

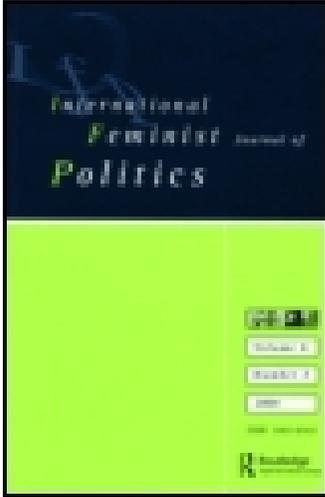
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A Luta Continua (The Struggle Continues)

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A Luta Kontinua (The Struggle Continues)

THE MARGINALIZATION OF EAST TIMORESE WOMEN WITHIN THE VETERANS' VALORIZATION SCHEME

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Abstract

This article examines how East Timorese women's contributions to the resistance against the twenty-four-year Indonesian occupation ("the Resistance") have been marginalized within the veteran's valorization scheme (veterans' scheme) established in the post-conflict period. Drawing on interviews with politicians, veterans and members of women's organizations, we show that although women played significant roles within the Armed, Clandestine and Diplomatic fronts, for the most part they have not been recognized as veterans within the veterans' scheme. Instead, the scheme has reinforced perceptions of women's roles as wives, mothers, homemakers and widows, rather than as political actors, suggesting that the return to "peace" in Timor-Leste has been accompanied by the strengthening of patriarchal traditions and the expectation that women return to "traditional" roles. We argue that the failure to recognize women as veterans is problematic both for East Timorese women and society as a whole. It represents a lost opportunity to recognize women's agency and potentially to improve their social status in society. It also narrows the way in which the independence struggle is remembered and represented and further promotes a culture of "militarized masculinity" that elevates and rewards men who show the capacity to use violence.

Keywords

Timor-Leste, resistance, post-conflict, veterans, women's recognition, militarized masculinity

INTRODUCTION

As women, we are offended and upset that on national days the leaders mention all the heroes' names to honour them, but forget our women leaders who gave their lives to liberate this nation: Maria Tapó, Bi Lear, We-We, Muki, Soimali, Mariazinha, Bi-Doli-Mau and others.

It is now ten years since we have restored our independence but the leaders have forgotten the contribution and values [that women brought to the independence struggle]. Will it be that these women's participation ended with their deaths? Or for those who are still alive, that they will only receive recognition as the wife of a deceased combatant or cadre? If so, this is unfair, particularly when we want to create a complete history of our people. (Secretary General Lourdes Maria A. M. Alves de Araujo, Popular Organization of East Timorese Women (*Organização Popular da Mulher Timorese*/OPMT)¹

It is increasingly recognized that periods of violent conflict are paradoxical for women. To some extent, conflict may open up opportunities for women to break out of narrowly defined gender roles and assume a range of positions in the public sphere that would once have been the exclusive domain of men. Nonetheless, it also has a devastating impact on women's lives. While men are more likely to be killed, women experience higher rates of sexual abuse and, in addition, are often expected to shoulder the burden of looking after families and ensuring food provision (Pankhurst 2003, 158–159). Furthermore, the limited gains toward gender equality during times of conflict may contract in the post-conflict period when, amid the pressures upon political leaders to achieve some semblance of “normality,” and reintegrate large numbers of demobilized soldiers, women are often expected to return to the domestic sphere (Mertus 2003, 555; Pankhurst 2003; Theidon and Phenice 2011, 24). Women remain overwhelmingly excluded from formal peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction processes, and usually receive less support than male fighters within demobilization, demilitarization and reintegration schemes (Pankhurst 2003, 160; Cahn and Ni Aolain 2009; Theidon and Phenice 2011, 25). This further entrenches their disadvantage in the post-conflict era.

Part of the reason why these inequalities persist, as feminist scholars including Sandra Whitworth and Cynthia Enloe have observed, is because periods of conflict tend to give rise to and celebrate a certain kind of “militarized” or “hyper” masculinity (Enloe 2000, 2004; Whitworth 2004; see also Pankhurst 2003, 168–169; Theidon 2009). In the process of “making men into soldiers” (Whitworth 2004, 160), male combatants are socialized into adopting a combination of traits and attitudes including aggressiveness, competitiveness and the creation and dehumanization of the “enemy” (Enloe 2000; Whitworth 2004; Theidon 2009). Rather than fading away with the end of hostilities, this form of “aggressive and frequently misogynist masculinity” (Theidon 2009, 5) may become further entrenched due to policies and practices that privilege the voices of male combatants over other citizens (Enloe 2004, 221–223). As Enloe

(219) observes, a militarized construction of masculinity exacerbates gender inequality in part because it rests upon a particularly constraining vision of femininity: a view that women's proper place is within the domestic rather than public spheres. In other words, a militarized construction of masculinity reinforces a problematic binary construction of "men as combatants and political actors" and women as "naturally" peaceful homemakers and nurturers who require men to act as their protectors (see Charlesworth 2008).

Recent scholarship has demonstrated that many of these observations have resonance in the context of Timor-Leste. While there have been some gains for women in the post-conflict era, evidence suggests that the return to "peace" has been accompanied by the strengthening of patriarchal traditions and expectations that women return to "traditional" roles (Myrntinen 2009, 15; see also Ospina 2006; Charlesworth 2008; Graydon 2009; Niner 2011). These trends are reinforced by a conservative Catholicism that emphasizes "women's roles as wives and mothers: their maternal and sexual purity" (Niner 2011, 420), and cultural mores which celebrate women as "custodians of culture" and "representatives of fertility and reproduction" (Graydon 2009, 406).

While East Timorese women like women elsewhere are not a homogenous group, and are marked by socioeconomic, class, education and rural/urban differences, gender inequality arguably cuts across society as a whole (Graydon 2009, 403). East Timorese women are poorer and less literate than men, experience high rates of fertility and maternal mortality and high levels of income inequality with men (Graydon 2009, 402–403; see also Niner 2011, 422; Charlesworth 2012, 264–265, 274). Women tend not to hold leadership positions within institutions such as the defense force and the police force (Graydon 2009, 399; Myrntinen 2009, 31). Despite being reasonably well represented in parliament and government, female politicians have been relatively ineffective in acting upon gender inequality, in part because they are constrained by and to some extent co-opted into a dominant patriarchal political culture (Graydon 2009, 403; Niner 2011, 427).

Scholars such as Sara Niner (2011, 429) have also observed a culture of entrenched militarized masculinity in post-conflict Timor-Leste, a product in part of the years of conflict when manhood was equated with a "warrior ethos" (Abdullah and Myrntinen 2009, 190). This culture is arguably a factor in the continuing high levels of domestic violence and the emergence of "generations of men who feel that violence is the only tool at their disposal to confront and attempt to resolve problems, whether of a personal social or political nature" (Abdullah and Myrntinen 2009, 186, 200, 188). Timor-Leste's political elite – including the current President and Prime Minister, both of whom are former guerrilla leaders – are deeply invested in this culture. This can be observed in public commemorative events, museums such as the Timorese Resistance Archive and Museum, and the Heroes cemetery, which promote a heroic Resistance narrative and celebrate militarized, male figures and roles. Popular culture is also deeply imbued with symbols of militarized masculinity,

as reflected in the prevalence of highly organized, militant, martial arts groups (Niner 2011, 429) and the worshipping of mostly male heroes (Myrntinen 2009, 17).

Against this backdrop, this article provides a case study of how East Timorese women have been marginalized within one particular post-conflict initiative: the veterans' valorization scheme ("veterans' scheme"). Established to provide symbolic recognition and material benefits to those deemed to be veterans of the 24-year Resistance against Indonesian rule ("the Resistance"), the veterans' scheme has become a core nation-building pillar. As a reflection of its perceived importance to the nation's current political elite, 82.7 million US dollars (6 percent of the state budget) was devoted to veterans' affairs in 2011, mostly for the payment of benefits (RDTL 2011). It is because of the significant role of the veterans' scheme in determining social, political and economic status in present day Timor-Leste that it is so critical to consider its gender dimensions.

Research for this article was conducted in Timor-Leste in 2011, and included interviews with twenty-two politicians, veterans and representatives of women's organizations. Interviewees were selected because of their leading role in the design and administration of the veterans' scheme or their seniority within Resistance structures, and efforts were made to select a mix of individuals who had played armed and unarmed roles during the struggle. Interviews sought to gauge how the veterans' scheme had developed over time – in particular, the extent to which those involved in the initial design of the veterans' commissions felt their outcomes had been achieved – how parliamentary discussions about the scheme had unfolded and individuals' attitudes toward the recognition of women's contribution to the Resistance.²

An analysis of these interview findings along with a close reading of the veterans' legislation and pension statistics³ suggests that although women are to some extent benefiting financially from the veterans' scheme – at the time of research, 38 percent of pension recipients were women – the vast majority of women are receiving a pension on behalf of a deceased male family member rather than in recognition of their own contributions. This suggests that the term "veteran" has been defined narrowly, in ways that do not recognize the critical contributions of women to the Resistance and which reinforce stereotypical perceptions of women's roles as wives, mothers, homemakers and widows. We argue further that although relatively small changes to the veterans scheme would eliminate some of its discriminatory effects, given what is at stake for male veterans in the form of status and monetary benefits, and the reliance by the nation's leaders on the scheme as a measure to "buy" stability, any efforts to this end are likely to encounter significant resistance. Nonetheless, we draw attention to how a failure to adopt a gender-sensitive approach to the veterans' scheme has wider consequences for both East Timorese women and for society as a whole. It represents a lost opportunity to recognize women's agency in the Resistance and, in doing so, opportunity to potentially improve women's social and economic status in

society. Moreover, it constricts the way the independence struggle is remembered and represented and further promotes a culture of militarized masculinity that elevates and rewards men who have the capacity to use violence.

EAST TIMORESE WOMEN AND THE RESISTANCE

East Timor, a Portuguese colony since the sixteenth century, was brutally invaded by its neighbor, Indonesia, on 7 December 1975. The invasion took place nine days after the East Timorese pro-independence party, the Revolutionary Front for an Independent Timor (*Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente*/FRETILIN), declared independence. Formally incorporated into Indonesia as its twenty-seventh province in 1976, East Timor was occupied for twenty-four years before eventually gaining its independence in 2002, after a UN-sponsored referendum in 1999. Throughout the Indonesian occupation, a determined Resistance struggle was waged, supported by large sectors of the population (CAVR 2005, ch. 5). Between 100,000 and 200,000 civilians are believed to have lost their lives during the occupation due to a combination of direct attack, slow starvation and disease (CAVR 2005, ch. 6).

East Timorese women contributed to all aspects of the Resistance (Cristalis and Scott 2005; Ospina 2006). Soon after the Indonesian invasion, FRETILIN established “support bases” in the interior of the island, where the civilian population lived together with and supported FRETILIN’s military wing, FALINTIL (*Forças Armadas de Libertação Nacional de Timor-Leste*). FRETILIN included a women’s wing, the Popular Organization of East Timorese Women (*Organização Popular da Mulher Timorense*/OPMT). Designed as a mass organization of FRETILIN with its roots in the rural villages, the founding Secretary of OPMT was Rosa Bonaparte, among the few East Timorese women with a higher education and who had studied abroad (Cristalis and Scott 2005, 28–29). With the declared aim of liberating Timorese women, OPMT organized women in the support bases to oversee crèches for children orphaned as a result of the war, prepared food and educated communities about the importance of the national independence struggle (Trembath and Grenfell 2007, 56). Women also coordinated the provision of supplies to the front line, managed armories and kept guard against enemy infiltration of the bases. OPMT’s efforts to educate women about their rights and change cultural practices discriminatory to women, such as the payment of *barlake* (bride price), were revolutionary for the time (Niner 2013).

By 1979, following the decimation of support bases by Indonesian military attacks, the majority of civilians, including women, surrendered and returned to villages or were resettled in military-controlled camps. A small number of guerrillas remained in the jungle to continue the armed struggle against Indonesia. Those women who had been mobilized within OPMT continued to participate in the Resistance as members of the “Clandestine” front, a network of civilians based in the villages and towns. Women made up more than 60

percent of the Clandestine front (Cristalis and Scott 2005, 39). They played key roles as couriers, supplying those on the front lines with food and other necessities, seeking out support within the church and local communities for the independence movement and hiding senior members of the Resistance when required.⁴

Women based in the villages, towns and resettlement camps remained at great risk. As the heavily militarized Indonesian state extended its reach to the village level, there was little separation of the “home front” from the “battle front” (Mason 2005, 739). As heads of households with the responsibility for holding families together, women had less mobility than men, and were particularly vulnerable to rape and sexual abuse by the Indonesian security forces. They could also be coerced into long-term sexual relationships with members of the Indonesian military. Those who were involved in or associated with the Resistance were especially targeted, and often became proxy targets for male family members who were fighting in the mountains or who had fled abroad (CAVR 2005, ch. 7; see also Carey 2001, 258–259).⁵

Women who experienced sexual violence or sexual slavery often suffered the additional burden of being ostracized by their families and communities and blamed for breaking tightly held cultural mores that value women’s sexual purity (Harris-Rimmer 2007, 339). For some women, the impact of their past experiences continues to be felt in the form of discriminatory attitudes toward themselves and their children (Kinsella, Pereira, and Wandita 2010), economic hardship, health problems, psychological trauma and loss of marriage opportunities (CAVR 2005, ch. 7.7, para. 25, 320, 327).

The handful of women who remained in the interior with the FALINTIL guerrilla forces after 1979 played important logistical roles: they collected food, cooked, mended clothing, took care of the wounded, acted as guards and managed munitions. When under fire, women guerrillas would prepare supplies for removal in case of retreat, or salvage whatever ammunition, weapons or other supplies they could from the bodies of dead soldiers on both sides. They were also engaged militarily against the Indonesians and took part in raids on Indonesian security posts and exchanges of fire (OPE et al. 2005, episode 7; Alves, Abrantes, and Reis 2003, 25–27; Conway 2010).

East Timorese women also played active roles in the “Diplomatic front” of the Resistance. This front gained increasing importance from the 1990s as then Resistance leader Xanana Gusmão built international support for the independence cause. Women – including those who had helped to found OPMT and younger, educated, urban-based student activists often living in exile – worked with international solidarity and women’s networks to raise awareness about human rights violations and to ensure the outside world did not forget their struggle. In 1998, the Timorese Women’s Organization (*Organização da Mulher Timorense/OMT*) was created to promote the vision of a unified Timorese independence movement. Although there was much overlap between OPMT and OMT membership and activities, OMT was open

to all East Timorese women, regardless of their political affiliation (Cristalis and Scott 2005, 47).

Despite their critical roles, women were not treated as equal partners by their male *camarada* (comrades) and it was men who took the decisions regarding resistance strategy. Women guerrillas were excluded from the FALINTIL command structure (Cristalis and Scott 2005, 31). Viewed as OPMT representatives, they were deemed to hold political, as opposed to military, ranks. This decision was not questioned at the time, given the all-encompassing preoccupations of survival. As former guerrilla fighter Maria da Camara (Biso) explains:

During the guerrilla war we never knew for sure if we were going to live or die, and every single man and woman concentrated on how to survive ... during the guerrilla war everything was limited, including information about equality and women's rights ... At that time we didn't care about these issues and concentrated only on how we would survive if the Indonesians attacked. For this reason women were put in a secondary role with specific tasks. I knew how to organise things and everyone treated me well within the movement. (Niner 2013, 237)

Women were similarly under-represented in the political leadership. Most women involved in the Clandestine and Diplomatic fronts did not hold formal positions within the Resistance hierarchy – those who did were subordinate to male colleagues (Cristalis and Scott 2005, 31). These inequalities continued into the late 1990s.⁶ A concrete example was the “All-inclusive intra-East Timorese dialogue” process convened by the UN Secretary General in 1995. Only one of the thirty people initially nominated to participate in this was a woman (Ospina 2006, 23). Female activists were also disappointed at a 1998 convention when their requests to establish a Women's Department within the independence movement's governing body, the National Council of the Timorese Resistance (CNRT), were ignored (Cristalis and Scott 2005, 54–56; Conway 2010, 102).

The marginalization of East Timorese women within the Resistance leadership speaks to how a militarized construction of masculinity rests on the portrayal of a peaceful, nurturing feminine “other.” It suggests that it may have been necessary for East Timorese men to allow women to take on combat positions during the conflict for the struggle, but it was not perceived as “natural,” nor could women be fully trusted with these “male” roles (see Loney 2012, 267). For example, there was a widely held perception that East Timorese women could not be trusted with sensitive information as they were more susceptible than men to breaking down under interrogation.⁷ There was an additional desire on the part of male leaders to “protect” women from possible harm.⁸ At the same time, the notion of women as inherently peaceful was also manipulated very effectively by Resistance leaders. Women generally had greater freedom of movement than men, as Indonesian security forces believed

they were incapable or too fearful to take on responsibilities within the Resistance (Niner 2009, 49). Women were frequently sent to make contact with people in the villages and towns as they were less conspicuous than the long-haired, male guerrilla fighters.⁹

As we now discuss, the gendered assumptions that excluded women from leadership positions during the resistance struggle have carried over into the post-conflict era, and are reflected in the invisibility of women within the veterans' scheme. We first discuss the evolution of the veterans' scheme, including the marginalization of women within the various commissions established to register veterans, and show how the scheme's growing emphasis on "stability" goals, narrowly defined, has been to the further detriment of women's interests.

THE MARGINALIZATION OF WOMEN WITHIN THE VETERANS' SCHEME

The current veterans' scheme had its beginnings in a series of commissions established by then President and former leader of the Resistance, Xanana Gusmão, in 2002, to identify and register veterans of the Resistance. Prior to this, inadequate and short-term demobilization processes had failed to address the question of what roles former combatants would play in an independent Timor-Leste or how to appropriately recognize veterans' contribution to the independence struggle (Kent 2006, 8). The commissions were intended to avoid the improper use of veteran credentials to obtain political and material benefits, placate disaffected members of the Resistance threatening to rearm and fulfill the constitutional requirement to valorize the Resistance (Rees 2003).¹⁰ A key motivation for political leaders was the need to absorb into civilian life large numbers of former guerrilla fighters to prevent them re-mobilizing and destabilizing a newly formed state.

The first commissions established were tasked with registering veterans of the Armed front. The Commission for the Issues of Former Combatants (*Comissão para os Assuntos dos Antigos Combatentes/CAAC*) and the Commission for the Issues of FALINTIL Veterans (*Comissão para os Assuntos dos Veteranos do FALINTIL/CAVF*) were established in September 2002. These commissions were tasked, respectively, with registering combatants participating in the struggle from 1975 until 1979, and veterans of FALINTIL who fought during the years 1981 to 1999.¹¹ In practice, the two commissions operated as one.

Despite the inclusion of two prominent women veterans within the CAAC-CAVF, only thirteen women registered with the commissions during the initial registration phase out of a total of 36,959. These thirteen names were then omitted from the final list (CAAC-CAVF 2004, 15). At the time, the reason given for these women's exclusion was they had acted only in support roles to FALINTIL and that they held political, not military positions within the Resistance structure. This rankled women who had spent years as an integral part of the Armed front in vital logistics and intelligence collection roles.

Although the final report of the CAAC-CAVF identified the lack of registration of women combatants as an issue, addressing this was not viewed as a priority.¹² An issue that was identified, however (and had been frequently raised during CAAC-CAVF community consultations), was that members of the Clandestine front, in which many women had been involved, had been excluded (Kent 2006, 12). To respond to these concerns, President Gusmão established another commission, the Commission for Matters of Cadres of the Resistance (*Comissão para os Assuntos dos Quadros da Resistência/CAQR*), in 2004, to register cadres who had held formal positions within the civilian ranks of the Resistance. It was far more successful at gaining women's participation than the CAAC-CAVF – indeed, 25 percent of those who registered their names with the CAQR were women (Kent 2006; Huybens et al. 2008). At the completion of the work of the three commissions, a total of 76,061 former members of the Resistance had been registered.¹³ This included 10,337 women (13.5 percent of the total).¹⁴

Following the conclusion of the “registration phase,” the National Parliament established an *ad hoc* commission to develop legislation on “valorizing” the Resistance. A draft law was completed by the end of July 2005, before the CAQR had completed its work. This timing, combined with a lack of coordination between the government, parliament and the CAQR, meant that the commission involving the largest number of women had little impact on veterans' policy formulation (Kent 2006).

The 2006 *Statute of the National Liberation Combatants* defines a “National Liberation Combatant” (NLC) as a Timorese citizen who participated in the independence struggle for more than three years (or less than three years if killed due to their participation in the struggle), and was “part of the structures or organizations of the Resistance.”¹⁵ Benefits for NLCs under the legislation include various forms of symbolic recognition, including medals, the right to funeral honors and presidential decorations.¹⁶ NLCs, their spouses and children also have the right to access state health and education services free of charge, although this is a largely symbolic entitlement as primary health care and education are supposedly free for all Timorese citizens.¹⁷ A later decree law has established scholarships to assist with uniforms, books and tertiary education fees for veterans' children.¹⁸

The valorization process also provides for entitlements to pensions for a select group of veterans. Initially, pension eligibility was based upon “vulnerability” criteria; elderly and disabled veterans and widows, orphans, elderly parents or tortured siblings of deceased veterans were priority recipients.¹⁹ However, later revisions to the law (which were due in large part to political pressure from powerful veterans, aided by newly flowing oil revenues), raised pension amounts and shifted the beneficiary emphasis. The initial legislative attempt to limit financial benefits to vulnerable groups has given way to a scheme in which length of service and rank within the Resistance hierarchy are key factors in determining pension amounts. A combatant's years of service are considered to be the sum of all periods of deportation, detention

and work in “exclusive dedication” to the Resistance (“exclusive dedication” meaning that individuals were not engaged in study or regular waged labor).

Not surprisingly, verifying who is a legitimate veteran for the purpose of the scheme has in practice proven to be fraught, complex and politically charged. Complaints of exaggeration or under-recognition of years served are common and in some cases, disputes over pension payments have given rise to violent incidents (Guterres 2011; ICG 2011; Belun and CICR 2013). The requirement for “exclusive dedication” also makes it extremely difficult for members of the Clandestine front to gain access to pensions, as clandestine activities were often only possible by concealing one’s activities behind study or work, or using one’s position within the Indonesian government, police or military to pass on intelligence to the Resistance. This has led to tensions between the Clandestine and Armed fronts; in particular *clandestinos* have protested the unfairness of a scheme that has seen a disproportionate amount of benefits flowing to former guerrillas who were dependent upon clandestine network support for their survival. It has also excluded the majority of women who, as previously discussed, primarily registered for the civilian veterans’ commission and did not hold specific ranks within Resistance structures. Former guerrilla members’ influence within the military, their close relationship with their former commander Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão and their ability to mobilize former combatants to oppose the government (as occurred during the police–military conflict of 2006/2007), has given added weight to the voice of the Armed front during debates on veterans’ issues.

The growing focus on pensions and the rising financial amounts at stake indicate that the veterans’ scheme has become a vehicle through which the Timor-Leste government has sought to “buy” political stability. This emphasis has become even more pronounced since the 2006/2007 “crisis,” as the government has sought to use the veterans’ scheme as a means of placating those who could become potential threats to the state (UNHCHR 2006). That both the government and major opposition party have used the veterans’ scheme to curry favor with a powerful voting constituency has also made it increasingly difficult to rein in pension amounts.²⁰ In 2009, pension amounts were increased, representing between a 5 to 225 percent increase of the original 2008 levels. In 2010, 23.1 million US dollars (3 percent of the state budget) was allocated to veterans’ affairs, most of that for the payment of benefits (RDTL 2010). As noted earlier, by 2011, this amount had risen to 82.7 million US dollars, or 6 percent of the 2011 state budget (RDTL 2011), and is likely to rise further in coming years.²¹ By way of comparison, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry for Education and Culture received 3 and 5 percent respectively of the 2011 state budget. The large proportion of the budget allocated to veterans’ payments and the increasing reliance on the scheme by the government to meet narrowly defined stability goals makes it likely that any attempts to expand beneficiary categories to include more women (who, needless to say, are not viewed as a security threat), will encounter significant resistance.

At this point in time, therefore, the primary beneficiaries of the veterans' scheme appear to be men who can claim to have been high-ranking and/or long-serving combatants. In addition to pensions and recognition of their past roles, these men are being rewarded with significant respect and power. Veterans' views carry weight in parliamentary debates, election campaigns and within local politics. Those who can claim veteran status are able to invoke this as a "trump card" to claim the authority and legitimacy to speak as an "authentic" East Timorese. Veterans are also benefiting financially through the preferential allocation of government contracts (ICG 2012, 14), and continue to play a variety of informal security roles, such as intelligence gathering and personal protection (ICG 2012, 12). All of this suggests that the veterans' scheme is bolstering the power and influence of a militarized male constituency, an issue which, as we argue below, is problematic not only for East Timorese women but for the society as a whole.

GENDERED ASSUMPTIONS: THE RESISTANCE AS A "MALE" STRUGGLE

Behind the marginalization of women within the veterans' scheme is the assumption that the Resistance was an overwhelmingly male struggle. A prevailing view held by prominent Resistance figures is that given men were the primary participants in the Armed front, a program to valorize veterans will necessarily include a higher proportion of men than women.²² This argument perpetuates the gender-stereotypical assumption about the roles of East Timorese men and women during the conflict, including the view that East Timorese women were primarily confined to the "home front" while men waged war. In doing so, it also ignores the ways in which the Resistance effectively operated by overlooking the extent to which it relied upon the integral support of women for those on the front lines (Loney 2012, 268).

Reflecting these assumptions, the narrow definition of "veteran" contained in the scheme valorizes certain kinds of contribution – such as bearing arms against the enemy – while eclipsing the critical contributions of women who played roles as logisticians, couriers, cooks, nurses, *clandestinos* and as international activists. A reliance on tallying up the years of "exclusive dedication" to the struggle and a person's formal position within the Resistance hierarchy in determining access to decorations and pensions further excludes women and perpetuates the gendered barriers that made it difficult for women to hold formal positions in the first place. While this definition also excludes men who made non-armed contributions to the Resistance, women are particularly affected because they are far less likely than men to have held formal positions within the Resistance hierarchy and to be able to prove their period of service.

Specific provisions in the veterans' scheme further discriminate against women. For example, the scheme contains a provision that precludes the spouses of deceased veterans from receiving a pension if they have remar-

ried.²³ This provision reflects an underlying assumption that women should have been “loyal” wives awaiting the return of their men from the battlefield. It also suggests that women are not viewed as independent persons but as the property and responsibility of their husbands.²⁴ During the parliamentary debate on the 2006 NLC Statute, female parliamentarians, some of whom were also OPMT and OMT members, raised a motion to amend the law in order to allow widows of Resistance members to be entitled to pensions regardless of whether they had remarried or not.²⁵ They argued that in many cases these women were left vulnerable to abuse by the Indonesian security forces and their militia after their husband disappeared, died or fled to the jungle. Remarriage was often the only way they could avoid this abuse. The motion was defeated as former male commanders, with the support of a number of female parliamentarians who were widows of FALINTIL, argued that these women should have been loyal to the memory of their deceased husbands and demonstrated the same strength as other women who had not remarried.²⁶ The outcome of this debate reinforces the point made earlier that although women are reasonably well represented within Timor-Leste’s parliament and government, this in itself is no guarantee of achieving gender equality (see Graydon 2009, 399, 403). In addition to constraining women’s agency, a dominant patriarchal political culture can socialize women, like men, into adopting positions that discriminate against women.

That the veterans’ scheme overlooks women who suffered sexual violence, including sexual slavery, as a result of their work for, or connections with, the Resistance, highlights further gender biases. Although the veterans’ scheme is not intended as a reparations program for victims of human rights violations during the conflict, it does purport to support NLCs and their immediate family who were left vulnerable as a result of their contribution to the Resistance. Factors such as an individual’s age, disability and their experiences of detention and torture are therefore taken into account within the scheme. The fact that the issue of sexual violence never entered into Parliamentary discussions of the veterans’ legislation points to the “culture of silence” that continues to surround this issue in the conservative Catholic society (CAVR 2005, ch. 7.7). The reluctance to consider this issue is also linked, perhaps, to the widespread perception that women who experienced sexual violence, in particular sexual slavery, are not deserving of pensions because they “chose” to enter relationships with the Indonesian military to secure access to an easier life.²⁷ To acknowledge that sexual violence was committed against East Timorese women also challenges the construction of men as the “protectors” of women and, in so doing, undermines the heroic, masculine Resistance narrative.

Another aspect of the veterans’ legislation that discriminates against women is its neglect of second wives. Many male FALINTIL fighters took on second wives, often referred to as *feen ailaran* (bush wives), while remaining legally married to their first wives. Under the NLC legislation, the survival pension must be equally divided among heirs with equal claims, such as the veterans’

two parents or his/her children. This does not apply to spouses in practice. In the event that multiple wives come forward to present their claim to a survival pension, only the legally married spouse is entitled. This ignores the reality that former Resistance fighters had multiple relationships and children with women who they subsequently abandoned. It serves to reinforce the gendered stereotype that these “bush wives” were women of low morals and not legitimate wives as they had been “living it rough” with male FALINTIL fighters in the bush.²⁸ It also plays into other stereotypical beliefs about East Timorese women, that unless they were loyal and virtuous wives, they must have been dangerous sexual forces that could lead men astray (Mason 2005, 746). When policymakers, including former OMT leaders, were asked about the issue of “bush wives” as part of this study, they explained that it was up to the woman to negotiate with the legal wife on sharing the pension. This unsympathetic stance quite possibly also reflects the fact that “bush wives” tend to be rural women of lower class and educational status than first wives from urban settings.²⁹ A “bush wife” who seeks to claim veterans’ benefits is therefore dependent upon the largesse of a woman and family with which she has no links, and therefore no leverage.

This is not to suggest that the veterans’ scheme has not had some benefits for some women. As previously mentioned, at the time of fieldwork for this study, 38 percent of those in receipt of a veterans’ pension were women.³⁰ However, of these women, 97.5 percent were receiving the survival pension, which means they were not receiving a pension in recognition of their own contribution, but that of a family member.³¹ The underlying gendered assumptions about women’s roles during the conflict are not being challenged. Nonetheless, that a significant percentage of pension recipients are women suggests that in theory the scheme has had some empowering possibilities for those who were widowed during the war. Specifically, that widows are being provided with an income independent of their deceased husband’s families may help to protect them from the exploitative family relationships that can arise out of the economic dependency on family.³² However, this income has not been without problems. The families of some deceased NLCs have made physical threats against widows and in some cases, widows pay a proportion of their pensions to their in-laws to avoid conflict.³³ Given the tenuous position widows occupy in society, particularly those without the support of extended families, more research is needed to gauge the extent to which women are truly benefiting from the survival pension.

TOWARD A MORE INCLUSIVE VETERANS’ SCHEME?

An initial reading of the veterans’ scheme and legislation suggests that greater recognition of women’s contributions to the Resistance could be accomplished relatively easily. Possibilities could include amending the legislation to allow second wives to claim a part of their former husband’s pension and allowing remarried spouses to claim the pension. There is also scope within the existing

veterans' legislation to award the title of National Liberation Combatant (NLC) to women who provided logistical support, medical services or intelligence to FALINTIL or the clandestine networks for a minimum of three years. It would also be relatively easy and affordable to award women the honorific title of "Supporter of the National Liberation Struggle" if they do not have the necessary years to qualify as an NLC but provided valuable support to the Resistance. A special award could be created to recognize *women's* roles within the Resistance, as was done for young people who were involved in the Santa Cruz demonstration of 1991.³⁴

Of course, these deceptively simple changes rely on a significant reconfiguration of prevailing constructions of male and female roles. Little is likely to be accomplished without the active involvement of women's NGOs and female parliamentarians. None of the male former Resistance figures interviewed for this study saw it as their role to advance the interests of their female *camarada* (comrades) and, at the time of writing, women's NGOs had been noticeably absent from any debates surrounding veterans' policy and legislation. While as previously discussed, members of OPMT were involved in designing the veterans' scheme and some have attempted to intervene in parliamentary debates, they have had limited success in promoting women's interests.³⁵ Given the powerful nature of the veterans' lobby, it might be fruitful for women's NGOs to instigate a strategic partnership with female parliamentarians, OPMT and OMT to enable women to exert more influence over veterans' policy. Insisting on women's representation from the Clandestine, Armed and Diplomatic fronts within the proposed Consultative Council of NLCs could be the first challenge of this partnership.

Women's organizations are, however, engaged in other efforts to remedy the lack of recognition of women's roles during the conflict. For instance, in 2010 OPMT began a nationwide program to document women's involvement in the Resistance. The project builds upon the existing documentation efforts of NGOs and government, and aims to produce two books and a film which will be used to celebrate women's roles in the Resistance and educate younger generations.³⁶ Systematic, in-depth research into women and the Resistance will form a good basis for lobbying for future recognition of women's contributions and educating East Timorese society more generally.

While these initiatives are important, more is needed to advance gender equality beyond advocating for women's recognition as veterans. Indeed, such a narrowly focused strategy may do little to transform Timor-Leste's culture of entrenched militarized masculinity, in which as previously discussed, the current political elite is deeply implicated. Leaving Timor-Leste's militarized dynamics unchallenged, we argue, has implications not only for women but for the inclusiveness of the democratization processes more generally. As Cynthia Enloe (2004, 222) warns:

It matters for the long-term inclusiveness of the democratizing process who is listened to . . . , who is presumed to have the 'credentials' to speak, who is deemed to

possess the pertinent experience, the relevant skills, the most acute stake to make their words worthy of attention when so many are vying for attention . . . *insofar* as it is masculinized combatants who are presumed by their influential civilian listeners to have things to say that . . . must be addressed publicly, the immediate post-conflict political process will be on the road to remilitarization without a warning shot being fired.

While broadening the current veterans' process to encompass women's contributions to the Resistance will go some way toward promoting gender equality, it is not sufficient. The creation of other, less militarized narratives is urgently needed. As Enloe's work highlights, this will require long-term advocacy for a "demilitarized society in which neither military needs nor masculinized presumptions determine historical memories, current job opportunities, or long-term public status" (2004, 213).

As a starting point, organizations working to promote gender equality in Timor-Leste might seek to reflect on how the diversity and complexity of conflict-related experiences could be better represented within official and unofficial projects to document, commemorate and recognize the past. One avenue might entail encouraging locally grounded social history and remembrance projects that highlight ordinary people's everyday stories of survival and not only the feats and accomplishments of a few male combatants. The development of diverse and more inclusive narratives of the conflict might in turn help to foster alternative and less violent conceptions of masculinity grounded in Timor-Leste's own history and culture, and enable the recognition of women not only as wives, mothers and grieving widows, but as political actors.

CONCLUSION

The dominance of male Resistance leaders in formulating the veterans' scheme, the perceived imperative to reintegrate former Resistance fighters into civilian life and pervasive gendered assumptions about women's roles during the conflict has resulted in a veterans' scheme that does not do justice to women's unique contributions to the Resistance. This has significant consequences not only for East Timorese women but for the society as a whole. It means that the economic benefits that flow from the veterans' scheme are being accrued mainly by men. Second, given that social status in Timor-Leste is inexorably tied to an ability to establish one's credentials within the Resistance, women are missing out on the respect that is accorded to veterans and the social capital that accrues from this. In this sense, the veterans' scheme represents a missed opportunity to promote women's agency and strength, and to help improve their social status. Third, the elevation of the role of armed men is further entrenching the culture of militarized masculinity that is prevalent in Timor-Leste today by privileging the voices of former male combatants above others. Finally, the representation and remembrance of the conflict as an

armed (and predominantly male) struggle against the Indonesian occupiers represents a missed opportunity to create a national narrative that is inclusive of the diverse and complex experiences of men, women and young people. To do justice to these experiences, and to work toward gender equality, long-term and creative efforts are required both within and beyond the veterans' scheme.

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Notes

- 1 Speech of the OPMT Secretary General, Lourdes Maria A. M. Alves de Araujo at a fundraising event for the OPMT documentation project, 6 August 2010.
- 2 All interviews were conducted in 2011 by Naomi Kinsella and Natalia de Jesus Cesaltino using a semi-structured interview format. Most interviews were conducted in Tetun (the lingua franca of Timor-Leste). Transcripts were provided to all interviewees. Three people approached declined to be interviewed: one senior male politician and two women parliamentarians. The two women parliamentarians (who were also veterans) explained that they had already been interviewed by other researchers about this topic and yet to be provided with the results of the research. They were therefore reluctant to be interviewed again. The fact that a foreign woman was one of the researchers may have influenced the male politician's decision to decline to be interviewed. This may have also influenced how other interviewees responded to questions.
- 3 Statistics on pension recipients as of 2009 were obtained from the office of the Secretary of State for the Issues of Ex-combatants of National Liberation.
- 4 Interview with Andre da Costa Abel (nom de guerre L4), 26 March 2011; interview with Elisa dos Santos, 25 March 2011.
- 5 While the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (CAVR) found that some men were also the victims of sexual violence, such as those who experienced sexual torture in detention, it concluded that the vast majority of victims were women (CAVR 2005: ch. 7).
- 6 Interview with Lourdes Maria A. M. Alves de Araujo, Secretary General of OPMT, 5 April 2011. See also Office for Promotion of Equality et al. 2005, episode 5.

- 7 Interview with International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) Timor-Leste Program Coordinator, Manuela Pereira, 13 April 2011. In addition, one former woman clandestine leader explained how she supported her husband's activities by concealing letters in her undergarments or within the house. More detailed information, such as the contents of letters or identities of Resistance contacts who visited their house, was concealed from her in a desire to protect her, and the clandestine network itself. Interview 20 April 2011.
- 8 Interview with ICTJ Timor-Leste Program Coordinator, Manuela Pereira, 13 April 2011.
- 9 Interview with Andre da Costa Abel (nom de guerre L4), 26 March 2011.
- 10 See Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, Articles 3 and 4.
- 11 Presidential Dispatch on the Commissions, 01/2003 of 3 April 2003.
- 12 Widows of "fallen or massacred husbands" were, however, identified as a top priority for receiving material assistance through a future veterans' pension scheme, along with orphans, the elderly and otherwise vulnerable former combatants (CAAC-CAVF 2004).
- 13 Two different technical commissions were created in 2004 and 2006 respectively to verify the previous commissions' data and consolidate it into a single database. See Gusmão (2004, 2006).
- 14 Statistics from the Secretary of State for National Liberation Combatant Affairs, March 2011.
- 15 Law 3/2006 as amended by Law 9/2009 of 29 July 2009, Article 4.
- 16 Law 3/2006 as amended by Law 9/2009 of 29 July 2009, Article 23 (1), 31–32.
- 17 Law 3/2006 as amended by Law 9/2009 of 29 July 2009, Article 23 (2).
- 18 Decree Law 8/2009 of 15 January 2008. In 2010 and 2011, a total of 250 scholarships were available to a total amount of USD152,250 and USD169,900 respectively.
- 19 See Law 3/2006 prior to its amendment in English. Available at <http://www.unmit.org/legal/RDTL-Law/RDTL-Laws/Law-2006-03.pdf> (accessed June 10, 2012).
- 20 For example, in January 2008, when the government attempted to reduce pension amounts due to budgetary constraints, the opposition party accused the government of "insulting veterans" and the proposed reductions were never made. See Timor-Post (2008).
- 21 This is even more likely given that none of the 121,000 applications lodged as part of a second registration phase have been verified, and that pension payments are retroactive to 2008. See Timor Post (2009).
- 22 Interviews with: Secretary of State for National Liberation Combatant Affairs, Marito Reis, 21 March 2008; Parliamentarian Cornelio Gama (nom de guerre L7), 12 April 2011; Parliamentarian Faustino dos Santos (nom de guerre Renan Selak), 13 April 2011; Parliamentarian and head of the parliamentary committee on veterans' affairs, Osorio Florindo C. Costa, 28 March 2011; Vice-President of Parliament, Maria Paixão, 30 May 2011.
- 23 Although the provision is not gender-specific, women are disproportionately affected given that most women are able to access a veterans' pension due to their deceased husbands.

- 24 We are grateful to the comments of an anonymous reviewer for this insight.
- 25 Initially the right to a survival pension was limited to widows. In 2009 this was amended to include widowers as well.
- 26 Interview with Vice-President of the Parliament, Maria Paixão, 30 May 2011; interview with Parliamentarian Maria Maia dos Reis, 28 May 2011.
- 27 Discussions with East Timorese human rights activists, 7 April 2011.
- 28 Interview with Lourdes Maria A. M. Alves de Araujo, Secretary General of OPMT, 5 April 2011; interview with Maria Paixão, Vice President of the Parliament and OPMT member, 20 March 2011. Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão's second wife is a high-profile example of how the veterans' Statute applies to "bush wives." Gusmão was legally married to Emilia Baptista prior to the war. After he became separated from her, he lived with another woman who subsequently suffered prolonged torture and detention due to her relationship with the former Resistance leader. As this woman is not legally married to Gusmão, she has no right to a pension under the veterans' scheme.
- 29 We are grateful to the comments of an anonymous reviewer for this insight.
- 30 Statistics obtained from the Secretary of State for National Liberation Combatant Affairs, March 2011.
- 31 Statistics from the Secretary of State for National Liberation Combatant Affairs, March 2011. This is most likely to be a male family member given that only 13.5 percent of those who registered as NLCs during the first registration phase were women.
- 32 This income may be particularly significant in areas where wealth is traditionally inherited through male family members and where widows can be excluded from her husband's land and assets by his family. In these areas, the survival pension may in practice be providing women with a form of inheritance rights. See NGO's Working Group (2009).
- 33 In Maliana, a woman was almost stabbed by her husband's family when she went to collect her first pension payment from the bank. Belun, a local NGO monitoring local-level conflict, has recorded a similar incident of conflict between a widow and her husband's family.
- 34 See Law 3/2006 as amended by Law 9/2009 of 29 July 2009, Article 33.
- 35 One notable exception was the successful attempt to advocate for honorary military decorations, including "The Order of the Guerilla," to be bestowed upon women who were stationed with FALINTIL in the jungle. Although the women maintain political, rather than military, titles, that this award recognizes them as part of the Armed front is significant. See Presidential Decree 56/2006 of 5 December 2006. There has been resistance to this initiative from former FALINTIL Commander and current Timorese President Taur Matan Ruak, who complained that women "who just sat there" have been provided with the same level of symbolic recognition as men who directed military strategy. Interview, 21 March 2011.
- 36 Interview with Lourdes Maria A. M. Alves de Araujo, Secretary General of OPMT, 5 April 2011; interview with Nuno Rodrigues, researcher on the documentation project, 6 April 2011.

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