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Displacement in the 2006 Dili Crisis: Dynamics of an Ongoing Conflict

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CONTENTS

List of Acronyms

ASDT   Associação Popular Democrática Timorense was formed in 1974. It later changed its name to Fretilin. The same acronym belongs to the party Associação Social-Demócrata Timorense, which won 15,7 per cent of the votes in coalition with Partido Social Demócrata in the 2007 parliamentary elections.

ASPI   Australian Strategic Policy Institute

CAVR   Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation, best known by its Portuguese acronym, CAVR

COI   Independent Special Commission of Inquiry for Timor-Leste. Report on the crisis released 2 October 2006.

CNRT   Congresso Nacional Reconstrução Timor (created in 2007) under Xanana Gusmão. The party won 24,1 per cent of the votes in the parliamentary elections of 2007. A coalition front under the same name was formed before independence (National Council of Timorese Resistance) and led by Xanana Gusmão and Ramos Horta. It was dissolved in 2001.

FALINTIL   Forças Armadas da Libertação Nacional de Timor-Leste (East Timor's liberation army

F-FDTL   FALINTIL-Forças Armadas de Defesa de Timor-Leste (the armed forces after independence)

FRETILIN   Frente Revolucionária do Timor-Leste Independente (Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor). Fretilin won 29 per cent of the votes in the parliamentary elections of 2007.

IDP   Internally Displaced Person (or Persons)

JTF   Joint Task Force (Portuguese, Australian, New Zealand and Malaysian troops sent to Timor-Leste to bring stability in late May 2006). At the time of writing, international forces are designated as ISF, International Stabilisation Force.

NGO   Non-Governmental Organisation

OCHA   United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

PNTL   Polícia Nacional de Timor-Leste

RDTL   República Democrática de Timor-Leste

RTTL	Radio Televisão Timor-Leste
SRSG	Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations
TNI	Tentara Nasional Indonesia – the Indonesian army
UDI	Unilateral Declaration of Independence
UDT	União Democrática Timorense
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Project
UNMISET	United Nations Mission of Support in East Timor (2002-2005)
UNMIT	United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (2006-2008)
UNOTIL	United Nations Office in East Timor (2005-2006)
UNTAET	United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (1999-2002)
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Glossary

Mari Alkatiri	Secretary General of Fretilin and first Prime Minister of Timor-Leste (20 May 2002- 26 June 2007).
'The Crisis'	In this paper I consider the crisis to begin before the assault on the government palace on 28 April 2006, and to be still going on at the time of writing (revised August 2007). Most accounts consider the crisis to begin on 28 April 2006 and last until the arrival of the Joint Task Force or the change of government in June 2006.
Firaku	Term to designate a person from the eastern (or Lorosa'e) part of Timor-Leste (often used in a derogatory manner).
Kaladi	Term to designate a person from the western (or Loromonu) part of Timor-Leste (often used in a derogatory manner).
Rogério Lobato	Minister of Interior (2002-2006). Lobato was sacked in late May. In March 2007 he was sentenced to seven years and six months prison for distributing arms to civilians during the crisis. In August 2007 he travelled to Malaysia for medical treatment, although the new government attempted to prevent it.
Loromonu	'West'. The derogatory term 'kaladi' is also used. It is generally (although not always) understood to comprise the ten districts in the West.
Lorosa'e	'East'. The derogatory term 'firaku' is also used. This term is generally (although not always) understood to comprise the districts of Baucau, Lautem and Viqueque, and sometimes Manatuto.
'Petitioners'	The group of F-FDTL soldiers who left their barracks to protest in Dili claiming mismanagement and discrimination within the army. The group was mostly from the West. The petitioners who constituted approximately 40 per cent of the armed forces were dismissed by the Brigadier General of the F-FDTL, a decision that was endorsed by PM Alkatiri. The President, however, publicly expressed his disagreement with the dismissal, which he characterised as 'unjust' (speech 23 March 2006).
Taur Matan Ruak	Brigadier General of the F-FDTL. His decision to dismiss the petitioners was endorsed by PM Alkatiri, but publicly repudiated by President Gusmão in March 2006.
José Ramos Horta	PM during the interim government. Ramos Horta, a Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, was Foreign Minister and, following the resignation of the Defence Minister during the crisis, assumed this position. He resigned

on 25 June in protest at Fretilin's decision that Alkatiri remain as PM. Alkatiri stepped down the following day, and Ramos Horta was sworn in as Prime Minister. In May 2007 Ramos Horta was elected President.

Xanana Gusmão	President of the Republic, 2002-2007. Current Prime Minister of Timor-Leste. He is the leader of the CNRT party. Charismatic and popular, Gusmão was the leader of the Falintil guerrilla and was imprisoned in 1992 until his release after the Popular Consultation of 1999. He threatened to resign in a speech on 22 June 2006 if PM Alkatiri did not. Alkatiri resigned four days later.

Acknowledgements

Introduction

The island of Timor is split in two. The eastern half gained independence in 2002 and became Timor-Leste. In April 2006 a group of disaffected army personnel called 'the petitioners' gathered outside the capital's government palace to protest alleged discrimination. This protest culminated in an outbreak of violence and confrontation within and between security forces. By May two-thirds of the capital Dili's residents were displaced.

Displacement and violence play a particular role in Timor-Leste's history. The aim of this paper is to explore displacement as a dynamic in its own right. Standard accounts take a different perspective (see COI 2006, ICG 2006). They focus attention on a divided leadership, weak institutions, and proximate and underlying causes. In such accounts, displacement is a consequence of these greater circumstances. Such accounts address the questions *What went wrong?* and *How to proceed from here?* By contrast, this paper attempts to map crisis dynamics, displacement in particular, and their greater significance. This is a necessary exercise if one is to explain, and not just identify, the ongoing crisis.[1]

This paper explores the relationship between conflict and displacement as dynamics of social change. It does not pay particular attention to factors leading to the attack on the government palace on 28 April 2006, which is generally seen as the start of the crisis. Instead it seeks to show how the Timorese population negotiates new, at times devastating, realities. One expression of this is the adoption of regional identities during the crisis.[2] This paper attempts to explore the key defining features of the crisis – displacement, regional identities, and repertoires of low-level violence. The thesis of this paper is that the sometimes violent 'crisis dynamics' will bring about profound societal changes that are likely to outlive any political deadlock at the top. This deadlock is usually understood as defining the 'crisis'. In opening up the scope of what the crisis is about, this paper simultaneously attempts to highlight particular dynamics that have not been given enough attention in standard accounts, embedded as they are in a liberal framework.

Background: Timor-Leste's struggle and independence

What is today Timor-Leste was a Portuguese colony for over 400 years. In 1974 Portugal's Carnation Revolution precipitated the decolonisation of all Portuguese overseas territories. In the eastern half of the island a civil war broke out between supporters of the two main political parties, UDT and Fretilin. Fretilin made a unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) on 28 November 1975. Independence lasted only nine days before Indonesia invaded, initiating an aggressive campaign of assimilation.

Resistance took on different forms. Dili was the centre of Indonesian control, but in the mountains and jungles a guerrilla war raged throughout the twenty-four year occupation. A report charged with investigating human rights violations under Indonesian occupation found that 100,000 - 180,000 people had died between 1975 and August 1999 in a territory of under one million. These casualties were the result of abduction, napalm and murder, as well as of 'indirect', but no less deliberate, campaigns of violence, displacement and famine

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[1] This paper was originally submitted in May 2007, approximately a month before Timor-Leste's general elections.
[2] This paper has opted to discuss cleavages as regional rather than ethnic for the reasons discussed in Section 3.

(CAVR 2005). The brutality of the Indonesian occupation, condoned by Cold War *realpolitik*, eventually caught the attention of international civil society. Suharto's fall in 1998 opened a window of opportunity to put pressure on the Indonesian government to 'solve the Timor affair'.

In 1999 a popular consultation was held under United Nations (UN) auspices. The vote established that 78 per cent of East Timorese wanted independence. Indonesian withdrawal was quick and devastating. In anticipation of an unfavourable outcome the Indonesian army had recruited and trained local pro-integration militia. The militia carried out a scorched earth campaign that decimated 70 per cent of the country's physical infrastructure and spread terror. A thousand or more people were killed in the days following the referendum, and three quarters of the total population was displaced, 250,000-280,000 of them across the border into West Timor (CHR 2000: 4-7).

The UN Transitional Administration in Timor (UNTAET) oversaw the country from 1999 to 2002, when it formally regained its independence. The country's natural gas and petroleum reserves made it stand out from other developing countries, as did its internationally renowned leaders.[3] Despite the enormous challenges of reconstructing a country literally burnt to the ground, Timor-Leste became an opportunity for effective nation-building. Though undergoing some turmoil since independence,[4] the country was hailed as a success story. This perspective prevailed until the end of April 2006. Paul Wolfowitz, in his visit to the capital just two weeks before the crisis, corroborated a climate of optimism: 'The bustling markets, the rebuilt schools, the functioning Government – and above all the peace and stability – attest to sensible leadership and sound decisions.'[5]

The Crisis

In a matter of days nothing seemed further from the truth. The capital was devastated by arson and the population fled. Individual members of the disintegrated security forces claimed loyalty to the country's leaders. Armed and uniformed, they took to the mountainous outskirts of Dili or the districts. Simultaneously, a splintered leadership rendered government institutions ineffective. President Xanana Gusmão publicly disagreed with Brigadier General Taur Matan Ruak's decision to dismiss the petitioners, who constituted a third of the army. Long-standing differences between Prime Minister Alkatiri and Xanana became particularly evident during the latter's speech on 22 June accusing the majority Fretilin party of authoritarian rule and corruption, and threatening to resign if Alkatiri did not. Alkatiri explained his decision to step down on 26 June 'so as to avoid the resignation of His Excellency the President of RDTL' (Alkatiri 2006). He held throughout the crisis that the conflict had been a coup to oust him from power (ICG 2006: 11). Ramos Horta became the interim Prime Minister. Not only did the conflict 'spiral out of control', it became marked by

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[3] The leaders included those in the so-called Maputo Group (much of the Fretilin exile, including Alkatiri) active in the lusophone world; two Nobel Peace Prize laureates (Ramos Horta and Ximenes Belo); and a charismatic guerrilla leader likened to Nelson Mandela (famous under his *nom de guerre*, Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão).
[4] For example, riots in Dili in December 2002 which led to the destruction of Alkatiri's house (see Shoesmith, 2003: 251); veterans' groups claiming a part in the 'peace dividend' were involved in the riots on December 2004 (see Simonsen, 2006: 593). In 2005 the church spearheaded a nineteen-day demonstration against the government. The point of contention was a secularist policy towards religious education (see COI paragraph 30)
[5] Closing press conference in Timor-Leste, 10 April 2006.

regional identity, taking many outside analysts by surprise. Despite efforts to facilitate the return of the displaced and the presence of international forces, the situation in Dili remained volatile at the time of writing this paper.[6]

Structure of the Argument

This paper springs from the perspective that displacement is a key feature of the crisis. Seen as a dynamic of conflict and not just a consequence of it, this case of forced dislocation demonstrates conceptual limitations intrinsic to top-down conflict analysis. Displacement in the Dili 2006/07 crisis illustrates how the usual emphasis on causes and outcomes of conflict ignores processes through which past and present experiences of violence coalesce. In order to explain the role of displacement in Dili this paper takes a holistic view of the crisis. It straddles theoretical narratives and local experiences of violence within Timor-Leste's own historical context. In so doing this study emphasises the interplay between histories of violence, structural elements conducive to the crisis, and the negotiation of possible renewed violence in crisis dynamics.

The first section of the paper lays out the conceptual backdrop for the greater body of analysis. Analysis of violent conflict in developing countries is embedded in a particular strand of liberalism, which views violence as 'development in reverse'; displacement is a consequence of this and something to be managed rather than understood.

Section two examines the authoritative Commission of Inquiry (COI) report that establishes the facts of the crisis, identifies those responsible as well as recommends measures to establish accountability; and its relationship with the nation-building effort in Timor-Leste. It contrasts the COI account with rumours, which purport to establish competing versions of the events and responsibilities in the crisis. These two forms of production of knowledge sit at opposite extremes of a 'hierarchy of credibility'. One speaks to 'global' international actors. The other is an expression of a 'local' climate of, in this case, insecurity.

The third section establishes displacement as the defining dynamic of the crisis, not just a consequence of violence, but an integral part of it. Following this, the fourth section discusses the role of past and present displacements in regional identities. The final section addresses long-term crises and continuities in Timor-Leste; specifically changing political scenes, repertoires of violence and corrosive elements of low-level violence that keep crises alive. Thus, the paper rejects the view that the crisis in Timor-Leste is 'warped development', arguing instead that it both builds on past experience of conflict and creates renewed conditions for future conflict and displacement.

Limitations

This paper is subject to several limitations. The first is my own bias. When I first formulated the title ('Displacement in the 2006 Dili Crisis'), I did so on the assumption that the crisis constituted only a moment of insecurity in 2006. In the early months of the interim

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[6] At the time of revision (August 2007) insecurity in Timor-Leste persists, particularly in the eastern districts and Dili. I have chosen not to change this paper in light of the renewed violence and displacement that have occurred between 30 June 2007 and the time of revision, August 2007. Notes added at the time of revision are indicated as: (note August 2007).

government the situation in Dili remained volatile, but violence was sporadic and localised. Then, as the months passed, periodic surges of violence thwarted the displaced populations' return, and increasingly rigid identities have reshaped the course of violent action. In writing this paper I have increasingly interpreted the crisis as a harbinger of the elections scheduled for June 2007. The reader's privilege will be to contrast my analysis against developments that have not yet come to pass. One author in a similar situation expressed this eloquently:

> My task would have been easier had the violence been a thing of the past, a done deed, or if the future and its hopes, in being attended upon by the present, had better survived the latter's relentless and deforming scourge. Relatively independent of the present, the past and the future are easier to fathom because they can be conceptually seized and positioned for a still-life representation, a representation hovered over by the protective shadow of coherent narrative (Daniel 2000: 336).

Like Daniel's paper, my analysis is both 'present-driven and present-stifled'.

The second limitation is that the analysis is influenced by my own experiences in Dili, before and during three months of the 'emergency' (June–August 2006). Some elements of this analysis derive from my own experiences during this time, and those of Timorese friends and acquaintances throughout the crisis. From where I write in Oxford I have been fortunate to benefit from comments and critiques from people in Timor-Leste and elsewhere. I have self-consciously attempted to write this paper as an engaged witness rather than an impartial spectator. This study does not put forward a definitive account of the events of 2006/07, but instead offers a perspective on the tenuous relationship between how violence and displacement are written about, and how they are experienced.

1.   The theoretical framework

The great challenge, in trying to explain and make sense of violence and war, and their relationship to profound societal changes at local, national, regional and global levels, is to steer between mystifying and over-rationalising (Cramer 2006: 7).

This section critically examines the theoretical framework in which violent conflict in developing countries is understood. It argues that a certain framework of analysis obscures how violence and displacement are experienced. The first part of this section explains this framework in relation to 'standard' perspectives on violence and peace. The second part suggests that the conceptual tool of a 'continuum' or 'spectrum' of violence (see Cramer 2006) helps mend the gap between past and present experiences of conflict. I do not wish to dispel liberal analyses entirely, nor sequester them under the 'subjective', but intend to nuance, position and contest them.

Liberal perspectives on conflict

From his home in Königsberg, Immanuel Kant (1795) envisaged a 'Perpetual Peace' that has found its way into the heart of the international community and the developmental project. Kant argued that political communities organised under constitutional republics would sustain deep, enduring peace because of their shared values. Shared values are articulated along a categorical imperative that all individuals be treated as ends in themselves. In combination, in their present form (democratic peace and human rights), these ideas lay

the foundations for a distinctly liberal system of political thought. Compelling as they are, I argue that these principles, although dominant, remain ill-equipped to explain conflict and social relations both within and between political communities.

The end of the Cold War ushered in a strand of liberal thought that conceptually merged development and security (Duffield 2001). Two approaches to conflict in developing countries have grown from this. The first is a 'pessimistic account' of violence as a pathological, congenital disorder emerging 'in conditions of "distorted" development' (Cramer 2006: 94).

An explicit formulation of this perspective is Enzensberger's thesis that contemporary wars are a form of 'political retrovirus' and are about 'nothing at all'. He suggests that 'no goal, no plan, no idea binds [conflicts] together other than the strategy… of plunder, death and destruction' (cited in Cramer 2006: 76-7). The negative perspective also underlies Kaplan's (2000) 'coming anarchy' linking growing populations, 'refugee migration', and ethnic conflict in the global South with instability in the North. It also informs Kaldor's (1999) categorical distinction between 'old wars' and internecine, 'new wars'. Timor-Leste's crisis contains many elements that are typically attributed to 'new wars'. But critics (Cramer 2006, Spyer 2006) argue that this perspective works simultaneously to 'other', or make exotic, contemporary conflict and romanticise 'old wars'.

According to the pessimistic view, contemporary conflicts are apolitical and criminal, dangerous because they can spill across borders. At the extreme, endemic conflict is attributed to primordialism, religious fanaticism or tribalism. Spyer (2006) condemns accounts that describe sociological processes under such rubrics. She explains that the characterisation of communal violence and the means of analysing it are two sides of the same coin: 'one invoking chaos and anticivilizational impulses; the other proposing the means and modes of government to cure it' (188).

Spyer's point helps understand the purpose of the optimistic account. This perspective links peace with a progressive assimilation of development goals. The corollary of this is that violence is development in reverse. The spirit of mending the conditions that create conflict is at the heart of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) Report on Timor-Leste (2002), titled 'New Neighbour, New Challenge'. The report clearly lays out the link between development and security, and explains that Australia's key policy challenge in Timor-Leste is to meet its security problems through economic growth and political development (2).

The logic underlying this dominant perspective has created the shibboleth that development, if done right, brings peace in its wake. A clear consequence of this teleological approach is that it extricates violence from the space in which it occurs. Like the pessimistic account, it also 'others' violence by casting it aside into a category that captures what development is not.

Policy-relevant conflict analysis

Both pessimistic and optimistic perspectives are set within a certain strand of liberal analysis. These perspectives on violence and development represent a changed projection of academics and policy makers (Cramer 2006). As policy makers seek to take stock of emergencies, analysts offer accounts that limit themselves to identifying the possible causes

of the conflict. They rely on definitional frames that are more than just descriptive: they 'shape *what* is viewed and *how* it is interpreted' (Cramer 2006: 51, emphasis in the original). The conceptual and empirical 'framing devices' adopted in this process sustain and produce a particular form of knowledge that dominates conflict analysis.

Spyer (2006) points out that there are epistemological risks involved 'when the very same terms used to describe the aims of government serve also as the analytical apparatus deployed by sociologists, political scientists, anthropologists, and the like' (188). Analyses are expected to be policy-relevant, for example by suggesting ways of 'rebooting' the nation-building effort. A primary concern for lessons learned and best practice induces a top-down, focused approach. How the violence is experienced on the ground is lost in this form of analysis:

> One can see an exasperation among the international elite of policy makers and bureaucrats who demand that social scientists should be able to suggest solutions rather than go into the minutiae of the lived experiences of people caught up in such violence (Das *et al*. 1998: 16).

Demands for clarity and predictability in the phenomenon of violence produce 'habits of description'. These habits allow for the 'premature acceptance of meanings that culture has to offer, or the ready-made solutions the social scientist comes up with' (Daniels in Das *et al*. 1998: 16).

Resorting to habits of description necessarily shapes what is known about a particular situation. In the context of conflict analysis, these habits of description are embedded in a liberal framework, and thus have a particular place in the nation-building agenda:

> Taken-for granted, hackneyed notions like transition to democracy, civil society, and crisis are more than the analytical stock in trade of neo-liberal think-tanks and organisations insofar as they simultaneously identify things to be fostered, abetted, and especially, managed in countries of the South (Spyer 2006: 188).

These concepts obscure the 'highly subtle, complex processes and regimes of change' of which violence is a telling dimension (*ibid.*). Analyses that privilege globalising discourses extract the experience of conflict from the phenomenon of conflict. Lost in this abstraction is the subjective experience of violence. Das (2007) describes this as violent events' 'descent into the ordinary'. As a result 'there are plenty of theories of war that stop short of analysing *violence*' (Cramer 2006: 92, emphasis in the original). The frames that are used in standard conflict analysis are ill-suited for approaching dynamics of violence.

Reconceptualising violent conflict

In a roster of violent conflict, analysts decide what to include, exclude and how to differentiate between the phenomena of violence (Cramer 2006: 57). Most analyses fail to recognise that seemingly independent forms of violence such as communal violence, ethnic conflict, civil war or non-war violence such as gang-violence or domestic violence become indistinguishable for those who are subjected to them. Harm may be inflicted in 'private' through domestic violence, or mimicked in public, in the display of authority by security forces (see Human Rights Watch 2006). This is particularly true of 'post-conflict' societies, because when war settles into peace, it shows its hand in violence (Cramer 2006: 276).

Cramer suggests that rather than obscuring realities through discontinuous, discrete phenomena, the study of violent conflict would gain from 'thinking in terms of a spectrum of violence: a continuum along which events easily shade into one another and the grand categories mark rather artificial breaks' (*ibid.*: 84). This spectrum of violence calls for a more nuanced understanding of violent conflict based on the idea of 'profound societal change'. Violence in developing countries bears 'family resemblances' (Suganami 1996), which reveal 'related experiences of societal transition' (Cramer 2006: 287). This perspective encourages the 'search for an explanation rather than the agglomeration of unrelated incidents rich in detail but devoid of significance' (*ibid.*: 136). Cramer's point of view complements the ethnographically sensitive literature endorsed in this paper, which avoids the totalising narrative of an 'aesthetic of misery' (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgeois 2004: 13, 26). The application of these ideas to the 2006/07 conflict in Timor-Leste can divest the crisis of exotic deviance, presenting instead something symptomatic of transition.

The analysis of the 2006/7 crisis is deeply embedded in a framework of development and nation-building, which presumes a given path of social organisation. The analysis of the crisis in Timor-Leste can only begin with the critique of standard violence analysis itself. I have argued that violent conflict in the developing world is marked less by a reversal or lapse of any presumed linear development, than the progress of an actual, non-linear one. In Timor-Leste, violence and forced dislocation of persons since 2006 marks a dynamic of social reordering ignored by these liberal perspectives and frames of analysis. Through the metaphor of a continuum or spectrum, violence becomes far more prolific than standard accounts allow for. It makes sense as a form of communication where other communication has broken down (Cramer 2006: 284). Thus, violence embedded in social relations bears continuity with both past experiences of conflict and peace. Bearing in mind that analysis must be more ethnographically sensitive and attuned to intersubjective experience, in the next section I contrast two forms of 'crisis knowledge' produced during the emergency.

## 2.	The production of 'crisis knowledge': from the COI to rumour

The previous section focused on how conflict analysis tends to be circumscribed by a certain liberal framework. This section turns to how analysis of this particular conflict is in turn constrained by a hierarchy of credibility (Becker in Hall *et al.* 1978: 58). I explore the production of knowledge of the 2006/07 crisis at two extremes of this hierarchy. In a hierarchy of credibility,

> the likelihood [is] that those in powerful or high-status positions in society who offer opinions about controversial topics will have their definitions accepted, because such spokesmen are understood to have access to more accurate or more specialised information on topics than the majority of the population (Hall *et al*. 1978: 58).

At the apex of this hierarchy lies the United Nations Commission of Inquiry report (COI). Its findings are deeply embedded in the nation-building literature. At the other end of the range lie rumours that momentarily make sense of a climate of uncertainty. For outside observers, the latter production of knowledge is entirely lost, despite being an important intersubjective element of ongoing violence. This section intends to highlight that many features of a violent conflict are omitted by established accounts. This is especially relevant to how the relationship between conflict and displacement is understood. Firstly, I consider the COI report's account of the crisis. I then turn to knowledge production of Timor-Leste in

the nation-building context, and finally I consider the role of rumour in 'making sense' of the conflict.

Commission of Inquiry report (2 October 2006)

On 8 June 2006 the government of Timor-Leste invited the United Nations to 'establish an independent special inquiry commission' to 'review the incidents of 28 and 29 April and 23, 24 and 25 May, and other related events or issues that contributed to the crisis' (COI 2006: 10). The COI report is particularly interesting for two mutually reinforcing reasons.

The first reason is that it addressed the need to legitimise the incumbent interim government. Although the report makes references to the human and social impact of the events (*ibid.:* 42), it is primarily concerned with establishing accountability and clarifying the role and responsibility of leading actors. Yet the standard of proof is that of reasonable suspicion (*ibid.:* 10).[7] As a consequence of the Commission's findings, in March 2007 the former Interior Minister, Rogerio Lobato, was found guilty of distributing weapons to civilians during the crisis, and sentenced to seven years and six months in prison.

The second reason is the need to clarify facts. In a climate of prevailing uncertainty in early June 2006, the Commission created an expectation that it could re-establish an authoritative narrative of events. The COI explains that:

> the violent events of April and May were more than a series of criminal acts. They were the deep-rooted problems inherent in fragile State institutions and a weak rule of law… The Commission hopes that the political leaders of Timor-Leste and the international community will draw from the report in developing strong frameworks, norms and practices of good governance… The Commission is of the view that justice, peace and democracy are mutually reinforcing imperatives (COI 2006: 74, emphasis added).

Interestingly, it acknowledges:

> many Timorese view the events of April and May 2006 as a continuum starting from the decolonization process in 1974/75 and encompassing the violence and factionalism of the Indonesian occupation and the violence that accompanied the United Nations-sponsored Popular Consultation in 1999 (COI 2006: 16).

The body of the report is a narrative of events that establishes the facts behind the crisis. It also clarifies criminal responsibility of those persons that should be held accountable.

I argue that the two needs that the COI responded to, legitimising the incumbent interim government and clarifying facts, together elevate this account to the apex of a hierarchy of credibility. The COI report functions as a 'primary definer [that] *sets the limit* for all subsequent discussion by *framing what the problem is*' (Hall 1978: 59; original emphasis). In the report's own words:

> the conclusions, findings and recommendations of the present report should not be considered as ends in themselves. Rather, they should be viewed as the foundation upon which the

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[7] For a discussion of the burden of proof and the limitations on the powers of the Commission see COI 2006: 14.

capacity-building and strengthening of State institutions and the rule of law should rest (COI 2006: 74).

The COI's perspective draws from the assumption that violence stems from bad governance: weak governmental institutions and political actors that are not harnessed sufficiently to the democratic process. The crisis is thus understood to be a lapse in the broader moment of state-building.

The nation-building context

The COI expresses the core values underlying the state-building project in Timor-Leste. Timor-Leste's crisis contrasts with sound governance and institutions. Yet accounts that spring from this perspective suggest that 'reconstruction, and development, are simply technical feats' (Cramer 2006: 249). In reality reconstruction is 'a highly charged political moment', a form of revolution from above (*ibid.*: 255).

Post-conflict reconstruction bears the 'unmanageable burden of best-practice demands on post-war states' borne of the accumulation of prior exercises of intervention (Cramer 2006: 277). In the process of engaging in reconstruction it assumes the 'ideological reflex' (*ibid.*: 256) of the blank slate. Timor-Leste was an unprecedented experiment in nation-building because its physical infrastructure had been decimated in the mayhem of 1999.[8] The scorched-earth campaign was accompanied by the pullout of some 70,000 Indonesian civil servants, leaving the upper and middle echelons of the administration empty (Robinson 2003). Critics such as Chopra (2002) argue that with Indonesia's withdrawal, global governance reached 'a kind of apotheosis' because the international community presumed a political vacuum. The nation-building project in Timor-Leste 'assumed a state-centric *terra nullius* and an open season of institutional invention' (981). Eventually, power was envisaged to be transferred to 'a newly minted state machine' (*ibid.*) that could harness political competition to the democratic process.

The Dili crisis has shown what was already known – nation-building is not simple. No country can be conjured into existence: as long as there is a population, there are latent systems of authority and legitimacy (Hohe 2002). Timor-Leste has never been a political no-man's-land, it is layered with a history of past peace and conflict. Chopra argues that nation-building as an emergency response is a self-defeating project because reconstruction never takes place in the vacuum such a project assumes (2002: 979).

Political legitimacy is invariably generated through existing paradigms that outlive established arrangements. Passionate interests that help generate war or emerge during war 'continue to shape political conflict after a peace settlement' (Cramer 2006: 276). This aspect of social organisation escapes the standard perspective that sound institutional arrangements can gear the political community into peaceful power-brokering. Prevailing accounts connect incidents, extracted out of a spectrum of violence, into a coherent narrative. Any prospect of bringing in the element of profound social change is contingent on taking into consideration the social experience of violence over time. This can be demonstrated by contrasting the apex

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[8] This mayhem destroyed over 70 per cent of the country's physical infrastructure including roads, electricity and government buildings. On the impact of the Indonesian occupation see CAVR (2005).

of the hierarchy of credibility (the COI embedded in the nation-building project) with the production of knowledge through rumour.

Rumour and misinformation

The starting point of this subsection is a report for USAID Timor-Leste (Brady and Timberman 2006). The report explains that there is a severe lack of mechanisms for effective communication in Timor-Leste because there is 'a tendency to only trust information passed through personal contacts' (10). This is a legacy of the resistance period and a feature of the 'tribal/clan-based nature of society'. Moreover, poor communications infrastructure, high illiteracy, and language complications have worsened with the breakdown of communication between the public and the State (*ibid.*). The report concludes that: '[t]his has led to pervasive misinformation and a rife rumor mill throughout the country' (11).

This paper argues that the role of rumour and misinformation is taken too lightly. Appadurai has noted that people and groups generate structures of feeling at a local level which over time 'provide the discursive field within which the explosive rumors, dramas, and speeches of the riot can take hold' (1996: 153). Local readings are part of the silent and the unobservable, 'except in the smallest of passing comments… They are part of the incessant rumour of urban political discourse and its constant undramatic cadences' (*ibid.*). In the classically liminal moment of curfew, censorship in the news, and riots: 'historical time collapse[s], as events and stories from the past [are] used to justify and explain actions in the present' (Spencer in Das *et al.* 2000: 127). Fabricated out of uncertainty and fuelled by fear, these spirals of information make volatile situations more precarious.

The relationship between rumour and truth becomes extremely ambiguous in the context of violent conflict. The causal chain between an event and knowledge of the event is distorted. In their anticipatory form, rumours are indicative of potential paths of signification in relation to events that have not yet, but may still occur. In Spyer's account of violence in Ambon, for example, rumours of the torching of a church spread even before the arson materialised:

> The rumour preceded the event and, contrary to the laws of nature, where there was fire, no smoke had been seen. Indeed, the only fire around was a wildfire of misinformation and suspicion sweeping with incredible speed across Ambon (Spyer 2006: 198).

Rumour and misinformation enable the construction of the 'other'. In Spencer's account of violence in Sri Lanka, rumour created an intersubjective space that made 'fleeing, terrified civilians appear to their attackers as aggressive terrorists' through a process of misrecognition. Rumour supplied a morally acceptable explanation for the violence 'even as it created the possibility for more acts of violence that would undermine or compromise that sense of order' (2000: 127).

Spyer invokes the notion of 'climate', a term that denotes a certain presence, but is 'bereft of any real precision' (2002: 21-22). Her notion fits with an early description of the situation in Dili: 'The capital of Timor-Leste is a place that makes people afraid, makes people's hair stand on end. [Dili] has become like a place of dead souls' (Rede Feto 2006, cited in Siapno 2007: 13). This enabling climate determines how the 'dynamics of violence … engenders the condition of its own ongoing and renewed possibilities' (Spyer 2006: 190). Amidst this climate the work of the imagination and the construction of violence work to

'compel and propel particular actions and shape those who are carrying them out' (*ibid.*: 194). The gap between what can be 'observed' of a crisis and how it is subjectively experienced is to some extent revealed in Spyer's vivid account.

I shall briefly refer to one particular rumour that grabbed my attention in Dili in early June 2006. I refer to this case because it offers a way to help clarify an uncertain, volatile climate and the events that came to pass, in this case, on 6 June 2006. There were, of course, many other rumours circulating.

In early June 2006, most of the rumours circulating on the streets of Dili were concerned with gun-smuggling into the capital, as a vast number of arms were known to be unaccounted for at the time.[9] It surfaced that both the police and the army had distributed guns to civilians, and one of the first tasks of the JTF was to retrieve these arms and conduct searches of vehicles and houses. One article reported that:

> The commander of Australian forces in East Timor, Brigadier Mick Slater, concedes some weapons will never be recovered.

> 'There are so many weapons in this country,' he told reporters on Friday. 'I don't think that in my lifetime we will get all of the guns handed in. There will be guns hidden in the hills for many, many years to come.'

> Tracing army weapons was relatively easy. While army guns were given to civilians at the height of the security crisis, this was done in a controlled manner and most had been returned. The army also had detailed documentation on its armoury.

> Tracing police weapons is more difficult. There is no single inventory and firearms had been given to groups of civilians over a longer time by Mr Lobato in a tactic to intimidate opponents and create a counter-force to the army, which remains loyal to President Xanana Gusmão. […]

> [Ramos Horta stated that] army command remained intact, despite divisions in the ranks. The police, on the other hand, had been 'very factionalised with too many weapons', Mr Ramos Horta said (*The Age* 2006).

Despite the presence of joint task force (JTF) patrols and armed personnel carriers, it was unsurprising that rumours circulated about arms being smuggled into and hidden in the capital. The means of disseminating rumours differed according to the setting: from word of mouth in the 'social chaos' of IDP camps to the technologically sophisticated means of mass mobile phone text messaging.[10]

On 6 June 2006 *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported that:

> Fifty truckloads of protesters from East Timor's western mountains are planning to travel to Dili today to push for the removal of the Prime Minister, Mari Alkatiri, risking an [*sic*] surge of violence in the capital.

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[9] An article in *The Australian* explained that unaccounted for were 3000 Glock 9mm pistols issued to the PNTL, as well as more than half the PNTL's 400 Steyr assault rifles and Heckler and Koch HK-33 sub-machineguns, 160 of 200 FNC assault rifles and all F-2000 machine pistols issued to police bodyguard units (*The Australian* 2006). In addition, there was a heightened fear of guns unaccounted for in the hands of veteran soldiers and civilians from 1999 or before, and rumours of containers of guns arriving to the port months before the crisis began.

[10] Rodgers (2004) describes the 'social chaos' of IDP camps. See below, p. 21.

East Timor's embattled Government has been warned rival groups from eastern parts of the country are planning to converge in the next few days on Dili, where more than 70,000 people are sheltering in squalid makeshift camps.

The arrival of two opposing factions in Dili poses a nightmare for Australian soldiers, backed by Malaysian troops and Portuguese police, who have been unable to stop a daily ritual of house burnings, looting and gang attacks.

It was also rumoured that protesters led by former guerrilla leader Major Tara would use the hidden arms to attack internally displaced persons' camps once they arrived in Dili. The logic was that Tara was coming from Ermera district (west) where 'the petitioners' had retreated, and would take revenge on the 'eastern' population and camps of Dili.

The protesters were stopped outside Dili by the JTF, searched and allowed into the city. Trucks with banners full of youths chanting 'Hatung Alkatiri!' (Alkatiri resign!) rolled into the deserted streets of Dili. The protesters assembled in front of the government palace, delivered speeches and left by nightfall. What was originally planned as a three day protest lasted only one afternoon. This was due to the prudence of the government and the protesters. The reason for this was, I believe, not the rumour itself but the prevailing climate of which the rumour was an expression. Perhaps due to good negotiation between parties, an incendiary rumour paradoxically produced a favourable outcome in the midst of a very tense climate in Dili.

I draw from this case the tentative conclusion that rumours, while shifting and untrue, can nevertheless help observers understand the production of knowledge and real developments in the crisis. Rumours do not have a definitive explanatory power, but they are still a crucial element in the 'climate' of violence. Thus, relegating rumour to mere gossip, as the report for USAID appears to do, misconstrues its role in the uncertainty of the present and the life of violence in day-to-day relations.

The Age article cited above highlights the atmosphere of insecurity in late 2006, and the rationale of the displaced persons firstly, not returning home, and secondly, distrusting the authorities:

Despite the gradual restoration of order in Dili, the weapons issue was causing fear among internally displaced people (IDPs), human rights activist Aniceto das Neves said.

"This is the issue in Dili and in the districts. People in government, in the ruling party, were delivering weapons to Fretilin members," he said. "Rumours about civilians getting guns make the people very afraid."

An informed source who asked not to be identified said the security crisis and political impasse would not be resolved until people were given the facts about weapons.

"It's all about the weapons. If you want to know the truth about the so-called death squads (allegedly set up by Mr Lobato), you need to trace the weapons," the source said.

"The IDPs aren't stupid. They're not moving until they know where the guns are. And the impasse between the politicians, it's largely tied up with who did what, with what weapons. My suspicion is we're not being told any facts, because on the police side the facts may be unhappy."

Amidst a climate of uncertainty, standard accounts give definitive explanatory narratives because they respond to a need to re-establish a hierarchy of credibility. However,

the prevailing narratives of recent events remain remote from the realities of violence. Spyer expresses similar apprehension on prevailing portrayals of the Ambonese conflict:

> Some of this writing is just too grand, too abstract, and too removed from the volatile, fractured field where, throughout the violence, Ambonese men, women, and children piece together their everyday lives out of the fears, contingencies, insecurities, and apprehensions that then weighed upon them (Spyer 2006: 194).

This section has contrasted an authoritative fact-finding account, placed in Timor-Leste's nation-building context, with local means of problematising a climate of insecurity. These two forms of production of knowledge typify different sites of dissemination. Dominant accounts, high up in the hierarchy of credibility, tend to focus on the causes and settlement of conflict. The COI report speaks to a contingent of international actors with stakes in making post-conflict reconstruction 'work' in Timor-Leste. Rumours by contrast typically take hold in the social chaos of IDP camps. Violence and uncertainty prompt individuals to develop 'a compulsive need to interpret and mine just about everything for hidden meaning, to see any trivial occurrence as a sign or omen of what might come' (Spyer 2006: 206). Siapno, herself a displaced Dili resident, argues that 'social realities are altered, reconstructed, negotiated and plotted in the IDP camps' (2007: 15). This section and the previous one dispel definitive explanatory narratives that do not do justice to the 'erratic rhythms and unfoldings' of violent conflict (Spyer 2006: 198). The coming sections are concerned with the dynamics of ongoing conflict, which tend to be lost to top-down analysis because they rely on local meanings and past experience.

3.   Dynamics of displacement in the Dili crisis

The phenomenon of displacement is by its nature elusive because it escapes the 'national order of things' (Malkki 1995). Top-down conflict analysis typically views displacement as an outcome of violence, and a usually destabilising force. However, when this is not the case displacement is associated with relief and assistance. The perspective of violence taken in this paper, that it occurs within a continuum, also applies to displacement. Viewed thus, displacement is not the domain of elaborate and bureaucratised coping mechanisms, but a dynamic of social reordering. Understood as a continuum, displacement collapses past and present in the subjective experience of violence.

The first part of this section looks at displacement in the context of emergency relief. It argues that, in the relief enterprise, displacement tends to be managed rather than understood. The second part looks at displacement as a major part of Timor-Leste's recent history, arguing that it is not only a reaction to events, but also anticipates them. The third part focuses on the nature of 'anticipatory displacement'. Finally I consider the issue of return from the perspectives of both the authorities and displaced people.[11] This section attempts to explain why displacement is a key form and experience of conflict in Timor-Leste's context, and to map it as a crisis dynamic.

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[11] I am indebted to Jacqueline Siapno, who has given me permission to cite her unpublished paper and include parts of her interviews undertaken in December 2006 in Jardim camp, Dili. Unpublished paper presented at the Workshop on Representation and Displacement, Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford, February 2007.

Displacement: managed rather than understood

Humanitarian relief operates at the intersection of conflict and development. Since the 1990s, the international community has come under increasing scrutiny for its role in emergency situations. From its brief historical record it has become clear that relief operations are highly charged undertakings. They do not hover above conflict, but are drawn into it through the services on offer, from protection to employment to food.

Localised social realities and universal discourses meet in the relief setting. A narrow conceptual range separates assistance from instruction and discipline. Forced dislocation of a population, while representing a reshaping of social relations for the persons involved, is managed within a highly bureaucratised setting. The politics of humanitarian aid was addressed in Harrell-Bond's (1986) seminal study on Ugandan refugees in Southern Sudan. Hyndman (2000) has also done extensive research on refugees in relief settings (see also Malkki 1995). Drawing from feminist scholarship, Hyndman views the refugee as the 'abject', in Spivak's terms, 'subaltern'. She argues that relief practices produce 'a kind of *semio-violence*, a representational practice that purports to speak for others but at the same time effaces their voices' (Hyndman 2000: xxii). The clearest site for this is the camp, where a 'microphysics of power' is at work through the coercive and disciplinary means of everyday practices (Hyndman 2000: xxviii).

In the analysis of conflict, particularly for understanding the impact of displacement, ascertaining frequency, intensity and trends of violence is notoriously difficult (see Cramer 2006: 63). Simultaneously, reliable and transparent data is a basic requirement of research in the social sciences. If violence occurs in poor countries there may be little preceding data. The onset of conflict, and violence, compounds this problem (Cramer 2006: 81). Cramer offers three reasons why evidence in violent conflict is unreliable. Firstly, the main way of collecting data is through official records or newspaper reports, both of which are unreliable and subject to political manipulation. Secondly, complications of interest and interpersonal violence stand in the way of collecting data. Thirdly, it is problematic to compare data of violence across countries, and even within conflicts (Cramer 2006: 81-3).

Amidst an environment adverse to rational-technical analysis, the refugee camp opens up a space of opportunity for gathering information on conflict. Humanitarian agencies often integrate relief and instruction by means of assistance, particularly through reporting practices 'aimed to standardise, control and order the fields from which they were generated' (Hyndman 2000: xxviii). Something is transformed in the process:

> The vicious spiral of political violence, causing forced uprooting, migration, and deep trauma to families and communities… spins out of control across a bureaucratic landscape of health, social welfare, and legal agencies (Das *et al.* 1996).

Relief agencies count and manage the camp population in order to best distribute resources. Once humanitarian assistance materialises surveys are circulated to organise the emergency response. Statistics and numbers indicate a situation to be 'resolved', which reflect the displaced population as 'a transitory phenomenon of crisis and disorder' (Harrell-Bond and Voutira 1992: 7). Hard statistics provide an abstract, convenient picture of a situation, but ignore the shifting and diverse reality of those who directly experience it. Although knowledge produced through camps surveys provides valuable sources for the

analysis of conflict in situations where information is scarce, they risk circular explanations of conflict through numbers. The assumption that the emergency is transitory and that normality can be mended, justifies the 'moral hygiene' of the international community in restoring order (Kennedy's term in Drew 2001: 683).

Rodgers (2004) argues that 'hanging out' with forced migrants is the most appropriate methodology for research, because refugee environments are defined 'by social chaos and subversive economies where affected populations experience profound sense of confusion and disorientation' (49). By contrast, human defeats and technological interventions are conceptualised in the 'business as usual' exercise of relief. (Das *et al.* 1998)

Relief can lead to the objectification of the lives of forced migrants by those who seek to assist them. Violent events are captured and delineated under terms such as 'emergency' or 'crisis', which indicate something to be contained, controlled, resolved. The title of the International Crisis Group (ICG) report, 'Resolving Timor-Leste's Crisis', attests to this. The objectification that results from assistance not only simplifies present displacement, but also the memories of past ones and anticipation of future ones. Most East Timorese alive today have experienced at least one, and many several periods of displacement.

Antecedents of flight in Timor-Leste

Timor-Leste's history clearly challenges the view of displacement as a 'transitory phenomenon of crisis and disorder' (see CHR 2000: 4-7). The Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation's report (CAVR 2005) found that displacement 'took many forms, occurred in a complex variety of circumstances and lasted for periods that could extend from days to years'. Invariably displacement had a seriously damaging impact on the affected, including the death of a large proportion of the population through famine and related hardship (CAVR 7.3.7: 502-3).[12] Since occupation by the Japanese during WWII, Timor-Leste has undergone various waves of displacement. During the internal armed conflict of 1974/75 up to fifty per cent of the population was displaced (7.3: 30), this number reached seventy-five per cent in 1999 (7.3.6: 423). Under the Indonesian occupation (1975-1999), displacement was a key method of control. Approximately 300,000 people were moved to Indonesian-controlled centres between 1978 and 1979 (7.3.4: 62-63). In the 1980s the occupying forces gained control of much of the territory (particularly the West), and the Indonesian Government created a resettlement policy that involved strategic relocation villages, in order 'to remove people from areas where the Resistance was active' (7.3.5: 256-259). During the Indonesian occupation, displacement was often used as a form of collective punishment or a form of hostage-taking, and has had long-lasting effects on communities and their integrity (7.3.7: 504-7).

In the months leading up to the 1999 popular consultation, the Indonesian military created local pro-integration militia, sowing seeds for intimidation and destruction. The Indonesian authorities ostensibly regarded these groups and the wider militarization of East Timorese society as a 'spontaneous pro-integrationist backlash against the gathering momentum in favour of independence' (7.3.6: 351). The months leading up to the ballot were

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[12] A minimum of 84,200 people died from displacement-related hunger and illness between 1974-1999. See CAVR Executive summary 2005: 72. From this point references to the CAVR report will only refer to CAVR chapter.subchapter: paragraph.

plagued by militia intimidation. As the violence escalated, displacement occurred both as spontaneous flight from militia violence, recruitment and intimidation, and as organised movement from homes to places of refuge (7.3.6: 352). Four days before the ballot, the leader of the *Aitarak* ('Thorn') militia in Dili announced, in a pro-integration rally, that East Timor would become a 'sea of fire' if independence won the vote (7.3.6: 421). When independence did win, the capital Dili became 'the crucible of post-ballot violence and destruction' (7.3.6: 421). Apart from being the country's administrative centre, and most populous city, it was also the home of its most infamous militias and the TNI (Indonesian army) (7.3.6: 424-5). An estimated three quarters of the total population were displaced from their homes (7.3.6: 423).

250,000-280,000 people fled or experienced forcible deportation to West Timor. In the Indonesian half of the island refugee camps and the aid flowing into them were controlled by militia groups (7.3.5: 489). Refugees were prevented from leaving the camps, subjected to roll-calls and physical threats. This was reinforced by a campaign of misinformation alleging revenge attacks and atrocities being perpetrated by Australian peacekeepers in independent East Timor. Most international agencies pulled out of the Indonesian camps following the murder of three UNHCR staff members in September 2000, but many East Timorese remain in Indonesian Timor today. Some are afraid of returning because of their militia involvement, others because they are prevented from doing so.[13]

Anticipatory Displacement

The case of Timor-Leste demonstrated how forced migration is both a weapon of war and a mode of survival. The CAVR study on different manifestations of displacement during the Indonesian occupation indicates how forced dislocation is not just responsive to violence but also anticipatory of imminent violence. For example:

> The full-scale Indonesian invasion of Timor-Leste on 7 December 1975 … caused many to flee to the countryside, following those who had left earlier in anticipation of the attack. Such movements were repeated outside Dili, both in response to the actual presence of Indonesian forces and in the expectation that their arrival was imminent.
>
> Some evacuations were spontaneous, others were organised by the Fretilin-led resistance. In a complex mixture of circumstances, many East Timorese who left their homes then found themselves caught between a fear of life under harsh Indonesian military rule and a resistance determined to keep them out of Indonesian control (7.3.4: 62,63).

There are elements of anticipatory displacement in the 2006/07 Dili crisis. In the days following President Xanana's address to the petitioners, seventeen houses were burnt and there were reports of intimidation against 'easterners'. Buses leaving for the east were packed with Dili residents (COI 2006: 8).[14] Many displaced persons, although occupying their houses by day, leave at night, anticipating that this is when most violence takes place. Ironically this may have added to the incidence of nocturnal destruction of their neighbourhoods. Following this logic the government has made several attempts to incite the return of IDPs to their homes.

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[13] This has been the case of women who remain virtual hostages of the encampments (now villages), like the case of 'Alola' after which the Alola Foundation NGO based in Dili is named. See www.alolafoundation.org/index.php (accessed June 2007)

[14] An employee of Care International told me that people also fled to the mountains surrounding Dili, as tensions simmered during the weeks preceding the 'emergency'. They had done so on numerous occasions in the past.

Fleeing in anticipation of violence, rather than in response to it, does not necessarily equate to a 'voluntary' action. Rather, it may reflect a lack of choice. This is not only true of internal displacement, but also of cross-border refugee movements. The precipitate nature and the scale of displacement in Dili indicate that the population showed agency in the face of pervasive insecurity. Arguably, an element of the displacement was anticipatory. Like anticipatory rumours, anticipatory displacement may create the enabling conditions for a situation to become more volatile. In the case of the 2006/07 crisis it was the abandoned neighbourhoods that suffered the most severe pillaging and burning, devoid of their populations to guard them. And yet the opposite may also have been true on other occasions, such as the Indonesian invasion, when fleeing the capital may have made the difference between life and death. Patterns of agency in anticipatory or pre-emptive displacement are overlooked when displacement is only understood as reactive to violence.

Rather than a simple effect of the climate of insecurity in the capital, displacement in the Dili crisis is best understood as a 'technology of violence' reminiscent of previous episodes of conflict. Seen thus, displacement can drive societal transition.

Displacement during the crisis: insecurity and prospects for return

Information on the population displaced during the 2006/07 crisis is insubstantial. Up to two-thirds of Dili's population (according to the 2004 census, 220,000) have been displaced. Numbers are difficult to verify because many displaced persons stay with relatives rather than in camps. At the height of the crisis Dili's camps contained 73,000, compared to 78,000 who took refuge in the districts (see annex). The COI report explains that the displacement built up progressively after 28 April, the largest increase occurring in the days following the massacre of unarmed police filing out of their headquarters on 25 May. Most of the destruction of property coincided with this period, particularly in the twenty-four hours following the massacre, which prompted a 300 per cent increase of displaced persons in the camps alone (COI 2006: 42). Interviews carried out among displaced persons in camps show that their predominant concern is the continuing lack of security. The interviewees indicated a preference to stay in the camps until they felt it safe to go back home - if they still had homes to which they could return (Brady and Timberman 2006: 15).

The circumstances leading up to the internal displacement in Dili broke the relationship of trust between the population and the government, whose handing of the displacement worsened the situation. In an article about food insecurity and the crisis, Kammen and Hayati (2007) explain that:

> Official responses to the IDP problem vacillated between encouragement and ultimatums. In August [2006], Minister of Labor Arsenio Bano publicly urged IDPs to return to their homes. A week later, however, following a violent attack on the IDP camp located across the street from UN headquarters, Prime Minister José Ramos Horta threatened that if refugees did not return home by the end of September he would discontinue the distribution of humanitarian aid. The following month, Ramos Horta changed his position, declaring that it was not mandatory for IDPs to return home after all. With the onset of the rainy season imminent, the Deputy Head of the new UN mission renewed the call for refugees to vacate the camps. Following on from this, President Gusmão and other national leaders set a deadline of 20 November for refugees to return home. Despite these ultimatums the number of IDPs receiving food assistance provided by humanitarian relief agencies remained largely unchanged (Kammen and Hayati 2007: 2).

The authors' account suggests that inconsistency in government policy on IDP return is a result of ongoing insecurity in the capital. Given the surges of violence and ongoing displacement, the government could not persuasively show that it was safe to return home. Kammen and Hayati's account also bears witness to how changes in the political leadership (between April and June 2006) are not coterminous with the crisis, which is ongoing. Although the interim government is unlikely to change before the June 2007 elections, and gang violence has been to a certain degree contained by international forces, a large number of Dili's population remains displaced. In March an attempt to capture renegade major Alfredo Reinaldo coincided with a rice shortage in Timor-Leste, resulting in widespread insecurity (Kammen and Hayati 2007: 1). In the first three months of 2007 the number of IDPs in Dili rose by 8000 (AKI 2007). The authorities continue to struggle with the issue of displacement in Dili. On 23 May 2007, the coordinator of the Emergency Programme of IDPs stated that the government would not compel IDPs to go home following a week of violent clashes between gangs in the neighbourhoods of Lecidere and Bairropite (*Timor Post* 2007). Standard accounts see the crisis as culminating in the resignation of Alkatiri on 26 June 2006, and tend to speak of the violence in Dili as 'sporadic' gang violence, implying that it is not politically motivated, and can be contained, controlled, subdued. The continued numbers of displaced and surges of violence, however, bear witness to an ongoing crisis.

A government announcement that 168,000 people were displaced was met with complaints that the numbers were inflated. Critics claimed that displaced persons registered twice or three times in camps, and that assistance to IDP camps was a major reason why people refused to return to their homes (Kammen and Hayati 2007: 2). This was true particularly after markets had been destroyed and the seaport had been made inaccessible - food was scarce in Dili.

The refusal of displaced persons to return home raises, in the provider mentality of certain engaged, often authoritative actors (for example humanitarian aid workers), questions of their legitimacy in receiving assistance. This preoccupation with aid dependence, as well as objectifying and emasculating the person, epitomises attempts to manage displacement rather than understand it. The issues of non-return and deception are addressed in an interview conducted by Siapno in a Dili IDP camp in December 2006. In this interview Mr. C. da Silva, in charge of the Commission for information in Jardim camp, explained:

> I want to go home, but my house has already been occupied by people from Loromonu [West]. I went back to our house several times with the Australian police but the people who have occupied my house refuse to leave. They said: 'we refuse to accept Lorosae [eastern] people in this neighbourhood.' … All of us in this camp continue to stay here after eight months not because we want to be dependent on aid, but because we are victims of government officials who are not yet capable of governing this nation. All of my life, I have worked hard to meet my own needs and my family's, I have never relied on the government or NGOs to give me food. But now, even when I look for employment it is extremely difficult. I have not worked for eight months now. (Interview with Siapno, Jardim camp, Dili 6 December 2006).

Another interviewee, Ms. E. de Sousa, displaced in Jardim camp where she is the coordinator for children's needs explained that:

> I haven't gone back to my home because I am severely traumatised with what they have done to our home. I used to have four houses – all of them burned down… Prime Minister Ramos

Horta thinks we live here because we like being dependent on aid – that is absolutely false. He could stop aid if he wants to, but we will not die of hunger because we can and are capable of providing our own food. (Interview with Siapno, Jardim camp, Dili 6 December 2006)

Although it is clear that the device of deception through relief in order to access resources is widespread, this is a matter of concern for the providers of relief. Access to aid is hardly the primary concern of IDPs when deciding whether or not to return. Rather they receive it as another part of their wider situation.

Siapno chose the IDP camp of Jardim in downtown Dili to conduct her interviews. The camp is situated between the harbour and the entrance to Hotel Timor, the five-star hotel in Dili where press-conferences and high-level meetings are often held. Siapno asked the respondents why they continued to live in the camps and why they had not returned to their homes. The accounts challenge the sanitised aesthetic of suffering that is characteristic of refugee/IDP representation. They lack the timeless element of 'testimony'. Instead, these accounts speak defiantly at government, aid agencies, and perpetrators of violence. For example, Ms. E de Sousa complained that in her eight months of staying in the camp:

> The government has never been in this camp to visit us… Don't they feel ashamed to see their own people suffering in front of the most expensive hotel in the country, while they sit and drink their expensive drinks and watch us?
>
> PM Ramos Horta has threatened to drive us out of these camps by December – where does he want to take us? Isn't it painful enough that we have become pengungsi [refugees] in our own land, in our own country? Where else could he possibly be planning to put us? Does the PM want to take us outside of Timor, put us outside of this country? (Interview with Siapno, Jardim camp, Dili 6 December 2006)

Ms. E. de Sousa's account also emphasises the particular difficulties for women and girls as displaced persons in the camps:

> as husband and wife we cannot sleep together, we cannot even change our clothes in privacy, especially the women and the young girls. One woman has died because of childbirth and one child because of illness.

Siapno's interviews are a valuable insight into the ways in which the lives of particular persons are embedded in violent events. For example, Ms. I. da Silva, a university student, recounts:

> every day I want to go to campus, but it is difficult because the queues for water to wash or take a bath are so long. It is not possible to study because every day there is conflict and violence, and cars and motorcycles are constantly passing by, since we live right in the middle of this city [Jardim is situated between two of Dili's main roads]. One cannot concentrate to study (Interview with Siapno, Jardim camp, Dili 7 December 2006).

These accounts speak of the everyday in relation to the rupture of violence and displacement and reflect the continuum of violence in which events shade into one another. Violence 'attaches itself with its tentacles into everyday life and folds itself into the recesses of the ordinary' (Das and Cavell 2007: 1).

The formulaic structure of most reports gives no room for the lived experiences of the displaced, other than through the mediated form of 'representative' testimony. It is ironic that

the displaced, who stand on the fault lines of a failing establishment, are represented through need (a universal, apolitical fact) rather than agency. This leads to an environment in which, as Siapno (2007) explains, 'the lived experiences of "dis-placement" become "dis-appeared" (in the epistemological, not the material sense).' Empirically-based research on forced migration must strike a balance between 'ethically re-present[ing] refugees without appropriating their victimization, privileging only their 'wounds', [or] romanticizing their political agency and resilience' (Siapno 2007). Research on displacement without subversive, ordinary and even angry accounts such as those in *Jardim* camp misses the way displacement is subjectively experienced. Most conflict analyses leave out the voices of the displaced, because they are caught in frames of analysis that are too abstract or 'global' for understanding the 'local' context.

In this section I have considered Timor-Leste's past and current displacement. Both are subject to being transformed through the present's 'relentless and deforming scourge' (Daniel 2000: 336). Displacement in Timor-Leste illustrates the complex interplay between 'the larger possibilities of phenomena and the singularity of lives' (Das and Cavell 2007: 1). It forms part of a repertoire of violence that induces 'repertoires of response', such as anticipatory displacement. The aspects highlighted here of forced dislocation during the crisis demonstrate that displacement is best understood as a band in the spectrum of violence. In the next section I consider how the dynamics of displacement have affected the emergence of regional identifications.

4.   Displacement and the Emergence of Regional Identities

Timor-Leste's capital lies in the West of the country, but its population is mixed with people immigrating from all regions of the half-island. Although the crisis originated in the army, the mobilisation of regional identities following the petitioners' claims of discrimination made the situation in Dili extremely volatile for the larger population. Various writers have referred to the origins of the east/west split in the security forces, and in the recruitment of the F-FDTL in particular (see e.g. Simonsen 2006, ICG 2006). However, until 2006 it was commonly thought that the relationship between *Lorosae*/*Firaku* (east) and *Loromonu*/*Kaladi*[15] (west) was merely one of mild prejudice (Simonsen 2006: 590). Writing in 2005, Simonsen argued that the predominantly regional distinction lacked sufficient clarity to be described as a serious ethnic fault line (*ibid.*). Each side contained subgroups with diffuse boundaries. Nevertheless, 'it has been found that the regional cleavage did influence voting behaviour in 2001 [for the constituent assembly]': support for Fretilin was higher in the east (*ibid.*).[16]

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[15] East and West were typically formulated under terms of *Lorosae* (East) and *Loromonu* (West), yet there is more literature on regional differences under the terms *Firaku* (East) and *Kaladi* (West). While the origins of these terms are unclear, one common understanding is that *Firaku* comes from the Portuguese *vira of cu* (to turn one's backside to the speaker) and *Kaladi* from *calado* (quiet, reserved) (Babo Soares 2003) *Firaku* and *Kaladi* have derogatory connotations.

[16] As predicted, this pattern repeated itself in the general elections of 2007. For sources on the 2007 parliamentary elections see http://www.etan.org/etan/obproject/ 2007elect.htm#Observer_. For individual district results, see CNE 9 July 2007 'Acta Final Apuramentu Distritu'. Available: www.cne.tl (Note August 2007).

Analysis of the crisis has often begun with east/west violence. In this section I shall review some of these analyses with the view to put regionalism within the context of past violence and displacement. The emergence of regional identifications as an organising principle for conflict is a prime example of crisis dynamics, which take on a life of their own in future conflict and the interpretation of past conflict. Through the next subsections I argue that what Harrington (2007) calls the 'vehiclisation' of regional boundaries is a process rather than aim of violent conflict.[17]

The first part revisits some accounts of the origins of the distinction between east and west. The second part contests the east/west distinction as established fact. The last section argues that past displacement and violence have played a key role in producing regional identifications as a new form of articulating conflict within East Timorese society.

Origins of regional identifications

Harrington (2007) writes that most foreign observers and international staff working in Timor-Leste were unaware of any major divisions in Timorese society (1). The COI report states:

> The Commission has heard opposing views on the origin and longevity of the cleavage [between East and West]. On the one hand it is suggested that it is a totally new phenomenon, as evinced by the total absence of the issue in the thousands of testimonies collected by the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation. On the other, the Commission has been told that it is a long-dormant issue dating from the Portuguese era (COI 2006: 20).

Peter Carey (2007) suggests that a colonial campaign of divide and rule is partially responsible for internal divisions in Timorese society. Geographical distinctions became fixed in the political consciousness because the less geographically hostile western part of the country was pacified by the Portuguese long before the East. Also, colonial institutions, the church and schools, were more established in the western part of the country. A similar distinction persisted during the Indonesian annexation. The western half of the country was controlled almost from the beginning of the occupation, while in the eastern half guerrilla warfare endured until 1999. This was reflected in the composition and structure of the Falintil guerrilla and Fretilin party, where 'easterners' formed a majority (16-17).

Relative suffering and sacrifice during the Indonesian occupation has served as a pretext for East/West antagonism (McWilliam 2006; Simonsen 2006; Scambary 2006). The West is accused of being complicit in the mayhem in 1999 because many of the militias were recruited there. The westerners are seen to have 'folded in the face of Indonesian army control' (McWilliam 2006: 9), predictably in tune with the stereotype of *kaladi*. Recalling the dismissal of forty-two officers in 2004, reportedly because they were from the West, Simonsen (2006) argues that it is clear some have been willing to exploit this situation for political gain. This prejudice has had serious ramifications for the composition of Timor-Leste's various security forces.

Already in 2003, in his PhD thesis Babo attributes the East/West divide to competition in the markets of Dili. The looting and burning of market stalls and small

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[17] The phenomenon of 'vehiclisation' whereby 'fictional differences […] become such an efficient vehicle for violence and anger in the country' (Harrington 2007).

business properties two days before the assault on the government palace in 2006 supports this thesis (Harrington 2007: 3). McWilliam explains that 'the targeted nature of the destruction suggests that the opportunity to disperse and bankrupt commercial rivals may have also played a role in the turmoil' (2006: 8). Although new markets have reappeared in the vicinity of the burned ones, they remain segregated (ICG 2006: 16).

A closer look at the distinction

The exercise of focusing on the history and reasons behind Timor-Leste's regional fault lines is necessary to make sense of the way that conflict has played out over recent months. However, it nevertheless obscures the diversity of Timorese society and the diffuse, shifting boundaries between East and West. The country's diversity may be lost to the outside observer through encompassing regional markers of East and West. McWilliam explains that the East/West 'clustering encompasses a wide range of ethno-linguistic communities in East Timor which have no particular history of rivalry or enmity across this divide' (2006: 2). In reality, dozens of languages and dialects are spoken by Timor-Leste's population of mixed descent (Malayo-Polynesian, Melanesian/Papuan, Portuguese, Chinese). And the country's rugged territory isolates one community from another. Additionally, transportation and communication infrastructure has not recovered from the 1999 scorched earth campaign. Even today, in a country smaller than Wales, a drive to parts of the South-East can take days.

There are two reasons why a preoccupation with the latent signs of a regional split must be questioned. These reasons have played out in recent months, in the very dynamics of the crisis.

The first is exemplified by a speech by the president on 23 March 2006. The second is the manifest lack of political claims that are common to the larger population (and not just the petitioners), which would help explain the currency of a regional split. In order to better understand these reasons explained below, a more detailed examination of Timor-Leste's geographical situation is necessary.

During the crisis Timor-Leste's thirteen districts have typically been divided into three in the East (Lautem, Viqueque, Baucau) and the remaining ten in the West. In practice this is not so clear. For example, Anthony Smith (2002) wrote that although fifty per cent of the population can be described as western, and thirty per cent as eastern, twenty per cent of the country's population remains outside this divide. He cites Oecussi, an enclave in West Timor (1).

Another example is the district of Manatuto, ambiguously positioned in the middle of the country, and particularly useful in understanding the construction of East and West during the 2006/07 crisis. Manatuto has been commonly perceived as lying in the eastern part of the country (McWilliam 2006: 2). The perception that Manatuto 'belongs' to the East is recorded in anecdotal sources.[18] However, a different perception has recently arisen regarding

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[18] For example the East Timorese NGO *La'o Hamutuk*'s 2002 midyear report states that 'La'o Hamutuk set up a modest office with two staff from which it coordinated activities focusing on the four eastern districts (Lautem, Viqueque, Baucau and Manatuto).' http://www.laohamutuk.org/ARept/2002/midyr02.html, accessed 27 May 2007.

Manatuto's directional affiliation. Xanana Gusmão's address examined below illustrates both the construction and malleability of regional markers in moments of political strife.

Xanana's 23 March 2006 address to the petitioners expressed the unfairness of their dismissal. This speech coincided with a tangible shift in Manatuto's allegiance from East to West. In siding with the petitioners (West), Xanana's choice of words worked to simultaneously show support for their claim and undermine the stereotype that all liberation heroes came from the East. His speech warned that if discrimination in the army was not dealt with, it would fester; and that the army cannot treat western recruits 'from Manatuto to Oecussi' as the children of militia. The subtle logic was that Xanana, himself from Manatuto, would then be a child of the militia, a collaborator with the Indonesians. Considering Xanana's emblematic position in the Timorese struggle, this claim is farcical. Manatuto's unequivocal designation as 'western' in the present speech achieved two things. It confirmed the district as 'western', and simultaneously renegotiated the stereotypical significance of that label, in the case of Manatuto at the very least.[19]

The second critical aspect of the emergence of regional identities during the crisis relates to the means of mobilisation. Bertrand (2004: 11) explains that effective mobilisation of regional identity requires a coalescence of group identity with political claims. No such coalescence was recognised at the beginning of the 2006/07 crisis. That is to say, there was no clear relationship between the claims of the petitioners, an impartial investigation into their grievances regarding recruitment and promotion within the F-FDTL, and the population at large. Other than solidarity, and a passionate response to the assertion that westerners had not contributed enough to the struggle, there was no clear common claim that justified the mobilisation of Dili's 'western' population against easterners in the capital. This is perhaps one of the reasons that regional elements of the conflict eluded the outside observer.

The role of past displacement and property disputes in emerging regional affiliations

It is not enough to focus on latent factors that explain regional affiliations. In this crisis in particular, it is crucial to consider regionalism as a crisis dynamic, which is therefore connected to other crisis dynamics. I suggest that past periods of displacement have been key in articulating current grievances. This section therefore examines the role of past displacement and property disputes in East and West affiliations.

The Indonesian evacuation in 1999 was followed by intense urbanisation, particularly to the capital Dili. This can help explain Dili's continuing unrest. With the mass exodus of Indonesian officials many houses stood empty in Dili. A clear objective of the militia was the destruction of housing, land title offices and records. Fitzpatrick recounts that in Dili a milk truck pumped gasoline from house to house before they were torched. Thus, 'when IDPs and refugees returned to seek shelter, there was an understandable rush to occupy habitable houses' (2002: 9). This, in turn, generated some social conflict and a relatively widespread pattern of ad hoc occupation of property by persons other than the pre-violence occupier. Two areas much affected by this, Kintalbot and Comoro, remain particularly vulnerable to destruction following the 2006/07 crisis (McWilliam 2006: 8). In the upmarket area of Comoro, some occupiers rented out the properties to foreigners at lucrative rates (Fitzpatrick 2002: 10).

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[19] I am grateful for Ivete Oliveira's insight into this point (in conversation with the author).

Harrington (2007: 7) seeks to explain property grievances as underlying the invocation of an East/West divide in the context of the crisis, citing violence along east/west lines as early as the 1940s.[20] Property restitution was overlooked in the early days of the 1999 repatriation effort (Harrington 2007: 11). Neither UNHCR nor IOM had a policy stating precisely where the displaced persons would ultimately be returned to (Harrington 2007: 11). Subsequently UNHCR has recognised it as a key issue for sustainable and successful return in accordance with the Pinheiro Principles in 2005.[21] The issue has been complicated by many choosing to be 'returned' to Dili. The capital was virtually the only place in East Timor where there were prospects of a cash income.

Reports in recent years have highlighted Timor-Leste's complex land and property situation. Clearly, with the recent wave of vandalism and arson Dili residents' claims have been complicated further. Property grievances alone, however, cannot explain regional conflict in 2006/07: 'While perceived injustice regarding land and property… can be very dangerous, it becomes even more so when merged with issues unrelated to land' (Harrington 2007: 10). Harrington describes the mobilisation of regional identities during the crisis as a phenomenon of 'vehiclising' in order 'to carry out alternative purposes not per se related to such identities' (*ibid.:* 18). The politicisation of these identities, or activation of collective identity boundaries (Tilly in Cramer 2006: 242), accounts for the currency of east and west identities in the lead up to the general elections.

In relation to recent displacement, property disputes in the capital are important because they are intimately connected with past periods of violence and forced migration. They clearly illustrate how these interlinked dynamics serve to articulate confrontation in a politically charged situation. Regional identities are not entirely instrumental: as a crisis dynamic they are capable of taking on a life of their own. Although 'conflict entrepreneurs' have galvanised smaller groups with common interests, coalescing their specific grievances, into larger, more calculated ones, in moments of conflict these evolved identities are able to develop on their own. These in turn may serve to solidify shifting identities and set a precedent for possible future conflicts. Thus, regional identities as they have been interpreted in Timor-Leste's present conflict are prone to being reactivated, and further transformed in the future in the conflict context.

This section attempts to take this analysis a step further, and link present conflict not only with unresolved property disputes, but with past displacement as well. For the people of Timor-Leste, property disputes and past displacement are practically indistinguishable as causes for the present conflict. Displacement tends to be overlooked as an underlying cause for conflict in standard crisis analysis. Although related to property disputes, displacement is typically understood as a transitional condition that hinges on another, greater circumstance (conflict, natural disaster, and so forth). Displacement is resolved upon return or integration, which may take generations. Although this is often not the case, dynamics of displacement are typically considered insofar as their complications are problematised. The clearest example of this is when legal disputes relating to property or land arise. Conflict analysis risks being overwhelmed when greater causes, related to the 'singularity of lives' as is forced

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[20] Contemporary accounts attributed this to confrontations between East Timorese kingdoms. (7)
[21] 'The Pinheiro Principles' United Nations Principles on Housing and Property Restitution for Refugees and Displaced Persons, Centre on Housing Rights and Eviction (August 2005).

displacement in the past, come into play. In the case of the Dili crisis, these greater dynamics have nevertheless articulated a 'new' regional element. This has been a catastrophic development, and one of profound societal change.

Violent conflict, more than a symptom of changing political environments, can be a profound societal change in itself. Regionalism is an example of this. The dynamics discussed in this section demonstrate that a concern for causes or latent signs of regionalism fail to capture the construction of 'east' and 'west' through crisis dynamics. A sound analysis of regional identities must take into account how these are articulated during the crisis, and recall the massive demographical changes that Timor-Leste has undergone since 1974.

5.   Crisis, continuity and change in Timor-Leste

This section argues that certain features of the crisis, such as the extent and form of displacement, obfuscate different emerging social arrangements and build on existing repertoires of violence. It explores the constitutional, structural, and empirical features of the crisis that help explain how in a fifteen-month period established institutional and social processes have been toppled. The first part focuses on changing political circumstances as one indication that the crisis represents a 'critical juncture' in the nation's development. The second part looks at structural features of the violence that can explain the climate of insecurity, arguing that particular elements resemble previous 'repertoires of violence'. The last part of this section looks at concrete dynamics that standard accounts have thus far overlooked, but which are nevertheless key to understanding the far-reaching implications of low-level violence.

The Timorese political scene

At the time of writing, Timor-Leste's political constellation is radically different from that preceding the crisis. The majority party, Fretilin, has split in two, interim Minister of Foreign Affairs Guterres leading a splinter faction, Fretilin Mudança. Crucially, this faction favoured independent candidate Ramos Horta over the Fretilin candidate Lu-Olo in the Presidential elections held in April and May 2007. Ramos Horta won the second round with over two thirds of the vote. Xanana, who had vowed to leave politics after his presidential term, also formed a new party, resuscitating the acronym CNRT, with its echoes of the resistance movement pre-independence, in a move to counterbalance the popularity of Fretilin. Simultaneously, several leading Timor-Leste politicians have been investigated for their actions during the crisis; the then Minister of the Interior, Rogerio Lobato, has received a prison term for arming civilians. The first general elections since independence have opened avenues of contestation that had previously been blocked (Simonsen 2006: 581).[22] Aspects of institutional arrangements during the transition into independence help explain the roots of this political inertia and its contribution towards widespread insecurity.

Violent conflict erupted in Dili at a critical juncture where 'the predictability of the institutional environment [was] lost and the stakes [rose] dramatically' (Bertrand 2004: 24).

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[22] Xanana's speech delivered on 22 June 2006, in which the President threatened to resign if the Prime Minister did not, emphasises Fretilin's failings to engage in the democratic process. For a further discussion on the 'authoritarian temptation' under Fretilin, see Simonsen (2006), Siapno (2006a).

A cursory examination of the country's constitutional beginnings gives some indication of how nation-building, even when closely monitored by the UN, is not a straightforward technical feat, but a highly charged political moment The constitution was adopted after a swift consultation process two months before the declaration of independence. Two decisions effectively strengthened Fretilin's position in power. Firstly, the country would enter self-rule without holding fresh elections for the new parliament. Instead, the constituent assembly would transition into parliament for the first five years of independence (Simonsen 2006: 581). This inadvertently allowed the Fretilin government to pass legislative initiatives in parliament by virtue of its majority (55 of 88 seats) (*Ibid*: 582). As a result, the opposition and particularly the young political intelligentsia have grown to resent Fretilin's exclusionary politics (Simonsen 2006: 582).[23] Secondly, the President's powers were circumscribed by a semi-presidential system.

These constitutional decisions were followed in independence by other, disputed policies. The most controversial decisions taken by the government were: the 2005 incorporation of a defamation law into the draft criminal code;[24] the choice of 28 November as the National Day – recalling Fretilin's victory and unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) in 1975;[25] and the choice of Portuguese and Tetum as official languages, virtually excluding the younger Indonesian-educated generation from the upper echelons of political debate.[26] Despite warnings of the risks of installing 'a de facto one-party system' (Shoesmith 2003: 246), Timor-Leste constitutional beginnings did just that, unintentionally aided by the international community (Carey 2007; Simonsen 2006). Simultaneously, however, Fretilin's constitutional and historical hegemony was challenged by Xanana's public persona.[27] The resulting system of divided leadership required collaboration between the two offices, but in 2006 the individuals occupying these critical positions were 'political opponents, perhaps even political enemies' (Shoesmith 2003: 232).

Simonsen (2006) explains that multilateral and bilateral actors promoted a system of effective institution-building rather than inclusive politics. The state apparatus received heavy investment but this was not felt by the country's larger population. In 2005, the World Bank criticised the government's 'poor outreach' to the wider community and UNDP in a report released in March 2006 (UNDP 2005) criticised the government's reliance on private sector engines for growth in Dili (see Curtain 2006). In the districts, where this private sector investment is minimal, the report called for a forthright pro-poor growth strategy. The focus of these demands was to create sufficient employment for Timor-Leste's growing labour force. Timor-Leste's youth amounts to a quarter of the total population, but in Dili this is closer to one third. Unemployment amounts to fifty per cent in the districts and more in Dili. Richard Curtain (2006) links Dili's 'youth bulge', economic stagnation and an unresponsive

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[23] Many foreign observers have argued that the 2001 elections did not take place on a level playing field and that the UN supported 'a pre-determined victory of one dominant ruling party as part of a clean exit strategy' (in Siapno 2006a). In its belief of stability through 'good governance', the international community latched on to the symbolic hegemony of the Fretilin party, but also to its actual organisational capacity.

[24] This law followed the publication of a 'defamatory' article alleging deaths from famine in the most widely read Timorese national newspaper. The Law on Freedom, Assembly, and Demonstration was also sharply criticised for insulating the government from public criticism. (Simonsen, 2006: 583; see also Siapno 2006a).

[25] The date of the restoration of independence (20 May 2002) when the UN-administered territory became a fully sovereign state also coincided with the foundation of the FRETILIN party in 1974, under the name ASDT.

[26] For a detailed discussion of language policy see Simonsen (2006).

[27] Dunn has remarked that whatever the constitutional limitations on the Presidential Office, the presidency was a force in national politics by virtue of Xanana's personal authority (in Shoesmith 2003: 244).

government to the onset and course of the crisis (5). These factors contributed to the pervasive nature of violence in Dili. This low-level violence may have been facilitated by these contemporary factors, but must also be explored in regard to long-term structural conduciveness, situated in the continuum of violence.

Repertoires of violence

In a continuum, violence, its methods and means, evolve. Patterns of violent behaviour emerge and disappear in a repertoire interpreted from past and present experiences as well as the anticipation of future events. Periods of peace are as relevant to this process as those of conflict. The 2006/07 crisis played on such structures to stir up violence in Dili. The ICG report (2006: 8) recounts that a whole month before the standard 'trigger event', the assault on the government palace, seventeen houses were burnt and buses left the city crowded with Dili residents. They were attuned to displays of violence, which mimicked past intimidation tactics.

Tilly's (1986) writings on popular protest in France suggest that people have a limited repertoire for collective action. This means that 'people tend to act within known limits, to innovate at the margins of existing forms, and to miss many opportunities available to them' (390). Contrary to the crowd gone amok, Tilly uses the analogy of a kind of musical score that runs the crowd through violent action. In the context of the 2006/07 crisis, the relevant score was composed by, to a large extent, the militarisation of Timorese society into militia groups preceding the 1999 referendum. Regionalism is an example of an 'innovation' at the margins of this familiar repertoire.

After Suharto's demise, Indonesia was swept by sectarian violence and surges of civil disorder that expressed a similar repertoire of violence to that in Dili 2006/07. Some argue the 'amok thesis' that Indonesia is overcome by a culture of violence. However most writers consider Indonesia's violent history structural rather than congenital. In a report on crimes against humanity in East Timor in 1999 Robinson explains that the methods used by the militia in East Timor were 'drawn from a repertoire developed by the TNI [Indonesian military] and other forces in other counter-insurgency and anti-crime operations conducted elsewhere in Indonesia over more than thirty years' (2003: 65). Cribb argues that the recurring appearance of paramilitary forces in Indonesia suggests a structural predisposition for catastrophic forms of political conflict (2002: 556). This inclination to militia violence was reflected in the actions of gangs in the Dili crisis. Gang violence has been a constant feature of the post-independence landscape, and most Timorese youths belong some form of voluntary organisations, some of which engage in violent confrontation (Scambary 2006: 1).

The *modus operandi* of the gangs during the crisis resembles that of the militia in 1999:

> the [militias'] modus operandi was designed to terrorize, to intimidate. … The most common elements of the militia repertoire included the erection of roadblocks and checkpoints, beatings, house-burning, public death threats, the brandishing and firing of weapons (Robinson 2003: 65).

It would be excessive to assume that the gangs are resurrected militia groups, but certain features of militia violence are present. During the crisis the violence has been remarkably low-tech. Although the security forces have distributed arms to civilians, this

sophisticated arsenal has not featured in the gang violence. On the contrary, their technologies of violence have been markedly different: arson, stoning, *rama ambon*,[28] machetes, knives, roadblocks and checkpoints (asking whether one is from the east or west), and occasionally guns (sometimes homemade) have been used.

The Australian reported on 6 June 2006 that

> Some of the missing firearms and equipment is believed to be in the hands of the capital's ethnic gangs.

> Until now, the gangs' battles have been fought with sling shots, knives, clubs and spears, but an East Timorese journalist robbed and bashed in the troubled Cormoro [*sic*] area last week was first doused in the eyes with police-issue pepper spray (*The Australian* 2006).

Precisely because of these low-tech tactics, aimed as they are at spreading terror, the effects of the crisis have been felt deeply. This is especially the case as the similarities they share with earlier incidences of militia violence evoke traumatic past experiences. Elements of militia tactics that are not present are rumoured,[29] and repertoires of violence are matched by repertoires of fear.

Stoking the crisis

The changing political scene, timing and protracted nature of the crisis suggest that there may be electoral incentives for keeping it alive. Simultaneously, certain features of violence and displacement suggest that renewed patterns and possibilities of conflict have been set in motion, fundamentally shifting the city's social realities.

The clearest and most effective campaign consisted in paralysing the entire public administration through intimidation. For example, an article in early June 2006 explained:

> In [a] western district near the Indonesian border [Bobonaro], Pessoa said dissident army officer, Maj. Alves Tara, appeared with armed men Saturday, ordering civil servants to stop working.

> During the past three weeks, intra-security force clashes and subsequent mob violence left several ministries and government departments in Dili empty of documents, furniture and equipment.

> Government warehouse [*sic*] have also been looted.

> Mob targets have included the ministries of development, agriculture, natural resources and mines, and justice, along with the national police headquarters, the high court and the offices of the Attorney General (LUSA 2006).

In October 2006 many government offices still operated on skeleton staffing, 'as employees remained fearful of returning to work or staying beyond lunchtime' (McWilliam 2006: 5). It has been estimated that the government was working at about thirty per cent of normal capacity (*ibid.*).

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[28] That is, arrows shot from slingshots, sometimes dipped in antifreeze or other poisonous substances. The weapon was also used in Ambon. It is mentioned in Spyer 2006: 195.

[29] For example, earlier in 2007 there were reportedly several cases of beheadings. The stories remain unconfirmed by official reports. There were also rumours of political killings, after two martial arts gang leaders were killed.

Ripple effects have been felt in the districts, especially in relation to food security (Kammen and Hayati 2007). Meanwhile ongoing gang violence has fuelled suspicion that violence entrepreneurs, people who profit from chronic low-level violence, are behind the crisis. The fact that individuals across the political spectrum have been targeted because of political affiliations implies a confluence of interests in stoking the crisis (see Siapno 2006b, COI 2006). For example, the Serious Crimes Unit (SCU), located at the Attorney General's office, was one of the mob targets. Among the looted or destroyed documents was evidence of the unit's findings of crimes committed in 1999. One article reported that

> According to [Attorney General] Monteiro, one of the missing dossiers pertains to the case of retired General Wiranto's involvement in the 1999 riots in Dili (*Tempo Magazine* 2006).

While pervasive insecurity has brought the country to a virtual standstill, it has not only mobilised the people violently. Rather, violence is only one expression of the population's, not necessarily conscious, problematising of profound societal change. This is supported by political dimensions of the destruction, suggesting that gang violence is not oblivious to political realities. On the contrary, some gangs are known to be affiliated with certain political parties (Scambary 2006), and the east with Fretilin. Thus, attacks on the houses belonging to people from the east may actually be attacks on Fretilin support and vice versa. This applies not only to the real motivation of attacks, but also imagined ones.

There is also evidence of concerted efforts to resort to intimidation or force so as to remove people from properties occupied since 1999. One account in Harrington's paper is of youths paid to set fire to certain houses. Another describes gangs being supplied by the local administrator with lists of properties occupied since 1999 (Chefe de Aldeia) for efficient targeting (Harrington 2007: 17-18).

> Those enduring disputes for up to six years used the security vacuum post-disintegration of Timor's security forces to exact retribution upon those illegally occupying properties around the city – exacting revenge on easterners. Pre-existing and impromptu gangs were mobilized into efficient retribution forces, commencing a large scale effort to remove people from occupied properties (18).

Several rarely mentioned features illustrate this confluence of interests. One is politicians' reliance on 'violence experts', demobilised ex-guerrillas sometimes assimilated into the security forces. The onset of the crisis prompted the emergence of many of these people as key actors. They included: Major Alfredo Reinaldo (military police), Gastão Salsinha (spokesperson for the petitioners, employed by the PNTL but operating and armed under F-FDTL), Major Tara (F-FDTL officer) and Rai Los (discharged from F-FDTL since 2003). The primary motivation for such reliance may be to prevent these actors from becoming liabilities, like Reinaldo, who was imprisoned but escaped a matter of weeks later. Together with 55 others, he walked out of Becora jail, downtown Dili, in broad daylight. Since then he has hidden in the mountains in the West, giving interviews with defiant messages to the leadership. In March the Australian military launched an operation to capture Reinaldo in Same, killing five. In the weeks before the Presidential elections however, both Ramos Horta and Xanana ordered a halt to operations to capture Reinaldo. Rai Los, allegedly in charge of a paramilitary group armed by the ex Minister of Interior, came forth and pledged his allegiance to Xanana in the weeks leading up to Alkatiri's resignation in June

2006. Despite their civilian status, when Ramos Horta became interim Prime Minister, Rai Los and his men marched in the inauguration ceremony.

Another feature is the particular dynamics of displacement and concomitant urbanisation. The exodus of many Dili residents from the capital into the districts, particularly to the East, will have long-term effects on the capital. In the months of June to August 2006 there were anecdotal reports of the occupation of houses, effectively the regional homogenisation of certain neighbourhoods (for example, the *bairro* of *Ai-mutin*). The presence of military and electoral observers and international emergency staff also contributes to this phenomenon. The relief effort and electoral support mission created new jobs for inhabitants of Dili and thus made it more attractive to potential migrants. This trend prompts new waves of displacement, providing the fuel for possible future conflicts.

Collectively, the phenomena discussed above are key to understanding how standard accounts fail to capture various elements of the spectrum of violence. In their emphasis upon democratic elections as key moments of passage, these accounts distance themselves from the social realities of the wider population. In the words of 'The Mothers of Children in Ailoklaran and Tonelaran Against Violence and Displacement' addressed to the country's leaders:

> How can the elections be 'free and fair' (free from whom? Fair from what?) when sections of the population, including entire communities, are already being massively intimidated, crippled and made non-productive, through violence and forcible displacement of their entire families? (31 January 2006)

It is indisputable that given the numbers, the crisis and particularly displacement (apart from disenchantment with political leaders and parties) will affect the result of the upcoming general elections. The crisis has created possibilities for institutional reform and for regional affiliations. Timor-Leste's political leadership and, increasingly, its population are aware of this. Individuals and groups have capitalised on the situation for electoral, property and personal gain and this is why the crisis has been felt at the top – the political leadership – as well as at the communal, neighbourhood level.

Together with the previous two sections, this section brings together the dynamics of conflict and displacement, presenting them as essential features of the crisis and societal change. If this analysis is correct, the crisis is not the outcome of mindless, apolitical gangs, the failure of political institutions or incompetence of political leaders. Rather, it is a country negotiating various changed circumstances. The paper avoids naming these or other features of the crisis as underlying causes because, understood in isolation, they cannot explain renewed possibilities of conflict. Elements that enable, justify or even encourage violence do not explain it. Similarly, the interdependence of the phenomena of the crisis and their greater significance depends on a broad appreciation of the features of conflict. To this end, this section has explored the context of the elections, the repertoires displayed, and the features that are likely to mark renewed dynamics of peace and conflict along a continuum.

Conclusion

In situations of violent conflict the present 'looms large': the everyday becomes both volatile and uncertain. This paper began with a critique of a particular strand of conflict

literature that privileges causes and outcomes rather than the protracted experiences of violence. This critique rejected the abstraction of violence into the domains of the abhorrent. It rejected understandings of conflict as development in reverse; and opinions that violent conflict is a 'political retrovirus', about 'nothing at all'. It also rejected the perception that displacement is a reactive consequence of violence, which extricates and objectifies the phenomena of violence from its subjective experience. Rather, favouring an ethnographically sensitive approach, it established a framework within which to examine the intersubjective experience of violence. This was applied to the ongoing 'crisis' in Timor-Leste.

In this paper, I have argued that the ideological reflex of the blank slate places Timor-Leste's particular case at the centre of post-conflict reconstruction literature, embedded as it is in the liberal framework repudiated above. The country, previously praised for its successful endeavours along the linear path of development, and peace, is now an instance of reconstruction 'gone wrong'. The 2006/07 crisis marks a resurfacing of violence, conceptualised in this paper as part of a continuum. This continuum is made of past, present and anticipated experiences. One example of the continuum is the role of rumour. This form of anticipatory knowledge production is capable of both anticipating and facilitating certain events. It can equally confound them. In the case of the 6 June 2006 protests in Dili, incendiary rumours of arms being smuggled into the capital to be used to attack easterners, culminated in no such event. Rather, the protesters departed peacefully after only one afternoon of their planned three-day rally.

More than defining conflict, violence prompts and provides stamina for profound societal change. Changing institutional arrangements and ceremonial moments of passage such as the democratic elections scheduled for June 2007 supply incentives for violence but cannot explain its entirety. As a principle of societal reordering, violence learns from the past and projects onto the future its own repertoires. Along this continuum, moments of peace and conflict shade into one another. The recent crisis has featured gang violence. Youth groups are a feature of Timor-Leste's peacetime social order. They may be civic, religious, martial arts, and sometimes engage in violent behaviour. The wave of destruction in the crisis is also reminiscent of repertoires of militia violence displayed during the end of the Indonesian occupation. Thus, structures of violence take on a life of their own.

Its scale and ongoing nature has made displacement a primary feature of the violence during the ongoing crisis. In this paper I have presented displacement less as a phenomenon to be managed than a technology of violence to be understood. Past experiences of displacement have re-emerged in the current crisis, seen in deliberate attempts to dramatically alter Dili's demographics and provoking 'repertoires of response' such as anticipatory displacement and rumour. Drawing from memory and conjecture, displacement also has its place in the continuum of violence. For example, many of Dili's displaced only left their homes at nightfall, expecting the evening to be more dangerous. In anticipating violence, however, this displacement facilitated and may have encouraged the looting and burning of their homes. Thus, these pre-emptive processes of rationalising a volatile situation are not merely responsive to, but also constitutive of, how violence plays out and outcomes are negotiated.

Another feature of the crisis discussed in this paper was the unexpected emergence of regional identities. As with displacement and violence more generally, these identities drew on historical legacies and the anticipation of political upheaval in the approaching elections.

It has been suggested that east/west identities reflect past occupations, Portuguese, Japanese and Indonesian. In the 2006/07 crisis, however, regional identities assumed new political significances, especially in the population's imminent engagement in the elections. In the burning of houses, regional identities have become a matter of party politics. The burning of an easterner's house may thus conceal the political desire to destroy the home of a Fretilin supporter. The regional rather than ethnic elements of the crisis show that demographic change in the capital, rooted in earlier waves of forced displacement, is crucial to explaining the nature of the crisis.

The key features of the 2006/07 crisis explored in this paper – displacement, regional identities, and repertoires of low-level violence – constitute a set of 'crisis dynamics'. Although perhaps all of these dynamics have developed in response to the 2007 elections, the changes they precipitate will endure. Just as the past events mentioned above have influenced the current conflict, this conflict will go on to influence future periods of peace and war.

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ANNEX: Map of Timor-Leste with IDP Movements
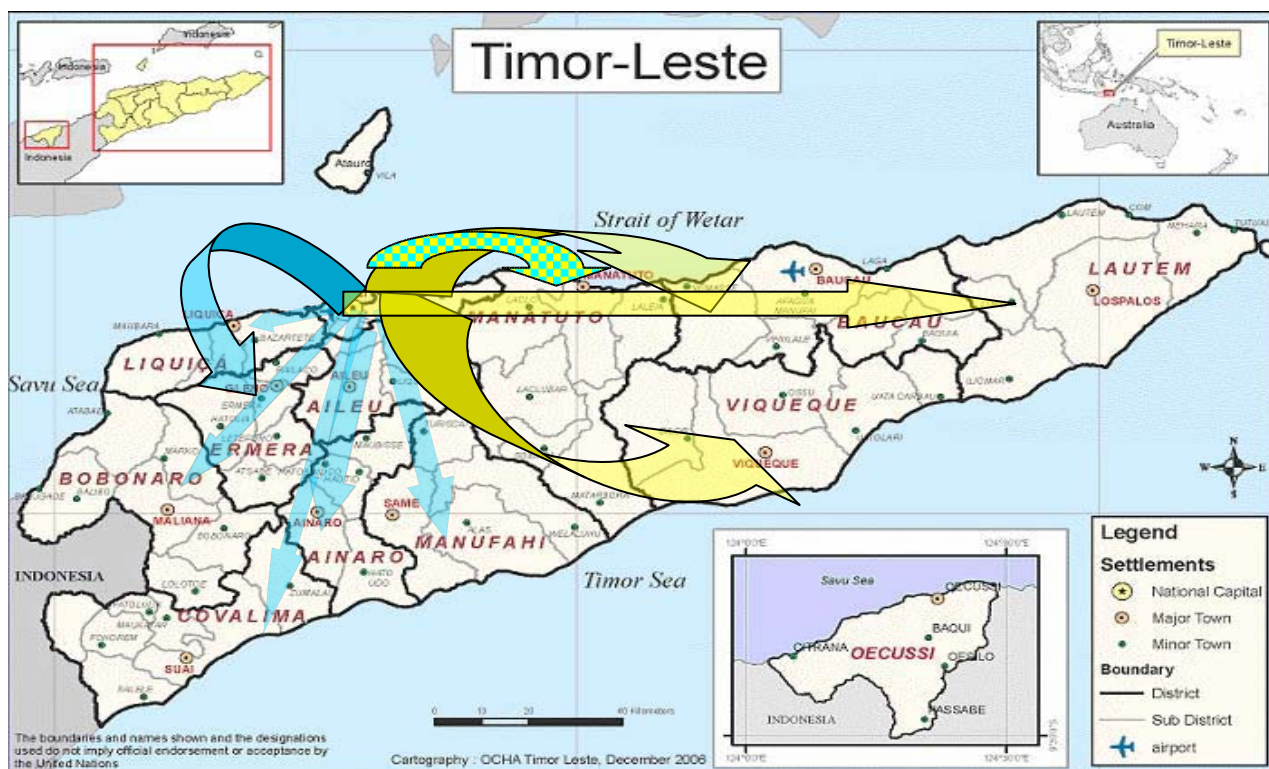
Note that the colour demarcations are tentative. For a further discussion on East and West see section IV. The original map is OCHA's.
Available: www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB.NSF/db900SID/JBRN-6ZJEJW?OpenDocument&rc=3&cc=tls.

(yellow)	'Eastern' districts (lorosae) – Lautem, Baucau and Viqueque
(cyan)	'Western' districts (loromonu) – Dili, Manufahi, Aileu, Ainaro, Covalima, Ermera, Liquiça (Oecussi)
(checkered)	Manatuto district (increasingly referred to as 'western')

MOVEMENTS TO DISTRICTS		
District of destination	Number of Families	Numbers of Individuals
Ainaro	1	6
Baucau	118	**863**
Bobonaro	2	8
Covalima	3	11
Ermera	9	41
Lautem	54	**383**
Liquiça	1	5
Manatuto	4	27
Manufahi	3	15
Viqueque	84	**554**
RETURNS TO DILI BAIRROS		
	274	1825

This data is from the period August 2006 to 12 April 2007 relating to *organised movement* from IDP camps to the districts or to Dili neighbourhoods. The data is gathered by the Ministry of Work and Community Reinsertion (MTRC) Information Centre, supported by UN OCHA.