

East Timorese in Melbourne: Community and Identity in a Time of Political Unrest in Timor-Leste

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

Signed:.....

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dili, May 2006—We are driving. I am sitting next to Señor Santos, the father of the family I have been staying with over the past two months. The silence between us echoes the silence of the dusty streets outside the car. For days, we have been watching people passing the compound where we live in cars packed to the brim. Anxious and frightened, they have fled an unknown enemy, an unknown danger. Dili is empty. The silence fuels the tension that has been building. I look at Señor Santos. I wonder what he thinks; how does he feel about his country yet again being marked by violence? How does he feel about his family being forced to flee and once more live with the uncertainty that violence brings? For the past few weeks, we have had our bags packed, ready to flee to the hills if the violence intensifies. The adults in the compound have gathered every afternoon, sharing news and stories, contemplating their options and praying for a resolution to the unfolding conflict. They have been asking me to secure their refuge in Australia or at the Australian embassy, a request I have been unable to meet. My heart wrenches with my decision to leave them, but I am too scared to stay. I unsuccessfully seek justification for my decision to return to Australia. I am left with no words as I see the back of Señor Santos' car leave after dropping me at my friend's place where I will seek refuge whilst awaiting my flight to Darwin in the morning. Señor Santos is on his way home. His children and wife are waiting for him to take them to the refugee camp.

This study started out as a research project that considered the post-independence situation of young East Timorese whose formative years have been marked by experiences of war, violence, displacement and social disruption. I was forced to terminate my fieldwork and later change my PhD project due to the political unrest of 2006. I wish to begin these acknowledgements by saying thank you to Señor Santos and his family for keeping me safe during what was a very difficult period for him and his family.

The four years of my PhD candidature have been challenging, yet inspiring and enriching. I have faced personal challenges I had not anticipated, particularly in relation to my experiences in East Timor. Giving up the original research project was hard, but, due to university regulations, I was left with no choice. Throughout this process, my inspiring and motivating supervisor, Professor Linda Connor, was a remarkable support. Linda's guidance and constructive advice and her intellectual and moral support have helped me face the various challenges and hurdles that I have encountered. Her sincere interest in my projects has helped me retain motivation at testing times. I have to thank her for maintaining trust in me and in the research project, for listening to my worries and concerns, for her constructive feedback and for her continuous encouragement.

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My family in Norway has been an amazing support throughout my candidature. Despite great distance, they have provided endless support and helped me deal with the many challenges that I have faced the last years. Thank you, Mamma, Pappa and Lasse, for listening to me when I have been in doubt and for getting me back on track when I have felt at loss.

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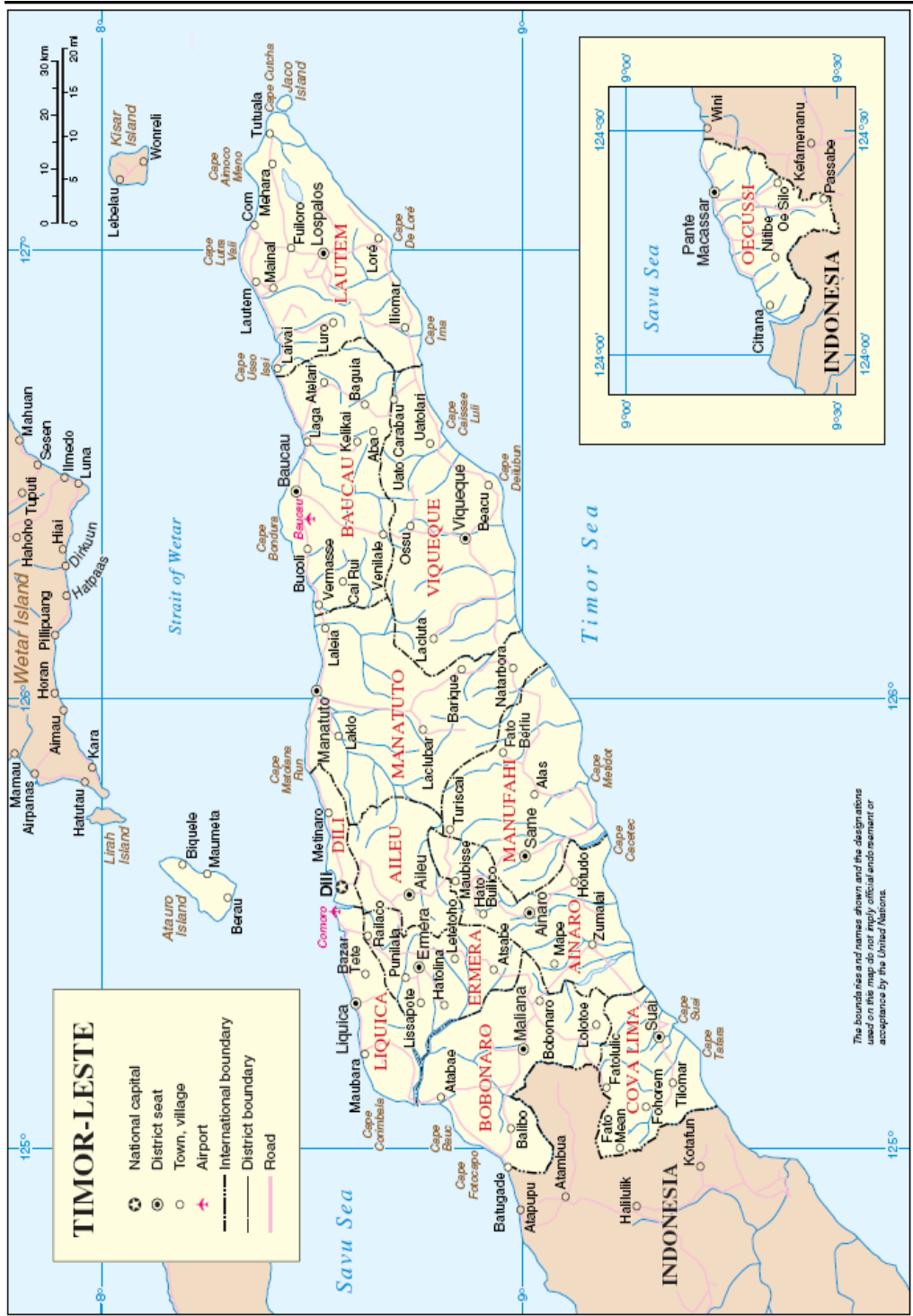
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ABSTRACT

This study considers the situation of a group of East Timorese exiles living in Melbourne, Australia, who left East Timor or were born in exile from the time of the 1975 civil war up to the end of the Indonesian occupation of the territory in 1999. During the Indonesian occupation of East Timor, diasporic groups played a central role in the campaign for self-determination. Throughout the occupation, East Timorese in Australia maintained a strong sense of long-distance nationalism, which drove, directly or indirectly, communal cultural and social activities. The fight to free East Timor was at the core of the exiles' collective imagination, defining them as a largely homeland focused community. However, in the aftermath of independence, many have struggled to find their place and role in relation to the independent nation. Personal experiences upon return, perceptions of political, cultural, economic and social development (or lack thereof), and political unrest and communal violence have led to renewed questioning of identity and belonging. The thesis explores this new questioning of identity and belonging and, through ethnographic field research with East Timorese living in Melbourne, it explores how the exiles experience and respond to the social and political changes in their country of origin.

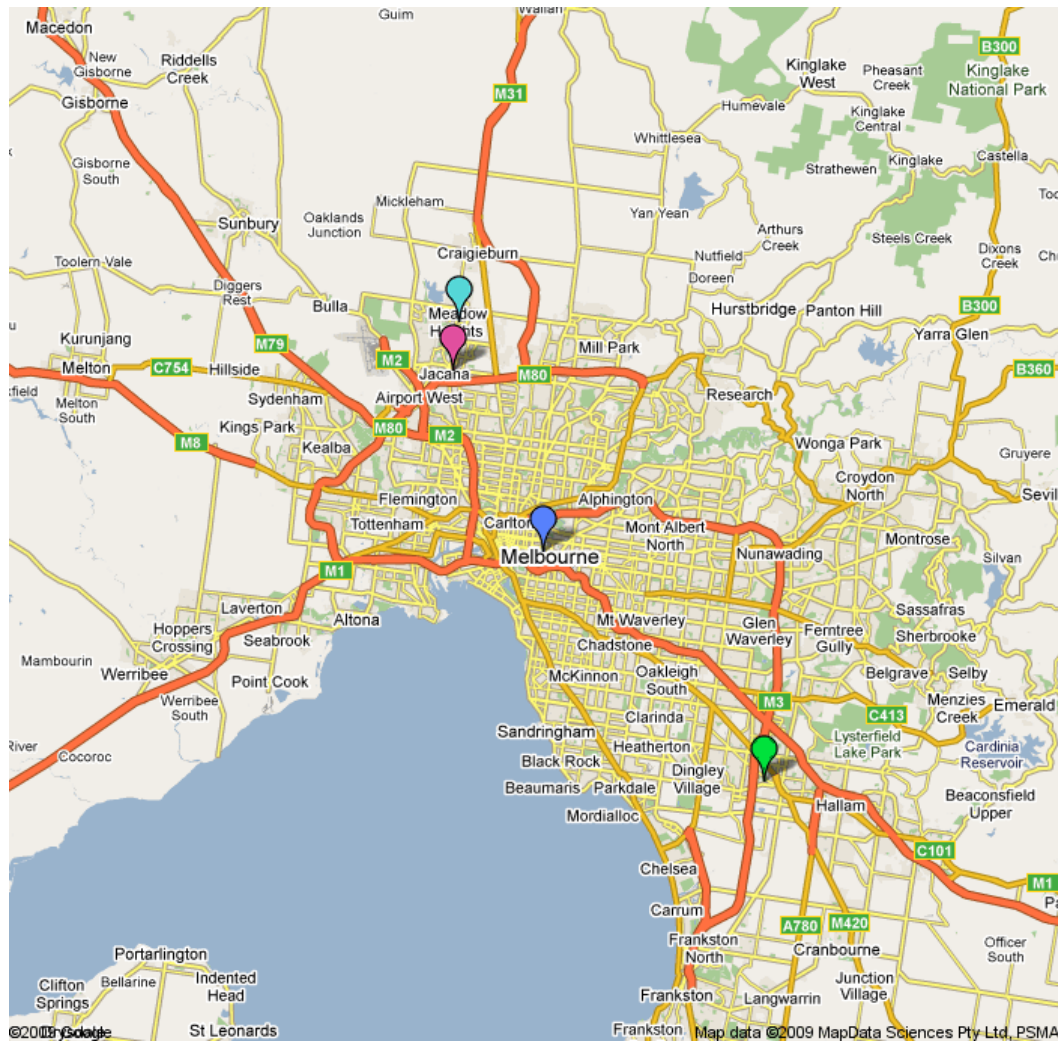
The research for the thesis was conducted during a period of conflict and national upheaval in East Timor, and the dissertation pays particular attention to how violence and unrest at home manifest in the exiles' lives and affect their experience of self, community and nation. The thesis explores how past socialisation and practice within social fields that are characterised by an emphasis on communalism, morality and reciprocity form part of present agency. It considers how potential contradictions between past imaginaries and lived realities can lead to intensely felt emotions, which may further advance the process of negotiation and transformation of identity and boundaries of belonging. Through an analysis of linked conceptualisations of self, emotions and national narratives, the thesis seeks to shed light on the exiles' engagement with and relationship to independent East Timor. It aims to inform contemporary understandings of the processes of change that occur within diasporic communities at times of radical political change in the exiles' home countries.

MAP OF EAST TIMOR



MAP OF MELBOURNE

MAIN AREAS OF EAST-TIMORESE RESIDENCE



Key:

-  Meadow Heights
-  Broadmeadows
-  Richmond
-  Dandenong

ABBREVIATIONS

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ABRI	Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia (Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia)
ADF	Australian Defence Force
AETA	Australia-East Timor Association
AMP	Parliamentary Majority Alliance (Portuguese acronym)
Apodeti	Associação Popular Democrática Timorense (Timorese Popular Democratic Association, earlier, the Association for the Integration of Timor into Indonesia)
ASDT	Associação Social Democrata Timorense (Timorese Association of Social Democrats, forerunner Fretilin)
BANH	Belgium Avenue Neighbourhood House
CAVR	Comissão de Acolhimento, Verdade e Reconciliação de Timor-Leste (Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste)
CNRM	Conselho Nacional da Resistência Maubere (National Council of Maubere Resistance)
CNRT	Conselho Nacional da Resistência Timorense (National Council of Timorese Resistance)
CNRT	Congresso Nacional da Reconstrução de Timor (National Congress for the Reconstruction of East Timor)
Falintil	Força Armadas de Libertação Nacional de Timor-Leste (Armed Forces for the National Liberation of East Timor)
F-FDTL	Falintil–Forças de Defesa de Timor-Leste (Falintil–East Timor Defence Force)
Fretilin	Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente (Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor)
ISF	International Stabilisation Force
INTERFET	International Force East Timor
KOTA	Klibur Oan Timor Aswain (Association of Timorese Warrior Sons)
METAC	Melbourne East Timor Activities Centre
NRCHC	North Richmond Community Health Centre
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PD	Partido Democrático (Democratic Party)
PNTL	Polícia Nacional de Timor-Leste (East Timor National Police Force)
PSD	Partido Social Democrata (Social Democratic Party)
PSHT	Persaudaraan Setia Hati Terate (Faithful Fraternity of the Lotus)
RDTL	República Democrática de Timor-Leste (Democratic Republic of East Timor)
SAP	Special Assistance Plan
SMH	The Sydney Morning Herald
SPH	Special Humanitarian Program
TAV	Timorese Association in Victoria

TECCVIC	Timor Ethnic Chinese Community of Victoria
TMAA	Timorese Middle & Aged Association
TNI	Tentara Nasional Indonesia (Indonesian National Army, until 1999 known as ABRI)
UDT	União Democrática Timorese (Timorese Democratic Union)
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNTL	Universidade Nacional de Timor-Leste (National University of East Timor)
UNMISSET	United Nations Mission of Support in East Timor
UNMIT	United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste
UNOTIL	United Nations Office in Timor-Leste
UNPOL	United Nations Police
UNTAET	United Nations Transnational Administration in East Timor
UPF	Unidade Patrulhamento Fronteira (Border Patrol Unit)
URP	Unidade de reserve da Polícia (Police Reserve Unit)