During the 24-year Indonesian occupation of East Timor, thousands of people died, or were killed, in circumstances that did not allow the required death rituals to be performed. Since the nation’s independence, families and communities have invested considerable time, effort and resources in fulfilling their obligations to the dead. These obligations are imbued with urgency because the dead are ascribed agency and can play a benevolent or malevolent role in the lives of the living. These grassroots initiatives run, sometimes critically, in parallel with official programs that seek to transform particular dead bodies into public symbols of heroism, sacrifice and nationhood.

The Dead as Ancestors, Martyrs, and Heroes in Timor-Leste focuses on the dynamic interplay between the potent presence of the dead in everyday life and their symbolic usefulness to the state. It underlines how the dead shape relationships amongst families, communities and the nation-state, and open an important window into – are in fact pivotal to – processes of state and nation formation.

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The Dead as Ancestors, Martyrs, and Heroes in Timor-Leste

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1 Ancestors and Martyrs in Timor-Leste

Susana de Matos Viegas

Abstract
This chapter reflects on the subject of ancestors: what are they in Timor-Leste? Assuming a comparative perspective, I argue that ancestors are inscribed in unilineal kinship dynamics implying mutuality of being. The category of martyrs emerges in the historical process of resistance against Indonesian occupation and should be understood as part of the lived experience of ancestorship and cosmic circularity (lulik circle). Contrasting constrained forms of honouring the dead imposed by colonial authorities after the Japanese invasion during World War II with the liveliness of the programmes destined to support reburials and pay tribute to martyrs in post-independence Timor-Leste, I argue that more than war heroes, martyrs inscribe the homage to the deceased in the conquest of freedom and self-determination.

Keywords: ancestorship, anthropological comparison, mutuality of being, martyrs

The debate on ancestor worship was initiated in anthropology back in the nineteenth century in order to address the history of religion preceding Christianity, Buddhism, or Hinduism. In present day anthropology, a consensus has emerged to reject the expression ‘worship’, as it presumes an evolutionary view of religions (cf. Bloch 2008 [1986], 330). Couderc and Sillander have suggested replacing it with the expression ‘ancestorship’ (2012, 6). Their proposal provides a good introduction to the Timorese case. Their suggestion is that the semantic core of the term ancestorship consists of ‘the relationship of the living with the ancestors, and the latter encompass both presently existing spirit agencies (ancestor spirits) and formerly existing people of the past’ (Couderc and Sillander, 2012, 6). In this light, the comparison between sociocultural contexts in which ancestorship
is central and others where it structures social life to a lesser extent is a primary consideration.

Taking as his starting point a historical and contemporary comparative panorama, Maurice Bloch (2002) highlights a particular contrast between, on the one hand, certain African and Asian (including Southeast Asian) contexts where ancestorship takes a central place, and on the other hand the Amerindians of Lowland South America, where this issue is residual. In the latter contexts, we frequently find that, instead of complex forms destined to create or maintain the presence of dead kinsfolk in the lives of their descendants, oblivion and the transformation of dead relatives into alternative categories of relatedness are produced (Bloch 2002, 66). Bloch argues that ancestorship should refer more strictly to kin relationships, usually referring to those who descend from a common patrilineal or matrilineal grandfather or great-grandfather. This is how it is interpreted in most of the anthropological literature, where ancestorship is associated with continuity from ascendant generations of unilinear kinfolk. In the Encyclopaedia of Religion, for instance, Hardacre argues that ancestorship implies that ‘a member of a certain lineage [unilineal descent group] prays only to the ancestors of that lineage’ (2005 [1987], 321). She adds: ‘it would be regarded as nonsensical to pray to ancestors of any other lineage’ (ibid.).

Addressing the issue of ancestorship in Borneo, Couderc and Sillander propose an analytical framework which is much broader than Hardacre’s. They argue that in Borneo, as well as in Southeast Asia in general, the category of ancestorship comprehends individuals who may not necessarily be related to each other by virtue of kinship, including those who are venerated because they have been prominent figures and possessed a socially specific value while they were alive (2012, 7). In this light, they argue against a vision of ancestorship circumscribed to the universe of unilinear descent, which they claim is excessively influenced by analysis of the Chinese and African contexts (2012, 7).

For the case of Timor-Leste, I propose to retrieve both Hardacre and Maurice Bloch’s argument, referring to ancestorship as kinship, cosmology, religion, and hierarchy, thus excluding the homage paid to individuals based on honorific feats accomplished in their lifetime. I believe this to be a framework that better permits us to understand rigorously how the relationships between ancestors and martyrs are established and differentiated in contemporary Timor-Leste. Here, I understand ‘martyrs’ in Timor-Leste as a category of personhood that has emerged in a specific historical context, that is, when Timor-Leste became an independent nation. The religious dimension of martyrdom should, then, be articulated with structural elements of the langue durée, namely the strong presence of ancestorship in the life of the Timorese.

As the introduction to this volume mentions, the category of ‘martyrs’ is consecrated in the preamble to the constitution of Timor-Leste, reflecting the degree to which the members of the Constituent Assembly decided to transform their work into a ‘heartfelt homage to all the martyrs of the Fatherland’ (Kent and Feijó, in this volume, see also Viegas and Feijó 2017, 95). Even though some other aspects of this important document may be regarded as somehow exogenous to specifically Timorese life experiences and strongly tainted by the logics and history of external interventions, such as those of the Portuguese or the UN (Trindade 2008, 167), this specific reference to ‘martyrs’ reflects deep feelings amongst the East Timorese.

In this chapter I will follow the Timorese philosophy espoused in its Constitution, referring to martyrs as all those who suffered while participating in or dedicating their lives to the Resistance. Section 11 of the Constitution states that ‘the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste acknowledges and values the centuries-old resistance of the Maubere people against foreign domination and the contribution of all those who fought for national liberation.’ The red in the national flag also stands for ‘the fight for national liberation’ (Viegas and Feijó 2017, 95). The argument put forward by Andrew McWilliam and Elizabeth Traube (2011) on the importance of suffering in the make-up of sentiments of belonging to a nation in Timor-Leste frames this perspective adequately, and underlines it well. As they suggest, ‘ideas of shared struggle against the Indonesian regime thickened a sense of pan-ethnic “Timorese” identity cultivated under common submission to Portuguese colonial rule and became the basis for asserting a horizontal solidarity of fellow sufferers’ (McWilliam and Traube 2011, 18).

The political elite responsible for drafting the constitution and recording the public homage to the people who fought for independence is the very same group that formed the Resistance, and its members have relatives who perished in that struggle. It is true that, as Lia Kent has argued (2012) and as Michael Leach has reiterated, ‘older nationalists have politically dominated
the post-independence state, and it is clear that significant numbers of young people have felt misrecognised' (Leach 2009, 145). However, as far as the tribute to the martyrs is concerned, there is a transversal understanding of their importance in different generations. A case in point is the fact that when a serious political crisis erupted in 2006, only four years after independence, one of the explanations for its surge was that there had been a lack of adequate homage to the martyrs (cf. Viegas and Feijó 2007; Loch and Prueller 2011, 321). Leading exponents of this view were Bryant Castro and Josh Trindade, who showed that, from the point of view of 'some interviewees [...] the East Timorese people, through the government, have forgotten the martyrs (Matebian/War Heroes) who sacrificed their lives during the resistance'. (Trindade and Castro 2007, 17-18). Forgetting actually means disregarding the world of ancestors, and this forgetfulness has consequences. This is because 'these martyrs or fighters are part of the spiritual world at the moment. When they are upset, the spiritual world is out of order, resulting in conflict in the real world, i.e. in the form of the Lorosa'e-Loromouna issue' (Trindade and Castro 2007, 17-18). Josh Trindade and Bryant Castro's thoughts on ancestorship guide the discussion in this chapter. Their view is clearly in favour of an identification of martyrs as part of the spiritual world where ancestors occupy a central role.

The relationship between the circumstances of martyrs' deaths – for instance, the fact that many of them were buried without proper mortuary rituals and far away from their homes, or that they were shot by a bullet – and the multiplicity of homage processes taking place after Timor-Leste obtained its political independence is a theme that I have addressed, together with Rui Graça Feijó, elsewhere (cf. Viegas and Feijó 2007; 2018). There, we underlined the tensions experienced by Timorese when making decisions about whether to bury their deceased kinsfolk regarded as martyrs in dedicated cemeteries – for instance, the Metinaro Garden of Heroes cemetery and its district replicas, or even in smaller ones that have been created spontaneously to honour martyrs and heroes – or else to opt for a burial in places that belong to the family and are inscribed in a territorial logic, including their ancestors. In this chapter, I shall concentrate on showing, on the one hand, the translation of sufferance as martyrdom, and on the other, that those who perished in this way are also deceased-ancestors. I shall argue that

3 My emphasis.
4 Interviews in this report were conducted among a sociological sample comprising 53 persons 'representing a range of professions, social status and local knowledge' (Trindade and Castro 2007, 8).

the presence of ancestors in Timorese people’s lives, and the historical emergence of ancestors-martyrs as a category of personhood, constitutes a framework for the comprehension of the theme of death that subsequent chapters of this book will develop.

Ancestorship and unilineal descent

In Timor-Leste, practices of ancestorship are circumscribed to a network of unilineal descendants associated with the group of origin, be it patrilineal or matrilineal. Therefore, it is critical to understand how, in a historical context such as the one experienced in Timor-Leste, and in spite of matrimonial alliances being structurally intertwined, practices of ancestorship do contribute to reinforcing, constituting and streamlining forms of belonging associated with origin groups and networks of unilineal descent.

In the rituals and homages paid to ancestors, only the network of kinsfolk descending from one origin group integrates and participates effectively in such rites as, for instance, the act of sharing and eating together sacrificial meat. Taking the example of the Fataluku, which I know not only from literature but as result of fieldwork research,5 in the ancestorship rituals, leura tei ('sacrificial/sacred meat') is only shared among members of one origin group (ratu), that is, ‘a dispersed, exogamous, patrilineal “house of origin”’. (McWilliam 2011, 65). In Fataluku, the generic for ‘ancestors’ is calu ho papu (lit. ‘grandfather and great-grandfathers’) that may correspond to patrilineal descent forefathers, considered as in so many other Southeast Asian contexts as “an anonymous collectivity” (Arhem 2016a, 20).6 In some rituals those anonymous entities intervene, whereas in others it is a relative who is a specific deceased-ancestor person belonging to one patrilineal ascendant line who is addressed. One example of the first kind are rituals performed in the house shrines known in Fataluku as acakaka or lafurutei (which literally translates to ‘sacred heart’). McWilliam considers

5 I carried out fieldwork in the region of Los Palos/Lautém for three periods of between two and four months each, totalling nine months in all, in the years 2012-2016. In most of these periods research was undertaken together with Rui Graça Feijó. This research was supported by a grant sponsored by the Foundation for Science and Technology of Portugal (FCT PTDC/CS-ANT/118390/2010).

6 Cahuho papu also includes the connection with the cahuho ukanke – the ensemble agamic forbearers, as the relationship with a cahuho papu never entails only one individual. It embraces and may approximate (for instance, in a communal sacrificial meeting and meal) many different kin of the same agamic descent line.
that the ancestors evoked in *aca kaka* may be ‘understood as an extension ultimately of the earliest origin hearth of the named clan’ (McWilliam 2011, 12; 2018, 73; see also McWilliam 2008, 323). An example of the second kind of rituals is the ones performed next to the tomb of a given and named patrilineal relative. These rituals mobilise a larger number of relatives than the first kind, house-based *aca-kaka*, but they are still confined to relatives belonging to the same origin group. In contrast to the *aca kaka*, in these ceremonies one communicates with a specific deceased relative – the one who is buried in there (cf. Viegas 2018, 2019).

There are a third and a fourth category of ancestorship rituals among the Fataluku which involve wider networks of descendants of the same *ratu* (origin group). These may happen both in the case of rituals performed next to a tomb located in previous dwelling places and in the case of those organised in long-distance from current inhabited villages, corresponding to more ancient inhabiting places. The latter tend to be highly formalised and performed more rarely. McWilliam gives a detailed description of such type of ritual ceremonies in the region of the Konis Santana National Park (McWilliam 2007, 197).

Among the Fataluku as well as across Timor-Leste and beyond, ancestorship emerges in and through relatedness. As Richard Fox recognises when considering offers given by Balinese to their ancestors in their shrines, reciprocal obligations towards the ancestors are not substantively different from ‘those one sustains with kinsmen and neighbours’ (Fox 2015, 39). Mutuality of being marks the relationship between living kinsmen and their ancestors, showing that ancestors behave as relatives, and that networks of interaction and tension between ancestors and the living help to integrate kinship relationships (cf. Viegas 2018, 2019). Several anthropologists working in different contexts in Southeast Asia have also highlighted that ancestorship is key in constituting mutually protective ties and interdependence among relatives (Schefold 2001, 363). Cederroth in his research in the Lombok underlines the influence of the ancestors in the life of their living kinsmen (Cederroth 2016, 239). Andrew McWilliam also highlights this mutuality of being among the Fataluku, when asserting that ‘[j]ust as people depend on ancestral blessings for their own health and wellbeing, so ancestors cannot exist without the continued ministrations of sacrificial offerings and the attention of their living descendants’ (McWilliam 2011, 73-74). Mutuality of being, which in this case means the actual co-presence of living and deceased agnatic kin (Sahlins 2001, 200a) implies that ancestorship is particularly proactive in contributing to the dynamic of kinship and belonging to origin groups or houses in Timor-Leste (cf. Viegas 2018, 2019).

### Origins, cosmology, immanence of life, and ancestorship

There is, however, a cosmological dimension of ancestorship, which is associated with kinship relatedness and origin groups but which needs to be independently addressed (Hardacre 2005 [1987], 320). Josh Trindade (2008) describes the cosmological and political philosophy of the Timorese with aid of a graphic showing a circle – the ‘Lulik Circle’ – that has several internal circumferences intersecting each other by virtue of complementarity/duality. He argues that the centre of the circle is ‘inhabited by the ancestors’ (Trindade 2008, 175). Traube (1986, 15) has also argued that for the Timorese there is a coincidence between origins (in a timeline sense) of the cosmological beginning of the world, and the ‘trunk’ of knowledge. The superimposition of the origin/trunk of the world and knowledge helps explain the fact that ‘[k]nowledge is considered to form part of the legacy of the ancestors’ (Barnes 2011, 38) that is passed on to their descendants as ‘disembodied words,’ that is to say, words that are not attributed to a specific person (Bovensiepen 2014b, 62). Judith Bovensiepen discusses the de-personalisation of the source of knowledge used by ritual experts in Funar, paying special attention to the fact that knowledge is received by the living descendants of one ‘ancestor’ without going through an appropriation by him. As she writes, ‘authorship and the ability to reveal these words remained anchored in the domain of the ancestors’ (Bovensiepen 2014b 69).

This identification of a time which is simultaneously one of origin in yesteryear and source of knowledge in the present consistsantes Josh Trindade’s argument that the centre of the ‘Lulik Circle’ inhabited by ancestors is ‘a place where the real world and the spiritual world are connected and communicate with each other’ (2008, 175). This connection signifies the existence of a co-presence of the world of the deceased and contemporary lives – a ‘cyclical interdependence of ancestral origins and contemporary living members of the group’ (McWilliam 2007, 1123).

David Hicks’ (2004) reflection on the generative power of ancestors and the co-existence of death and life can be also regarded in a similar perspective, and the same holds true for his argument about the difference between ancestors and dead souls. As he writes, ‘it is ancestors, not the dead soul, who are the sources of life’ (Hicks 2004, 130). This generative force of ancestorship and its contemporary presence can then be associated with the ‘immanence of life’ that has been used to describe the spiritual world in various contexts of Southeast Asia (cf. Fox 1980, 2005). In fact, the immanence of life, as a dimension in which the reality of ancestors and many other spiritualities are projected, is widely acknowledged by ethnographic works on the subject.
carried out in Timor-Leste (cf. Bovensiepen 2014a; McWilliam 2011, Palmer and Kehl 2012; Palmer 2015). O’Connor, Pannell, and Brockwell underline that sacred sites should not be envisaged as cultural archives, but rather as alive and animated realities (2013, 211). Bovensiepen (2014a, 2014b), on her side, has underlined that the debate on Southeast Asia has identified several contexts where one finds this very same immanence of the cosmological, referring specifically the work of Aragon on Tobaku religious practices in Sulawesi:

Tobaku land spirits’ and dead ancestors’ presence in the world is not a transcendent one, since people discern empirical signs of their immanent and interactive existence in the cosmos. For Tobaku, the daily interventions of spirits, deities, and ancestors are explainable and ‘perceptible ontologically “real” events’ (Bovensiepen 2014a, 124).

The immanence of ‘spiritual life’ also means that there is a sensorial dimension in experiences connected to ancestors. Couderc and Sillander recall the approach of Appleton, who identifies forms of sensorial interaction with ancestors in manifestations such as strange noises, arguing that knowledge regarding ancestors is ‘accessed experientially’ and ‘anchored in concrete rather than abstract reference points’ (2012, 38). These authors reiterate that ancestors in Borneo tend to have a strong presence in the immanent world of the living, ‘a presence which to an important extent is represented by sensorially perceived material phenomena’ (Couderc and Sillander 2012, 38–39).

In Timor-Leste, smell plays an important part in framing these sensorial processes connected to the death and the ancestors (cf. Viegas 2019, 68). Elizabeth Traube has stressed that among the Mambae bad odours are an integral part of the mortuary rituals, encompassing quite often the ‘sacrificial buffalo rotting’ (Traube 1986, 207). In the description I heard from several of my interlocutors in Lautem regarding the journeys in search of the remains of a martyr, the identification of the place where a relative has been buried is connected with the appearance of a black or dark blue fly, a grasshopper, or a black bird. In addition, a very strong sign of success in having found the site is a strong smell of rotten flesh, a smell described just like the one experienced during funerary rituals (during which there is the smell of the corpses of sacrificed animals like huge buffalos). In the case of the search for the remains of a corpse buried and lost in the territory, this odour is regarded not only as a sign of the presence of the corpse at that site, but also, and meaningfully, as answering or communicating with the person who called on him (cf. Viegas 2019). When the smell is detected, one knows the ancestor is there to speak.

This relationship between decay, bad odour, and speaking/communication between living and dead ancestor kin is again meaningful in the anthropological literature on Southeast Asia and Oceania. In her extensive work on the wooden funerary statues specifically created by the Malanggan for funerals in New Ireland (Papua New Guinea), Susanne Küchler shows how these statues are ‘left to decompose’, the odour of rotting being the vehicle for the transformation between different types of presences – in this case, she argues, between the visible and the invisible (2002, 74). Odour is a form of communication – smelling is a form of ancestor-talk, a way of speaking, to make co-present dead ancestors and their living kin. It is worth mentioning that descriptions of funerary rituals among the Fataluku in the past become meaningful in light of this connection between the smell and communication between living and dead ancestors. I was told by several of my interlocutors in Lautem that when, perhaps a century ago, corpses were put on the higher levels of inhabited houses for weeks, months, or even years, before being buried, the sign that the moment to bury the corpse had arrived was an intense stench of rotten flesh. People would subsequently associate that smell with a form of communication. The smell of rotting flesh meant, I was told, that ‘our elders were already speaking’ (afi calu hai lubulu). Besides odours, the sensorial communication between the deceased and the living in Timor-Leste assumes other expressions, among the most frequent of which is that of dreams that allow the dead to be heard (cf. McWilliam 2008, 225; 2011, 74; Bovensiepen 2014b, 69; 2014c, 116; Sousa 2010, 201-202; Viegas 2019).

In the context of communication with the ancestors, however, it is not only the registration of dialogue or interaction that matters. One also has to consider the equilibrium, the complementarity, the balance ‘between different and opposing elements’, to quote Josh Trindade (2012, 16). Several authors have emphasised that respect towards ancestors is necessary for such a balance to become real, and it is within such a framework that it makes sense to understand the duty to follow the ancestors’ prescriptions (cf. Babo Soares 2004, 22; Grenfell 2012, 95). As has been widely noted, failure to care for the ancestors and follow their recommendations made through dreams, or to simply remember them and respect their memory by looking after their graves, ‘is believed to incur the wrath or displeasure of the ancestors and might result in some form of misfortune, illness or death’.

7 Küchler is herself influenced by the work by Carlo Valeri who also underlined the fact that in funerary rituals the sense of smell invokes invisible forces (Küchler 2002, 74).
hold guns to their heads. ‘Do you want to kill FAINTIL?’ they would ask. ‘You want us to kill them, yes?’ The questions would go on, repeatedly, the intention being to coerce verbal expressions of agreement. The people would keep quiet, Carlos says, not saying anything for fear of speaking out against the ancestors, of ‘breaking the sacred rules’ of obligation that bind them to one another, to extended kin, to ancestors going back to the beginning of time and to generations of descendants to come. (Stead 2017, 28)

Stead adds that in conversations about this episode various comments were made. Some are similar to several other well-known reported situations, showing that going against the wishes or the rules set by ancestors results in calamities, death, and illness for a whole generation of relatives, ‘not just for those who cause the breach but also for their kin, their children, and their children’s children to come. Whole descent groups can be devastated’ (Stead 2017, 28). This association of disrespect as having effects in a long temporal path should thus be regarded in a context of worldview balances in time. The *longue durée* is what Babo Soares emphasises when he underlines the connection mentioned in the beginning of this section between the concept of origin/roots, or *hun* in Tetum, and the future, or *rohan* in Tetum (2006, 23).

**Martyrs in the context of ancestorship**

When dealing with the emergence of the expression mártires (taken from Portuguese, an official language in Timor-Leste that has offered several terms to Tetum), the experience of Catholicism by the Timorese, both at a religious and a political level, is unavoidable. The theologian and researcher Joel Hodge puts forward an argument stressing that the prolonged experience of suffering during the occupation years made the Catholic Church not only a political partner but also a spiritual supporter capable of addressing the Timorese experience of suffering (2013, 152). As he states, ‘when there was death all around, everywhere and constantly in people’s minds, the Catholic Church was a place to find hope — otherwise there was just death’ (Hodge 2013, 153). Hodge shows how Jesus Christ was himself conceived by the Timorese as ‘the first revolutionary [...] who overcame loss, despair and death’ (Hodge 2013, 159). Peter Carey had already made a similar argument when he wrote:

In much the same way as in nineteenth-century Ireland or Poland, the individual experience of suffering and oppression in East Timor shaped a deep
Beyond the theological aspect of the suffering of Christ on the cross, Hodge bases his analysis on the reference to the solidarity of Church members – monks and nuns, priests, missionaries, and even bishops – who, starting in the early 1980s, took the side of the Timorese in their struggle against Indonesian rule in the point of risking their lives and suffering with the people. In opposition to the Indonesian oppression, the Church 'gave implicit support and encouragement to the local culture' (Hodge 2013, 154). This support suggested a vision of co-habitation of Catholic practices with those that the Church considers to be ‘animist’, amongst which one finds ancestorship (cf. Viegas and Feijó 2017, 209). Hodge goes further and recalls the extraordinary case of processions of Catholic images such as the ‘national tour of the statue of Our Lady (Mary)’ in which ‘even local resistance fighters from the forested mountains became involved’ (2013, 158), which reveal that the resistance struggle assumed a political-social dimension.

In this light, Hodge ends up adopting an expression used by Patrick A. Smythe (2003, 47, quoted in Hodge 2013, 156) to synthesise these actions as ‘the spirituality of resistance’. As I have argued elsewhere (Viegas 2016; Viegas and Feijó 2017) in Timor-Leste history, the balance of power in cohabitation between Catholic practices and those articulated with ancestorship has shifted in different situations, historical periods, and particular locations, sometimes showing a great deal of tension between them (see also Viegas 2018, 2019; Grenfell 2012, 92; Fidalgo Castro 2012). Also, the nexus between the Catholic Church and the Timorese is not the only way to understand the emergence of the category of martyrs. As mentioned in the introduction, Elizabeth Traube has shown that among the Mambai, the sentiments of suffering and nationhood are articulated by a ‘code’ which is structured around a local narrative about a ‘martyred prophet’ (2007, 10). This martyr is known by the name of Felis Marindo, and he is referred to by the Mambai as ‘grandfather, ancestor, old man’, ultimately assuming ‘the name Mau Bere’ (Traube 2007, 10). Traube reports she has found the presence of this narrative to be unavoidable in the conversations she entertained when she returned to Aileu in 2000. She argues that for the Mambai, the story of this ‘prophet who suffered for the people has been interwoven with that of a people who suffered for the nation and gives meaning and force to popular demands upon the new state’ (2007, 10).

Reconnecting the living with the world of ancestors and the place of martyrs in that process is clearly meaningful in the post-independence period. Resurgence of custom in Timor-Leste can be interpreted as ‘part of a process of reaffirming ancestral connections’ (cf. Barnes 2012, 24). Gratitude for the support of the ancestors and the reburial of martyrs can thus be envisaged as two sides of the same process. As Andrew McWilliam observes, in Lautem several ceremonies have been ‘designed as a formal expression of gratitude to the Ma’aste ancestors and as an explicit form of direct communication to the ancestors following a long hiatus’ (2008, 226). As is clear from the discussion I develop in this chapter, the hiatus in communication with the ancestors during the Indonesian occupation did not entail a rupture of their co-presence. Explicit communication was, however, not possible. Lucio Sousa, who has carried out fieldwork among the Bunak, argues that after independence the Bunak had to formally reopen their communication with the ancestors, ritually addressing ‘those who died in conflict and cleans[ing] the living of the (hot) blood transported by war victims’ (2010, 254-255). Sousa argues that these rituals, named asuain kias, could not possibly be performed under the occupation as it would involve remembering the war against the Indonesians’ (2010, 255).

For the Bunak, as well as in many other cases across Timor, people killed during the war become a specific category of dead. If martyrs are all those who died in suffering during the collective struggle for independence, the forms of their deaths may have differed significantly. As various authors have noted, both in Timor-Leste and in other places in the Indonesian archipelago, deaths are not regarded as ‘natural’, even when they derive from illness. Violent deaths, suspicious deaths, sudden deaths – all are designated in various places as ‘red deaths’ or ‘hot deaths’ and are therefore considered to be a special case (cf. Bovensiepen 2014c, 116; Hicks 2004; Gunter 2016; Sousa 2010). Some bad deaths during the occupation resulted from illness or physical exhaustion – many Timorese perished when their hideout in Mount Mataebian fell in 1978, and a lot of people died of starvation. Others occurred due to bullet or machete wounds, or ambushes. The latter require a differentiated ritual treatment, and often they need to be buried in a separate location. Among the Timorese Fataluku speakers, for instance, those who died by
means of a sword-like weapon are designated ula ucanu (a person who was murdered, namely by a firearms) and before burial it is necessary to perform several rituals destined to promote the ‘closure’ of the body. As McWilliam has mentioned, this should be read ‘in the sense of releasing their spirit (humawa) from the pain and suffering they experienced’ (2008, 225), so that they are healed (amukumi) (2017, 68). Lucio Sousa identifies this very same category of dead by ‘sharp instruments (knives, spears, fire arms)’ as ‘hot deaths, specific to war’, which need to be dealt with through differentiated rituals (2010, 212). As Judith Bovensiepen underlines, ‘red death’ implies a long-term effect by ‘polluting future generations and affecting the relatives both of those who have died and those responsible for the death’ (2014C, 116). One of the most contentious issues for the ‘abandoned dead’ during a war period is the difficulty of redressing the absence of ritual treatment.

Janet Gunter has provided us with a reflection based on her analysis of the period of the Japanese occupation of Timor-Leste (1942-1945), when violent deaths occurred on a massive scale. This allows us to open an historical perspective on how the presence of ancestors-martyrs emerged. Gunter underlines the problem felt and expressed by her the Timorese, regarding the fact that during this period the Timorese had not been able to properly bury their dead: ‘the practices of burial were rendered impossible, in many circumstances, by forced labour, by hunger, by orders issued by the Japanese to leave corpses behind and burn them’ (2016, 127). She further argues that the ‘intense terror’ of the Japanese occupation – which resulted in the death of circa 40,000 people (in a population of around 600,000) by starvation and violence – is heightened in the subsequent period by the Timorese, because the colonial regime impeded the living to pay the ‘imperatives of honour due to ancestors, and bury the dead’ (2016, 121). Sources Gunter refers to identify many deaths resulting from attacks with ‘bayonets and swords’, leaving ‘the chest and the belly with multiple perforations’ (2016, 123). Her interlocutors attribute the unfeasibility of performing adequate rituals both to the absence of material resources and to the absence of freedom under the Portuguese re-colonisation that immediately followed the Japanese withdrawal. The inability to perform rituals had long-term consequences; the Timorese today regard the events of that period as factors that generated protracted misfortune. The ‘unquiet spirits’ Gunter refers to are the ancestors whose deaths were never fully respected owing to ‘lack of ceremonies’ (2016, 129).

9 One of my interlocutors referred that it was necessary to ‘stitch up the wound’ with the blood of sacrificial pigs.

Final remarks

The historical window opened in the last section shows the Timorese regret not having been able to grieve appropriately their dead after World War II / Japanese occupation, because of the constrains imposed by the Portuguese colonial regime. This conclusion emphasises the prevalence of homages to martyrs after the independence of Timor-Leste in 2002 – through the provision of proper burials and adequate rituals – as a conquest of the freedom brought about by independence itself. The support provided by the state to such ceremonial burials offers a meaningful contrast with other cases such as Vietnam where, after the war in the sixties and seventies, the revolutionary state developed explicit efforts to ‘battle against what it considered feudal and backward customs’ associated with ancestorship (Kwon 2018, 297). It was in the period of the Indonesian occupation when an identification occurred between the Timorese Resistance and the suffering of Jesus Christ that the notion of martyrdom emerged, and Catholicism became a political ally of the Resistance, as is widely recognized. In Timor-Leste martyrdom is thus a comparatively recent phenomenon, sustained in an interdependence between martyrdom and ancestorship, creating what I suggest to describe through a compound expression of martyr-ancestor.

In Timor Leste the mortuary rituals and ceremonies that have been performed after independence (cf. Viegas and Feijó 2017) show unequivocally that the process of burying and paying homage to martyrs is conceived through the historical relevance of ancestorship. In this sense, the status of the deceased as ‘potent’ agents (Reid and Chambert-Loir 2002) needs to be understood as part of a wider balance, sustained by a cosmological worldview, which inscribes life in a wide temporality where commitments between different generation of still-alive and dead kin are assumed.

References


About the Author

Susana de Matos Viegas is an Anthropologist and Research Fellow at the Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon, where she holds a tenured position. She was President of the Association of Portuguese Anthropology (2006-2009). She has been a member of the Scientific Board of *National Geographic: Portugal* since 2001 and of the scientific editorial board of several journals, including (since June 2013) *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*. She conducted fieldwork with the indigenous people Tupinambá de Olivença in Brazil and among the Fataluku in Timor-Leste. From 2003 to 2009, resulting from both the will of the Tupinambá and a government consultancy, she became the coordinator of the Report for the demarcation of the land of the Tupinambá of Olivença. Her research interests centre on lived experience in the study of personhood, kinship, place and territorial belonging, land, indigenous transformations, and historicity and ancestorship. Her regional focuses are Amerindian Peoples of Lowland South America and, since 2012, the Sunda Islands (Timor-Leste). Among her publications is the monograph *Terra Calada: os Tupinambá na Mata Atlântica* (7 Letras, Almedina/Rio de Janeiro/Coimbra 2007) and *Transformations In Independent Timor-Leste: Dynamics of Social and Cultural Cohabitations* (Routledge 2017), edited with Rui Graça Feijó.