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Fieldwork in a New Nation

Maj Nygaard-Christensen and Angie Bexley

Why write a regionally defined volume on fieldwork? Anthropological studies have long moved away from spatial understandings of the field (Coleman and Collins 2006; Dalsgaard 2013; Olwig and Hastrup 1997); and away from understandings of the field as a 'site' waiting to be discovered by the ethnographer (Amit 2000: 6; Candea 2007: 172). We think, however, that these attempts to de-objectify 'the field' can usefully be incorporated in our understandings of field-based research in independent Timor-Leste. For if the tendency in anthropology and area studies has been to move away from associations between 'the field' and bounded communities, political processes in Timor-Leste have been marked by attempts to demarcate the boundaries of, and to define the place, that would become 'Timor-Leste'. Or put differently, while anthropological debates have abandoned 'the common sense idea that such things as locality and community are simply given or natural' and instead turned 'toward a focus on social and political processes of place making' (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 6), such processes in Timor-Leste have often revolved around making essentialist claims about what constitutes Timorese national identity. The chapters in this volume go to the heart of this tension.

This volume engages the question of how we might examine these processes of place-making – or 'nation-making' – without taking particular claims about what constitutes Timorese national identity for granted, as we set out to do fieldwork and ethnographic research in the country. While this may not be a problem unique to Timor studies, it is a particularly present one in new nations such as Timor-Leste, where nationalist projects inevitably revolve around claims to a stable, national community, and where outsiders not only play a significant part in the process of nation-building, but also in the process of making particular characteristics of the new nation – i.e. language, understandings of his-

tory, and political institutions – appear natural and given. As noted by Suny in the context of nation-building projects in Armenia and other post-Soviet states, it is rarely acknowledged 'how much work by intellectuals, activists, and state administrators goes into the forging of new nations' (Suny 2001: 895). Instead, these efforts are typically written out of the process of creating national histories, which are 'carried on as if a real past can be recovered, as if a continuous, unbroken existence of a coherent nation has come down through time' (ibid.). In this volume, we wish to highlight this aspect of how the nation has been socially produced, contested, and understood, and to engage critically with the categories through which we have come to understand Timor-Leste.

The process of defining Timor-Leste was surrounded with particular urgency between 1999, when the territory separated from Indonesia, and 2002, as it transitioned to independent nationhood. This transition, overseen by the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) meant that a broad set of questions relating to Timor-Leste and its national form had to be settled in a remarkably short time span. Sue Downie's overview of UNTAET's various tasks provides an idea of the scale of this project:

> In practical terms … UNTAET had to establish the territory's administrative system from village to central level … UNTAET had to establish a political system, hold national elections, establish a financial and tax system, formulate foreign policy and draft laws, as well as train teachers, health workers and independent journalists. The mission also set up a police force and a judicial and prison system, trained lawyers, prosecutors, and court officials and prison officers, and recruited and trained new police and army personnel. Other non-traditional peacekeeping tasks included establishing border control, developing revenue collection systems and enrolling university students (Downie 2007: 30).

The country had, in other words, to be 'institutionalized from scratch'. In addition to the process of state-building and physical reconstruction of the territory, the transition and early independence years were also characterised by urgent debates about what constituted Timorese national identity. Heated discussions took place both amongst academics (see Geoffrey Hull 2002a and 2002b) and activists (including Indonesian-educated Timorese youth) about the role of Timorese 'culture' and 'tradition' in an independent Timor-Leste, and about which national

language(s) best expressed its national character and history. As Angie Bexley's chapter in this volume demonstrates, such debates continued long into the post-independence years and reveal how the shifting foreign administrations have impacted on some of the discontents and experiences of exclusion in contemporary Timor-Leste. The language debate was grounded in negotiations over the territory's cultural and historical heritages, and competing ideas about which language best reflected the territory's historical and cultural belongings. These debates in turn reflected the broader engagement with Timor's historical heritage. In the years after independence, the Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation concluded its lengthy report *Chega!*, which comprises the most comprehensive historical documentation of Timor-Leste's recent history. As documented by Lia Kent, this 'production of an official record of the Indonesian period' was viewed as 'a means to cultivate a distinctive national identity, forged out of a collective experience of suffering and a sense of shared history' (Kent 2012: 144).

This process of identifying and defining the cultural, historical, and political contours of the new nation, in which international institutions were heavily involved, meant that not only aid workers but also foreign researchers became vocal in debates about what belonged, and did not, in the new nation, and in debates about what did, or did not, constitute Timorese national identity. The language debate has been one of the more pointed examples of this.

Indonesian, Portuguese and Tetum were the key options put forward in deliberations over which languages should hold the status of official languages. Through conferences, articles and recommendations, a number of academics acted as proponents of Portuguese, citing Portugal's centrality to Timorese culture and history, and suggesting that Indonesia's violent legacy in the territory made its language inappropriate for the independent nation (see Hull 2002a and 2002b for an example of this, and Taylor-Leech 2007 for a thorough examination of the Timorese language issue). This view fell in line with elite visions for the independent nation. However, the notion that Portuguese was more properly Timorese side-lined the many Indonesian-speaking young people and others, who were fluent in Indonesian and had little if any knowledge of Portuguese (Bexley 2009 and this volume). The point here is that research debates have sometimes made assumptions

about the stability of Timorese identity that potentially undermined a focus on other, competing ideas and which, more broadly, tended to take for granted the unity of the Timorese population. While the issues discussed above were rapidly settled and formalised due to the need for quick independence, questions of language, cultural, and historical belongings continued to surface in popular debates and, at times, at moments of crisis. As argued by Taylor-Leech, Timorese nationalism might therefore 'more appropriately describe an emergent sense of ethnic solidarity and related sentiments that have evolved out of historical experience and solidarity but do not necessarily reflect an inevitable, singular, homogeneous geopolitical entity' (ibid.: 154).

Aim of the book

The problem we have attempted to spell out above is when particular claims about what constitutes Timorese national identity become the starting point of ethnographic inquiries. The objective of this volume is not to add fuel to negotiations over what is or should be 'properly Timorese' by defining particular characteristics of the kind of field new scholars embarking on research in the country can expect to encounter. Hence, the book is not intended as a manual on the practicalities of fieldwork in Timor-Leste. The original aim of the volume was to bring together chapters that reflected on fieldwork practices and challenges and that would make us familiar with the methodological approaches pursued by some of those who have contributed to the founding of a field of Timor studies. What emerged as we gathered these chapters together, however, were not only reflections on the fieldwork process itself. Rather, we found that many of the chapters also engaged critically with some of the preconceived ideas about what kind of place Timor-Leste is, which had been challenged through the ethnographic or historical research of the contributing authors. It is therefore a book that looks at Timor-Leste through a number of transitions. Following this up, the book presents a number of chapters on the fieldwork process, as well as a series of attempts to unravel or destabilise some of these definitions and understandings of Timor-Leste and its history. Indeed, together the chapters highlight the contestations and deliberations that we believe have been symptomatic of the nation-building process.

Our hope is, firstly, that the volume will be of use to students and researchers embarking on their first fieldwork in the country and to development workers using ethnographic methods in their work. For new scholars, we hope that the volume can probe critical reflection on the categories through which Timor-Leste has been portrayed in research and aid debates. Secondly, we hope to engage established researchers in conversation and reflections about field approaches. To stimulate such conversation, we outline in the following some of the research trends and themes that have shaped ethnographic research on Timor-Leste. We trace these to research traditions that emerged during and as a result of Portuguese colonial rule, the Indonesian occupation, and the post-intervention years. Clearly, these themes are not exclusive (see Gunn 2007 for a review that deals more specifically with development reports and discourses). However, we hope that critical engagement with these themes may encourage conversation about how different research traditions direct our analytical attention in the field, and limit – or expand – our understanding of processes of social, cultural, and political change in Timor-Leste.

Timor as culture area: Austronesia studies

Ethnographic research on Portuguese Timor took form after the Second World War, when Dutch scholar J. P. B. Josselin de Jong introduced Eastern Indonesia as a site for comparative anthropological research (Vermeulen 1987: 4). The area spanned the islands stretching from east of Bali towards what is today known as Indonesian West Papua and thereby included the island of Timor and the territory that then constituted Portuguese Timor. The Second World War and the Indonesian independence struggle halted this research agenda for some years, but the work of de Jong would be continued in the post-war years, among others by his student F. A. E. van Wouden. Van Wouden's research agenda was to 'delimit, define, and compare the societies' in the eastern Indonesian archipelago (Fox 1980b: 327) in work that identified a set of 'unifying principles' that were at the basis of social and cultural forms in the region (van Wouden 1968). The work of van Wouden and de Jong focused on systems of classification, and marked out 'socio-cosmic' dualism as being at the centre of Indonesian societies (Therik 2004: 10).

Alongside this work, another research tradition began to take form within Portuguese Timor, with a focus on physical anthropology, race, and racial hierarchies, and closely tied to the Portuguese colonial regime (see Roque, this volume) and which was thus quite distinct from the Dutch ethnographic project described above. This was spearheaded by figures such as Ruy Cinatti Vaz Monteiro Gomes (1915–86), a Portuguese civil servant who undertook ethnographically oriented studies, and came to act as a gatekeeper to foreign anthropologists who arrived to conduct fieldwork in Portuguese Timor in the postwar years (see Hicks, this volume).[1] In the 1960s and 1970s, a number of anthropologists, including David Hicks, Elizabeth Traube, Shepard Forman and Brigitte Renard-Clamagirand, put the ideas developed by van Wouden and de Jong to the test through new fieldwork projects in Portuguese Timor. Their work was further revitalised in the 1980s when anthropologist James J. Fox set out to further renew the research agenda of de Jong and van Wouden. Through collaborations with the above-mentioned scholars and several of Fox's colleagues from the Australian National University, this led to the Comparative Austronesia Project, which aimed at drawing 'together anthropological, archaeological and linguistic approaches for the study of the Austronesian-speaking populations and to fashion a general framework for the mutual interpretation of the complexities of the Austronesian heritage' (Bellwood et al. 1995: 6). This resulted in the production of a range of ethnographically rich publications on kinship structures, exchange systems, political diarchies, and alliances in Austronesian-speaking territories, including what was then known as East Timor (Clamagirand 1980; Forman 1980; Fox 1980a; 1980b; Traube 1986). A recurring theme in these studies, taken up in a number of post-independence ethnographies, is that of the social organization of communities, through research primarily conducted in rural areas. Studies demonstrated how the *uma lulik* or ritual house, understood as 'both a physical entity and as a cultural category' (Fox 1993: 1), were the 'dominant structures in the organization of the community' (Waterson

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1. We thank one of the anonymous reviewers of this volume for the insightful notes on ethnographic work developed by Portuguese ethnographers and Ruy Cinatti. We regret that it is outside of the scope of this introduction to offer a detailed review of Portuguese-language sources on these research traditions but refer to the chapters of Roque and Hicks who offer their own insights on these.

1993: 229). As described by McWilliam, the *uma lulik* was 'simultaneously a social construction and a ritualized focus for the articulation of social relations and exchange among 'house' members' (McWilliam 2005: 28). Such literature set out to understand broader societal issues and values 'from "inside" its houses' (Fox 1993: 2). A related theme in this literature, also taken up in a growing body of post-independence studies (Bovensiepen 2011; Fitzpatrick 2002; McWilliam and Traube 2011; Thu, this volume) concerns the relation of communities to land, with the landscape understood not only in terms of the physical environment, but also as a site connected with social and ancestral knowledge (Fox 1997) and spiritual potency and political authority (Bovensiepen 2011; McWilliam and Traube 2011).

Given the theoretical inspirations of the time, the most common unit of analysis in Austronesia studies was the village; in early research typically the ones perceived as most 'isolated' and untouched by external influences such as colonialism or Catholicism (see Hicks, this volume). Hence, early Austronesia studies were relatively little concerned with broader political or historical processes. An exception to this is Elizabeth Traube's study of ritual exchange among the Mambai (Traube 1986). Although not the primary focus of the monograph, its account of the anxieties surrounding the Portuguese withdrawal from Timor provides us with one of the few ethnographically grounded examinations of how this transition was experienced within Timor-Leste. Largely though, the literature has been concerned with village-level social and cultural structures, through studies that emphasized the ties of people to land (McWilliam and Traube 2011), and linked issues of identity, belonging, and social organization to the immediate community and to kinship networks and alliances.

Indonesian-occupied Timor: resistance and national identity

Such ethnographic studies of East Timor came to a virtual standstill under the Indonesian occupation, when 'virtually no independent anthropologies or social science studies were conducted' (Gunn 2007: 95; see also McWilliam, this volume). The primary body of writings on Indonesian-occupied Timor took the form of activist and human rights documentations which testified to human rights violations in the territory (Aditjondro 1994; Amnesty International 1994; Retbøll 1998).

Subsequent historical volumes have sought to make up for this (see for instance Dunn 2003; Hill 2002; Taylor 1999). In terms of ethnographically-grounded studies, however, the Indonesian years are characterized by a research gap. A few accounts have emerged after independence that testify to life under Indonesian occupation, particularly those of children and former youth activists (see Bexley 2009; Bexley and Rodrigues 2013; Rei 2007; van Klinken 2012). These accounts have engaged critically with established notions of the resistance as a united front, by highlighting the fractures that emerged between – and within – different generations in the resistance. Outside of resistance narratives, however, very few accounts of everyday life under Indonesian occupation have been produced.

Still, the Indonesian occupation has had a marked impact on the field of contemporary Timor studies. The oppressive reality of Indonesian rule over East Timor made it urgent for both activists and academics who sympathized with the Timorese resistance movement to support their claims of cultural and historical difference from Indonesia, claims that were crucial in attempts to legitimize calls for an independent Timor. As discussed in George Aditjondro's 1994 study of the Indonesian occupation of East Timor, however, there was a tendency for analysts sympathetic to the independence struggle to overemphasize the 'uniqueness of East Timorese cultures', which in effect came to be understood as 'completely different' from Indonesian cultures (Aditjondro 1994: 23). This further strengthened the idea of Timorese society as an already existing, broadly united national community (see also Anderson 2001).

This legacy had a number of effects on contemporary studies of Timor-Leste. Firstly, relations between Indonesia and Timor-Leste tended to be either portrayed in antagonistic terms or were overlooked as a significant influence on post-independence political life (Budiarjo and Liong 1984; Cotton 2004; Dunn 2003; Fernandes 2004; Lansell 1999; Moore 2001; Robinson 2001). However, relationships between Timorese and Indonesians were always, in fact, much more nuanced. The openness of many Timorese towards Indonesian people and influences in the post-independence years, in relation to everything from political life to popular culture, education and language, has taken many foreign researchers by surprise, given the violent history of Indonesia's rule of Timor (see Nygaard-Christensen 2013; Sakti 2013). Through

their involvement in the clandestine movement and collaborations with the Indonesian pro-democracy *reformasi* movement, many Timorese began, in the post-Suharto period, to question hardline assumptions about Indonesia as the stereotyped enemy and to view ordinary Indonesians as fellow victims of Suharto's authoritarian politics (Bexley 2007 and 2009; Bexley and Rodrigues 2013). Following independence, the Indonesian legacy and renewed relations with Indonesia have moulded state politics, business opportunities, and education (Bexley 2009). On one level, the new intimacy between Indonesia and Timor-Leste was pushed by the Timorese political elite, who were eager to establish good relations with the country's closest neighbour and who therefore called for amnesty and forgiveness rather than pursuing justice for war crimes committed during the Indonesian occupation. Likewise, Indonesian politics have inspired forms of political communication and ideas about authority and leadership in independent Timor-Leste (Nygaard-Christensen 2013). However, the establishment of positive relations with Indonesia has not only been an elite project. Indonesian influences have also been reintroduced through television, popular culture, collaboration by activists, and by Timorese youth pursuing educational opportunities in Indonesia (Bexley and Nygaard-Christensen 2013). These multifaceted engagements and considerations of Indonesia went beyond the monolithic representations of us/them binaries in the academic literature and in resistance debates.

A second effect of Timor-Leste's history of Indonesian occupation on subsequent scholarship has been the centrality of the resistance in external imaginaries of the country. Clearly, the resistance holds a key place in both official accounts and popular narratives of Timorese history (Leach 2002; Wallis 2013: 135). Nationalist discourse operates on the basis of an opposition between pro-independence supporters, who are regarded as resistance heroes, on the one hand; and 'opportunists' on the other hand, a term used to refer to those who supported continued integration with Indonesia and who are broadly viewed as inferior to those who supported independence (Kammen 2003: 83; see also Traube 2007).

There has been a tendency in academic debates to employ these divisions as analytical rather than informant categories. Timor-Leste's separation from Indonesia led to a range of studies that focused on vari-

ous aspects of the resistance struggle, its significance and its aftermath (Kent 2014; Leach 2002; Mason 2005; McWilliam 2005; Niner 2013; Rimmer 2010), while hardly any studies have been carried out that concern those who favoured integration with Indonesia over independence (there are exceptions; see Bovensiepen, this volume; and Damaledo 2014). Moreover, past research tended to insist on radical difference between resistance and other protest forms such as gang violence or the rebellion of Major Alfredo Reinado (see Nygaard-Christensen 2012 for an analysis of this), and often favoured accounts of non-violent resistance (Mason 2005). Yet there are many recognizable aspects of the modus operandi of the current-day Dili gangs associated with recurring social unrest in the capital and the clandestine movement, in terms of their symbolism, structures and secrecy (Bexley and Rodrigues 2013). Perhaps mirroring the general 'romance of resistance' (Abu-Lughod 1990; M. Brown 1996; Fletcher 2001; Ortner 1995) in past anthropological research, activist and academic fascination with the Timorese resistance has contributed to an understanding of the Timorese national community as coherent and internally stable. An increased focus on political mobilization that falls outside formal national narratives of heroic resistance might, however, aid us in better understanding how and why crisis and conflict occurs in current-day Timor-Leste.

The conflict paradigm

Following East Timor's separation from Indonesia, a different set of studies emerged that falls into what Bexley (2009) terms the 'conflict paradigm'. Given the breadth of wanton destruction in East Timor by the Indonesian military, police and militia before and after the plebiscite in 1999,[2] subsequent scholarship came naturally to focus on the aftermath of these events. Two trends characterized external debates and literature on Timor-Leste in this period.

Firstly, aid discourses broadly portrayed Timor-Leste as a 'test-case' for future intervention and democratization efforts. Inherent in this characterization was a view of Timor as a 'clean-slate' where, from

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2. The plebiscite was conducted on 30 August 1999, and 78.5% of voters chose independence from Indonesian occupation. Indonesian military and militia went on a violent rampage afterwards, killing up to 1,000 people and destroying much of the country's infrastructure.

independence onwards, development agencies could implement their development agendas (see Chopra 2002; Hohe 2002a; Traub 2000). This is evident in the plethora of foreign aid reports and international media references to Timor as a blank slate or 'ground zero' (see Nevins 2002; Power 2008). 'Building from scratch' was the recurring trope in aid descriptions of the UN's role in the new country (see Nygaard-Christensen 2011). Tanja Hohe has documented how the lack of state administration structures following Indonesia's exit from East Timor was assessed externally as a 'power vacuum' (Hohe 2002a: 579). This meant that already existing social and political structures were rarely taken into consideration in international plans for the new nation.

In spite – or perhaps because – of the immense scale of the task of rebuilding Timor-Leste, the early intervention process was overall an optimistic one. Nygaard-Christensen has shown how the visual aesthetics of Timor-Leste's flattened landscape in the aftermath of the violence-fraught referendum for independence facilitated the process through which Timor-Leste 'became the imaginative site of one of the development community's most optimistic 'success-story' narratives; an imaginative miracle nation in the making' (Nygaard-Christensen 2011: 8).

Confronting this discourse, a range of new, often ethnographically grounded studies emerged which examined local political structures and cultural/traditional frameworks and analysed how these interacted with the introduction of new political systems (i.e. Babo-Soares 2004; A. Brown 2009; Cummins 2010; Cummins and Leach 2012; Fox and Soares 2000; Goldsmith and Harris 2009; Hohe 2001, 2002a, 2002b; Kent 2012; Nixon 2011). With such studies, an ethnographically oriented field of 'Timor studies' had thoroughly taken form a few years after independence, consisting of research that drew particularly on Austronesia studies, resistance- and post-conflict literature, and development critique.

Despite the expanding body of research on Timor-Leste, the 2006–2007 crisis and the violent rupture between eastern (*firaku*) and western (*kaladi*) citizens took many aid workers and academics by surprise (for thorough analyses of the origin of these terms, see Kammen 2010 and Soares 2003). Briefly summarized, a dispute in the Timorese army is commonly pinpointed as the starting point of the crisis, which was, how-

ever, comprised of a series of entangled crises. Soldiers from the country's western districts – later known as the 'petitioners' – complained of discrimination by their superiors and favouring of soldiers hailing from the country's eastern districts, and were subsequently fired. The dispute tied up with a popular claim that those in the eastern districts had been more invested in the resistance struggle against Indonesia; a claim which again linked up with popular understandings about who is entitled to enjoy benefits and privileges in the new nation (see Traube 2007 for a compelling ethnographic analysis of this understanding). The army dispute, which further led to clashes between army and police forces, soon spread to the civilian population, with eastern citizens residing in Dili coming to be targeted in attacks and house burnings. As a result, an estimated 100,000 people became internally displaced, either in IDP camps scattered around the capital's parks and convents, or temporarily returned to their home districts. An upscaled UN mission (UNMIT) and an Australian-led International Stabilisation Force (ISF) were put in place to curb the crisis, which continued through to 2007 (for further analyses of the origins of the 2006–2007 crisis, see Devant 2008; Gunn 2008; Moxham 2008).

To understand this instability, another set of post-crisis studies instead began to draw on more classical post-conflict studies, leading to an increased focus on security issues (Hood 2006; Goldsmith and Dinnen 2007), particularly after the 2006 socio-political and security breakdown. This had the effect of positing Timor-Leste primarily in relation to the conflict it has endured and Timorese as either victims or perpetrators of conflict. Although much research still deals with the aftermath and recovery of communities, and hence focuses on victims of conflict (see for instance Thu, this volume), the 2006–2007 crisis saw a shift in external discourses, particularly in foreign media, which went from categorizing Timor-Leste as a 'miracle nation' to characterizing it as a 'failed state'. This was especially prevalent in the literature from Australia (Kingsbury 2007; see also Cotton 2007), despite the fact that this has been the focus of criticism in analyses that included a focus on external actors in the production of Timorese political crises (T. Anderson 2006; Devant 2008; Grenfell 2008; Moxham 2008; Nygaard-Christensen, this volume). However, if previous understandings of violence and conflict in Timor understood it as deriving from Indonesia's violent policies (see

B. Anderson 1992 for an example of this), or, prior to that, as deriving from the oppression of Portuguese colonial rule, studies falling under the conflict-paradigm largely saw the crisis and prolonged instability in Timor-Leste as internally produced. Mirroring this trend, and unlike the resistance focused studies described above, ethnographically grounded work has increasingly included a focus on the 'villains' of the post-conflict political setting, from political leaders and rebel leaders to youth gangs (Arnold 2009; Myrttinen 2013; Nygaard-Christensen 2012; Scambary 2009; Wallis 2013). The overall shift described here was thus one that went from viewing crisis in Timor-Leste as produced primarily by external factors (Indonesian occupation and, more rarely, Portuguese colonialism) to a view of Timorese crisis as locally produced.

An increased focus on the everyday political and social dynamics that surround the build-up or escalation of crisis and conflict – and which approaches conflict as not necessarily *either* exclusively local in nature or externally produced – would further broaden our understanding of the instabilities that have intermittently characterized Timor-Leste's first years of independence.

'The field' and social change

Field-based academic studies have made critical contributions to external understandings of Timor-Leste. The strongest in terms of contributions to aid discourses have been those that challenged the view of Timor-Leste as a blank slate, an approach which characterized aid debates on the new nation. This was done through ethnographically-grounded studies of traditional power structures and political systems and aid encounters (Brunnstrom 2003; Cummins 2015; Hohe 2001, 2002a, 2002b; Hughes 2009; McWilliam 2005; Palmer 2010; Soares 2004; Trindade 2008). The focus on 'the local' which emerged in this literature was a necessary response to aid discourses and their tendency to gloss over local political and social conditions and exclude local participation in the nation-building process. The literature has also problematized the notion of Timor-Leste's purported state failure or weakness as owing to local political conditions alone (Moxham 2005 2008; Nygaard-Christensen 2011).

A second theme that emerged in the literature is that of resilience (Fitzpatrick and Barnes 2010; Fitzpatrick et al. 2013; Hicks 2012;

McWilliam 2008; Scambary 2013; Siapno 2009; Stead 2012). The resilience literature holds that the disruptive political and social changes seen in Timor-Leste over the past decades have led to the strengthening and reproduction of communities. Often, these studies drew on Austronesia studies, and demonstrated among other things how exchange systems and kinship alliances were central to peoples' survival during Indonesia's occupation. The resilience argument has been central in examinations of how Timorese coped with the brutality of the Indonesian occupation.

Ethnographically-grounded studies that emerged out of the three research traditions outlined above – Austronesia studies, resistance-focused literature and post-conflict studies – thus made significant contributions to understandings of how people in Timor-Leste have coped with disruptive political and social change. What might be explored further is how such change is produced in the first place. Neither academic work nor development approaches have enabled us to make sense of the conflicts, crises and instabilities that have also been a feature of Timor-Leste after independence. The reasons for this, we suggest, can be traced to the themes explored above, which highlighted continuity, community resilience and unity over rupture and discontinuity. Moreover, a tendency in Austronesia studies and the Dutch structuralist studies that inspires this research tradition has been, as noted by Murray et al., that although 'attention to the impact of colonial rule, nationalism and globalization is now the norm in this tradition of scholarship, such forces tend to be framed as secondary modifications of already existing indigenous cultures, rather than constitutive of those cultures' (Murray et al. 2006: 221). In other words, although Timor studies have broadly engaged with the impact of external political administrations on Timorese society, it remains to be explored in more depth how profound the changes brought on by shifting foreign political interventions have been in terms of issues of identity and belonging, political imaginaries and mobilization, and conflict. As noted by Judith Bovensiepen in her analysis of origin house reconstructions in Funar, 'experiences of violence do not just destabilize existing identities; they can lead to the formation of different modes of identification' (Bovensiepen 2014: 301). The reconstruction of origin houses that Bovensiepen explores has been broadly understood as part of a revival of tradition in post-independence Timor-Leste and seen as central to the reconstitution or reproduction of

local communities described in the resilience literature. Engaging this argument, however, Bovensiepen points to the tensions and conflicts that framed the rebuilding of origin houses in Funar and demonstrates how their rebuilding 'has led not only to the reproduction of previous modes of sociality but also to their reconstitution' (ibid.: 291). Indeed, in analyses that view traditional power structures, patterns of exchange and alliances as central to stability and community 'reproduction' and recovery, it is easily missed how what is often described as 'tradition' has also been shaped through engagement with colonial influences, and later through encounters with international development processes (Bovensiepen, this volume; Grainger 2014: 282) and is always being remade (Bexley and Nygaard-Christensen 2013; Silva 2013; Silva and Simião 2012).

   As we wrote in the introduction to a previous special issue on Timorese processes of social and political change, one of the exciting things about 'researching post-independent Timor-Leste has been to carry out fieldwork in a context where not just researchers, but also our informants, are caught up in processes of "sense-making", of determining what kind of place Timor-Leste as an independent nation is becoming' (Bexley and Nygaard-Christensen 2013: 399). We thereby stressed the unique experience of doing fieldwork in a new nation, where at the same time that we 'as researchers have tried to learn about Timor-Leste, our informants, as citizens of a new nation, have been absorbed in a parallel process of learning, deliberating and at times contesting what kind of place Timor-Leste as an independent nation is, and should become in the future' (ibid. and Kammen 2009). In other words, making sense of independent Timor-Leste has, over the past decade, been a project that preoccupies Timorese citizens as much as the foreign researcher (Bexley and Nygaard-Christensen 2013: 399; see also Neves, this volume).

   If anything general may be said about Timor-Leste, it is that it has been a rapidly shifting terrain marked as much by contestation and rupture as consensus and continuity. With the chapters that follow, we therefore hope to encourage critical reflection and debate on how social change is produced. It is important to stress that our argument is not simply to replace 'continuity' with a focus on rupture, but rather to high-light the ambivalences that have characterised Timorese engagements with, for instance, tradition, foreign influences, the colonial heritage,

and politics, and to focus on the ambiguous and heterogeneous ways in which our informants relate to these. Ethnographic fieldwork, due to its focus on everyday practice and discourse rather than institutions, for example, is well positioned to be able to capture these ambivalences. Through chapters focused on moments of crisis, claims to community and the social production of historical, social, and territorial categories, we wish to inspire analytical engagement with these aspects of how the nation has been socially produced, contested, and understood, and to question the categories through which we have come to understand Timor-Leste.

Organisation of the book

Portuguese Timor

We begin the volume with a chapter by David Hicks. His paper on his fieldwork in Portuguese Timor, presented at the 'Crossing Histories and Ethnographies' conference at the Institute of Social Sciences at University of Lisbon in July 2013, inspired the idea for a volume with collected chapters on fieldwork in Timor-Leste, past and present. Hicks' presentation allowed us a rare glimpse into fieldwork conditions in a period that has been scarcely covered in ethnographic research. It also inspired us to collect chapters for a volume on fieldwork in Timor-Leste that would include contributions from both senior and early-career researchers. Hence, we are grateful to be able to introduce the volume with a chapter by David Hicks that reflects on his fieldwork in Portuguese Timor and later, in independent Timor-Leste.

David Hicks' chapter testifies to the dramatic changes the country has gone through. Over the span of a few decades, the territory went from abandoned Portuguese colony to unwilling Indonesian province and later UN protectorate before, finally, achieving independent nationhood. Hence, the country hosts a population whose older generations are able to recall two different colonial frameworks and an additional UN-led foreign administration. A select group of Timor researchers have also dealt with Timor-Leste through the lens of three disparate foreign administrations. Hicks was trained at the University of Oxford under Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard and Rodney Needham. Encouraged by the latter and inspired by research trends in French and Dutch structuralist research, he set out to conduct fieldwork in Portuguese Timor to study

asymmetric marriage alliance systems. Hicks' chapter offers a personal account of fieldwork in Portuguese Timor, shaped through his encounter with Ruy Cinatti, a Portuguese civil servant, who acted as a gatekeeper to his fieldwork in Viqueque. In addition, the chapter describes Hicks' return to Timor-Leste following independence and renewing relations with informants after several decades in a community now busy transitioning into the market economy. Alongside this development, however, the chapter shows how the shift to independence has been accompanied by a shift in perceptions of tradition, previously surrounded by secrecy and even shame, to a local re-engagement with 'tradition', encouraged by the broader project of nation-building.

Ricardo Roque's chapter approaches the Portuguese colonial heritage from a different perspective. At the centre of his analysis is an undocumented collection of decapitated Timorese skulls found in Coimbra Museum in Portugal. The archival void surrounding their history led Roque on a search for what he terms 'archival traces', resulting in extensive fieldwork in public and private archives. Roque describes archival research as a 'hunting praxis, a form of knowledge by traces' and the archives as a 'rich ethnographic space … from which to engage with colonial knowledge'. What emerges from his own archival hunt is a complex history of colonial collaborations. While Portuguese sources assessed the skulls as representative of exotic indigenous warfare practices in which Portuguese played no part, Roque's research locates them at the intersection between Timorese and Portuguese colonial culture. Their history implicated Portuguese officials, missionaries and Timorese opponents and collaborators of Portuguese colonial rule in warfare that could neither be described as fully indigenous nor colonial. Roque's chapter eloquently demonstrates how archival research can help us 'formulate new questions and generate fresh insights into past and present events in Timor'. Indeed, the chapter not only complicates Portuguese colonial dichotomies between indigenous and colonial culture, but also inspires a rethinking of how we think about Timorese history and Timorese engagement with external political projects more broadly.

Fieldwork in a new nation

Following Indonesia's exit from what was then known as East Timor, the territory instantly shifted from decades of isolation to a dramatic open-

ing up to foreign aid workers, INGOs and peacekeepers. In addition, the transition led to a reopening of the area to foreign researchers. Although the influx of international projects was such that some described it as 'another invasion' (Brunnstrom 2003), the experience of many researchers was that of a country remarkably accessible to ethnographic fieldwork. This was owing not only to the lack of bureaucratic red tape restricting the arrival of people and projects, but also, as described by McWilliam in this volume, to the mix of trauma and exhilaration in the aftermath of the violence in 1999, which meant that 'everyone wanted to tell their story' (see also Hicks, this volume).

Andrew McWilliam's chapter introduces us to foreign researchers' new access to Timor-Leste after the Indonesian occupation, and to his transition from fieldwork in Indonesian West Timor to newly independent Timor-Leste. In fact, McWilliam commenced his research in Timor-Leste when it was still under UN administration, at a time when the atmosphere was 'a surreal mix of shock and elation at the unexpected victory over the might of the Indonesian military'. Like many other ethnographers, McWilliam has held the dual roles of aid worker and researcher, working initially in a World Bank project. From there, however, he picked up on research interests developed years previously during extended fieldwork in West Timor as part of the comparative Austronesia research project described above. He thus left the 'hot, humid, chaotic mix of rubble and dust, foreigners and UN badged soldiers, Timorese squatters and makeshift cafés' for the forests of Lautem in the far east of Timor-Leste, where he came to carry out extensive research on Fataluku cultural resilience and forest livelihoods. The chapter reflects in particular on the serendipitous nature of identifying a 'field' over time, a process developed through a mix of chance and opportunity, and, in the early years of independence, supported by the broad popular willingness for people to 'reflect on the tumultuous events of the recent times and the challenges of rebuilding'.

Angie Bexley's chapter likewise reflects on the critical juncture of independence but it engages with a younger generation of Timorese. Like McWilliam, Bexley came to Timor through the Australian National University focus on Eastern Indonesia and Indonesian politics and culture. This provided a particular entry point to viewing Timor-Leste, which differed from the perspectives that mostly viewed Indonesia as

a monolithic entity. As Bexley's chapter demonstrates, the perspectives and experiences of young people had been excluded from the new nation-state and their connection to Indonesia dubbed them the 'Supermi Generation' by the nation's elites – a reference to Indonesia's instant noodles and implied a lack of strength and leadership. These understandings about them worked to deny them a legitimate stake as citizens in the new nation-state. Bexley takes a textual analysis of the magazine *Talitakum,* which was an important cultural product of the young generation in the early years of independence, as a basis from which to untangle the influence of Indonesia in independent Timor-Leste and from which to understand how young people grappled with forging their own positions in the new nation.

Spatiality and temporality

The next two chapters, by Judith Bovensiepen and Douglas Kammen, approach from different angles the construction of historical and territorial categories in Timor-Leste. Above, we touched on some of the ways in which 'Timor-Leste' was socially produced and cast as a coherent, national community in international research debates. One of the recurring distinctions made in academic debates about Timor-Leste is that between the urban and the rural, often accompanied by associated divisions between 'modern' and 'traditional' livelihoods. In recent years, Timorese urban areas have been the main locus for analyses of conflict, crisis, and politics (Devant 2008; Moxham 2008; Scambary 2013), while the rural is often analysed using starkly different terms, through studies of community, tradition, and resilience (see Silva 2013 and Silva and Simião 2012 for exceptions). Douglas Kammen and Judith Bovensiepen's chapters, however, challenge such divisions, by focusing on the way in which territorial, administrative, and historical categories have been constructed through engagement between external administrations and local political organisation.

Douglas Kammen's chapter sheds light on the social and historical construction of the territorial and administrative units that comprise Timor-Leste as we know it today. Like Roque in this volume, Kammen's chapter is based on extensive historical and archival research. Kammen traces contemporary understandings of Timorese rural societies to the making of administrative boundaries and divisions during Portuguese colonialism. In addition to questioning the widespread view of the

country as a primarily rural and agrarian society, Kammen's chapter engages critically with the notion that the units which comprise Timorese society – from district to sub-district and down to village level – 'accord with the social organization of East Timorese society'. This is done through a detailed examination of the historical formation of the *suco* (village-level administrative unit) under Portuguese colonial rule. Based on historical research that presents the *suco* as a 'foreign imposition', Kammen's chapter challenges the association of the *suco* with relatively bounded communities, an understanding which, among others, underlines contemporary accounts of a 'revival of tradition' in rural Timor-Leste. Rather than a 'sociologically coherent entity', he argues, the *suco* is 'far more often an administrative vessel with which competing claims are made to historical legitimacy, accusations are hurled about collaboration and other past injustices, and struggles occur over access to the parties, the state, and largesse' (ibid.).

Next, Judith Bovensiepen's chapter takes up the construction of the historical categories through which many of us have come to think of Timor-Leste's recent past. Through combined ethnographic fieldwork and historical research, Bovensiepen's chapter presents an analysis of political elites, alliances and conflict in Laclubar sub-district in Manatuto. Both nationalist discourse and academic research on Timor-Leste work with the division of historical periods into different periods arranged on the basis of the shifting political administrations in place: Portuguese colonial rule, Indonesian occupation, and independence. Bovensiepen's chapter, however, demonstrates how political alliances and struggles over authority transcend these temporal distinctions, just as they are entangled with and shaped through engagement with shifting external administrations. Inter-party struggles, she demonstrates, were caught up in already existing political disputes which had, in turn, also been shaped through engagement with the Portuguese colonial administration. Hence, Bovensiepen shows how official – as well as international and academic – narratives that pit pro-integrationists and pro-independence supporters against each other overlook the complexity of how political allegiances and alliances came into being. Bovensiepen's chapter focuses on a piece of neglected local history in an area associated with pro-Indonesian supporters, which fit awkwardly with the official national narrative. The result is a chapter that encourages us to pay more attention

to memories and historical accounts that are neglected in nationalist, official narrative, and often, in academic work (see also Rothschild, this volume).

Post-conflict fieldwork

The next two chapters highlight Timor-Leste as a post-conflict setting. The first, by Pyone Myat Thu, examines the local dynamics of conflict, while Maj Nygaard-Christensen's chapter zooms in on the entanglement of post-conflict political crises with international aid practices. Both chapters, however, contest the idea of Timorese conflict as either externally generated or purely domestic in nature. Thu's chapter does this by examining the local dynamics of tensions and conflict in rural Baucau districts, which themselves arose through Indonesian resettlement programmes under occupation. Nygaard-Christensen's chapter, on the other hand, shows how the local political dramas that have characterised the post-independence years, and which at first sight seem only to confirm Timor-Leste's state fragility, were often co-produced by the massive international presence the country has hosted after independence.

Pyone Myat Thu's chapter introduces us to her rural fieldwork in a village in Baucau. The village, a resettlement village established in the late 1970s during the Indonesian occupation to host those who surrendered from Matebian Mountains, was established on a site claimed as ancestral land by neighbouring villagers. Thu's fieldwork was carried out in the late months of the 2006-2007 crisis, when displacement was not only grounded in past conflicts but was also related to the crisis, which again set populations on the move and set community tensions in motion in new ways. Thu's chapter narrates the experience of conducting fieldwork in an environment characterised by deep distrust and suspicion, and the implications this had for her ability to carry out ethnographic research. Among other things, local dynamics of conflict and distrust spilled over into peoples' assessment of her as a fieldworker. Initially, her association with one particular village caused her to be perceived as biased in relation to community divisions. While this issue is relevant to many fieldwork experiences, it is particularly pronounced in post-conflict situations such as Timor-Leste, where political or communal differences are typically considered to be threatening (see also Rothschild, this volume). Hence, Thu's chapter encourages researchers working in such environments to pay attention to 'what is left unsaid as

much as what is said'. Indeed, her chapter demonstrates how such unsaid information, which emerged by accident, was vital to piecing together a grounded and nuanced understanding of conflicting community experiences of displacement.

Maj Nygaard-Christensen's chapter likewise engages with silences and secrets during ethnographic fieldwork, but shifts the focus from local dynamics of conflict to the presence of the international aid community. On the basis of extended ethnographic fieldwork among aid workers and Timorese political elites, the chapter examines the circulation of a UN document which was leaked to the Timorese press in 2011. With a focus on UN practices promoting democracy, the chapter examines the political drama that resulted from the leak of the document, which contained a number of critical comments about the domestic political leadership. The chapter focuses on the informal and everyday practices of those promoting democracy, and shows how 'even practices relatively peripheral to the broader project of democracy promotion ended up in the thick of politics' (Nygaard-Christensen, this volume). Against this background, Nygaard-Christensen suggests that the political dramas and instabilities that have characterised the Timorese political landscape after independence, although typically examined as 'local' in nature, are in fact produced through the entanglement of international and local political agendas and best studied through a focus on everyday practice. Rather than viewing aid practices as somehow external to the unfolding of local political dynamics, the chapter thus analyses international aid and 'local' political practices through a shared analytical framework (see also Shepherd 2009). Based on this, it calls for an increased methodological and analytical attention to the broader, unintended consequences of the massive international presence Timor-Leste has hosted after the separation from Indonesia.

Positionality

The final two chapters by Guteriano Neves and Amy Rothschild offer two examples of how positionality impacts on ethnographic research and directs our attention in the field. Many researchers, for instance, came to Timor-Leste with a background in activism or at least in strong solidarity with the resistance movement against Indonesia. As already described, this led to a range of resistance-focused studies and studies that challenged aid accounts of independent Timor-Leste as a 'blank

slate'. In other words, much of the work done on Timor-Leste, while not necessarily activist in nature, has therefore been 'politically engaged' (Hale 2006). Guteriano Neves' chapter most clearly illustrates this. Written from the perspective of a Timorese researcher, he likens his research on aid and petroleum politics to a form of 'engaged citizenship'. Amy Rothschild's chapter instead analyses issues of access and ownership among internationals working in Timor-Leste.

Guteriano Neves' chapter offers reflections on the particular challenges faced by Timorese scholars researching their own society: what, for instance, does it mean for research when one never quite 'exits' the field and has few possibilities of putting any distance between oneself as researcher and one's informants; and what particular challenges do researchers who are constantly in 'the field' encounter? Foreign scholars are, of course, increasingly in constant touch with what is going on in the field, as informants become Facebook friends, and, increasingly, read publications written about them. Hence, the real difference between the work of foreign researchers and the kind of research described in Neves chapter lies not in the distinction between outsiders and insiders. Instead, Neves conceptualises his research on international aid and petroleum politics as a form of engaged citizenship, carried out in a shared political space with those of his co-citizens (Becker et al. 2005). The chapter moreover describes his coming of age as a researcher, from being a spectator to incoming aid projects in the early years of independence to engaging analytically and politically with the effects of such projects. While this in a sense sets him apart from his co-citizens, the chapter also demonstrates how this level of engagement with state politics is not restricted to urban scholars and elites, but that even remote rural communities are intensely invested and interested in what is going on in relation to the state and to the politics of aid.

Amy Rothschild's chapter brings the tensions surrounding Timorese history-making to the forefront of her analysis. Like Neves' contribution, her chapter touches on the issue of access in relation to fieldwork. In this case, however, the chapter examines the issue in relation to notions of ownership and approaches to history among internationals working in Timor-Leste. The starting point of her chapter is her failure to gain access to one of the field sites she had hoped could aid her PhD research into Timorese memories of violence during the Indonesian occupation:

the making of a film about the 1983 massacre in Kraras. The turning point is a confrontation between her and one of the foreign filmmakers involved in what was advertised as Timor-Leste's first feature film, with the filmmaker requesting her to leave the site of the filming in Kraras. The chapter revolves around different understandings of the site and, more broadly, of Timor-Leste's history. If the filmmaker viewed the filming site as 'on set' – indicating a closed and bounded set – Rothschild regarded it as 'on location', as filmed on a site where no one – save Kraras inhabitants and survivors of the massacre – could claim ownership. The chapter not only raises the question of who has the right to grant – or disallow – access to particular sites, it also demonstrates how national or 'local' projects of history-making in a new nation such as Timor-Leste are intensely entangled with international ones.

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