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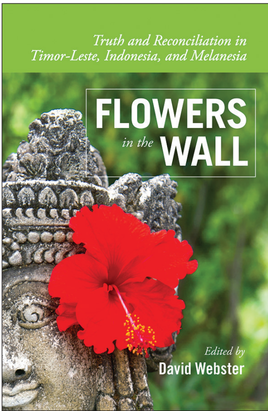

FLOWERS IN THE WALL
Truth and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste, Indonesia, and Melanesia
by David Webster

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Politika Taka Malu, Censorship, and Silencing: Virtuosos of Clandestinity and One's Relationship to Truth and Memory

Jacqueline Aquino Siapno

Silence can be a plan rigorously executed
the blueprint to a life
It is a presence it has a history a form
Do not confuse it
with any kind of absence.

—Adrienne Rich, *Cartographies of Silence*[1]

Their history is to have none.

—James Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*[2]

Because it is a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: "In reality, who am I?" … Once again the objective of the native who fights against himself is to

> *bring about the end of domination. But he ought equally to pay attention to the liquidation of all untruths implanted in his being by oppression. … Total liberation is that which concerns all sectors of the personality.*
>
> —Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*[3]

This chapter explores the paradox of being asked to examine "the truth" when the methods used during the clandestine period were to have no history of records (i.e., leave no trace behind)—a negation of the work of historians and historiography (while keeping in mind the paradox and irony that some of the clandestines were historians—both Timorese and "international").[4] What happens when memory fails? What if one remembers selectively? What if silence and having no history is not only a strategy, a plan—rigorously executed, the blueprint to a life—but an identity, even a kindred spirit network of being and belonging? Clandestinity was a method that worked so well during the resistance towards colonial occupation, but in post-independence, "free" and "democratic" Timor-Leste, senior ministers, MPs, and other key decision-makers remained virtuosos of clandestinity and refused to change and/or adopt new identities or new methods of learning, not to mention a so-called "free press" that is not really that free at all.[5] In some cases, the clandestine identity is stronger and more dominant than the "real" identity. In other cases, the clandestine identity and fictive name has become embedded into the "real" name. Some ex-clandestines even argue that transparency and honesty are "foreign/Western values," as some ex-Falintil-guerrillas-turned-MPs informed us when we interviewed them about their thoughts on civilian oversight of the military and police, and in relation to strengthening transparency in public financial administration and anti- corruption. What are the consequences of this *politika taka malu* (covering up for each other) for truth commissions and activists, for struggles of gender justice, access to basic services, the democratization process, anti-corruption initiatives, and accountability in public financial management and economic development?

5.1: Display from Archives and Museum of the Timorese Resistance, Dili, Timor-Leste. Photo: David Webster.

Clandestiny as Identity and Method

In music, a virtuoso is someone who isn't just technically proficient, but also spiritually gifted and talented, someone who embodies the music itself: the musician is the music (not something outside or separate). In war, the virtuoso of clandestinity embodies the same identity as the musical virtuoso. It is someone who doesn't just put on multiple masks for winning the war and running the resistance struggle in an instrumentalist kind of way, but someone who has embodied this way of knowing and being, someone with the unusual skill, gift, talent, even identity, to blend with one's worst enemies, and with the skill set for self-preservation and defending one's privacy from unnecessary and unwanted intrusion. It is a soft power by which the enemy is defeated not with violence, guns, or weapons, but by other means—including living with them close by, working behind the scenes, blending in so that they have no idea that you are even there,

writing and using one's pen. Such were the survival skills of the clandestine virtuoso during the resistance against colonial occupation.

Paradoxically, in the post-independence, post-conflict era, some people who do not want to understand or appreciate this *longue durée* history dismiss clandestinity and secret identity as a weakness, a flaw, even a liability, possibly a crime; they mostly blame individuals, but not the structures, societies, and environments that engender this way of being, operating, and networking. Being duplicitous, hiding truths, operating in secret networks, protecting one's privacy from intense public surveillance are now considered by certain sectors as unacceptable, if not dangerous to nation-building and economic development. Publicly, some people condemn it as killing development ("hamate desenvolvimento") and not good for the nation ("laduun diak ba nasaun"), but at the level of everyday politics, something else happens.[6] What happens when war veterans who have never sought psychological support for unpacking and processing their old attitudes and methods of doing things are now suddenly being told that they have to throw away all their past history to begin a new life, to start telling the truth, to start doing "civilian oversight on their close friends in the military and police," and to open up? How might they react? Clandestinity is an ongoing *modus operandi*, a chosen identity especially in an environment that is riddled with brutal (but subtle, hidden) inter-party and intra-party violence (cloaked by a thin public veneer of "coalition" and "harmony") and a weak judicial system. Trust is the highest casualty. The importance of psychoanalysis in trying to comprehend the psychology of the state and its character and actors is both underestimated and under-studied.[7] One telling example is the rhetoric of doublespeak, if not hidden meanings: only other clandestines can figure out what is really being said (by analyzing the irony and the silence in the speech act—i.e., what is *not* being said). For example, a TV Timor-Leste interview with Fernando La Sama de Araújo, in Tetun, on how his "boss" makes solo decisions in government. Referring to Xanana Gusmão (president, subsequently prime minister), he captures in a quintessentially "clandestine style"—very funny, yet subtle, not really saying anything directly, but saying a lot (to those who can read the silences)—Xanana Gusmão's "art of governing."[8]

If one's identity for a long period of time is marked by clandestinity, what would it take for change and transformation to happen in one's psyche, one's methods and *modus operandi*, in the postwar context of a society

full of other clandestine virtuosos? How does one go about "disarmament" if one had no "arms" in the first place—as compared to the ex-guerrillas who had to go through a precarious process of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (or DDR)—but only one's mind and pen? Shouldn't there be a different kind of DDR for clandestine virtuosos? In fact, one can argue that the unarmed clandestine method of infiltrating and collaborating very closely with the enemy was much more difficult that being an armed guerrilla in the isolated mountains. In the hierarchy by which the armed struggle, the clandestine front, and the diplomatic front is supposedly more "important" than the other, it is the armed struggle, led by the armed guerrillas, that is often held in the highest regard. In post-independence nation-building, former guerilla fighters get the most medals, along with other material and symbolic markers of honour.

If one reflects carefully, one can argue that it is the virtuosos of clandestinity, the secret identities with a pen, who had a much more difficult time, living and connecting very close to the enemy (physically and psychologically), against overwhelming odds, with no weapons. The capacity to survive in such an environment required extraordinary courage and skills that are very different from those acquired by someone who can use a weapon to simply shoot and kill. On the contrary, many of the virtuosos of clandestinity honed their writing, argumentation, rhetoric, and translation skills, and learned through a long process that the pen is mightier than the sword, or that rhetorical persuasion is much more effective than shooting your opponents. It would serve them well in the post-independence period, where they are able to "dialogue" with difficult opponents instead of just shooting them down. In comparison, the guerrillas from the armed struggle have had a much harder time in the transition to independence. One of the most revealing interviews we conducted for our DDR research[9] comparing former members of the Moro National Liberation Front in the southern Philippines with ex-Falintil members in Timor-Leste was with a Timorese guerrilla-turned-MP. He said: "One of the most difficult things for me in this transition from being a guerrilla to an MP is being told to learn how to dialogue. In the past, when we didn't like somebody, we just beat them up, or shot them. But now … apparently, we have to learn how to dialogue and communicate." He also added: "When we were disarmed, I literally felt as if my arm was cut off. I slept with my weapon for seventeen years. It was like my wife."

Clandestinity is a method. It was meaningful under a colonial occupation that suppressed dissent, opposition, and freedom of expression. But under a post-independence semi-democracy, it continues to be the predominant method. Why are ideas about clandestinity, leadership, hierarchy, social stratification, and gender inequality so resilient and persistent, even as governments, including the Timorese government, sign on to global human rights treaties, conventions, and co-operation agreements (including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, or CEDAW; civilian oversight of the military; human rights; and truth and reconciliation commissions), and global governance mechanisms on public financial administration (such as transparency portals; anti-corruption commissions; and investigative journalism)?[10]

Another thing about clandestinity as a method is that it is very suspicious of outsiders, even semi-outsiders, unless one has done a traditional, sacred "pact" with them. It is like a mafia—an organized group that is impervious and impermeable (except that in this case, we are talking about a state actor, not a non-state one). How does one unpack the paradox that the more "transparent" the Ministry of Finance's online budget portals, the more sophisticated the corruption?[11] The problem with clandestinity as an ongoing method of independent governance is that it is set up in such a way that if one is not part of an inner circle of an *ema boot* (big shot), whatever you need to get done doesn't get done unless an *ema boot* is approached and wants to, or learns how to, delegate. But what if one has no connections with such a figure?

The other problem with the culture of silence and clandestinity and personalistic politics is that people think it is best to change things by going through silent, informal channels instead of having an efficient public service that is easily accessible to "ordinary" people. Politically savvy Timorese think that clandestinity is the best way to expedite whatever it is you need to get done. In such an environment, the consequences for the work of grieving and mourning, for memory, truth, and reconciliation—especially for those who have a different definition of "normal"—can be devastating. Another problem is that it breeds an environment of paranoia. People are prone to put more trust in fabricated rumours and propaganda, than in "official truths" produced by the state and government, precisely because the nation, and the colonial occupation before that, were built on lies. An outside observer might find it shocking, for example, that most

Timorese consider various private websites more credible than official government sites, which they assume are propaganda. An additional problem with clandestine methods is that they have created a community of people with persecuted mentalities, especially among those in the higher echelons (one never knows if and when a fellow clandestine will finally act out against another, so one is always on edge). But the most tragic and violent consequences of clandestinity are those felt at the level of the family and household; it is what keeps husbands and wives awake at night, and children wondering about their fathers. Women become the signs of disorder.

International Advisers and Global Entanglements

At the end of the day, who, ultimately, should be and can be made responsible and accountable for these cultures of silence? Are the Timorese solely to blame? What about their former colonizers and the international organizations responsible for building this new nation-state? The only reason that the system of money, politics, corruption, and lack of accountability continues is that the internationals (the advisers, donors, consultants, and others) in Timor-Leste are complicit. Instead of being agents of change and transformation, some actively participate in perpetuating the system, mostly in order to keep their jobs and lucrative salaries as "advisers." One of them even told me: "You can't believe how much money they pay us! Imagine."

Some of the white Australians and Americans in Timor-Leste, the Indonesians, Filipinos, and members of other nationalities are, ironically, even more nationalistic than the Timorese. They defend everything the Timorese do. Instead of creating and supporting new spaces for dissent, opposition, and transformation, they are part of the problems of inequality and domination, acting as apologists for the dysfunctional state and corrupt government. Very few disengage, distance, let go, disconnect, or detach themselves to reflect on what their continuing engagement means in terms of ethical responsibility. Meanwhile, some "solidarity activists" are quite competitive with each other in their quest for resources (the "dark side" of giving and so-called solidarity). This is especially true for citizens of Timor-Leste's former colonial overlords: Indonesia and Portugal. While I have a lot of respect for some Indonesians and Portuguese who have gone through the painful process of examining their identity as colonizers, one

cannot say that for many others, including those who are now still operating in East Timor as if it was "business as usual," those who work as advisers to the Timorese, seemingly without ever having to reflect on the history of violence first, and who have absolutely no interest, capacity, or willingness, to meditate on that violent history, and their ethical responsibility as human beings.

In the larger geopolitical context, whose "ethical politics," whose "transparency," whose "justice," and whose "democracy" are served when highly paid international consultants find it so easy to dump on and mock the Timorese without examining their own complicity? Apparently, it is all the fault of the Timorese. But what about all those advisers from the UN, the World Bank, and other multinational organizations? What could they possibly have been advising? Was it all just very expensive bad advice? Huge mistakes were made that contributed to the disillusionment in the nation-building process. Are we even willing to listen, to study history so as to avoid repeating the same mistakes? Are we equipped to listen? Do we have the capacity? Or are people, institutions, and countries condemned to make exactly these same mistakes over and over? What can the West Papuans possibly learn from the processes that unfolded in Timor-Leste? Or is politics, in general—whether an independence movement or post-independence government, and regardless of where we sit (whether in Quebec or West Papua)—an environment riddled with clandestinity?

Writing about India, Sankaran Krishna contrasts two opposing views of politics:

> a simplistic view of politics as, at some level at least, the exercise of power for the sake of the betterment of the nation and the people, versus an understanding of politics as a domain constituted by crime, corruption, illegal and unethical activities. Understandings of the political were split between a covert and real economy of power, on the one hand, and an overt and rhetorical economy of ideas and idealism on the other. Naive people, media and leaders believed the latter while insiders knew reality to be the former.[12]

Continuities of Violence and Clandestinity

If we act on the above understanding of politics, what comparative studies and analyses can be drawn for political sociology (e.g., psychology of the state), conflict, post-conflict reconstruction, democracy and democratization, coalition formation, voting behaviour and party competition, government structures and institutional reform, peacebuilding in postwar societies, the role of the UN and other international organizations in humanitarian interventions, comparative public policy, and nation-building processes? What could possibly be useful for West Papuans from the Timorese experience? It's not enough to remain independent geographically or symbolically only. One has to decolonize one's mind, which, as Fanon writes, is a program of complete disorder.[13] It's also not enough to decolonize one's mind. The post-colonial society might need another social revolution and new methods of learning. That's why critical educators are important. Get rid of old violent methods of "solving problems" like distributing guns; this one, especially, has to go. Get rid of "politika taka malu" on corruption. But when you have ex-guerrillas dominating the institutions of power, these—not dialogue and accountability—seem to be the default mechanism that we turn to whenever there is a "problem" or "disorder."

I have argued that in the case of the Indonesian occupation of East Timor, the use of clandestinity and secret identity was a condition of survival under colonial occupation. In the post-1999 independence period, however, it has turned into a politics of ruling cliques. My reading weighs more on finding out the "why" of such a persistence of clandestinity, in a post-independence era of alleged "freedom of the press" and "freedom of speech and expression." While secrecy during the anti-colonial struggle was often a precondition for survival, it loses its reason to exist after 1999—unless, of course, the new state's leadership continues to operate in clandestinity in order to remain "untouchable" and "unchallenged."

Critical investigative reporting on politics in East Timor and the formation of a vibrant and dynamic opposition has not been possible for various reasons. Nevertheless, since 1999 there have been some political and economic developments that are relevant to the discussion of memory, truth, and reconciliation. The second half of the 2000s saw the re-entry of the old Indonesian business network whose presence was so significant

during the occupation years. Some of these businesses were connected in the past to the Indonesian military. In light of this development, the scrutiny of the peculiar form of politicking among members of the ruling class should be contextualized in such an evolving development and "relationship" (too much friendship, not enough truth). When did these clandestine relationships become the noticeable rule for those in the central government's "inner circle"? What does it entail, really—apart from contributions to election funds for certain political parties and personalities? Cronyism in the face of postwar belligerence among military factions? A necessary tactical level of maneuver for the ruling group, in response to the inter- and intra-party competition and violence in the new electoral politics? Or is it a new oligarchy in the making, not unlike the bureaucratic corruption in Indonesia? If so, what then was the point of becoming independent? What was the point of so many people, including Fernando La Sama de Araújo, sacrificing their lives for an "independent" East Timor?

The Role of Scholars

The truth is that even with the so-called free press in East Timor, there is actually a lack of a space for opposition and dissent. What is our role as scholars? We become scholars, I hope, not just to interpret the world, but also to solve problems and tensions, to transform and change society. If we spend all our time studying, researching, and teaching, but we still cannot change anything when it comes to the problems of corruption and the disempowerment of marginalized peoples, then we are bad students, researchers, and teachers.

While the discussion above focuses on the Indonesian and Timorese governments, I would add that we also act as critics of the power of international organizations, including the United Nations and its missions and agencies, and other global governance outfits, rather than apologists, which some scholars tend to be. Some, but not all of the *malae* (outsiders or internationals who are in Timor-Leste as advisers, activists, consultants, and business people) are complicit with, and indeed sometimes the cause of, the new forms of domination and inequality that impact knowledge production. Others are sycophantic, incestuous, ingratiating themselves to the powerful and dependent on the state for their salaries. These individuals and groups comfortably accept the culture of silence, censoring

themselves in order to keep their jobs. Instead of embracing the critical possibilities inherent in the status of outsider, they are so desperate to belong, to be part of insider circles, that they are willing to forego moral clarity, integrity, and ethical responsibility.

"True Colours": Clandestines—From the Perspective of a Child

My son and I are in the process of rebuilding again, after my husband's death. This time, it is a lot more challenging, as we are rebuilding our lives in a country where my son is a new immigrant. We can empathize with those who have fled regime change, especially those from Eritrea, as the similarities and parallels are troubling. Recently, my son wrote a short narrative piece called "True Colours," which is about the true colours of clandestine war veterans like his father and the differences in their behaviour in public and at home. Even though he was only eleven when he wrote it, he was able to capture the tensions and transformations in so many societies—in Southeast Asia and in North America—especially those relating to the impact and long-term consequences of the wars on children. I hope that I can share it someday with other Timorese. But for now, that space does not exist. It has to be created and built—a space where it is all right to be truthful and honest about the veterans of the war, the national heroes of the anti-colonial struggle for independence, from the perspective of a child. Children are the greatest teachers of life's most mysterious lessons. And yet, in Timor-Leste, we hardly listen to their voices. Like poor youth, and poor women, hardly anybody listens to them.

Notes

I wish to thank Hendro Sangkoyo, David Webster, and "mica" Barreto Soares for careful reading and sharp and insightful comments on this paper. The title of this paper was inspired by an interview by *Tempo Semanal* with my late husband, Fernando La Sama de Araújo, who passed away on 2 June 2015, on Anti-Corruption day, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhmU6rcORBc (accessed 29 June 2017). Fernando La Sama de Araújo was a former clandestine activist and political prisoner in an Indonesian jail, then leader of the Democratic Party (PD) in independent Timor-Leste, serving in a number of positions including speaker of parliament and acting president.

1 Adrienne Rich, "Cartographies of Silence," in *Collected Poems: 1950-2012* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016).

2 James Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 34.

3 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* preface by Jean Paul Sartre, translated by Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1963), 250.

4 Clandestinity and secret identity were by no means limited to the Timorese. Scholars from other countries, who empathized with and supported the Timorese cause, wrote articles against the violence of the Indonesian colonial occupation under pseudonyms. See for example Aloys Smith [Rodolphe de Koninck], "Timor Oriental Devant la Conscience de l'Humanité," *Le Devoir* (Montreal), 20 December 1991. A kind of excavation or archaeology of knowledge would be required in order to uncover and determine the depth and expansiveness of the clandestine struggle (including new archives coming out of Japan, Canada, Australia, the Philippines, the UK, and other places) and evidence that "the pen is mightier than the sword" (despite current discourses of militarized masculinity arguing that it was militarized men who won the war).

5 For example, some Timorese ambassadors, members of parliament, and some government ministers continue to use clandestine names on Facebook and other social media sites. During the day, they work for the state and government, and at night and weekends they "activate" their clandestine identities.

6 Since first writing these reflections on "virtuosos of clandestinity" in August 2015, three months after my late husband's death, some interesting, unexpected transformations at the institutional level have occurred in Timor-Leste's dysfunctional system. See for example: www.tribunais.tl, especially the section on *"Camara de Contas"* and "Auditorias," for eye-opening, thought-provoking reads. It is possible that untimely deaths and collective national mourning, possibly even "Desluto Nacional" (translated in their official website as "National Mourning-End" celebration; see http://timor-leste.gov.tl/?p=13180&lang=en) in all their paradoxes and contradictions can perhaps be a cathartic opening for critical self-reflection and institutional transformation and change. My sincerest gratitude to former virtuosos of clandestinity, themselves "insider/outsiders" in the state, for sending me the recent information on "transformations" in anti-corruption mechanisms. It just goes to show that the state and government is porous and permeable and not as able to "put a lid" on its everyday secret activities as it may wish.

7 For one example of a psychosocial needs assessment in Aceh, see International Organization for Migration, "Indonesia: A Psychosocial Needs Assessment of Communities in 14 Conflict-affected Districts in Aceh": http://reliefweb.int/ report/ indonesia/indonesia-psychosocial-needs-assessment-communities-14-conflict-affected-districts (accessed 29 June 2017).

8 See "Steitementu Fernando Lasama," 27 January 2015, https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=ygBoH9NrnUY (accessed 29 June 2017). For those who understand Tetum, this is a very revealing statement on Xanana Gusmao's random, authoritarian, personalistic governance style.

9 Some of this research is taken from a 2008 study commissioned by the Timor-Leste National Commission on Planning, in co-operation with the Ministry of Defense, focusing on engendering the security sector. The study was commissioned by Ms.

Milena Pires and her team at the National Commission on Planning, with the author as principal investigator. The intention and idea of the state-sponsored research was to open up the discussion on civilian oversight of the military, and uncover the dynamics of civilian-military-police relations, in order to link research and policy, and transform Timorese society from a zone of "commando style" militarized masculinities to one of more open, inclusive, egalitarian, democratic, an pluralistic dialogue. The findings were presented in a public seminar entitled "Security Sector Reform: Gendered Perspectives" in Delta Nova, Dili, attended by representatives from the military, police (including commanders from the rural districts), the former minister of defense and former minister of interior during the Fretilin government, international security forces (including the UN and the ISF), Atul Khare, the former UN special representative of the secretary-general, and his wife Vandna Khare, and former UN police commissioner Rodolfo Tor. See also Jacqueline Aquino Siapno, "De guerilléros à soldats, civils et membres du parlement: L'intégration des femmes et des ex-résistants Timorais dans l'Administration et la Societé Civile," in *Timor-Leste Contemporain: L'émergence d'une nation*, ed. Benjamim de Araújo e Corte-Real, Christine Cabasset, and Frédéric Durand (Bangkok: IRASEC, 2014); and Jacqueline A. Siapno, "Brave Women Warriors, Unfinished Revolutions: Political Subjectivities of Women Ex-Falintil and Falintil-FDTL Combatants in East Timor," in *Women Warriors in Southeast Asia*, ed. Vina Lanzona and Tobias Rettig (New York: Routledge, forthcoming).

10 For one useful explanation, see Thomas Nail, "The Politics of the Mask," 11 December 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/thomas-nail/the-politics-of-the-mask_b_4262001.html (accessed 29 June 2017).

11 Again, please refer to www.tribunais.tl and read the interesting comments on "contradictions" in the "camara de contas" section.

12 Sankaran Krishna, "The Moral Economy of Political Assassinations," paper presented at "Political Violence in South and Southeast Asia," Colombo, LK, April 2007 and Kuala Lumpur, MY, August 2007.

13 Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 250.