. Before this point is examined however, it is important to finish the summary of the schema set out at the start of this essay by speaking of the modern, and in turn the nation.

As with 'customary' and 'traditional', the 'modern' refers here to an ontological formation. While all forms of sociality have elements of abstraction to them, as noted by Benedict Anderson at the start of his famous treatise on nations, the argument here is that the modern is demarcated by the way that people are held in relation to each other across time and space by highly abstracted and disembodied systems of organisation, communication, exchange, production and so forth.[25] Social integration in the context of the modern tends to identify the scientific and the secular as sources of authority (rather than the mythological or cosmological), production becomes 'mass' as does the circulation of digitised information, and typically institutional forms such as the state come to the fore as the dominant modes of organisation. Where the *adat-na'in* or the priest may have authority within customary or traditional formations, in modern societies such forms of authority recede with the emergence of the bureaucrat, the academic or the politician, who are located and held in place by a range of secular and highly abstracted social institutional forms and through their deployment of logic and rationality.

A discussion of the modern is important as it is within this ontological form that the 'nation' comes into being. Echoing but extending on Anderson's thesis on nation-formation, it is argued here that the points of intersection between different abstracted social practices—such as (but not limited to) print forms of communication and mass systems of production—can give rise to the modern nation as a secular community defined by sovereign control over a distinct community.[26] Where customary patterns of remembrance occur within communities constituted at the embodied (face-to-face) and traditional patterns of remembrance are underpinned by a broader community of faith, remembering is differentiated within the context of the modern nation as it occurs across a secular, territorially and temporally bound community of strangers.

There is no attempt to argue here that modernity is new to Timor-Leste. In fact, for a nation forged in large part from colonialism and contesting nationalisms, any such claim would be difficult to sustain. While the character of both Portuguese colonialism and Indonesian occupation meant that engagement with the modern remained limited in many communities within Timor-Leste, the effect of national-liberation has been to accelerate the connection between people's own localities and the broader national polity. The last ten years or so has then meant for many East Timorese, especially in rural areas, a kind of

inversion of the argument that modernity gives rise to the nation. In contrast, for many East Timorese modernity is gaining traction as they are being lifted into abstract relation through the process nation-formation.

That the modern nation is gaining traction in a lived sense—as in people feeling a tangible connection to an abstract community rather than simply knowing of its existence—can be seen across a whole host of practices from elections to law enforcement. However, such a subjective sense of nation is typically going to be more obvious in situations where the state undertakes activities on a national scale, while equally much harder to decipher in the local and less orchestrated actions undertaken by and within communities. The latter is the focus here for, as will be explained, in Timor-Leste the role of the state in any form of memorialisation can be categorised as at best partial, uneven and *ad hoc*. Such an approach by the state can be understood for a range of reasons, including for instance the sheer lack of resources that mean that many aspects of national infrastructure remain in a parlous state. However, in the political domain, the emphasis by East Timorese leadership on reconciliation with Indonesia can be seen as constraining how the past is remembered domestically, unwillingness perhaps to extend and generalise grieving beyond particular groupings out of a concern for relations with Indonesia.[27]

Rather than a generalised and encompassing approach to remembering, as writers such as Lia Kent have demonstrated, the East Timorese state has through selective remembering prioritised some groups over others.[28] Emphasis has been given to valorising former guerrilla fighters, activists and political leaders, typified by the construction of the Heroes Cemetery at Metinaro.[29] Here the graves are standard concrete formations laid out in equally placed distances from each other, each carrying the remains of former FALANTIL fighters and activists who are connected to one another through the sacrifice of national liberation, rather than genealogical connection or faith.[30] It is important to note the generic character of the graves—which, in terms of applying a uniformity, mirror the Indonesian war graves still dotted across the territory—as in this form of memorialisation the identical concrete graves carry the remains of citizens who have died for their nation rather than individuals whose fate was without association.

In the absence of a more generalised state-driven process of memorialisation, monuments have often appeared through the efforts of local community initiatives in conjunction with non-state organisations. Commemorating the Suai Church massacre on 6 September 1999 is a large stone block monument, fenced off and set back from the church site.

Far less formally, a second memorial was built very close to the church and comprised of a circle of stones constructed at the site where bodies were dumped by militia forces and Indonesian military, with each stone carrying the name of the dead.[31] Other monuments have also appeared sporadically over the last decade: on the road to Los Palos there is a monument to three nuns and other victims who were killed by militia in 1999; the

Monument to the victims of the 1999 Suai Massacre, October 2003

Angel monument in Liquica at the São João De Brito Church marking the massacre on 6 April 1999; and in Maupitine, on the road eastwards out of Los Palos, there is a monument to the victims of a 1984 massacre. Notably these types of remembrance have often come through local communities

'Circle of Stones', Suai Church, October 2003

working with a range of non-state organisations, such as the United Nations Development Programme, Fokupers or the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation.

Given the uneven nature of this kind of memorialisation in Timor-Leste, there are a great many sites in which massacres and horrendous human rights abuses have occurred that are not marked by memorials. In a less strict sense however, frequently seen along the sides of roads and on hills are crosses and graves that take on some sense of being a memorial. For example, at the main intersection in Balibo there is a white monument with the names of eight people listed who were killed at the beginning of September 1999. The remains of victims that could be collected are interred at its base.

In Ainaro, near to a place known as Jakarta One, a cross and a list of names mark the spot on a high cliff at which people were thrown to their deaths in the same year. Along the road between Maliana and Bobonaro, as in Luro in Lautem and various other sites across Timor-Leste, it is similarly possible to see lines of graves which list the names of people killed in 1999. In many of these cases the graves are placed in prominent public places on roadsides, intersections and in public spaces, and have been built as substantial cement

Memorial to victims killed in Balibo in September 1999, October 2003

structures, at times marking the site of execution. As with the memorials discussed above, there is a sense that such built constructions are honouring the dead in a way that while fulfilling demands across the customary-traditional, also have a more public dimension that are part of a claim-making process by the living in the context of an emergent nation.[32] As the following section considers, while such forms of public memorialisation can be seen as points of contestation between local and national narratives, it is also possible to see such forms of memorialisation as suggestive of a kind of

Site of killings during Indonesian occupation, Ainaro, October 2003

sustainability where, through mourning, people reconstitute their daily lives within existing customary communities as well as within an emergent modern national community.

Contestation and abstraction

Lia Kent, in her *The Dynamics of Transitional Justice*, argues that local forms of memorialisation such as those discussed above seek to make the connection between the dead and the existence of the nation. Acts of memorialisation such as the Angel monument in Liquica, the ring of stones in Suai, and the monument in Maupitine, are each part of practices of remembrance that Kent argues make a demand for recognition and contest the selective focus that the state has given to former combatants:

> Although these practices have their own politics, power struggles and exclusions, and may also be constrained by national and international discourses, their locally embedded and collective nature does appear to enable remembering, mourning and making sense of the past in ways that differ markedly from the narratives of the national elite and the UN. That many local memory projects foreground the experiences of the *povu ki'ik* disrupts the leadership's emphasis on remembering and recognising 'veterans' and 'heroes'

who fulfilled leadership roles during the resistance struggle. These practices, by suggesting that the suffering of ordinary people continues into the present, also unsettle the political leadership's entreaty to focus on the future rather than the past.[33]

While graves remain largely intimate in terms of social connection, memorials are marked by a more generalised relationship between the dead and the living *per se*, a point which brings us back to the earlier quote by Jelin and Kaufman where 'Collective remembrances become then politically relevant, as an instrument for legitimizing discourses'.[34] Where graves are typically built in spaces that are important to living relatives, monuments have tended to be built in more publicly obvious domains and demand recognition from those who knew of the deceased but also from strangers. In such circumstances, the embodied patterns of remembering across the customary-traditional become overlain with broader disembodied narratives that sit as part of the abstracted national form. This can be seen not just in terms of the built environment itself, but by the way the sociality of remembering comes to frame such memorialisation. For instance, the commemorations of a 1983 massacre in Lautem do not occur on the actual anniversary of the massacre but rather, as Kent describes, on 12 November, the date of a national holiday that commemorates the Santa Cruz massacre in Dili.[35] In this instance, the dead are then being remembered as part of a national whole rather than within the specific temporal and spatial context of the massacre as a stand-alone event. At the inauguration of the Angel monument in Liquica, demands were made that the anniversary of that massacre become a national holiday, and moreover the national leadership was drawn into the localised event, as has also occurred in other instances.[36] As Kent has suggested, these patterns of remembering can be taken as local attempts at contesting state priorities by demanding recognition from the state.

What this reveals is that at particular moments of remembering local communities are seeing themselves subjectively as part of the national whole. Contestation in this form is suggestive of inclusion within the national polity rather than being located outside of it, especially as what is being challenged is in effect the form of national history rather than the nation itself. In such circumstances, a particular locale, the victims and the living are drawn together and re-framed in a way where the loss and grief of that specific group are read into the larger narratives of nation-formation. This suggests that even in local communities still primarily constituted at the customary and traditional, there is a modernity that allows for such abstract connections to occur (as 'local' does not necessarily equate with customary). Hence, in effect the contestation that Kent is referring to is occurring *within* a modern ontology, whereby local communities and elites are in tension over the patterns of remembrance and the place of different categories of victims within the nation which they are both already 'imagining'.

In concluding this essay, and as a way of making the final argument, it is important to step away from both the axis of local-national and the notion of contestation in order to develop a different dimension to the patterns of remembering. If we look instead at the forms of remembering across the customary, traditional and the modern, it is important to note that while these ontological categories may look contradictory that is not necessarily how they are 'lived', at least in terms of remembering. To return to the monument at Maupitine for instance, this is a cenotaph which carries depictions of the massacre as well as the names of the dead. Importantly, at the top of the memorial are a Catholic cross and a cement map of Timor-Leste. Within its immediate context, such a monument can be seen as part of the process of honouring the dead in a customary sense by showing the spirits that their sacrifices are not forgotten.[37] The Catholic cross signifies that those who were killed are remembered as part of a community of faith that stretches beyond their genealogical connections, an act that helps to ensure that the spirit may finally transcend to heaven. The cement map of Timor-Leste represents a different form of remembering again, one that lifts the dead into relationship with an abstract community of the nation. Certainly, contestation of remembrance may occur within an ontological level, such as that which occurs over the recognition given to different groups of victims discussed above. But as the monument in Maupitine demonstrates, it is evident that different forms of remembering can occur across different ontological levels that do not lay claim on each other, and in doing so suggest that such acts may in fact be a kind of pathway for negotiating different forms of community, not least as a national polity continues to reshape existing social relations. This is a point of importance not only in terms of planning for future forms of memorialisation, but also more generally in the way highly complex societies such as Timor-Leste are able to negotiate difference across distinct patterns of social integration in a way that respects the needs of the living as well as those of the dead.

Endnotes

1   My sincere thanks to Lia Kent for her collegiality and goodwill with regards to this article, and her direction towards several sets of important texts. Aniceta Rosa F. Grenfell has provided ongoing support and as with her family, has been forever generous with my never ending supply of questions. I also wish to thank my colleagues at RMIT in the Globalism Research Centre and the very helpful comments of two blind reviewers for this article.

2   While a wide variety of articles and reports are drawn on for this article, the strong connection between the dead and the living is particularly influenced by the work of David Hicks in his *Tetum Ghosts & Kin*. In writing in the preface about the second edition, he states how the book 'describes the implications for Tetum life that the source of fertility, tapped by ritual for the benefit of humanity, is considered to lie in the world of the dead'. See D. Hicks, *Tetum Ghosts & Kin*, second edition, Waveland Press, Long Grove, 2004, p. ix.

3   H. Hirsch, *Genocide and the Politics of Memory: Studying Death to Preserve Life*, The University of Northern Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1995; H. Halilovich, 'Beyond

the sadness: memories and homecomings among survivors of "ethnic cleansing" in a Bosnian village', *Memory Studies Journal*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2011, pp. 42–52; I. Kovras, 'Unearthing the truth: the politics of exhumations in Cyprus and Spain', *History and Anthropology*, vol. 19, no. 4, 2008, pp. 371–90.

4   For writing on the sociality of memory see J. Fabian, 'Part three: forgetting and remembering', in *Memory Against Culture: Arguments and Reminders*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2007. Also see Jelin and Kaufman who write that 'Memory is an intersubjective relationship, based on the act of transmission and reinterpretation. Even personal memory requires others to remember: it is group support that makes waking life and memory cohesive and structured. *We are never alone*. When given the opportunity to reminisce, people talk as if their memories were there, waiting to be given the opportunity to be expressed in words'. E. Jelin and S.G. Kaufman, 'Layers of memories: twenty years after in Argentina', in D.E. Lorey and W.H. Beezly, eds, *Genocide, Collective Violence, and Popular Memory: The Politics of Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, Scholarly Resources Inc, Wilmington, D.E., 2002, pp. 31–52.

5   Some of my thinking on this has been influenced by writers on reconciliation, especially in regards to collective memory in post-conflict societies. See for instance Michael Humphrey, *The Politics of Atrocity and Reconciliation: From Terror to Trauma*, Routledge, London, 2002; and Richard Ashby Wilson, 'Anthropological studies of national reconciliation processes', *Anthropological Theory*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2003, pp. 367–87.

6   A. Whitehead, 'Collective memory', in *Memory*, Routledge, New York, 2009, pp. 123–52.

7   E. Jelin and S.G. Kaufman, 'Layers of memories', p. 49.

8   This schema is referred to as 'constitutive abstraction' and has been developed particularly by Paul James. See both P. James, *Nation Formation: Towards a Theory of Abstract Community*, Sage, London, 1996; and P. James, *Globalism, Nationalism, Tribalism: Bringing Theory Back In*, Sage, London, 2006. In relation to Timor-Leste, this schema has been applied to understanding the post-independence period in Timor-Leste in D. Grenfell, 'Reconciliation: violence and nation-formation in Timor-Leste', in D. Grenfell and P. James, eds, *Rethinking Insecurity, War and Violence: Beyond Savage Globalization?*, Routledge, London, 2008. One of the challenges of this schema comes with the actual names of its categories. I have used 'customary' here rather than 'tribal' for instance—the problem being that while customary perhaps suggests a narrower domain, the term 'tribal' has been used in such a pejorative fashion that to employ it here risks distracting from what is actually being argued. Equally, the term 'traditional' can add a layer of confusion, as it is certainly not referring to 'traditional culture' as it might often be used elsewhere (including in this current set of essays). The problem though in naming these categories is that the 'modern' is the most accurate, as the term is a product of itself, whereas modernist attempts (such as this one) to name non-modern categories of social being will seem to inevitably jar. The alternative of course is to go for a different set of categories—for instance 'Category One Abstraction', 'Category Two Abstraction' and so forth, but obviously that would just create a whole set of new problems.

9   See for instance S. Pannell, 'Struggling geographies: rethinking livelihood and locality in Timor-Leste', in A. McWilliam and E.G. Traube, eds, *Land and Life in Timor-Leste: Ethnographic Essays*, ANU Press, Canberra, 2011, pp. 217–40.

10   P. James, *Globalism, Nationalism, Tribalism*, p. 23.

11   Interview with East Timorese woman, 21 April 2012, Dili, Timor-Leste. I have translated from the Tetun which is as follows: '*Sim klamar bele fo todan, tamba sira bele husu maromak, sira segundo - primeiro maromak segundo sira, entaun sira husu, hau bele,*

maromak bele loke odamatan ne'e ba hau ka lea? Entaun maromak loke odamatan ba klamar ne'e entaun sira ba liur sira bo'ok ona sira nia nene bainhira mate la fo ninia tais, la fo ninia osan, entaun sira bo'ok ona ida ne'e'.

12 See J. Chandler, 'Scientists and villagers summon spirits of the dead in bid to heal old wounds', *The Age*, 23 August 2008. This article discusses the ways in which forensic anthropologists have worked with customary leaders in their efforts to locate the remains of victims of the 1991 Santa Cruz massacre. The notion of holding two ontologies in place but ascribing priority to one is carried in the following quote: 'A woman approached the scientists to talk. "She told us it was all very well for us to do this, but we wouldn't find anything because we had not had a traditional Timorese ceremony," says Dr Blau, who works for the Centre of Human Identification at the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine'.

13 There are various excellent anthropological studies that discuss rituals relating to death in far more detail than can be afforded here. See for instance D. Hicks, *Tetum Ghosts & Kin*, particularly Chapter Six 'Kin and ghosts' for a detailed examination of death rituals in *suku* Caraubalo in Viqueque.

14 These ceremonies are often said to occur a week and a fortnight after death, though there may be more variation in terms of intervals between them and whether both rituals are even followed than such generalised pronouncements actually suggest.

15 Ancestral graves can also be located on hilltops and crests, in effect following the Christian tradition of sacralising elevated sites. Even in urban areas, people can be buried outside of a cemetery for a range of reasons. If for instance a baby is born illegitimately its body may not be accepted into a Catholic cemetery and buried in turn either with ancestors or within the yard of a house.

16 Materials drawn together, such as rocks, wood and pieces of metal, can be used to mark the site, or small cement monuments are sometimes erected in the form of a miniature grave.

17 As was the case when nine police were massacred in central Dili during the 2006 crisis. Despite the road being a major thoroughfare, it stayed closed to traffic for the following year out of respect to the grieving families.

18 S. Robbins, *An Assessment of the Needs of Families of the Missing in Timor-Leste*, The University of York, 2010. This is an exceptionally good report on this topic.

19 D. Babo-Soares, 'Nahe biti: the philosophy and process of grassroots reconciliation (and justice) in East Timor', *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2004, p. 22. This notion of balance reappears in a wide variety of articles, see for instance A. Loch and V. Prueller. 'Dealing with conflicts after the conflict: European and Indigenous approaches to conflict transformation in East Timor', *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2011, pp. 315–29; C. Rawnsley, 'East Timor, a theology of death: massacres, memorials, rites and reconciliation', Proceedings of Peaceworks, 3rd Triennial Conference of Women Scholars of Religion and Theology, Latrobe University, Melbourne, January 2004; T. Hohe and R. Nixon, *Reconciling Justice, 'Traditional' Law and State Judiciary in East Timor*, Final Report Prepared for the United States Institute of Peace, January 2003, p. 17; J. Trindade, and B. Castro, *Rethinking Timorese Identity as a Peacebuilding Strategy: The Lorosa'e–Loromonu Conflict from a Traditional Perspective*, The European Union's Rapid Reaction Mechanism Programme: Technical Assistance to the National Dialogue Process in Timor-Leste, Dili, 6 June 2007. In this report Trindade and Castro write that 'These martyrs or fighters are part of the spiritual world at the moment. When they are upset, the spiritual world is out of order, resulting in conflict in the real world'. They explain that 'When Fretilin fought Indonesia, fighters came to the uma lulik (sacred house)

and held ceremonies. They took many things to give them protection: special water, leaves. The guerrillas all believed in the traditional house. But now when independence has come they haven't come back to offer thanksgiving; they have started to say that they don't believe these things. The leaders are not unifying people; instead they are divisive because they have lost their source, so they create chaos and people fight. They haven't come back to use the tools that are here to unify.' This quote is also used on page 157 in an excellent article by M.A. Brown, 'Security, development and the nation-building agenda—East Timor', *Conflict, Security & Development*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2009, pp. 141–64.

20 *Chega!, The Report of the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste (CAVR)*, 7.2 Unlawful Killings and Enforced Disappearances, (Fokupers, Submission to CAVR, 99BOB026), pp. 280–1.

21 It should be noted here that I am speaking of Catholicism as I have learnt about it in Timor-Leste, and have no doubt that in other societies Catholic practices and emphases would differ considerably.

22 A.K. Molnar, '"Died in the service of Portugal": legitimacy of authority and dynamics of group identity among the Atsabe Kemak in East Timor', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 37, 2006, p. 344.

23 S.E. Wagner, *To Know Where He Lies*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2008.

24 Over the last decade the emphasis on restoring *uma lulik*, or building new ones, has been noticeable in general travels around Timor-Leste, as has the rehabilitation of graves and reburials. For an excellent discussion on healing within customary culture, and as part of that rituals following death, see A. McWilliam, 'Fataluku healing and cultural resilience in East Timor', *Ethnos*, vol. 73, no. 2, 2008, pp. 217–40 (especially pages 224–5).

25 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London and New York, 1991, p. 6.

26 P. James, *Nation Formation*.

27 J. Kingston, 'Balancing justice and reconciliation in East Timor', *Critical Asian Studies*, vol. 38, no. 3, 2006.

28 L. Kent, *The Dynamics of Transitional Justice*, Routledge, Oxon, 2012, p. 182.

29 Community debate was still occurring for instance in 2010 and 2011 over the formation of an Institute for Memory, with consideration by Parliament continuously deferred. See for example 'Conference proceedings: formal and informal justice in Timor-Leste: national and international perspectives on strengthening peace, reconciliation and prosperity in Timor-Leste', 21–3 October 2010.

30 For commentary on burials, see for instance 'Rift looms as Dili mourns dead', *The Age*, 30 August 2009. Activists from the clandestine front which opposed the Indonesian occupation have as a group been recognised by the state as having a special status, such as through the 12 November national holiday which commemorates the Santa Cruz massacre of 1991. Commemorations on that day have often drawn the most senior political levels, such as those in 2005 when then Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri, President Xanana Gusmão and President of Parliament Fransisco 'Lu-Olo' Guterres all visited the Santa Cruz cemetery together as part of the commemorations. *Timor Post*, 14 November 2005.

31 The stones were collected by family members of victims. Sign posts marked the actual spot along the side of the church where each of the three priests were killed. While the stones and the signs have now been moved to one side, they remain as a

marker of remembrance and the site is still marked by a memorial service held each year on September 6.

32 S. Feuchtwang, 'Reinscriptions: commemoration, restoration and the interpersonal transition of histories and memories under modern states in Asia and Europe', in S. Radstone, ed., *Memory and Methodology*, Berg, Oxford and New York, 2000, pp. 59–78.

33 L. Kent, *The Dynamics of Transitional Justice*, p. 182.

34 E. Jelin & S.G. Kaufman, 'Layers of memories'.

35 L. Kent, *The Dynamics of Transitional Justice*, p. 181.

36 L. Kent, *The Dynamics of Transitional Justice*, pp. 183–4.

37 This notion of debt by the living to the dead is examined in a great article by Elizabeth G. Traube, 'Unpaid wages: local narratives and the imagination of the nation', *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2007, pp. 9–25.