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Peace and Conflict Studies: Tangible Learning Towards Local-Level Peacebuilding

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Abstract

As Timor-Leste celebrated the 20th Anniversary of the "Restoration of Independence" on May 20th 2022, UNTL Institute for Peace and Conflict Social Studies (IPACSS) celebrated the restoration of their graduate studies program. The timing of this launch and reclaiming peace and conflict studies at the national university in Timor-Leste, is a fitting tribute to recognition of the political history—of a nation's courage and solidarity in striving for human rights, justice and peace. Peace education and research are significant in fragile contexts like Timor-Leste.

This paper discusses how the field of peace and conflict studies can make tangible contributions to local-level peace building (historically through community action and more recently via innovative research on peace through tourism and sustainable ecological practices). The subject is values explicit. It is interdisciplinary at its core and therefore resists being allocated any specific faculty: that is, the field has no discipline. It is also a pedagogy of praxis. That discussion, which is of interest to both practitioners and scholars, informs the formulation of the research question of this paper. In what ways do peace and conflict studies enact social change? The journey to re-establish the graduate program at UNTL underscores these key components of this academic field. That story begins with the insightful vision and tireless leadership of the inaugural IPACSS director and a band of committed IPACSS students who continued to lobby the university administration for almost a decade to have their program reinstated in order to complete their masters' degree studies. Their impressive research projects form the empirical section of this article. They demonstrate the key characteristics as testament to tangible learning towards local-level peacebuilding.

Keywords   peace, conflict, nonviolence, justice, eco-humanity, interdisciplinary, education

Introduction

As the preamble to the constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) stated over half a century ago:

a peace based exclusively upon the political and economic arrangements of governments would not be a peace which could secure unanimous, lasting and sincere support of the peoples of the world... [that] peace must therefore be founded upon intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind. (United Nations 1946: 1)

Seventy-five years later, 'solidarity of mankind' has been replaced with 'a common humanity' and more recently in the scholarship the concept of 'eco-humanity' (da Silva, 2015)—a compelling theorisation in this age of the Anthropocene where the violence of 'mankind' upon the earth has created, arguably, our most pressing contemporary peace issue. As violence continues to mark our geopolitical relations and global climate change demands 'solidarity' in action for our shared world, peace and conflict studies must be considered a significant and crucial subject for tertiary studies.

This can be seen globally, with an international institutional commitment towards peace education. In 2020, the Kroc Institute lists about 400 colleges and universities globally that offer peace studies programs. Such international interest, arguably, highlights the legitimacy of peace education, and its significance to the international community as endorsed by several governments and research institutions (UNESCO 2013-2022). The basic philosophical principles behind peace education, is education that is geared towards change and transformation in society (Jenkins, 2008). Transformation here connotes the way one thinks, perceptions of the world, values, behavioural patterns, human relationships and structures in society. Peace education, in this way, seeks to inculcate values of peace linked to justice and skills that help learners to 'understand, confront, resist, transform and ultimately eliminate violence in all of its multiple forms' (Jenkins, 2008). International attention to 'conflict studies' is also fundamental to the attainment of sustainable peace in contemporary times when tensions across the globe signal violence. Peace and conflict studies therefore contributes key learning— in the philosophy, language and practice of 'nonviolence'; dialectical and critical reading of 'universal human rights'; and theories linking 'peace with justice'.

As editors Ying Hooi Khoo, Antero Benedito da Silva and Therese Nguyen Thi

Phuong begin in *Rethinking Human Rights and Peace in Post-Independence Timor-Leste Through Local Perspectives*, (2022: v):

… one intriguing question raised…[is] what exactly human rights really mean for the Timorese community, which endured a long period of bloody conflict during Portuguese colonial rule and under Indonesian occupation. From the restoration of its independence in 2002 to the United Nations (UN) assisted transition experience until now, where the country is moving toward strengthening its state-building operations independently, [yet] oil-rich Timor-Leste continues to be one of the world's poorest countries, with 42% of the population below the national poverty line. The question then arises: what do human rights and peace mean for Timorese in this postindependence context?

Peace education and research are significant in historical contexts like Timor-Leste. This paper discusses how the field of peace and conflict studies can make tangible contributions to local-level peace building—historically through community action and more recently through innovative research on peace through tourism and sustainable ecological practices. That discussion, which is of interest to both practitioners and scholars, informs the formulation of the research question of this paper. In what ways do peace and conflict studies enact social change?

Historical note to begin

In Timor-Leste, UNTL—IPACSS (Peace Centre) located at the national university was founded February 14, 2007, partly as a memorial centre for the Students' Solidarity Peace Prize 1999. Peace Centre founding director Antero Benedito da Silva was a leader of Timor-Leste Students' Solidarity Council and their contribution to the active, non-violent, self-determination struggle. From the earliest beginnings from 2009, UNTL—Peace Centre has hosted and supervised foreign PhD students including research projects on the history of resistance. However, the vision of Peace Centre always included the teaching of postgraduate studies, as integrating research into postgraduate courses would enable the university to directly link with the people in the remote areas and to involve communities in the development process and advancement of science.

Peace Centre has also been action oriented in its development. The first activity was to promote conflict transformation dialogue at the community level mainly in Bebonuk and Becora in July 2006. And with the support of the Student Solidarity Council, to organize national youth dialogues celebrating International Peace Day September 21, by bringing 200 youth from 13 districts together in Oecusse. In 2007, Peace Centre initiated a space for dialogue among young people and students; and the first activity was to organize "Peace Camp for Youth" with community leaders around Dili. The Peace Camp was conducted in Atauro allowing participants to learn about peacebuilding, conflict resolution and nonviolent leadership. In 2008, on the advice of the Irish Mission in Dili, Peace Centre began to create links on the international stage such as with the Irish Foreign Affairs in Ireland that resulted in the UNTL— Peace Centre cooperation with the Conflict Resolution Unit (CRU) of Irish government.

This approach of Peace Centre to educate for peacebuilding is to enhance the social, cultural and economic development of the marginalised members in Timorese society and to seek alternatives to the 'status quo'. Early research topics included: cooperative and local economic development; local initiatives in conflict transformation in Oecusse and Uato-Lari and alternative energy. As one of the strategic issues in Timor-Leste, Peace Centre supported the construction of a micro-hydro power system in Baucau, with preliminary findings presented to a conference on Transforming Timor-Leste and organized by UNTL in collaboration with Victoria University in Australia. Similarly, Peace Centre has participated with national NGOs for programs on conflict resolution regarding national issues such as land and housing rights— creating working groups with national and international NGOs and government (da Silva & Furusawa, 2014).

Since 2009 Peace Centre has organized seminars on corruption in government; peace journalism training in cooperation with Timor-Leste Media Training Centre and Philippines-based PECOJON; International youth conferences on peacebuilding in cooperation with FRONTIERS of South Korea; and 'reconciliation' research on the history of Timor-Leste's resistance. In cooperation with University of Chulalongkon, Thailand, Peace Centre facilitated collaborative research on land conflict and transformation to contribute to the Draft of Law on Land, under consultation at the time by National Parliament. Peace Centre also worked with UNMIT and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to run diplomatic training for 30 students as part of the Solidarity Committee to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the Popular Consultation 1999.

Peace Centre has always been indirectly involved in transformation of the learning system within the university, by enabling undergraduate students to be included in research projects and as 'volunteers' in community activities. The provocative research topic 'violence against university students' was undertaken in 2007 aiming to push for educational reform at UNTL, including in learning methods. Past and current research projects involve participation of high school teachers and students in the conflict transformation for alternative learning methods, instead of one-way conventional methods. Continually, attention has been on social justice research *and* institutional development— such as, curricula and library development; empowerment of young people as student leaders; promoting bottom-up community social-cultural and economic development as key to peace building in Timor-Leste; and providing solidarity with marginalised peoples in other countries such as Palestine, West Papua, Western Sahara, Burma and Aboriginal communities in Australia.

This historical snapshot aligns with the theoretical tenets of Paolo Friere who defines praxis in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as "reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed". Demonstrating pedagogy as praxis, the final objective above of 'solidarity' also gives us the cue to examine the other key characteristics of academic peace and conflict studies—as 'values explicit' and 'interdisciplinary', as discussed below.

Why peace is linked to conflict studies?

Peace theorists argue that peace is more than the 'absence of war' certainly; but also argue that it is more than harmony and harmonious relations. Australian social work professor Stuart Rees asserts that peace scholars and practitioners are indeed interested in these aspects of peace—in ridding the world of direct violence— however, in order to do that, peace needs to be linked with justice (Rees 2003, 2006). In his book *Passion for Peace*, 'peace with justice' promotes ideas about critical human rights, an interconnected humanity (with ecology) and the practice of nonviolence. In this theory of peace, *conflict* is distinct from *violence*. As Rees (2015: 10) asserts: "my view [is] that conflict reveals life's injustices and that conflict inherent in promoting peace with justice gives us a chance of unearthing realities, of speaking truth to power."

In his most recent work entitled *Cruelty or Humanity*, Rees speaks of "diverse forms of advocacy for a common humanity through literacy about nonviolence and for the health promoting values of creative, non-destructive uses of power" (2020: 8). In *Passion for Peace* Rees (2003: 20-21) posits,

peace with justice is characterized by an absence of violence, whether it is direct and observable or indirect and invisible. A just peace would be marked not only by an end to hostilities between peoples, but also by fairness in social, [ecological], economic and political arrangements… Relationships of domination and subordination are often a cue for violent conflict and transformation of such unequal power relationships is key to peace with justice.

This positive view of conflict concurs with the notion of positive peace. Norwegian scholar and mathematics professor Johan Galtung (1969) coined the term to connote 'more than the absence of war', as he says, to addresses indirect or structural violence as negative peace. Totalitarian states and authoritarian organisations often maintain negative peace via expressions of oppressive power over citizens or employees. Galtung's extensive body of work rests on the assumption that the best way to understand peace is to unmask and address all expressions of violence. That is, direct violence as direct injury or harm; indirect violence as harm caused by structural means imposed by unjust societal structures; *and* by cultural violence as a result of deeply entrenched assumptions that underpin direct and indirect violence (Galtung1996; Webel & Galtung 2007). Militarism, patriarchy, colonisation, imperialism as well as poverty, dispossession, racism, class structure and greed are all expressions of indirect violence. Peace practitioner and professor of education from the United States, Betty Reardon theorises peace in terms of conflicted spaces as "the long haul, for ongoing struggle" (Reardon 1988, p. 47). For Reardon (1990, 1993, 1999, 2009, 2015) educating for peace requires us to unmask direct and indirect violence to develop capacity to create possibilities for nonviolent social change in the promotion of human and environmental security.

Echoing the sentiments in the UNESCO (1946) quote with which this paper begins, philosophers as well as social policy makers have written about peace in terms of international citizenship and implicit in such views is an understanding that achieving peace is not just the responsibility of diplomats and politicians but a task for all citizens (Rees and Blanchard 1999: 169). The subject is interdisciplinary at its core and therefore resists being allocated any specific faculty but is ideal for an independent institute (see Galtung & Fischer, 2013:139-150). All academic thinking is invited to contribute to research towards 'peace and justice' in our shared world: from nuclear physics to biological studies; from studies in psychology, sociology and the humanities; to journalism and tourism studies; as well as creative studies in poetry, literature, film. Arguably, however, academic peace and conflict studies starting point includes pedagogy as praxis. As peace educator da Silva (cited in Silva, 2020: 225) points out: Marx (1976), in his theses on Feuerbach, provides a compelling idea: "Philosophers have hitherto only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it".

We are getting closer to the nub of our argument. What do human rights and peace mean for Timorese in a post-independence context? As detailed above, the journey to establish UNTL—Peace Centre has been concerned to address such a question in a myriad of diverse locations and experiences. Also, with the insightful vision and tireless leadership of inaugural director Antero Benedito da Silva and a band of committed peace studies' students who continued to lobby the university administration for almost a decade, to have their postgraduate program reinstated to complete their masters' degree studies. Their insights, showcased below, constitute empirical evidence and demonstrate the intellectual rigour, innovative project design and diversity of research within the field of academic peace and conflict studies.

Showcasing peace research at UNTL

Making a 'Green Solidarity Economy'—theory in practice.

Research undertaken at Peace Centre over the past decade highlights investigations of 'sustainable development' in Timor-Leste through the lens of positive peace. This involves theorising the innovative idea of 'the green economy' which focuses on generating new jobs, goods, and services that encourage processes less destructive to the health of the planet; together with, the 'solidarity economy' that includes commercial and non-commercial activity oriented to meet individual and collective social needs over profit maximisation (da Silva, 2015:16-18). Such as various kinds of voluntary or cooperative associations within communities—for example, worker cooperatives credit unions, co-housing, fair trade, local currencies etc. The definition (re)centres the principles of solidarity, sustainability, equity, participatory democracy and pluralism as core values of interpersonal relationships and exchange. Theorising *the green solidarity economy* focuses on building 'sustainable', 'closed cycle', or 'environmentally friendly' production processes and services which promote workplace democracy, social justice and community empowerment.

Near Dili, the 'Namalai Eco-village and Solidarity Movement' has been established as a site of peace praxis—involving students, staff and volunteers from the Peace Centre and international students and academic collaborators. Zona Tutiar consists of five main small Aldeais (hamlets) with a population of approximately 3000 people, and with a distance of only 45 minutes travel by car or by bike, from the capital city of Dili. However, until 2017 it was considered a very remote community. There is still today no health centre operational and the road is unreliable. There are two elementary schools and one pre-secondary school, but there is no pre-school nor a secondary school. Parochial politics are evident in the community and semi-subsistence farming practices prevail.

In January 2017, GHAMEL, an environmental student voluntary organization initiated an intervention in the área of Namalai aimed to promote sustainable agriculture for economic self-sufficiency and they are still there today. They first began to cultivate horticulture, and later expanded to tree planting and a community forestry program. The following February 2017, working with the students and some of the community members, the establishment of an office of Peace Centre of Universidade Nacional Timor-Leste (UNTL) in Aldeia Namalai was created to develop the following activities. First, potential for community eco-tourism, with an academic article publishing the research in Australia (see da Silva, 2017). The área has 'eco-tourism' potential with mountainous, fresh air, beautiful views to the city and to the ocean. Secondly, 'sustainable agro-ecology' including the youth of the community and visiting university students working to create terrace-sharing in an área 40x40m2 provided by the community; and, by early 2018, the promotion of tree planting around the mountain of Bellamun with some 2000 trees now having been planted. Third, in 2018, working with community development students from UNTL, water resource management—starting from Manlor Water Spring, and thus far, five small damps have been created for rainwater deposits aiming to generate more ground water at the top of Tutiar Mountain.

Significantly in 2020, the community provided about two hectares of land at the top of Tutiar Mountain, to endorse the plan to build an agro-ecological vocational high school. From late February 2019, over 30 children of age 0-7 years old, who have no access to pre-school—and the number seems to have increased to include children from nearby communities— have been attending 'eco-preschool' where at least five community volunteers have been facilitating classes near to Manlor Water Spring. The community has also agreed to allocate 12x7m2 land to build a pre-school building, when the funds can be generated for the building. Some of the villagers are part of the women's empowerment micro-finance institute Moris Rasik, which provide small loans up to US$300-500 per annum, but with very high interest rates of 30%. In September 2017, Peace Centre volunteers worked with local women and have established a small financial cooperative known as, Arosan Haburas Tutiar=Working Together to Green Tutiar. With a membership of 34 people now they have collected capital of USD$1000. The first activity of the cooperative is to promote community savings and the setting up of a souvenir shop to promote eco-tourism.

Zona Eco-village and Economia Solidario is increasingly visited by students and youth groups and in May 2019, organised the first Eco-village and Economia Solidario Conference inviting politicians including members of the National Parliament as guest speakers. Over the past two years, there have been multiple student field trips to the region to examine and document at the practice of agro-ecology, which is linked to 'cultura' and the animist traditions of mountain people. The research work is still in progress, in promoting local knowledge of agriculture technology, terrace sharing and rainwater deposits, for up-land sustainable practice of agro-ecology. This includes the conduct of exchange of local youth to other permaculture sites to encourage more participation of the locals, particularly young people. There is potential for this model of Eco-Village and Solidarity Economy Movement to promote sustainable communities across the country in Timor-Leste as it generates research, data collection, publications, conferences and action for sustainable development as positive peace.

"LALETEK NANIS DOMIN CATROSA"—A local community approach to tourism in Dare

Postgraduate student Julio Ximenes Xavier is developing another project proposal at UNTL—Peace Centre concerning tourism for peace and sustainable development utilising theoretical insights from 'peace tourism' (Higgins-Desbiolles et al 2021). Peace through tourism is a theory and practice that envisions tourism as a peace industry: An industry that considers ecology and community as equal players to the 'market' imperatives of tourism (Blanchard and Higgins-Desbiolles 2013). Community participation in the decision-making process, particularly in developing countries, is always limited or secondary (Dola and Mijan, 2006). Development of tourism through community participation not only relates to the decision-making processes, but also helps in its sustainability (D'Amore, 1988). Community attitudes are important for sustainable tourism development because the attitudes and perceptions of a community which are formed regarding tourism development, are invaluable knowledge for decision-makers (Niezgoda & Czernek, 2009). Community is the most important party, because they will be affected

by tourism planning and development. The positive relationship between community and tourism development includes their perceptions towards an increase in development (Hunter & Green, 1995).

In *Growing Tourism to 2030: Enhancing National Identity* the nation-building policy proposal is for setting a path for Timor-Leste tourism created by a vision of inaugural President Xanana Gusmao (1999):

A beautiful country like Timor-Leste, with its determined and heroic history, must not be promoted through a tourist industry which creates a small modern world of luxury hotels, but rather we should accelerate the creation of conditions for ecotourism as a means to promote unique identity, personality and character of our people, with a dimension of more *humane relationships between people*. (Cited in "Timor-Leste National Tourism Policy", 2017: 3 emphasis added)

This vision is in keeping with the principles of peace tourism—a new area of academic enquiry—as more than a niche market. Residents gaining more economic prowess is also most helpful for the tourism industry—although tourism development may involve a trade-off between economic benefits and environmental costs (Zhang, et al 2006). However, a peace tourism approach diminishes such a trade-off as the community is primarily responsible for tourism development and also the protections of culture and environment. The interactions between the community and the tourists have more positive impacts in creating opportunities, bringing positive peace, by creating opportunities for the host (on their own terms) and integrating different cultures in dialogue or interaction with the visitors to the community. Tourism may help to improve the quality of life in an area by increasing employment and economic opportunities for the community; but also, by enhanced access to nutritional foods, such as the growing of local foods as permaculture as well as produce for sale to visitors. It also provides opportunity to local residents to interact with different people, make friends, learn about the world, and represent themselves to new perspectives (Sharma et al, 2018).

The research project aims to study the local community participation towards sustainable tourism development in Dare village, Laletek Nanis Domin, in general, and Jammu in particular, for building peace in the region. The purpose of the study is to explore the role of the local community in tourism development of Dare village. Specifically, the community's participation in decision-making regarding tourism development in the village and/or district and/or the perceived lack of control by community regarding the impacts and opportunities of tourism development. The methodology will include mixed methods with sampling and interviews to be undertaken with key stakeholders in the community (including youth) and local businesses. The growth of the tourism industry can have significant impacts on the overall growth of a region—the reason being, its capability to generate employment and trade (industry). The academic study of 'peace tourism' emphasizes the positive peace aspects of the tourism enterprise—including taking account of the impacts on local communities and the local ecological environment as well as the opportunities created to address structural inequality.

Education, Horticulture and Peace Tourism in Osso-Huna, Baguia

A fellow postgraduate student Jose Caetano Guterres has initiated community research utilising 'storytelling as research' (Davis 2004: 2) to share the experiences of community development via relationship-building with local and international friendship groups that were built in the community. The project has been ongoing and documented for over two decades in Osso-Huna and surrounding villages, located in a remote area under the second highest mountain in Timor-Leste. The village belongs to Baguia Sub-District, about 2-3 hours' drive from Municipality of Baucau. The road to Osso-Huna is seriously undeveloped and is a dirt road that can become impassable during the rainy season. Most of the villages in Baguia have had access to electricity since 2011 and the people in Osso-Huna and surrounding villages have access to a local traditional market once a week. However, there are some kiosks (small stores) open every day. There is also one health centre that can be accessed by the community. Communication is very limited although people can access Timor- Telecom, Telemor and Telekomsel.

Educational development in Osso-Huna was seen as a priority by the community. After the 1999 Referendum the community wanted a school in their village. The local authorities submitted a request to the United Nations Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) to establish a pre-secondary school in Osso-Huna. UNTAET rejected the request due to the lack of funding. However, the community continued to seek support and they approached Fundação Saude de Timor-Lorosae (SATILOS) a local NGO in Dili to support. SATILOS lead by a protestant priest, originally from Osso-Huna, decided to mobilise support. Twenty students were registered for the first time and volunteer teachers became available to support. The Community donated a simple building with chairs and tables

from bamboo to use. SATILOS and local authorities informally launched the school in October 13, 2000. SATILOS provided administration support and paid teachers honoraria with amounts of US$50/month.

An effort was made to promote the school. Christiane Vertucci, a friend of Jose Caetano Guterres who, at that time, worked at the office of Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in Dili, was invited to the school in 2002. This was the first time a foreigner visited the school. Christiane met with the students and the teachers and she admired the motivation of the students to learn despite the very poor situation and limited conditions. She was inspired to support the school and in December 2003, when SATILOS faced difficulties and had no funds to sustain the school, Christiane linked the school to Mr. Doug Hynd in Australia who visited the school in 2005. This developed into a more systematic effort to raise funds, especially in 2005, when a cyclone storm hits Osso-Huna and surrounding villages and damages the school. This was a moment where an emergency proposal was submitted to TEAR Australia.

TEAR Australia secured the school with support for construction of a four-room building and honoraria for teachers. At the same time SATILOS and the community advocated for government support. Finally, in 2014, the government took over all responsibilities and contracted all six volunteer teachers. As a result of the establishment of the school most of children had access to education. From 2003-2022, the school has graduated more than 600 students. Most of the teachers are hired by the government, and the alumni students of the school established their alumni association in Dili. Currently, about 65 students are enrolled in the Osso-Huna pre-secondary school. The government also established another pre-secondary school in the village in 2011. However, the original school continues to exist. Built on the success of the pre-secondary school, in 2014 the community requested SATILOS to establish a secondary school named Ensino Secundariu Jeral Taur Matan Ruak (ESG-TMR) Osso-Huna—as Taur Matan Ruak is the resistance name of a former Prime Minister of Timor-Leste who was originally from the area. His name was used by way of honouring his contribution to the liberation of the country.

The Government contracted one teacher and deployed to the school. The other nine teachers were voluntary and only received a small honoraria for the amount of $50/month/teacher from school fees and regular donations from Australian friends—Doug Hynd and friends in Canberra and Neil Holm in Queensland. The school also received 500 books as a donation from people in Perth Australia arranged through Prof. Lynda Blanchard who was visiting UNTL--Peace Centre with the books delivered to Timor-Leste via the arrival in Dili Port of the Peace Boat (a Japanese NGO and tourist venture) when it visited in March 2018. The three-room school building was originally constructed by the Ministry of Education in 2016-2017. However, the building was completely destroyed by the cyclone in 2018. In 2019, the secondary school also received a donation from Friends of Baguia for the rehabilitation of a school building that was again destroyed by another cyclone storm.

Photo copyright: Jose Caetano Guterres   Photo copyright: Jose Caetano Guterres

The school has participated in the national exams since 2016. About 100 students have graduated from the school and most of them are now continuing their studies at universities in Dili. Currently about 104 students are enrolled in the school. Patience, persistence and resilience underpin the success of the educational development and Osso-Huna Community Cooperatives and Tourism Project (OCCTP) is the next vision—created to involve the majority of the population in Osso-Huna and the surrounding villages who are subsistence farmers and who grow corn, cassava, sweet potatoes, and vegetables. The farmers have wet cultivation when there is rain. They also grow rice, corn and

beans, but this is only for subsistence family needs. The production in these villages is so low that farmers are not able to meet their own household needs for food throughout the year. With limited input and infertile soils, the farmers also need to continue harmful (not eco-friendly) cultivation practices such as slash and burn and cultivation on steep slopes. The situation has made people despondent, inactive and they have started to abandon their agriculture activities. The vision of OCCTP is to create synergies between sustainability, food, identity, culture and eco-tourism: to create permaculture gardens of local produce and invite more visitors to visit the community.

Women in the Co-operative Setting in Timor-Leste: A Case Study

Postgraduate research by Elsa Joaquina Araujo Pinto involves a case study of Timorese society that addresses deep culture and structural violence. 'Cooperative' has been a part of Timor-Leste society since its independence and the Timorese have practiced the culture of working together in their society; for example, *Fulidaidai* in Iliomar and *Slulu* in Ermera. However, given the widely held view that Timor society is ruled by a patriarchal system and that gender equality has only become a part of public discourse since the transitional period, the need to realize women's empowerment is the need to uncover various important aspects of life, including women's role in the co-operative. Therefore, the central research questions include: how have co-operatives developed since the restoration of Timor-Leste's independence; what are women's roles in the co-operative setting in Timor-Leste; and, how does the co-operative contribute to peacebuilding in Timor-Leste through its members? The methodology is case study analysis.

Cooperative is defined as 'an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and culture needs' (International cooperative Alliance, n.d.). Timor-Leste's long path to its sovereignty was paved by its experience under the Portuguese colonialization for 450 years; the Indonesia occupation for 24 years; and the United Nation's administration from the end of 1999 until May 2002, finally on May 20, 2002 Timor-Leste became an independent nation in Southeast Asia (Molnar, 2010). As a post conflict country, peacebuilding is an emerging context for this country. There are various indicators contributing to peace such as education, health, security, agriculture and economy. The Constitution of RDTL (2002) defines three sectors for the economic development as public, private, and cooperative sectors.

Pinto cites, a case study from Nepal conducted by Ramnarain (2013: 30) to reveal "co-operatives potentially articulate a grassroots political economy of peacebuilding that builds the basis for more sustainable forms of peace, based on social justice, not simply the absence of violence." This suggests that in some parts of the world, cooperatives have contributed to peacebuilding. However, in Timor-Leste, there has been no research focused on this topic. To build the connection between co-operative and peacebuilding, this study uses Johan Galtung's peace theory, and in particular notions of negative and positive peace. This research focuses on how 'co-operative' can contribute to building a positive peace in Timor-Leste, focusing on women's empowerment and gender equality.

Data collection tools include observation, interview and focus group discussion (FGD) and the target key respondents are the personnel from the State Secretary for Commerce, Industry and Environment (SSCIE), particularly the Department of Cooperatives, and cooperative members of two selected cooperatives, *Klibur Uniaun Crédito* (KUC) and *Lamanoma (Lakon Nakukun, Mosu Naroman)*. The data is analyzed by using descriptive qualitative methods which include data reduction, data presentation and analytical tools. Notably, most of the primary data collected is from the period of 2014 to 2015, so there is the need to update and reconfirm some studies from the past six years. In addition, this research will also unpack some of the current development agenda for women's empowerment, for example on Women Economic Empowerment (WEE). This research will establish updated data and information, and accumulate the latest trend adapted for women. Finally, the study is significant in contributing to an understanding of cooperative movements in the country especially in encouraging women's participation in the cooperative setting, for building a more peaceful and just society within Timor-Leste.

International Fieldtrip: The Peace Boat Japan

International research projects and collaborations are also a feature of graduate studies undertaken by researchers at UNTL—Peace Centre. Postgraduate student Eugenia Urania da Costa Correia's research collaboration included a field visit to Peace Boat Japan for the 98th Voyage. The field visit entailed visiting several ports from Kobe-Japan to Xiamen-China, then to Singapore, and finally whilst the boat was in port in Singapore—a flight to Siem Reap-Cambodia. However, prior to departing from Kobe, there were some site visits in Japan, such as to the Hiroshima Peace Museum. Peace Boat is an International NGO working to promote peace, human rights, equality, sustainability and respect for the environment through the organization of global educational programs, responsible travel,

cooperative projects and advocacy activities (Yoshioka 2008; 2013). Peace Boat has Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations and is a dedicated campaigner for the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Insights gained through this field trip are reflected below as a response to the program "Building Peace Together in Asia".

Correia's research logbook and field notes document the Global University Program in 2018 where participants visited and learned about direct and indirect violence in four countries in Asia—Japan, China, Singapore, and Cambodia. Correia notes that in Cambodia, people live with the direct violence of (and struggle to clear) landmines planted in their environment coupled with the structural violence of extensive poverty; whereas in the 'richer' nation of Singapore, the small population and small size of land masks the reality that nearly half the population are migrant workers who may work in 'slave-like' conditions as domestic maids or manual labourers and face discrimination, poverty and denial of their human rights regarding their working conditions. In addition, the bigger, 'developed' countries in Asia such as China and Japan also struggle with issues of direct and indirect violence. Japan's history of surviving (as a nation) the devastating direct violence in World War II (WWII) where the experimental atomic bomb (a-bomb) exploded in Hiroshima — one of the prefectures of Japan where the survivors continue to struggle to promote peace as they campaign for the elimination of nuclear weapons around the world (see Nahory, 2017). Whereas the largest country in Asia well known as the world's greatest growth as an "economic nation", China is continuing to increase financial opportunities through the aquaculture projects in the local communities and although China is becoming, the most advanced economic state in the world not merely in Asia, the vast rural communities are severely under-developed and this represents the gross (and often hidden) structural inequality within the country.

During the Peace Boat Global University Program September 2018, participants learned about key elements in building peace in Asia (Peace Boat, 2018). There were several onboard seminars about dimensions to peace, violence and armed conflicts, and challenges of sustainable development. The exposure tour program in Hiroshima (Japan) was about listening to stories from experts and from survivors such as the testimonies from Hibakusha (see Fihn, 2020); while, in Xiamen (China) there was learning about the economic development through the aquaculture projects. In Singapore listening, to the stories of discrimination and violence against migrant workers; whilst in Siem Reap (Cambodia) learning about the history of Khmer Rouge Regime, Vietnam War, and Civil War as well as the governmental efforts through the international agencies to support clearing the landmines and addressing the consequences of people's disabilities in promoting improved livelihoods and futures. In Phnom Penh (Cambodia) learning about the history in Cambodia as the world's largest killing field during the Pol Pot Regime, was a sobering lesson in how a nation of people killed each other because of power and interest. The learning involved the capacity for each person to be a peace promoter to certify survivors' key message *"for we shall not repeat the evil"*.

Peace is key for sustainable development and certainly violent conflict is the greatest obstacle to building peace. In addition, to promote positive peace, Asia might adopt treaties created to build regional peace together in the region, such as the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, signed in 1976 which constitutes a code of behaviour for states of Southeast Asia to adhere to and provides a mechanism for the peaceful settlement of disputes through regional processes. The Treaty on the Southeast Asia nuclear weapons-Free Zone, signed in 1995 and now in force, is ASEAN's contribution to the cause of the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons as well as to the safety of the region (Hatakeyama & Kawasaki, 2020). Timor-Leste registered ratification of the Treaty on the Prohibition of nuclear weapons (NPT) in June 2022.

Furthermore, to guarantee inclusive and sustainable societies it is critical to incorporate universal and inalienable human rights and fundamental freedoms of all people. It is crucial to acknowledge 'community' and 'society' as a platform for development, promoting social progress, poverty eradication, and overall human wellbeing. These ideals are reflected, in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), because the SDGs are interrelated to safeguard the mantra "leave no one behind" by 2030, as per the message from former Prime Minister of Timor-Leste, Dr Rui Maria de Araujo in January 2016:

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development embodies a remarkable balance of interests and priorities with a set of goals that are profoundly interlinked and indivisible. Timor-Leste is particularly pleased with the inclusion of Goal 16, which strengthens *the essential elements of peace, justice and institutions*. We know from experience that these elements are crucial to our joint commitment "not to leave anyone behind" on our path towards sustainable development. (United Nations Office in Timor-Leste, "Development in A Rising Young Nation" 2016: 4, emphasis added).

Inter-Faculty Collaboration

In order to support the varied research projects and topics within peace and conflict studies, professional cross-faculty collaboration is a feature of praxis at UNTL—Peace Centre. Visiting scholar Li Li Chen undertakes research in political science, international relations and human rights. Melding these perspectives (disciplines) in her research is in keeping with an interdisciplinary 'peace studies' approach. A research article published in UNTL *Revista Ciensias Sociais* (Chen 2021) and focused on Timorese women who experienced positive and negative impacts of the UN peacekeeping from 2002-2012:

I chose this topic because in the previous peacekeeping literature, women of colour are often described as victims of male peacekeepers. I wondered if Timor-Leste as a UN laboratory of peacebuilding for 12 years is also the same and would like to find out more information regarding what women's experiences of peacekeeping looked like. Specifically, I was interested in the experiences of women in relation to the UN peacekeepers in Timor-Leste. (Personnel correspondence, June 10th 2022).

Chen argues that Western critical legal feminists who tend to consider women's experiences of peacekeeping as mixed, unintentionally recast women as victims in dominant discourses that risks totalizing and silencing women's diverse experiences. Therefore, Chen argues for a need to see women as knowledge bearers and agents, whose agency cannot be captured within the dominant discourses and needs to be situated in their daily struggles. That requires an ethnographic and contextualized understanding of women's inconsistent and contextualised life experiences. In addition, the research demonstrates that the agency of women exists in negotiating and navigating their suffering and the violence encountered in everyday life, through storytelling.

Based on two extensive fieldtrips in 2016 and 2017 in Dili, Oecussi and Covalima, the research project interviewed 17 Timorese women who had relations with the UN peacekeepers—most of whom bore children but were abandoned afterwards. Semi-structured interviews were used to talk to these women, but let the women lead the interview and talk freely. The interviews were then transcribed and translated into their stories. Also, participant observation was utilised to observe and document existing cultural and social norms mediating women's bodies and agency. This research found that women in relationships with peacekeepers are often labelled as "malae nian (foreigners')" and suffer from similar discrimination and ostracization by their communities and families, compared to women who were sexually violated by the Indonesian militaries, as these "malae nian" challenge the ideal stereotypes of women as mothers and wives as constructed in local culture. Furthermore, women who are partnered with international male partners tend to be more easily gossiped about in comparison to Timorese men with international female partners.

These women do not easily fit the images and stereotypes of the victims of sexual abuse and exploitation, although they may suffer from undue economic burden and social stigmatization after they are left behind by their UN partners. Rather than easily reading sexism in women's agency, women's bodies are marked by power, which means that women's agency is often negotiated with and mediated by power. Through controlling women's bodies and sexualities, culture is reactivated for nationalism while colonialism is purged in order to justify Timorese men's dominance over women (Chen, 2018). In other words, women's bodies highlight the continuum of violence of colonialism and nationalism shaping their agencies on a daily basis. In terms of research contribution to the existing literature, the critical legal feminist position challenging the power underwriting discourse of the UN zero tolerance policy within the framework of peacekeeping, needs to avoid reconfiguring with the gendered categories and assumptions of women of colour as victims. The research findings highlight the importance of contextualization of women's stories in power and norms; as well as reflection of the scholars' power relations to their interlocuters, which tends to be ignored by Western feminism (Otto, 2007; McGill, 2014). International Relations (IR) scholars with a feminist commitment need to bring women's paradoxical and multifaceted narratives and experiences back to the theory-centred international relations often starting with particular assumptions of women's agency in non-Western societies. By centralizing women's experiences and stories, their agency amid the sexual exploitation and abuse shaped by colonialism and state violence needs to be foregrounded.

Concluding remarks

Although the showcase of research projects from UNTL—Peace Centre presented here, demonstrate some of the current and ongoing work, this is by no means a complete picture. Masters' students currently enrolled in the postgraduate program have prepared their individual thesis topics on vastly diverse themes: such as, *Legal Contribution to Land Conflict Transformation In Timor-Leste* by Jose Caetano Guterres; *Building a Peaceful Timor-Leste*

through Co-operative Members by Elsa Joaquina Araujo Pinto*;* and, *Indonesian Intelligence & Preventive Diplomacy Operations, to Annex East Timor, from 1974 to 1984* by Julio Ximenes Xavier; as well as, international project by Eugénia Urania Da Costa Correia and her research thesis *An Analysis of Residents' Protests Against US Military Bases in Henoko, Nago City-Okinawa*.

The interdisciplinary nature of these projects, coupled with the 'praxis' of research for social change as highlighted above, creates the unique character for academic peace and conflict studies. Following radical educators such as Paolo Freire (1970) and bell hooks (2003), we suggest this requires pedagogy of praxis in which the learners actively engage with texts and lived experience. Although there is not space for further discussion here, in studies of genocide, racism, gendered violence, war, discrimination, child soldiers, poverty, ecocide, hunger, dispossession, homelessness and countless other peace and justice issues; resistance, solidarity and nonviolence also include a pedagogy of hope. Moreover, we concur with Audrey Osler (2015: 30-32) that education for peace, justice and human rights is:

[an] emancipatory or transformatory form of education where learners get to study justice/injustice and equality/inequality… to support greater justice and equality in learners' lives and to promote solidarity with others to achieve these ends in the wider society.

For Osler, that involves a pedagogy that addresses 'asymmetrical power relations' and recognises that human rights can 'become part of a hegemonic discourse used to control, if rights and principles are applied without dialogue'; echoing Jim Ife's (2009) idea, to engage 'human rights from below'.

In this paper we argue that academic peace and conflict studies contains a 'critical pedagogy' that engages 'conflicted spaces' (as in 'peace linked to justice') in a dialectical relationship with texts; in solidarity with the marginalised or disenfranchised; giving voice to the voiceless (such as agro-ecology); and in ethical research relationships with people and communities (Blanchard & Nix 2019). In this epistemology we follow Rees' earlier assertion that "the conflict inherent in promoting 'peace with justice' gives us a chance of unearthing realities, of speaking truth to power". Furthermore, as posited in *Rethinking Human Rights and Peace in Post-Independence Timor-Leste through Local Perspectives* (2022: vi), we agree the nexus between human rights, peace, security and development "no longer [means] just absence of conflict, …[as] sustainable peace must be built from a rights framework to protect the local's interests in the process." Finally, we note UNTL Rector Joao Martins who shared in a public forum held in Dili in June 2022 his observation that "peace is an ongoing process". Let the journey continue by taking seriously tertiary studies of peace and conflict with solidarity, commitment, creativity and passion.

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