

# Reconstituting the Nation

## RECONCILIATION AND NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN TIMOR-LESTE

Dr Damian Grenfell

### A B S T R A C T

In December 2005, the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (CAVR) in Timor-Leste was finally closed by President Xanana Gusmão. Over the nearly four years of its duration, CAVR initiated a series of processes in an attempt to confront the horrific human rights abuses that occurred in the territory prior to and during the Indonesian occupation of 1975–1999. Pursued through community hearings and truth seeking, CAVR's stated objectives included the reintegration of perpetrators of violence and the restoring of dignity to victims. Clarifying the past and bringing victims and perpetrators together are amongst the more obvious ways in which such a commission can produce stability and social integration in a post-conflict society. Truth and Reconciliation processes also have socially integrative effects, in some ways distinct to a period of post-conflict reconstruction, that can be understood as originating in the practice of drawing people into a nationally constituted program. By examining the operations of CAVR, and drawing on thinkers of nationalism such as Benedict Anderson, a two-fold argument is made. Firstly, this paper argues that reconciliation processes can give rise to forms of temporal integration that are central in terms of shaping a national consciousness. Upon this, an argument is then made that this form of temporality is carried not just at the level of the abstract and disembodied, but also through the reframing of social relations constituted through face-to-face relations.

KEYWORDS: Timor-Leste, nationalism, reconciliation, temporality, nation-formation.

## Introduction

The horrors perpetrated by the Indonesian military and militias following the 1999 vote for independence in Timor-Leste were only the final acts of an extraordinarily violent 24-year occupation. With Timor-Leste achieving formal independence in 2002, accountability for the human rights abuses committed during the occupation have remained high on the public agenda both locally and for many within the international community. The *Comissão de Acolhimento, Verdade e Reconciliação de Timor-Leste* (CAVR), known in English as the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in East Timor, has been one of the central post-independence institutions that has sought ways to confront the massive human rights violations that occurred during the occupation.<sup>1</sup> It has also become one of the central institutions of nation-building.

In Timor-Leste an enormous variety of aid and development projects have been initiated by an equally wide-ranging body of agencies, international and local non-government organisations and newly formed national governing apparatuses. While many of these organisations have worked at developing a material infrastructure that was virtually decimated during the Indonesian occupation, CAVR has played a different but in many senses equally important role in terms of the development of a national consciousness in the newly constituted nation. Hence, the impact of CAVR should not be understood as limited to outcomes of reconciliation or the establishment of a 'true' history of national struggle, but should also include a consideration of the integrative effects that the actual processes of reconciliation can bring into being. By using thinkers such as Benedict Anderson as a platform for debate, and by looking at the work of CAVR in Timor-Leste, this article will build towards an argument that, at particular moments, national communities are sustained by mutually reinforcing patterns of social integration that occur in both abstract and face-to-face ways.

### National reconciliation in Timor-Leste

This begs the deeper question, however, as to why Timor-Leste chose to address its difficult past. As a resource poor nation burdened with exceptional challenges, Timor-Leste could have done nothing or opted to forgive and forget. Instead, our nation chose to pursue accountability for past human rights violations ... our mission was to establish accountability in order to deepen and strengthen the prospects for peace, democracy, the rule of law and human rights in our new nation.

Aniceto Guterres Lopes, CAVR Chairperson at the ceremony for handing the report to the President <sup>2</sup>

In the lead-up to the 30 August referendum in 1999, many militia groups were formed across Timor-Leste with the support of the Indonesian military. These armed civilians were

part of a plan to create the pretence of civil war, and they were responsible for many human rights violations both before and after the East Timorese voted for independence.<sup>3</sup> Many of these militias were made up of Indonesian transmigrants who later fled to Indonesia. However, other militia members were also born in Timor-Leste and had chosen, or had been forced, to side with the occupying power. Following the violence, rather than fleeing to sanctuary in West Timor, some militia chose to stay in their home towns and villages, willing for whatever reasons to risk retribution.

Amid the devastation of Timor-Leste in 1999 and 2000, there was an early recognition that those who had sided with the Indonesian military and remained in the country needed to proceed through a reconciliation process of some kind. The impetus for such a process stemmed from a range of sources, including—significantly—the National Council of Timorese Resistance (CNRT) in 2000. In 2001 the United Nations Transitional Authority in East Timor (UNTAET), at that stage the governing body in pre-independent Timor-Leste, created the legal basis for CAVR by passing regulation 10/2001, with the legal mandate of the commission further strengthened following independence by Section 162 of the constitution. A panel was formed to select seven national commissioners who, along with a team of international advisors, were the key decision-makers in turning the UNTAET regulation into CAVR's institutional form.

In October 2005, CAVR closed with the handover of its final report to the President. Titled with the Portuguese word 'Chega', which translates approximately to 'no more, stop, enough', the report is more than 2000 pages long and covers themes from the civil war to gender violence, from killings to forced resettlement, and carries account upon account of the most heinous violence perpetrated throughout the occupation. Much of the information for the final report was collected under CAVR's 'Truth Seeking' mandate, whereby the commission was charged with the responsibility for establishing a factual account for human rights violations committed by any side between 25 April 1974 (the date of a military coup in Lisbon which triggered the decolonisation process in the then Portuguese colony) to 25 October 1999 (the establishment of UNTAET).<sup>4</sup> Research of documentary sources, extensive interviews, a graveyard census, a retrospective mortality survey, seven themed public hearings, along with some 7,740 detailed statements with the vast majority taken from victims, all provided a detailed archive of information about the passage to independence and the human cost of that task.

Mandated to also undertake reconciliation processes, CAVR instituted a Community Reconciliation Process (CRPs) across the country. With virtually no legal infrastructure available for formal justice processes, these hearings were an attempt to reintegrate into the community individuals who had committed less serious crimes during 1999 such as house burning, theft, destruction of property or minor assault.<sup>5</sup> Hearings were held around the country with perpetrators brought into forums to face victims and members of the community. Through a combination of ceremony, traditional practices, and state-sanction, the perpetrators and victims would proceed through a set of admissions, testimony, questions, and clarifications, all mediated by a panel of local and CAVR representatives. A total of 217 hearings were held across all districts for 1,404 perpetrators with an estimated

40,000 members of the community participating in the process.<sup>6</sup> In many cases, the final act of reconciliation would consist of a simple sanction requiring an apology and a demand that such activity would never be repeated. In some cases, the deponent may have had to pay a fine or equally help in the reconstruction of damaged property. If the deponent defaulted on an act of reconciliation they were liable for a year's imprisonment or a \$3,000 fine.

CAVR's work can in different ways be seen as central to the shaping of national consciousness. Richard Ashby Wilson has argued that truth and reconciliation commissions serve to separate the past from the present where "the national self is one which is forged in the suffering and violence of the past, but no element of that political past has entered into the present. The present political order is presented as purified, decontaminated and disconnected from the old authoritarian order."<sup>7</sup> The work then of CAVR is important in that it helps to underpin the recognition of the legitimacy of a new state and territorial entity, working to clearly delineate the past from the present in both drawing a distinct historical period into review (namely that ending with the Indonesian withdrawal) and by reconciling perpetrators from a past into a non-continuous present.

The impact however on national consciousness goes beyond reinforcing distinct historical periods. CAVR's final report can for instance be seen as a foundational document of the nation as it records, with unprecedented access and resources, the testimony of many people who had faced the extraordinary violence and repression in the lead-up to national independence. The final report codifies and narrates the consequences of the violence, effectively re-writing a pre-national period into a fulfilment of national liberation in a way that becomes a generalised history for all of the population. Similarly, the community reconciliation hearings were a direct attempt at 're-integrating' into the community those who were once aligned to the Indonesian occupation. Former members of militias, for instance, were able to negotiate with their local community a penance, and to go through legal processes established by the new nation. In practical terms, community reconciliation helps to secure the ongoing sustainability of the new nation, and like the truth-seeking elements of the commission, comes with state-sanctioned authority that international human rights groups cannot claim.

While these outcomes of CAVR are central to constituting the nation, of equal import though less commonly articulated is how the actual processes of reconciliation—such as statement-taking, public hearings, and community forums—all can work to re-affirm national integration in the wake of a long-enduring conflict. Put another way, at a moment of massive national reconstruction, and at a time when people are being brought back into regularised patterns of contact with one another, institutional processes such as that undertaken by a reconciliation commission have a tremendous impact in the linking of different communities and individuals into a national community. Unlike many other institutional processes that may also give rise to similar effects, the direct national intentions of a body such as CAVR, including the outcomes discussed above, give it a rare potency at a point of nation-formation. In order to make such arguments it is necessary to draw on the analysis of several key texts that consider the question of national consciousness and nation-formation, and to extend the parameters of discourse to more conceptual concerns.

## CAVR and national integration

In public hearings in villages and sub-district towns across the country, and at the national hearings, the CAVR placed victims of violations at the centre of the national story of Timor-Leste. The voice of our sisters and brothers who suffered, and who were silenced for so many years, is a vital voice which must be heard in independent Timor-Leste. We believe that only through understanding and appreciating the impact of violence upon people's lives we as individuals and as a nation remain vigilant to ensure that this behaviour is never repeated in our land.

Isabel Guterres, CAVR National Commissioner<sup>8</sup>

Until its closure on 28 October 2005, CAVR's headquarters had been housed in the former Comarca prison, a site of innumerable human rights abuses during the Indonesian occupation. With the graffiti of former inmates still etched onto the walls, the conversion of the former prison into a reconciliation commission can be seen as an expression of post-independence reappropriation of space and time, an act of power typified by a new addition above the main entrance, 'CAVR has shown that flowers can grow in a prison'.

The physical space that CAVR has occupied becomes a kind of site of national significance in that it preserves a violent past by framing it as part of the final achievements of a nationalist struggle. More generally, as an expression of power, the occupation of the former prison cells works to tangibly represent the fuller reconstitution of territorial space in the form of the new nation. That there are specific spaces (massacres sites, former prisons), or for that matter times (dates of key battles, independence days), for people to subjectively witness the nation, to walk through the walls of a torture room and in doing so to 'sense' the whole of nation, allows for that which is objectively not possible. While such actions serve to counter the highly abstract character of the modern nation, reconciliation commissions affect temporal and spatial relations far beyond the symbolic parameters of the walls of former prisons and in ways that importantly contribute to the development of a national consciousness.

While Timor-Leste is a world away from the formations of nations that Benedict Anderson wrote of in the initial chapters of *Imagined Communities*, key ideas in his writings assist in understanding the ways in which a reconciliation commission's processes can form an important contribution to the development of a national consciousness. For Anderson, the nation is a peculiarly modern form of community where ontological shifts—new discoveries both social and scientific—stimulated social changes that made possible new forms of community.<sup>9</sup> After mapping the demise of both the religious community and the dynastic realm, he discusses shifts in temporal perceptions that ushered in the possibility of a new and qualitatively different form of community: the nation. He tracks a change “from simultaneity along time, where the past and future are bound to an instantaneous present, marked by prefiguring and fulfilment” (what he refers to as Messianic time) to what he refers to as a “homogenous, empty time”, one marked by a temporal coincidence and measured by the clock and calendar.<sup>10</sup> It is this change in temporal perceptions that creates the conditions where people can imagine themselves as living alongside other people *simultaneously*.

Anderson uses tracts from early nationalist texts to show the growing sense of simultaneity in literature, arguing for the modernity of the term ‘meanwhile’. It is not just that print carried the ‘technical means’ for “‘re-presenting’ the kind of imagined community that is the nation” but that the advent of printed materials in specific languages was central to the development of national consciousness.<sup>11</sup> He argues that the nation, as one potential form of a ‘horizontal-secular, transverse-time’ community, came into being due significantly to what he famously refers to as ‘print capitalism’. This intersection between modes of communication and production gave rise to print languages that linked, via a consolidation of language that was below the elite use of Latin and above the multiple day-to-day vernaculars, the reader with countless unknown others through the consumption of books and newspapers.

Speakers of the huge variety of ‘Frenches, Englishes, or Spanishes’, who might find it difficult or even impossible to understand one another in conversation, became capable of comprehending one another via print and paper. In the process, they gradually became aware of the hundreds of thousands, even millions, of people in their particular language-field, and at the same time that only those hundreds of thousands, or millions, so belong. These fellow-readers, to whom they were connected through print, formed, in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community.<sup>12</sup>

Of interest here is the sense of modern simultaneity (across rather than along time) that Anderson argued underpinned the recognition by people that they lived in particular forms of spatially extended communities linked by a kind of co-presence with unknown others. Although nationalists subjectively call upon less abstract forms of social integration—for example, through the embodied connection of blood and belonging—the nation is understood as a bounded community of strangers moving simultaneously across time and stretched across abstracted territory. Such a community can only be sustained when the dominant form of social relations are integrated at what we will here call the ‘disembodied’. By ‘disembodied’, and from here I am particularly drawing on the work of Paul James, it is meant highly abstract patterns of social integration where people feel bound into a kind of community, such as through the technologies of communication, without ever necessarily knowing one another personally.<sup>13</sup> To bring the different concepts and thinkers together, print capitalism for Anderson provides one way into thinking about how communities that are constituted in dominance at the level of the disembodied, giving rise to a sense of simultaneity and providing the material means to make possible the conscious recognition of an abstract community.

Like Anderson, it is argued here that modern forms of simultaneity are critical to understanding the slightly more tangible sense of a national consciousness. One cannot imagine a compatriot or a fellow citizen, or be conscious of a more generalised but bounded community, without first having the sense of being in temporal tandem with others. ‘National consciousness’ then later may give shape to a sense of others living in co-presence, with print-capitalism in early modernity providing this outcome for Anderson. If we take Timor-Leste as the latest (but by no means the last) of the ‘modular nations’ that have since proceeded to extend across the globe, we can then think about national consciousness at the point of the most contemporary, rather than the earliest, expression of nation formation. National consciousness is taken to be a state of recognition that both territory and sovereignty have



been brought into unison and people, at least in a generalised sense, understand themselves to be integrated into that community.<sup>14</sup> In the wake of social disruption and material devastation, and at the point of national inception, national consciousness is often seen to be the assumed and critical starting point for ensuring a sustainable community.<sup>15</sup> So how in Timor-Leste is 'national consciousness' embedded and sustained, and from where is a sense of simultaneity, of a sense of people linked territorially and calendarically from Independence Day on, derived?

The answers to the questions are of course complex and varied. On the one hand it could involve a kind of massive social recognition of national status following the final and dramatic victory over Indonesia in 1999. However, to win a war would not seem enough to then ensure the ongoing integration of population into an entirely new national community nor a direct comprehension of the nature and form of that new nation. Hence, there is a need to consider a whole range of actors who since independence have been involved in ensuring the integration of the population into a national form. To some extent this question of national consciousness, if not its origins then at least its sustenance and shape, can be answered by thinking again of the kinds of activities undertaken by CAVR and in turn drawing them into the architecture of Anderson's ideas. It is important to stress however that for Anderson while print-capitalism helped lay the conditions in which national consciousness could then develop it by no means provides a straight line to national fulfillment. Moreover, this article is by no means a full account of national consciousness in Timor-Leste, but is an attempt to suggest some of the institutional impetus that underpins how people come to be aware and feel integrated into the nation.

Turning to a consideration of CAVR's textual output, in a society in which the communication of information is often carried by poster campaigns and street banners the production of printed materials for public consumption in Portuguese or Tetun remain uncommon. Given the high rates of illiteracy and extraordinary poverty, those printed materials that do exist remain of limited use. The national character of CAVR and its desire for civic participation has meant however a comparably high rate of printed publications. These have included the testimony publication *Rona Ami-nia Lia* (Hear Our Voices), booklets based on the seven public hearings, various pamphlets that are used to communicate to the population information about the commission's work, and of course *Chega*, CAVR's final report.

A notable difference with Anderson's notion of print capitalism is that the publication of CAVR material is not directly undertaken by capitalist businesses working in the pursuit of new markets. Instead the orchestration of publication is undertaken by the commission, a state sanctioned body charged with the public mission of finding the truth and securing reconciliation. A second point of note in reflecting on Anderson's emphasis on written language in the development of national consciousness is the complex use of languages in Timor-Leste. Yet while it may be uncommon to have two constitutionally defined national languages, both Tetun and Portuguese do in practice differentiate the population from a colonial past (with Tetun not spoken in Portugal and Portuguese not spoken in Indonesia).<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the 'working languages' of Indonesian and English see the former serving in diminishing degrees the young who were educated during the occupation, with the latter

known to be serving the demands of an international community. Hence, the employment of a particular set of languages still comes with a sense of fixity, as in an acknowledgement that these are *the languages* used in Timor-Leste. After all, the use of English and Indonesian in CAVR publications does not mean that its booklets are designed for consumption in Melbourne or Jakarta. In any case, the plurality of set languages still overrides the use of a whole variety of widely spoken vernacular languages across Timor-Leste.

Language should only be considered as one element in the process of developing a national consciousness, for it is in the content of such publications that the perfect 'technical means' of re-presenting the nation as a *fait accompli* is found. Unlike a fictional account of a lover's tale, the material distributed by CAVR carries explicitly national information—maps of the country, lists of national and regional commissioners, laws and mandates—and carry testimony from each of the districts in a way that fixes a reality within the pages to one that the reader can at least partly identify with. Hence the content compounds the effect that Anderson points to in regards to the creation of a sense of simultaneity with readers becoming consciously linked into a unified field via fixed languages, sharing a cultural artefact with a distinct group made up of thousands of unknown others reading together of a past and present of repression and liberation.<sup>17</sup>

With the limited use of printed materials in Timor-Leste, it is evident that other forms of modern media—including the radio and television—can be seen to be used to the same ends in terms of instituting a sense of simultaneity that underpins the development of a national consciousness. While television and newspapers remain largely confined to an elite in Dili, as one CAVR staff member conveyed, radio was central to the communication of CAVR's work.

We chose it as our principle public information mechanism knowing that most people don't read, and even any paper resources come and go. And although radio doesn't reach everybody it does reach a large part of the country, and not everybody has a radio but usually there's a radio, a couple of radios in a community, and it's something that a lot of people do together.<sup>18</sup>

And as with the different communities represented in the textual publications, the radio programs served as a direct attempt to integrate people across the different communities into a singular national process, of re-presenting the national form back to the communities that were participating in different ways in the reconciliation process.

... the whole purpose of our program was to foster this notion of, this is the whole country doing this. So Los Palos listening to Suai, Metafahi listening to Dili, Liquica listening to Viqueque and Oecussi listening to Ermera, and so people can say, particularly around the CRP process, we're all part of this, this is bigger than the single community ... At the local local level, and at the national level, and at how the two mix through the sharing of experiences through people being brought from all different villages and regions to the national level ... And that was our design, that people would feel that in doing this local thing they were part of the national process.<sup>19</sup>

These various examples of the communication of CAVR material are used to demonstrate that while the material infrastructure in Timor-Leste is extremely limited, the disembodied



modes of communication drawn on by CAVR have been used so as to create, to use Anderson's phrase, an imagined community. Through the spoken or written word people not only learnt about the nation 'in fact' but also participated in an activity which they knew was being repeated by an unknown population of others, limited by the applicability of language and of the broadcast range of the radio antenna. To think of such communities constituted at the level of the disembodied is however to not dismiss the fact that it is also the embodied, as played out through institutional processes initiated by bodies such as CAVR, that also remains central to understanding how national consciousness is shaped and sustained.

### From the embodied to the disembodied

I stood up and said 'Alright! I will tear myself in two. The lower half I will give to him, but the upper half is for my land, the land of Timor'.

Testimony of Beatriz Miranda Guterres on being forced to marry an Indonesian soldier.<sup>20</sup>

The emphasis given to sustaining social integration at the level of the disembodied, necessary for the sense of co-presence and shared temporal and spatial relations with others, allows us to understand a key process in how nations are formed and sustained. Yet nations cannot simply be understood if they are left at the level of the imagined, as if taking place only in the 'lair of the skull'.<sup>21</sup> For all the emphasis given to the disembodied, to masses of people integrated into imagined communities of never-seeing never-knowing strangers, social relations constituted at the face-to-face also remain crucial to understanding the development of national consciousness. By face-to-face, or embodied extended relations, it is meant those forms of social relations that are integrated by regularised, meaning-generating contact conducted in person. And while it is understood that even in Anderson's terms a book is read by a person in an embodied sense, the emphasis here is far more on the interchange between people face-to-face.<sup>22</sup>

In one sense this occurs when that which is imagined repeats back onto and re-frames the activities at the level of the face-to-face, even to the extent that a woman, as quoted above, can in effect see the sexual violence perpetrated against her as something that can be framed in national terms. This of course is a most horrific example of what we might otherwise understand to be the mundane ways a nation plays through the body and either re-frames or changes embodied actions; it is not just a newspaper but a national newspaper, and it is not simply a matter of watching a soccer match between local communities, but instead two contending teams playing out for a national championship. Perhaps often at a specific point of early nation-formation, especially where material infrastructure and literacy remains limited such as in Timor-Leste, the embodied has a vital role in the development of the national-consciousness via giving rise to a sense of 'simultaneity'.

The work of CAVR, both in its form and the content of its task, serves again as a way of understanding the significant role that reconciliation commissions can play in the development of national consciousness. CAVR has followed a typical pattern of operation to other large and small organisations that work across the country. Operations were centred

in the capital Dili, in turn coordinating a range of regional offices and subdistrict teams that undertook a range of information dissemination, statement-taking, formal community proceedings and victim support. As one CAVR staff member explained, the actual role of CAVR personnel in the field depended on what mandate they were working under.

They work sub-district by sub-district. Any sub-district of operations will work for three months. Normally in the first week or two the team will go around the villages and socialise the commission's work, gives a series of speeches about the team's mandate, about the reconciliation mandate, about the help that the victim support team may be able to provide and they'll then start implementing. For the truth-seeking side of things, it involves taking statements about violations of human rights which can be any degree of violations from minor violations to gross violations of human rights, and they'll typically be working with victims of those atrocities. Our work is a bit different. What we do in the socialisation is the staff with the reconciliation portfolio will stand up and give a spiel about what the process is and what it is we can achieve out of it. And then we put the emphasis on the perpetrators of acts, and say we would like you to come forward and contact us, because we're bound by regulations not to oblige anyone to participate in this process.<sup>23</sup>

Several points of interest are apparent in such a process. Firstly, with the sheer lack of access to communication systems due to material destruction and poverty, organisational activities that may have been coordinated via abstract modes of communication in other instances are in fact carried into the communities by people travelling and conveying the information in an embodied way. In such instances the effect is one where people come to be informed about the nation in which they live, not just through the limited circulation of printed materials or through a radio broadcast, but via the carrying and imparting of knowledge of the nation. In the above instance, this occurs with 'speeches about the team's mandate', a 'spiel about what the process is' and how they are 'bound by regulations', with the information carrying a pro-forma sense to it, with it used for any and all communities. In other words, the dissemination of formulaic information that is conveyed in person gives rise to a sense of a joint national process where other people, elsewhere in the nation of Timor-Leste, are also participating in a similar process.

This conveyance of information is not one conducted by equals within the nation however, but rather by elite, proselytising nation-builders who carry the nation out with them into the communities. As a CAVR worker put it, all the equipment, bureaucratic forms and means of transport ensured these workers carried with them "a sense of gravitas".<sup>24</sup> Through their movement across the sub-districts they get to see the nation enacted in a self-confirming way, while those to whom the information is conveyed very often remain only within the direct vicinity of their village or towns. Interestingly, while the institutional authority that CAVR granted to an employee which gave them the legitimacy to enter a community, as one CAVR worker expressed it, the nature of the work still required teams to stay in that territory for a given time in order for the process to work:

... we spend three months in each subdistrict and there were reasons for that. Core ones were in around participation, in that we were asking people to do very sensitive things. Tell personal

stories of the most serious violations to somebody they maybe do or don't know. Be recorded and go into the national archive. Or to come forward as a perpetrator and actually say what they did in front of their communities. It was felt that we needed to build a sense of connection to the community, trust and a sense of people knowing us a little bit before they would actually come forward and do this thing.<sup>25</sup>

In a mirror process to the relationship between an author and a reader of book, such activities see an embodied transferral of information about the already established national form to a myriad number of those within the nation, embedding, shaping and further consolidating a conscious sense of integration. This is one way in which a kind of mutual dependence can be understood to occur between both embodied and disembodied forms of social relations that work, in these instances, to give rise to the nation. Such interconnections between the embodied and disembodied are in practice messy and unintegrated, with the kinds of patterns drawn here just one way of thinking about how a sense of co-presence, and of nation, comes to be sustained. That said, the embodied can work in other ways as well in underpinning a national consciousness that both emphasises activity rather than language, and again suggests that the embodied is not merely the reconstitution of activity via the disembodied.

This form of embodied interaction gives rise to a second avenue for a recognition of a nation, albeit one that links the capital-centred elites in with victims, perpetrators and witnesses across different activities—hearings, statement-taking or victim support—into a replication of activity across the nation. That is, it is not just telling people that they are part of a national process—marking a kind of epistemological transfer—but also by undertaking activities within communities in a way in which it is acknowledged that the same processes are occurring across the nation, simultaneously in time, by a territorially limited like group. The effect in this instance is born from the knowledge of a like form, rather than the content or matter at hand, much in the same way as a reader comes to realise that there are thousands of others consuming the same material. In other words, the participation in a ceremony by all those involved in a community reconciliation hearing occurs with an understanding that like activities are being carried out in both a territorially defined space but also with temporal unity across time. It is in fact conceivable to imagine the term 'meanwhile' being used to describe the actions in other towns and villages.

In a short article written well before the tumultuous events of 1999, Benedict Anderson put forward arguments as to why Indonesia's attempt to absorb East Timor had failed. As part of his answer, he argued that from 1975 East Timorese nationalism grew massively for two reasons. Firstly, a

profound sense of commonality emerged from the gaze of the colonial state. Indonesian power is infinitely more penetrating, infinitely more widespread, than Portuguese colonial power ever was. ... Thus the consciousness of being East Timorese has spread rapidly since 1975 precisely because of the state's expansion, new schools and development project also being part of this.<sup>26</sup>

It was not simply the experience of repression however that gave rise to a nationalism, but also significantly because of the effects of religion.

The Catholic commonality in some sense substitutes for the kind of nationalism I have talked about elsewhere, which comes from print capitalism. Moreover, the decision of the Catholic hierarchy in East Timor to use Tetun, not Indonesian, as the language of the Church has had profoundly nationalizing effects. It has raised Tetun from being a local language or *lingua franca* in parts of East Timor to becoming, for the first time, the language of 'East Timorese' religion and identity.<sup>27</sup>

The emphasis for Anderson here is still very much with language, as he quickly turns to an explanation of how a significantly illiterate society could secure a kind of 'field of exchange' through a common yet distinct language.

What he is only intimating in such an explanation however is the way in which knowledge of common activity, either of distinct persecution or of religious expression, were activities that gave rise to an institutionally grounded opportunity for the sharing of experience. Perhaps more importantly however, the knowledge of such activities also provided a sense of simultaneity through replicated activity, whether that be the generalised terror of the occupation or the specific duty of attending mass.

All kinds of processes can be understood as producing a sense of simultaneity through like-activity, from the consolidation of the education system, of laws, policing and citizenship, the undertaking of the first national census, the development of national industries, the implementation of taxation, the initiation of referendum and elections, and of course the determination and consolidation of 'national languages' can all be seen as different processes that we may understand as working to develop a national consciousness.<sup>28</sup> Each of these activities, when coordinated and communicated as national, give rise to a sense of simultaneity through active participation in processes.

A reconciliation commission plays a central role in the development of a 'national consciousness' in that both the tasks it is charged with and the processes that it undertakes are overtly national in their character. Even a school curriculum is limited in the degree to which the content can carry information about the nation, and while a coffee industry may be structured nationally, its end remains the private appropriation of profits. However, the content of a reconciliation commission, even when concentrating on individual experiences of human rights abuses, continues to draw back to the national on a continuous basis, lifting those testimonies from the villages and towns into an explicitly national program that seeks to both consolidate the nation's past and in doing so is part of a pursuit in securing its future. Yet it is not just a matter of content, but also of the processes enacted, that together work in relatively potent ways to ensure that reconciliation commissions play an important role in developing and sustaining a national consciousness. This is particularly the case by giving national shape to social activities that give rise to a sense of a simultaneous other, carried by a combination of embodied and disembodied activities.

## Conclusion

Timor-Leste became a nation at a historical moment in which many were declaring the historical demise of that very form of community. Such soothsayers were at the very least impatient in their declaration, and the energy and commitment that has gone into

establishing what is so frequently referred to as ‘the newest nation’ would hardly suggest the death of what continues to be the dominant political form in the world today. Caught between processes of European decolonisation and Indonesian advancements, Timor-Leste paid a dear price for the desire of many to be an independent nation. The work of CAVR, both in terms of recording a certified history as well as reconciling low level offenders back in to the community, has played a significant role in the formation of the new nation. While a target of criticism, there was a sense that CAVR was able to achieve a high degree of participation from the most senior members in Timor-Leste society through to many of the poorest, as summed up by this quote from one CAVR staff member regarding the appointment of the seven National Commissioners.

I will always remember the day when the phone rang and it was like, ‘hello we’re from Comoro market, we’re the vegetable sellers, this is all the vegetable sellers in Comoro market, we’ve had a meeting out here and this is our list of seven national commissioners, please write it down’. And then they said ‘oh and by the way, they don’t have a phone, but the meat sellers, they’ve had their own meeting as well and this is their list of seven nominations’.<sup>29</sup>

This narrative of participation gives a sense to the broader concern of this article, namely the way in which a body such as CAVR can mobilise participation across communities at both embodied and disembodied levels so as to promote, shape and sustain national consciousness. Whether it be meat or vegetable sellers nominating commissioners, communities in Hera and Ermera going through reconciliation hearings, or people effectively all over the country giving statements, the role of a body such as CAVR can be seen as central in the development of a national consciousness. The way this has been achieved however has not simply been through the means of mass communication. Rather, it has been through the complex interchange between social processes occurring at the disembodied level, as well as those occurring at the level of the face-to-face, which together have contributed to enabling a conscious recognition by a population that they live in the new nation of Timor-Leste.

## Author

Dr Damian Grenfell is Research Fellow and Project Manager of the Globalism Institute’s Sources of Insecurity research project in the School of Global Studies, Social Science and Planning at RMIT University, Melbourne. His research interests include social conflict in East Timor, Aceh and Thailand; violence; nationalism; social movements; globalization; global protest movements. Damian is the author of *Millennial Nation: Violence, Identity and National Formation in Timor-Leste* (with Paul James, Pluto, forthcoming 2007) and co-editor of *Rethinking Security and Violence* (with Paul James, Routledge, forthcoming 2007).

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## Interviews

- Interview with Participant 8, CAVR, 17 October, 2003.
- Interview with Participant 11, CAVR, 5 November, 2003.
- Interview with Participant 13, CAVR, 5 December, 2004.

## Notes

- 1 Much of the research in this paper has been derived from a range of interviews conducted in Timor-Leste with staff from CAVR between 2003 and 2005. I thank the staff for their generosity, especially when far more important tasks were before them. Aspects of the more general commentary on Timor-Leste are derived from field research.
- 2 Aniceto Guterres Lopes, *The Presentation of the CAVR Report to the President of the Republic*, 31 October 2005, CAVR, Dili, 2005.
- 3 There is numerous pieces of documentation on the militias in Timor-Leste across 1999. See variously James Dunn, *East Timor: A Rough Passage to Independence*, Longueville Books, Double Bay, 2003, pp. 342–363, Hamish McDonald, et al, *Masters of Terror: Indonesia's Military and Violence in East Timor in 1999*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence No. 145, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, Canberra, 2002, and Don Greenless and Robert Garran, *Deliverance: The Inside Story of East Timor's Fight for Freedom*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2002.
- 4 Comissão de Acolhimento, Verdade e Reconciliação de Timor-Leste (CAVR), *Regulation 2001/10: A Plain Guide*, CAVR, Dili, 2002.
- 5 Piers Pigou, *The Community Reconciliation Process of the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation*, UNDP Timor-Leste, Dili, April 2004. Lia Kent, 'Community views of justice and reconciliation in Timor-Leste', *Development Bulletin*, no. 68, October 2005, pp. 62–65. The so-called more serious crimes were investigated by the UNTAET mandated Serious Crimes Unit and tried, where possible, before the Special Panel for Serious Crimes. Due to the fact that many of those indicted had fled to Indonesia and beyond the court's jurisdiction, the vast majority of those accused of serious crimes have not been brought to trial. See Tiago Sarmiento, 'The future of serious crimes', *Development Bulletin*, no. 68, October 2005, pp. 48–50 and Office of the Deputy General Prosecutor for Serious Crimes Timor Leste, *Serious Crimes Unit Update*, Dili, 4 February 2004.
- 6 Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste (CAVR), *Timor-Leste: Forced Displacement and Famine, National Public Hearing, July 28-29 2003*, CAVR, Dili, 2005, p. 4.
- 7 Richard Ashby Wilson, 'Anthropological studies of national reconciliation processes', *Anthropological Theory*, vol. 3 no. 3, 2003, pp. 370.

- 8 Isabel Guterres, Preface, in Comissão de Acolhimento, Verdade e Reconciliação de Timor-Leste, *Rona Ami-nia Lia*, CAVR, Dili, 2005.
- 9 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd edn, Verso, London, New York, 1991, Chapter Two.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 44.
- 13 Paul James, *Nation Formation: Towards a Theory of Abstract Community*, Sage, London, 1996. The methodological framework that significantly informs this paper—particularly the modes of practice and the arguments around various forms of social integration—is drawn from a body of work that has been developed through *Arena Journal* in Australia by thinkers such as Geoff Sharp, Paul James and Chris Scanlon. See also *Globalism, Nationalism, Tribalism: Bringing Theory Back In*, Sage, forthcoming (2005). This methodological approach to social formations has been referred to the ‘constitutive abstraction approach’, and has become one of the methods informing the Globalism Institute at RMIT University in Melbourne.
- 14 The influence here is straight from Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1983. National consciousness preceding independence is to speak of an unactuated or embryonic state of recognition that a range of communities share an ideal that they should be integrated into a particular nation.
- 15 This is a rarely articulated point, especially in the policy pages, reports and public information of different organisations. However, it is there to be seen from the way in the way in which social resources are directed towards an array of gestures that may not be seen in strict material terms a necessity: elections, independence celebrations, tours by politicians, and information campaigns about the nation itself rather than food or education. In Timor-Leste, the United Nations has orchestrated much of this activity, with one example a poster titled *Timor Lorosa'e: Sekulo Foun, Nasuan Foun, Dame Foun* (Timor-Leste: New Century, New Nation, New Peace) and with the subtext of ‘*Ita hetan tiha ona progesu bo'ot. Maibe ida ne'e foin maka nia habu* (We have already made progress, but we have only just started).
- 16 Thushara Dibley, Habits of language: The impact of colonial languages on the attitude and experience of the Indonesian-speaking Timorese, Honours Thesis, University of Sydney, November 2004.
- 17 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Chapter Two.
- 18 Interview with Participant 13, CAVR, 2004.
- 19 Interview with Participant 13, CAVR, 2004.
- 20 Testimony of Beatriz Miranda Guterres, in Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste (CAVR), *Timor-Leste: Women and the Conflict, National Public Hearing, April 28-29 2003*, CAVR, Dili, 2005, p. 25.
- 21 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 35.
- 22 James, *Nation Formation*, pp. 23-25.
- 23 Interview with Participant 11, CAVR, 2003.
- 24 Interview with Participant 8, CAVR 2003.
- 25 Interview with Participant 11, CAVR, 2003.
- 26 Benedict Anderson, ‘Imagining East Timor’, *Arena Magazine*, No.4, April—May 1993, p. 25.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- 28 The organizational impetus for such activities should be the source of another inquiry, as since 1999 they have stretched from those who were once central to the resistance movement through to the anywhere-anyplace tech-nomads of global institutions such as the World Bank and the United Nations.
- 29 Interview with Participant 13, CAVR, 2004.