



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

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# Introduction: Memory, Truth, and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste, Indonesia, and Melanesia

DAVID WEBSTER

*Everything will be crushed / Everything will be broken / Everything will become dusty / New buds will appear, flourishing the flat land / We will pray / We will sing the songs of ancestors / We will tebe / We will bidu / Circling the stones of the sacred house / A big mat will be spread out / We all will sit down / Our hearts will be soft / Our heads will be cool / Telling the truth / Recounting the wrong doings / The happiness of love will appear / The beauty of peace will be green / Flourish and flourish / Flourish everlastingly*

—Abé Barreto Soares, “Flourish Everlastingly”<sup>1</sup>

## *Circles, Stones, Songs*

In Suai, a town in the southwestern corner of Timor-Leste (East Timor<sup>2</sup>), there is a circle of stones. Built by local people, it stands near the church where, in 1999, members of the pro-Indonesia Laksaur militia massacred as many as two hundred people with grenades, guns, and machetes.<sup>3</sup>

The killings at Our Lady of the Rosary Church are one of the many threads that tie Canada to Timor-Leste. Among the dead was the parish priest, Father Hilario Madeira. He had spent time in Canada, twinning his parish with one in Windsor, Ontario. “The blood of martyrs is the seed-bed of the church,” his Canadian counterpart, Father Jim Roche, told me after Father Hilario’s death. “But it’s not supposed to happen to people you know. It’s supposed to happen to those nameless people over there.”<sup>4</sup>

There are two monuments to the Suai church massacre, just as there are memorials—both official and popular—scattered over the country. Cenotaph-like, one of the Suai monuments inscribes the names of the dead in marble. The other stands nearer the church, on the site where the bodies of the dead were brought to be burned by men wanting to erase not only their victims’ lives, but the truth of their killing. This circle of stones is unpolished, but on each one, local people have carved the name of a loved one lost in 1999.<sup>5</sup> The stones sing out their lives and the truth of what happened there.

On this site, too, local people remember the truth of the Suai church massacre. One such example, a re-enactment scripted by Timorese human rights advocate Filomena dos Reis, is recounted in the documentary film “Circle of Stones.” The documentary, made in English for international viewers, was possible only because local women invited Australian filmmaker Jen Hughes into their circle.<sup>6</sup> It connects local communities and international audiences. That is the aim of this book, also.

Like a community reconciliation ceremony, *Flowers in the Wall* tries to circle the truth. It circles around truth commission reports, around truth and reconciliation processes fighting to be born, around the struggles of people trying to turn truth commission reports into “living documents”<sup>7</sup> that can shape national futures. When truth and reconciliation is seen as an event, not as an ongoing process, its roots are shallow.

This is not a traditional academic book grouping discrete chapters on discrete topics. Instead, we aim to present an integrated narrative about



1.1: Popular monument to victims of mass killings outside the local Catholic church, Liquiça, Timor-Leste. Photo: David Webster.

recent truth and reconciliation processes in a part of the world sprawling from Sumatra to Solomon Islands, from the islands of Southeast Asia into the islands of the Melanesian Pacific. The authors include scholars and human rights practitioners, engaged academics, and informed advocates whose conversations and comparisons spawned this collection. We see the hope embodied in truth commissions and in reconciliation processes in post-conflict societies. We see links between the disparate experiences of different places: the way gender concerns came to take a more central place in Timor-Leste and Solomon Islands truth commissions; the efforts to embody Indigenous traditions in truth-seeking processes; the vital role of civil society; the importance of seeing truth-seeking as a process that goes before and comes after truth commissions. We also see the barriers to true reconciliation. When calls to seek truth are denied, conflicts persist. When truth commission reports are not followed up, their impact is weakened.

“You have already consumed me,” writes Mama Yosepha Alomang, a famous Papuan advocate of Indigenous rights, in chapter 16. She is referring to the predatory impulses of global mining companies in her homeland, but could just as well be describing global governments, whose role in local conflicts cannot be overlooked. International economics and politics are crucial to understanding local conflicts.

What follows are thoughts in a conversation about truth and reconciliation across different places in which the authors are taking part. They are also notes and stanzas in a song that we are trying to perform together. The chapters in this book do not try to stand alone, but rather contribute to a single story about several places.

One of those sites of memory is the Comarca, a former prison and torture facility in Dili, the Timorese capital. Today visitors can enter the “dark cells” that once held prisoners of conscience and tour an exhibit that fills much of the old prison and which chronicles the human rights history of Timor-Leste and the work of the Timorese truth commission, known by its acronym CAVR. The Comarca housed the truth commission’s offices and is still home to a follow-up institution dedicated to carrying on the memory and work of truth and reconciliation. Above its entrance are carved the words: “CAVR has shown that flowers can grow in a prison.”

The title of this collection draws from that image, as well as from the pieces of creative writing that open three of its chapters. Indonesian poet Wiji Thukul’s metaphor of flowers growing until they crack the wall of tyranny leads off chapter 10. They evoke both Canadian poet Leonard Cohen’s image of a crack in everything to let the light shine in (which opens chapter 4), and the words of Timorese poet Abé Barreto Soares, noted above, about new buds flowering in a blasted land. The flowers stand for individuals who strive for peace, for reconciliation, for remembering, for truth. Walls and wastelands look permanent, but humble flowers can make the wall crumble or the wasteland bloom: for flowers, too, are perennial.

### *Memory, Truth, Reconciliation*

Truth and reconciliation commissions are an increasingly common tool for addressing the aftermath of conflicts in the global South. Eight formed in the 1980s; twelve in the 1990s; and at least nineteen in the first decade of the twenty-first century.<sup>8</sup> Truth commissions, in other words, are not going



1.2: Sign welcoming visitors to the *Chega!* exhibit at the former Comarca prison facility, Balide, Dili, Timor-Leste. Photo: David Webster.

away. In fact, they have spread from post-conflict zones in the global South (especially Latin America and Africa) to developed countries, most notably Canada and Germany. Appearing as a “restorative justice” alternative to the “retributive justice” model of criminal prosecutions of human rights violators, they answer a clear need in many societies.<sup>9</sup> And they are said to offer the bonus of building reconciliation between communities previously in conflict—most famously, in post-apartheid South Africa, where the country was to be healed by a truth and reconciliation commission. As chapter 2 explains, scholars have offered a mixed verdict on the South African experience of reconciliation and the model of truth commissions it bequeathed. Nevertheless, the increasing use of truth and reconciliation commissions around the world demonstrates that the tool meets the perceived needs of multiple societies.

This book surveys the truth and reconciliation experience in a part of the world that has drawn less attention in the “transitional justice” literature: the islands of Southeast Asia and the Melanesian region of the Southwest Pacific. It does so with a focus on three countries: Timor-Leste, Indonesia (including both national and local spaces), and Solomon Islands. Indonesia and Timor-Leste are part of Southeast Asia, but this region shades eastwards into Melanesia, which includes the Indonesian-ruled land of Papua.

Timor-Leste was occupied by the Indonesian army for twenty-four years (1975–99) before regaining its independence. Under military rule, more than a hundred thousand civilians died from war-induced famine and slaughter—a death toll approaching the levels of the Cambodian genocide, which also started in 1975. After the Timorese won their freedom, they formed a truth and reconciliation commission with two goals: to reconcile divided communities after a long-running conflict, and to reconcile the new country with its own tumultuous past by crafting a narrative that for the first time would tell the truth through Timorese testimony rather than outside research about what had happened between 1975 and 1999. The Commission on Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (CAVR) is considered to be one of the more substantive truth commissions to date.<sup>10</sup> The findings of its five-volume report, entitled *Chega!* (Portuguese for “no more” or “enough”), were confirmed by a subsequent joint Timorese-Indonesian Commission on Truth and Friendship.<sup>11</sup>

Truth commissions in Timor-Leste are examples of a preference for “restorative” over “retributive” justice. In the aftermath of a brutal military occupation, the Timorese government’s desire for cordial relations with a post-dictatorship Indonesia combined with a lack of will in the international community to lead to the choice of a truth commission rather than a criminal tribunal like those established for Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia, and, in a far more limited fashion, Cambodia and Sierra Leone. Compassion was selective, and neither the Timorese government nor other governments heeded calls for a tribunal. Although the truth commission was a necessity, it also sought to be a virtue. Beyond the work of victim support, it aimed to tell the first national history grounded in Timorese testimony. The result was an agreed national narrative of what had happened under near-genocidal conditions and thus a “usable past” for independent Timor-Leste.<sup>12</sup>

Indonesia has itself experienced a succession of mass violence throughout its history, starting under Dutch colonial rule and continuing periodically since the proclamation of an independent Republic of Indonesia in 1945. The most severe violence came as the army, under General Suharto, seized power from the country's first president, Sukarno, in 1965–66.<sup>13</sup> Encouraged and directed by military leaders, mass violence claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. Where Sukarno had promoted a brand of left-wing nationalism, Suharto's "New Order" clamped down on dissent and promoted a form of crony capitalism. The New Order imposed an official version of history that blamed the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) for the "1965 events," as they were euphemistically dubbed. Only since the fall of Suharto in 1998 has it become possible to discuss and debate the 1965 events, though to date the truth remains contested.

Indonesia has long struggled to define itself as a united nation, and the arrival of democratic government after Suharto's fall has done nothing to change this. It spans hundreds of islands and as many ethnic groups, with the nationalist slogan "from Sabang to Merauke" defining the westernmost and easternmost points of the national territory. It also highlights the tentative nature of the Indonesian state's borders. Merauke is in Papua, home to an independence movement that predates Indonesian annexation. Sabang is located in Aceh, a province considered to be the most strongly Islamic in Indonesia.

In 1976, the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, or GAM) declared the province's independence, sparking decades of guerrilla warfare with the Indonesian National Army. The armed conflict ended only in 2005 with a pact between GAM and the Indonesian government that in effect permitted the group's leaders to take power in provincial elections while keeping Aceh within the Indonesian national fold. Former rivals henceforth shared power in a more open Indonesia. But the conflict left scars, as all conflicts do, in the form of lives lost and in a legacy of human rights troubles. Talk of a truth commission to follow the peace process stalled for years, though it never vanished entirely. In 2016, the Aceh provincial government finally created its own truth commission, with a plan to leave the commission's doors open permanently.

Meanwhile, regional conflicts flared in many other parts of Indonesia. Often described as "ethnic conflicts," they also showed the scars of repression under the New Order and the revived aspirations for local control.



Some of the most enduring violence centred on the island of Sulawesi, today one of the front lines in the global “war on terror.” Yet coverage of these conflicts has tended to overlook their local and historical roots. Different regional conflicts have been met with different efforts at peace and reconciliation between divided communities.

Indonesia’s post-Suharto government consented to a referendum on Timorese independence, but all subsequent governments have otherwise clung to the idea of national unity. In particular, they have stridently resisted calls for a referendum, or even dialogue, in Tanah Papua (the land of Papua).<sup>14</sup> Papua came under Indonesian rule in 1963 and it remains the site of a struggle between an independence movement and Indonesian rule. A major line of division is identity: while Indonesia claims to be a multi-ethnic state, Papuan nationalists have long asserted a Melanesian identity, one they contrast with the Indonesia’s “Asian” identity. One of the major Papuan demands to emerge is for *pelurusan sejarah*, a setting straight of the historical record. This can be likened to a call for a truth and reconciliation process, as it does not focus on the political future, but rather on how two sides in a conflict address the past, and to what extent historical injustices can be righted in an effort to reach peaceful future outcomes. In other words, Papuans seek truth. The Indonesian government has tried to resolve this ongoing conflict with a “special autonomy” package that granted considerable local self-government, along with the promise of a truth commission that has so far gone unfulfilled due to objections from the still-influential Indonesian army. History is a battlefield.

Papuan nationalists’ embrace of a Melanesian ethnic identity links Papua to the final area covered in this volume: Solomon Islands.

Solomon Islands became independent from Britain in 1978. The country experienced mass internal violence from 1998 to 2004. When the violence ended, a Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission was formed with three national and two international members. Inspired directly by South Africa’s famous TRC, the commission could point to successes but not to a lasting legacy. Its impressive report was at first not released to the public for fear that it would enflame rather than cool tensions. This has now changed, but unlike Timor-Leste, Solomon Islands lacks a follow-up institution to continue the commission’s work and preserve its archival and institutional memory.

In sum, the cases here run the gamut from a relatively strong commission (Timor-Leste's CAVR) through commissions whose actions are dictated by politics (the joint Indonesian-Timorese CTF, Solomon Islands TRC, and now Aceh's TRC) to areas still awaiting truth processes as the prerequisite for reconciliation (Papua and much of Indonesia).

The truth commission model, developed for the global South, has begun to be implemented in the developed world, most prominently in Canada. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, which has looked into residential schools for Indigenous peoples, opened with an event that featured senior members of truth commissions from the global South (including Timor-Leste) sharing potential lessons.<sup>15</sup> This book suggests that there are mutually beneficial lessons to be learned from truth and reconciliation experiences in Timor-Leste, Indonesia, Melanesia, and Canada, and that these cases offer lessons for truth and reconciliation processes in other contexts.

### *History, Narratives, Phases*

Truth and reconciliation processes have implications for conflict resolution.<sup>16</sup> This book aims to create, synthesize, and share knowledge about issues of conflict resolution in which the conflicts are partly driven by clashing historical narratives. When each side in a conflict disagrees on what happened in the past, it is not easy to engage in dialogue about ways of moving forward. We also address truth-seeking efforts in the wake of conflict.

Several chapters analyze and interrogate officially-crafted narratives and efforts from non-governmental voices to put forward counter-narratives. For reconciliation to take place, official narratives must make space for alternative tellings. Truth commissions can embody what Priscilla Hayner calls "official truth-seeking,"<sup>17</sup> but they can also offer a platform for alternative stories about the past to emerge, and for unofficial memory to penetrate through cracks in the official story. Onur Bakiner argues that in some cases truth commissions are more valuable for their "indirect" effect on civil society than for their ability to directly convince governments to implement their recommendations.<sup>18</sup> The chapters in this book underline that conclusion by highlighting the vital role of civil society and considering truth and reconciliation as a process rather than simply an

institutional exercise in which a commission forms, researches the past, aids victims and survivors, and produces a final list of recommendations. Bottom-up aspects are as important to truth and reconciliation *processes* as the top-down workings of a truth commission.

It is important to underline, as several chapters in this volume do, that this requires seeing women's experiences, women's roles, and women's participation more clearly. Conflict and human rights violations are gendered, and truth and reconciliation processes must acknowledge this if they are to be effective.

The best truth commission reports are not simply history texts but road maps towards greater respect for human rights, and it is groups and advocates outside government who are sometimes best equipped to follow that road map. In the words of Murray Sinclair, chief commissioner of the Canadian TRC: "As commissioners, we have described for you a mountain. We have shown you the path to the top. We call upon you to do the climbing."<sup>19</sup> In response, Canadian ecumenical justice coalition KAIROS produced an educational resource booklet entitled *Strength for Climbing: Steps on the Journey of Reconciliation*.<sup>20</sup> This is the sort of responsive partnership work that has been carried out for some time by others in Canadian and international civil society. The Pacific Peoples' Partnership, based in Victoria, British Columbia, has a long record of helping to build ties between First Nations communities on Vancouver Island and Indigenous Papuan communities. The Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace did extensive work in Indonesian-occupied East Timor on strengthening civil society.

Civil society's role in truth and reconciliation is vital. It falls to non-governmental groups to disseminate truth commission reports, to bring them to wider audiences, and even to do much of the work of implementing their recommendations. Indonesian and Timorese activists call this "socialization" (to translate into somewhat awkward English the Indonesian-language term *sosialisasi* and the Tetun-language derivative *sosialisasaun*). Civil-society groups may be the key agents in bringing about change—both in terms of pushing to implement change after a truth commission delivers its report, and in trying to create truth and reconciliation processes where they do not, yet, exist. Commissions are often preceded by a popular struggle for justice in the face of past wrongs, a theme seen in Papuan campaigns to "set history straight." They are as often followed by a

popular struggle to see justice done, not just in the words of a commission report, but in society's deeds in the aftermath of that report.

This conclusion implies also that there are phases in truth and reconciliation processes: a “before” and an “after” that are as important as the truth commission itself. In her research on wars, political scientist Cynthia Enloe has argued that we should see war not simply as an event bounded by start and end dates, but as a process with “pre” and “postwar” phases.<sup>21</sup> This framework can be applied to truth and reconciliation commissions, too. Truth commissions are a valuable tool, but they often lack follow-up mechanisms to implement their recommendations. The existing literature looks in detail at the operational phases of truth commissions. It is now starting to pay more attention to the campaigns to establish truth processes, to efforts to implement truth commission recommendations, and to the role of activists and civil-society organizations in creating the context for truth commissions and pushing for follow-up action.

### *Origins, Scope, Methodology*

This book's origins lie in a workshop held at the University of Ottawa in October 2015 on Memory, Truth and Reconciliation in Southeast Asia.<sup>22</sup> The workshop aimed to share research and experience between academics, Canadian advocates of human rights in Southeast Asia, and people directly involved in the cases described below. The mix of academic and advocacy perspectives lies at the heart of this book's approach. Some authors write in an academic voice; others write from their wealth of experience as advocates; and many authors combine these two approaches. Every effort has been made to maintain the voice of contributors, including the orality of some texts. It is important also to note that chapters inform one another, with themes running like threads through them.

Starting with research questions about truth and reconciliation processes in Indonesia and Timor-Leste, we followed the story to include Melanesian cases as well, both from Indonesian-ruled Papua and from the independent Solomon Islands. As a result, this book includes coverage of all truth commissions to date held in Southeast Asia (Timor-Leste and a joint Indonesia–Timor-Leste commission) and the Southwest Pacific (the Solomon Islands TRC). It also explores, quite deliberately, cases in which the promises of a truth commission did not materialize. This is the case

in Indonesia with respect to the mass killings that took place in the aftermath of the 1965 military coup, and in Indonesian-governed Papua. The lack to date of truth commissions does not mean there will never be a truth-seeking process. Indonesian-ruled Aceh is moving, after considerable delay, to create a process. What might future truth commissions look like? Some authors consider this question for locales that have not (yet) had a commission.

Methodologically, our focus on “socialization” is an attempt to implement current methods among researchers rooted in Indonesian civil society. The attention it pays to campaigns to “rectify” the past is inspired by historical approaches that emphasize a “usable past” but attempt to shift the agency in this quest from state to civil-society actors. This project highlights two less-studied aspects of truth commissions. First is the ways in which truth commissions seek to define and disseminate an agreed-upon “truth” about past events and to deploy that truth in ways that will serve the present.<sup>23</sup> Second is the focus in many commission reports on follow-up aspects that relate to memory and memorialization. We aim to incorporate a more historical note into the existing literature on truth commissions while also highlighting the way stories told by truth commissions are framed as authoritative truths and, driven by witness and victim testimony, as an emerging form of historical narrative creation.

## *Outline of Chapters*

Truth commissions have often been studied through the lens of the most famous commission, South Africa’s TRC, which was formed after the end of apartheid in 1994. In this and other scholarly accounts, truth commissions are often found at best to be partially successful, and at worst fatally flawed. Sarah Zwierzchowski’s chapter provides an overview of the academic literature on truth commissions, noting their basis in Western positivist notions about truth and the way they are often yoked to government aims. This is increasingly seen as a weakness. “What will you do with our stories?” some Solomon Islanders asked. They want to explore outcomes beyond the simple completion of a government report.<sup>24</sup> We argue that one of the goals of civil-society organizations concerned with truth and reconciliation is to see that these stories are used—that is, heard and acted upon, not filed away or treated simply as evidence for a report.

Following the introductory essays, this book is organized into five sections that cover five geographic areas (Timor-Leste; Indonesia's national memory of the 1965 killings; Indonesian regional conflicts; Tanah Papua, a Melanesian space ruled by Indonesia; and, further into the Melanesian Pacific, Solomon Islands). A closing section connects these truth and reconciliation processes to Canada and looks for lessons that might be applicable to the wider study of truth and reconciliation.

Timor-Leste's significant truth commission makes it the logical starting point. Denied any prospect of a tribunal along the lines of those established in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, or even a mixed tribunal like the one set up in Cambodia, Timor-Leste hosted an impressive Commission on Truth, Reception, and Reconciliation, and followed it up with a joint Indonesia–Timor-Leste Commission on Truth and Friendship.

Neither commission was divorced from Timorese history. Geoffrey Robinson's historical overview opens the Timor-Leste section by examining "repertoires of violence" from the twentieth century that carry on influencing the independent Timor-Leste of the twenty-first. After Indonesian rule came to an end in 1999, there were high hopes that the "cycle of impunity" would be broken and perpetrators of mass violence held accountable through international legal processes. These hopes were dashed as neither the post-independence Timorese government nor the international community pushed to have justice done. As processes like the UN-mandated Serious Crimes Unit faltered, the CAVR emerged as the closest thing to an avenue for accountability. Robinson is both a leading scholar of these topics and a human rights researcher whose extensive report on the violence he witnessed as part of the UN mission in East Timor in 1999 forms volume 5 of the *Chega!* report.

Pat Walsh, a senior adviser to the CAVR with a history in Timor advocacy going back decades, picks up the story with a close focus on the commission itself. It was, he stresses, a Timorese institution driven by Timorese voices, not an attempt to impose a cookie-cutter version of truth commissions. Walsh debunks suggestions that the commission was imposed by the United Nations or based on outside models by painting it as very much a local creation. It was intended as a forward-looking road map with lessons on human rights and recommendations on accountability, not simply as a new official version of Timorese history. A decade after its completion, the report still has much to offer. As Walsh points out, the

recent decision by the Timor-Leste government to establish an institute of memory, the Centro Nacional *Chega!* (*Chega!* National Centre), to implement many of the recommendations made by both the CAVR and the CTF, will give both commissions a new lease of life. The impact of this initiative, however, may depend most of all on current debates over historical memory and historical justice in Indonesia, the former occupying power.

The fate of Timorese truth-seeking processes will also depend on Timorese politics and economics. Most Timorese political leaders are former guerrillas or clandestine youth activists—a legacy that still shapes Timorese politics. This theme is examined by Jacqueline Aquino Siapno, a scholar who has worked in Timor-Leste, Australia, Europe, and North America. She traces the legacy of a violent occupation into “post-conflict” independent Timor-Leste, revealing the ways in which former independence activists continue to use clandestinity as both method and identity. This has shaped the independent Timor-Leste state in multiple ways. Timor-Leste today grapples with its past, with notions of truth, and with the desire for reconciliation in ways that are shaped by the experiences of clandestine activism in the days before freedom, and also by the often colonialist approaches of the international governments and individuals who have exerted an influence over the country since independence. Siapno’s analysis draws on her own years as an academic and activist in Timor-Leste and on the experiences of her late husband, the leader of a major political party and the former speaker of the Timor-Leste parliament.

Timor-Leste also joined the international community as one of Asia’s poorest countries. This economic legacy informs reconciliation processes. Mica Barreto Soares, a Timorese academic and former officer with the UN Development Programme in Timor-Leste, offers an overview of the successes and challenges of development in a country that combines oil wealth with widespread poverty. Timor-Leste has its own development plan, but it cannot escape global development strategies. Barreto Soares discusses the country’s positioning between the liberal state-building approach championed by the United States and other Western donors and the emerging challenge of Chinese aid models that stress “non-interference” but also imply outside influence on Timor-Leste’s future direction. Memory and continued calls for reconciliation and justice intertwine with development. It is not simply a case of “goodbye conflict, hello development,” as banners in

Dili occasionally proclaim. Rather, development must address the wounds of the past if it is to move forward.

The final three chapters on Timor-Leste are more personal in tone but they, too, draw out thematic threads. Along with the Philippines, Timor-Leste is one of two majority-Catholic countries in Asia. Religion clearly informs reconciliation, all the more so given the historic role of the Timorese Catholic Church. Jess Agustin draws on his own solidarity work in Canada and Timor-Leste as an officer with the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace to describe the role of the Timorese church during the independence struggle. He points to a tension between its role as bastion of the Portuguese colonial state and its alliance with popular movements during the Indonesian occupation. Both approaches to the church's role shape its attitude towards the independent Timor-Leste state, towards Timorese civil society, and towards reconciliation—itsself a Christian concept in many ways. Building a culture of peace, he concludes, remains a key need today, and that requires healing.

In thinking about religion, Agustin's meditation is also a reflection on the key role played by civil society. This theme shines through the testimony of two Timorese women that closes this section. While most political leaders and parliamentarians avoided calls to implement the CAVR report's recommendations, Fernanda Borges, during her time as a member of parliament, sought to place the report's findings at the centre of the policies of the independent Timor-Leste. Her chapter reproduces in edited form a speech she delivered on Human Rights Day in 2010, a powerful statement of the case for a victim-centred approach to reconciliation even after the *Chega!* report's completion.

This section's concluding testimony comes from Maria Manuela Leong Pereira, director of ACbit, (*Asosiasaun Chega! Ba Ita*, or "*Chega!* for Us Association"). If the calls for a victim-centred approach continue today, they originate mostly from outside government—from human rights organizations and other groups located in Timorese civil society. In an interview conducted for this book, she speaks about ACbit's socialization efforts and insists that the report is not over, but rather that *Chega!* remains a "living document" belonging to all of the Timorese people.

In sum, the Timor-Leste section links the inheritance of a violent past and a shared struggle for recognition of Timorese identity and Timorese freedom to a contested present in which truth and reconciliation processes



intersect with the contemporary challenges of effective governance, economic development, and popular participation. Timor-Leste was not a blank slate when it regained independence in 2002: memories of the past shape the present and the future of the country.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the publication of a truth commission report did not end the truth and reconciliation process. Indeed, it continues today.

The next section moves the story to Indonesia. The country has faced truth and reconciliation challenges on both the national and local levels, with increasing demands for an accounting over the “events” of 1965–66 in which hundreds of thousands of people were killed in a violent military takeover of the country that brought General Suharto to power. Unresolved tensions from 1965 led to a promise, by a post-dictatorship elected government, to create a historical truth commission, but that promise was abandoned soon afterwards.

This section opens with history. Advocate, researcher, and Jesuit priest Baskara Wardaya provides an overview of the 1965 events before moving to his main topic, the way the mass violence and repression of 1965 have been remembered by the state and by victims and their families. The Suharto regime developed an all-encompassing narrative that blamed violence on the PKI, which was alleged to have masterminded a coup attempt. The “impenetrable wall” of this official narrative could not be challenged during the three decades of Suharto’s New Order. Since the fall of Suharto, victims and human rights groups have tried a number of creative ways to break silences and offer different tellings of 1965, all in an attempt to make cracks in the wall of state-imposed official “truths.”

The 1965 events are not just an Indonesian story: they are an international story as well. Bernd Schaefer also touches on narratives of 1965, but from an international perspective. The state narrative rests on an alleged collusion between the PKI and the People’s Republic of China, which implies that Chinese records would be valuable as part of a multi-archival truth-seeking effort into what happened in 1965, and what role was played by global actors, including the United States, other Western countries, the Soviet Union, and China. Schaefer’s chapter closes with a road map for what an Indonesian truth commission into 1965 might address, and how international records could inform its truth-seeking efforts. There is no immediate prospect of Indonesia’s government holding a truth-seeking process into the mass killings of the 1960s. Still, truth and reconciliation

processes inform debates about 1965, and Schaefer's thoughts on the shape of a possible commission draw on these global conversations as well as on the Indonesian civil-society voices described in Wardaya's account.

This section closes, again, with personal testimony—this time from the letters and diary of Gatot Lestario, an Indonesian political prisoner arrested after the 1965 coup and executed twenty years later. His letters shed light on the experience of the *tapol* (*tahanan politik*, or political prisoner) in Suharto's New Order. His words are reproduced from letters on file at TAPOL, the Indonesia Human Rights Campaign, in London. They were provided, along with a translation of parts of the prisoner's diary, by TAPOL founder Carmel Budiardjo, herself a political prisoner (1965–71) during the New Order.

Indonesian debates about truth and reconciliation do not take place only at the centre, nor are they concerned only with the past. They are also present throughout the archipelago, especially in conflict-ridden areas. We take a close look at a truth process in formation in Aceh and a failed reconciliation effort in Central Sulawesi.

Aceh was promised a truth commission in the peace settlement that ended three decades of warfare in the province. As with the 1965 events, government promises of truth-seeking in Aceh were not transformed into action. In this section's opening chapter, Australian researcher Lia Kent and Acehnese researcher Rizki Affiat explore a new model being tried in Aceh: a truth and reconciliation commission mandated by the provincial government, with the stated intention of being permanent. The authors explore this way of "gambling with truth," assessing the potential benefits and and pitfalls of the Acehnese approach.

Diverse Indonesia has seen the emergence of twenty-first-century tensions between different groups in several regions, and consequent efforts to build reconciliation processes for more recent conflicts. Are these simply "ethnic" or "religious" conflicts, as most accounts argue? Arianto Sangadji, a former human rights campaigner on Eastern Indonesia's island of Sulawesi and now a Canada-based scholar, argues that the prevailing interpretation has it wrong by way of a close analysis of the class-based roots of conflict in Poso, in Central Sulawesi province. Government-led reconciliation efforts there have failed because they saw the local conflict as one based in religious splits between Christians and Muslims; because they ignored class elements; because they took a top-down approach rather

than one based in grassroots civil-society leadership; and because they treated the Indonesian state as a neutral arbiter rather than as one of the parties to a complex, multi-level conflict.

Perhaps the most intractable and troublesome challenge to Indonesian unity is the conflict, ongoing since the 1960s, on the western half of the island of New Guinea—now defined by the Indonesian government as the provinces of Papua and West Papua, but treated by local Papuan nationalists as a single territory that is still seeking its right to self-determination. The conflict in Tanah Papua, subject of the next section, may also be one of the most serious human rights challenges in today's Indonesia. Anthropologically, as Papuan nationalists always point out, Papua, inhabited by people with darker skin and curlier hair than the Malayo-Polynesian people of most of Indonesia, is part of Melanesia. Whether this claim is accepted or disputed, it underpins a sense of Papuan identity that continues to feed a widespread movement for Papuan independence.

The Papua section again moves from history to recent context to testimony, ending with a reflection on the role of the key outside actor, the United States. NGO worker Todd Biderman and researcher Jenny Munro offer a close description of current human rights troubles in Papua and the challenges those troubles put in the path of reconciliation. In an echo of the failure in Sulawesi, they see current "reconciliation" processes conducted by Indonesian state agents as missing important aspects of local agency. Is reconciliation possible when the truth is so disputed, and the Indonesian government's truth is seen as "non-truth" by so many Papuans? Based on a close involvement with Papuan partners over many years, Biderman and Munro consider what a Papuan truth and reconciliation process might look like, and what lessons flow from Papuan centring of the natural environment for global truth and reconciliation processes.

Julian Smyth asks related questions in her examination of the role of music and song in Papuan resistance struggles. In an oral tradition, Papuan identity is expressed through word and song, which become at once both "living symbol" and "participative practice." Indigenous traditions and lived experiences are at the centre of Smyth's account of song and identity, and she illustrates the troubles inherent in any effort to resolve the conflict through the dominant security and development approaches.

Like other conflicts, this one is both local and international. Former US diplomat Edmund McWilliams, who now coordinates the West Papua

Advocacy Team, takes aim at US policy as the key lever in creating a genuine reconciliation process in Papua. He analyzes the current human rights situation and the “compromises with the truth” that run through annual US government human rights reports on Indonesia. While post-Suharto Indonesia is relatively democratic, the New Order mentality seems to live on in Papua, where human rights violations are widespread. Many of these violations can, in part, be laid at the feet of the American business interests exploiting Papuan natural resources. This has led successive US governments to back the continued military occupation of Papua, rather than promote a stable, democratic, and demilitarized Indonesia with full respect for human rights. Reconciliation requires the Indonesian army to leave Papua and allow free dialogue.

The next section moves further into Melanesia, with two accounts of the experience of the only Melanesian country to hold a truth commission: Solomon Islands. This was a mixed national-international commission, struck after an internal conflict within the country. A pair of chapters on the Solomon Islands experience comes from two participants, one offering a historical account and the other describing how gender entered the commission’s deliberations.

At the time of the conflict, Canadian Anglican Terry Brown was the bishop of Malaita, a diocese of the Church of Melanesia. His chapter recounts the history of this conflict and the truth and reconciliation process that followed after a ceasefire agreement was finally reached. The commission’s report was secret until Brown published it online himself in order to ensure that its results were available to the public. His chapter tells this story and assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the Solomon Islands TRC final report, the silence from government and media that followed its release, and the value that still lies in the commission’s powerful final report.

Betty Lina Gigisi worked as one of the gender officers on the Solomon Islands TRC, and her chapter recounts her own experience in attempting to have women’s rights and women’s status included in politics. She briefly describes the work done and the form of the commission and argues that to be effective, truth commissions must include a gender perspective.

The book’s closing section attempts to connect truth and reconciliation processes in Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific to similar processes in Canada. Maggie Helwig, an Anglican priest with many years of

solidarity work behind her, draws connections to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, which completed its work in 2015. Canada's TRC focused on "Indian residential schools" and issued a broader set of calls to action that together amount to a plea for a renewed relationship between Indigenous peoples and Canadians descended from settlers. Canada's TRC did not exist in isolation; rather, it was embedded in global truth and reconciliation processes as well as in the painful legacy of residential schools. Helwig highlights the Canadian TRC's focus on systems of oppression rather than individuals and its efforts to "socialize" a counter-narrative about Canadian history before considering what lessons it might offer for truth commissions and processes in other countries.

The conclusion, finally, aims to draw together the various threads that make up the book, to contribute to the literature on truth and reconciliation commissions and transitional justice, and to inform current policy debates on how governments and societies can, and should, face the violence and conflict in their own past.

## Notes

- 1 Abé Barreto Soares, "Flourish Everlastingly," *Dadolin* (blog), 1 October 2008, <http://dadolin.blogspot.ca/2008/10/poetical-expression-1.html> (accessed 10 February 2017). Tebe is a Timorese dance, usually performed by men and women holding hands in a circle; Bidu is another traditional Timorese dance, usually performed by men.
- 2 The official name, the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, was determined at independence. Timor-Leste is Portuguese for "East Timor." The two names are used interchangeably in this book.
- 3 See "The Suai Church Massacre," *Chega! The Final Report of the Timor-Leste Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation*, <http://www.laohamutuk.org/Justice/99/bere/CAVRSuaiChurch.pdf> (accessed 10 February 2017).
- 4 Father Jim Roche cited in David Webster, "East Timorese: Destroy Their Religion, Destroy Their Identity," *Catholic New Times* (Toronto), 3 October 1999.
- 5 Lia Kent, *The Dynamics of Transitional Justice in East Timor* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 176.
- 6 *The Circle of Stones*, directed by Jen Hughes and Filomena dos Reis, 2001, <https://archive.org/details/TheCircleOfStones> (accessed 10 February 2017). See also *Suai Media Space*, 20 November 2008, <http://www.suaimediaspace.org/2008/11/20/the-circle-of-stones-uploaded-at-last/> (accessed 10 February 2017).
- 7 The concept of a "living document" is borrowed from Manuela Leong's contribution to this book.

- 8 Priscilla B. Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths: Facing the Challenge of Truth Commissions* (New York: Routledge, 2010). See also Greg Grandin, “The Instruction of Great Catastrophe: Truth Commissions, National History, and State Formation in Argentina, Chile, and Guatemala,” *The American Historical Review* 110, no. 1 (2005): 46–67; Joanna R. Quinn, *The Politics of Acknowledgement: Truth Commissions in Uganda and Haiti* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011).
- 9 Kent, *Dynamics of Transitional Justice*; John Roosa, “How Does a Truth Commission Find Out What the Truth Is? The Case of East Timor’s CAVR,” *Pacific Affairs* 80, no. 4 (2008): 569–80; David Cohen, *Indifference and Accountability: The United Nations and the Politics of International Justice in East Timor* (Honolulu: East-West Center Special Reports Number 9, June 2006). See also Elizabeth F. Drexler, “Fatal Knowledges: The Social and Political Legacies of Collaboration and Betrayal in Timor-Leste,” *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 7, no. 1 (2013): 74–94; Lia Kent “Local Memory Practices in East Timor: Disrupting Transitional Justice Narratives,” *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 5, no. 3 (2011): 434–55; and Johannes Langer, “Including and excluding civil society in the truth commission of Timor Leste,” *Perspectivas Internacionales* 11, no. 1 (2015): 89–114.
- 10 See Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*.
- 11 *Chega! The Final Report of the Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation Timor-Leste*. The occupation of Timor-Leste is chronicled, among other sources, in António Barbedo de Magalhães, *Timor Leste : ocupação Indonésia e genocídio* (Porto : Universidade do Porto, 1992); Carmel Budiardjo and Liem Soei Liong, *The War Against East Timor* (London: Zed Books, 1984); James Dunn, *East Timor: A Rough Passage to Independence* (Australia: Longueville, 2004); Clinton Fernandes, *The Independence of East Timor: Multidimensional Perspectives—Occupation, Resistance and International Political Activism* (Eastbourne, East Sussex: Sussex Academic Press, 2011); Jill Jolliffe, *East Timor: Nationalism and Colonialism* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1978); Jose Ramos-Horta, *Funu: The Unfinished Saga of East Timor* (Boston: Red Sea Press, 1987); Geoffrey Robinson, *If You Leave Us Here, We Will Die: How Genocide Was Stopped in East Timor* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010); and Awet Tewelde Weldemichael, *Third World Colonialism and Strategies of Liberation: Eritrea and East Timor Compared* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
- 12 Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); David Webster, “History, Nation and Narrative in East Timor’s Truth Commission Report,” *Pacific Affairs* 80, no. 4 (2008): 581–91. On the evolution of Timorese nationalism, see Michael Leach, *Nation-Building and National Identity in Timor-Leste* (London: Routledge, 2017).
- 13 The modern spelling system for Indonesian and Malaysian is being used here, thus Sukarno and Suharto rather than Soekarno and Soeharto. Like many Indonesians, both Sukarno and Suharto use only one name.
- 14 Tanah Papua (the Land of Papua) in this book refers to the territory that was officially called Netherlands New Guinea before 1962, West New Guinea in 1962–63, the Indonesian province of West Irian (later Irian Jaya) until 2000, and the Indonesian province of Papua after 2000. It also includes the new province of West Papua, split from Papua province in 2003 (originally under the name West Irian Jaya). Contributors

- use the terms *Tanah Papua*, *Papua*, or *West Papua* interchangeably except where stated otherwise. On Papuan history under Indonesian rule, see, among other sources, Carmel Budiardjo and Liem Soei Liong, *West Papua: The Obliteration of a People* (London: Tapol, 1988); Danilyn Rutherford, *Laughing at Leviathan: Sovereignty and Audience in West Papua* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); and S. Eben Kirksey, *Freedom in Entangled Worlds* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).
- 15 This was recalled, for instance, by TRC Canada Commissioner Murray Sinclair, in his Woodrow Lloyd lecture at the University of Regina, 24 February 2016.
  - 16 See, for instance, International Center for Transitional Justice, “Challenging The Conventional: Can Truth Commissions Strengthen Peace Processes?” Multimedia website, March 2016, <https://www.ictj.org/challenging-conventional-truth-commissions-peace/index.html> (accessed 10 February 2017).
  - 17 Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, 8.
  - 18 Onur Bakiner, *Truth Commissions: Memory, Power and Legitimacy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).
  - 19 Cited in Dan Lett, “A Mountain Waiting to be Climbed,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 3 June 2015, <http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/a-mountain-waiting-to-be-climbed-305943201.html> (accessed 10 February 2017).
  - 20 KAIROS Canada, *Strength for Climbing: Steps on the Journey of Reconciliation* (Toronto: KAIROS Canada and Mennonite Church Canada, 2015), [http://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/KAIROS\\_StrengthForClimbing.pdf](http://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/KAIROS_StrengthForClimbing.pdf) (accessed 10 February 2017).
  - 21 Cynthia Enloe, *Nimo’s War, Emma’s War: Making Feminist Sense of the Iraq War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).
  - 22 Workshop materials are available online on the project web site, <https://memorytruthreconciliation.wordpress.com/> (accessed 10 February 2017).
  - 23 Greg Grandin, “Chronicles of a Guatemalan Genocide Foretold: Violence, Trauma, and the Limits of Historical Inquiry,” *Nepantla* 1, no. 2 (2000): 391–412.
  - 24 Louise Vella, “‘What Will You Do with Our Stories?’ Truth and Reconciliation in the Solomon Islands,” *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 8, no. 1 (2014): 91–103.
  - 25 See Douglas Kammen, *Three Centuries of Conflict in East Timor* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015).