
Passing Through Walls: The transfiguration and circulation of graffiti from East Timor

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Abstract

This paper outlines an assemblage of ideas developing a broader understanding of graffiti from East Timor.

Addressing concerns of the center and the periphery, theory and practice as encountered in the study of graffiti in East Timor, the paper draws from James C Scott's concept of hidden transcripts to illustrate the nuanced notions of identity and resistance in the country's graffiti and the unique interface of its existence located across both the public and private sphere.

In this way, graffiti in East Timor demonstrates, both in the face of and in the life led beyond domination, an aesthetic nexus of resistance and recuperation where the "open interaction" and the "offstage" interaction of its sites portray the contest of its post-colonial and post-conflict context.

The author's practice-led research is included in the paper to illustrate how graffiti has spawned creative, cross-cultural collaborations that have passed through and beyond the country's walls, demonstrating characteristic features of alternative modernities; transfiguration and circulation.

*Capturing the resonance of research developed through the author's publication, *Peace of Wall: Street Art from East Timor and Animatism*, a collective of artists and curators from Australia, East Timor and Indonesia, founded by the author, is an approach to the topic of center and the periphery, theory and practice, indebted to Henri Lefebvre's theory of Rhythmanalysis. Here, Rhythmanalysis presents a conceptual blueprint to mediate the author's own temporal and spatial displacement in the act of writing about a 12 year time frame.*

A methodological approach behind the paper's form is drawn from intertextuality. This concept scaffolds the author's recognition of writing about graffiti as part of a larger creative practice where the subject matter determines the form of presenting knowledge. Theoretical motifs from graffiti and street art are presented through this paper's form; an appropriation of reference points.

What is presented, then, is what N. Katherine Hayles posits is 'Work as Assemblage', "a cluster of related texts that quote, comment upon, amplify, and remediate one another" (Hayles, 2003, p 278).

Keywords: Graffiti, street art, post conflict, hidden transcripts, East Timor, alternative modernities

Introduction

In the month of June 2001, I lived in the district of Ainaro, a central highlands district of East Timor.

My days unfolded between a seminary, the dilapidated classrooms of the local school further up the mountain and the village's lower market area.

In this daily movement through the town, I would encounter an electrical box. Wedged upright between a rock and its former anchor, a pole, its presence was a curious reminder of context. Resilient yet wrecked, rust consumed the flaked paint consummating its decay. Scuffs and physical outpourings were chiseled, punched and inscribed into it. Amongst these marks, the sharp, rudimentary scratch of a nail stated the following:

Indonesia are Crazy and Stupid.

Mark-making, American art critic and author Carlo McCormick suggests, is “an attribute of man, innate in our being and quite probably organically connected to the genesis of our consciousness. That is, our compulsion to make our marks defines us and is at once idiomatic of culture and inherent in all cultures” (McCormick, 2012).

The manic, marked rhythms of the past merging with the present upon the country's surfaces are suggestive of palimpsests, “seismographic acts of recording the emotion contained in a particular gesture” (Chmielewska, 2008, p 11).

This was East Timor's graffiti.

Described by Former President of East Timor and Nobel Peace Laureate, Dr Jose Ramos-Horta, in his introduction to *Peace of Wall: Street Art from East Timor*, as the “ordinary and extraordinary work of sharing hopes, frustrations, triumphs, allegiances, joys, loves and hates... an act of therapeutic expression for young people, a release and a vehicle that enables the voiceless to be heard,” (Parkinson, 2010, p 5) East Timor's graffiti peers from a history replete with layers of domination.



Fig 1. Audian, Dili, East Timor, June 2007. Image: Chris Parkinson.¹

Four hundred years of Portuguese colonialism, occupation by Japanese forces during World War II, reinstated Portuguese rule post World War II and the wreckage of a brutal 24-year Indonesian occupation from 1975, that ended in 1999 with a comprehensive scorched earth policy and the reduction of East Timor to rubble, bequeathed a complex history of violence and resistance upon the country.

An enduring profusion of violence paired with practices of promiscuous hegemony deepened an opposing national consciousness that tethered itself to “unifying discourses of blood, soil and shared suffering” (Philpott, 2006, p 136) but also to the clandestine, where a culture of resistance that manifest itself in the shadows of domination took root through the Catholic Church, language, poetry, ritual, literature and a dedicated network of student activists.

Poetry in particular, as a means of promulgating an anti-colonial and resistance transcript, “engaged in a revolutionary and anti-colonial lyrical discourse that mirrored the aspirations of those fighting for independence” (Soares, 2006, p 134).

1 - Image appears in Parkinson, C. (2010) *Peace of Wall: Street Art from East Timor*, Affirm Press, Melbourne, pg 111.

When poetry advanced the Fretilin² ethos through the reappropriation of the term Maubere³, a significant cultural act of defiance engendered a subculture to “oppose its own variant form of social domination against that of the dominant elite.” (Scott, 1990, p 27).

“Whenever, at the beginning of a social movement, a particular slogan seems to be on everyone's lips and to capture the mood, its power is likely to come from the fact that it condenses some of the most deeply felt sentiments of the hidden transcript.” (Scott, 1990, p 226)

This tradition of creativity as resistance continues through the country's graffiti.

As a contemporary cultural production in East Timor, graffiti bears witness to a complex history. It resonates the constructs of identity advanced through cultural production during the resistance and deepens understanding of the aspirations and contest that furnish this identity, transfiguring and circulating popular and historical narratives, expressing the sentiment of an era in the lives of its population (Parkinson, 2010).

In the next section of this paper, section two, I outline a historical backdrop to East Timor's graffiti using a timeline of events that highlights the role of young people in East Timor's history and illustrates the destruction wrought upon the country.

2 - Fretilin (Frente Revolucionario do Timor-Leste Independente) ENGLISH: The Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor is a leftist political party in East Timor. They presently hold a plurality of seats in the National Parliament and formed the government in East Timor from independence until 2007. The party began as a resistance movement that fought for the independence of East Timor, first from Portugal and then from Indonesia, between 1974 and 1998. It was originally called the Timorese Social Democratic Association (ASDT). After East Timor gained its independence from Indonesia, Fretilin became one of several parties competing for power in a multi-party system. (Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolutionary_Front_for_an_Independent_East_Timor)

3 - Towards the end of Portuguese colonialism, the term Maubere, once a term of contempt for backward, illiterate and poor mountain people under Portuguese rule, was reappropriated and recontextualised by the Fretilin party, creating a populist catch cry and term of national pride.

Leaders in East Timor's clandestine resistance, young people in contemporary East Timor are blighted by the daunting legacy of the armed struggle. History operates as another layer of domination. The country's graffiti, painted by young people responding to the past, the present and the future, follows a lineage of clandestine acts that constitute conditions of practical resistance. (Scott, 1990).

In the adaptation of graffiti's broader form to a local East Timorese cultural and socio-urban experience, graffiti represents a 'glocalised' form of cultural production; an alternative modernity, open to multiple forms of transmission, and therefore, multiple translations and circulations (Ashcroft, 2009).

The destruction of East Timor at the hands of the Indonesian occupation plays a pivotal role in the location of East Timor's graffiti. I use this destruction to illustrate how East Timor's private sphere encroaches upon its contemporary public sphere, adding to understanding James C Scott's concepts of hidden and public transcripts as they pertain to public and private lives, notions of identity and performances of citizenship.

In section three of the paper, I demonstrate the narrative capacity of East Timor's walls, likening them to palimpsests; etched traces of history and sites of publishing the emergent aspirations of the future.

In the final section of the paper, section four, I present an inventory of experience framed by Henri Lefebvre's concept of Rhythmanalysis.

“In order to analyse a rhythm,” Lefebvre states, “one must get outside it. Externality is necessary; and yet in order to grasp a rhythm one must have been grasped by it, have given or abandoned oneself 'inwardly' to the time that it rhythmmed.” (Lefebvre, 1992, pg 88).

This section serves to demonstrate the foundational role of graffiti in developing a broader creative dialogue on contemporary East Timor and highlights the practice-led knowledge that contributes to the topic.



Fig.2. Baucau, East Timor, December 2007. Image: Chris Parkinson

Storytelling

Archetype to colonialism's trace, East Timor was born from the havoc of violent struggle.

With limited exposure to means and methods, beyond rich and enduring oral traditions, of transmitting history to the outside world, the country sat upon the periphery of the world's interest through much of its colonial history.

On December 5, 1975, Indonesia capitalized upon this vague global gaze and the disintegration of Portuguese colonialism, launching a full-scale invasion of East Timor.

Over the course of the next 24 brutal years, hallmarks of their occupation included rampant counter insurgency campaigns, rape and torture, famine, public displays of corpses and violent resettlements. East Timor's Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (CAVR) Chegal Report estimates that between 102,800 to 201,600 deaths

occurred during this occupation; one of the worst acts of mass violence in the twentieth century (CAVR, 2013).

In 1989, then Indonesian President Suharto partially opened East Timor to investors and tourists. Resistance groups, journalists, students, international aid agencies and human rights groups, among others, exploited this window and advanced communication between East Timor and the outside world.

On the 12 of November 1991, the Indonesian military opened fire on a group of several thousand mourners who had marched from the Motael church in Dili to the Santa Cruz Cemetery in honor of slain student, Sebastião Gomes.

Popular history sees this event, and the ensuing documentation of the tragedy by British journalist Max Stahl, as a catalyst in informing the world of East Timor who, until this time, had had scant international witness to Indonesia's barbaric occupation.

Furthermore, the events galvanized a student movement in the country that would go on to signal a changed focus of East Timor's resistance that "envisaged a new and distinct role for youth and students as the center of the urban based clandestine struggle" (Wigglesworth, 2013, p 54).

On August 30, 1999, in the face of widespread intimidation and Indonesian-backed militia violence, the East Timorese voted overwhelmingly for independence from Indonesia's occupation.

Raging militias retaliated, and in the guise of a backlash against the vote for independence, a "scorched earth" policy in East Timor, under the direction of the Indonesian military, ensued.

"The militias wrecked East Timor in a very distinctive way. The country was burned, not bombed. From the street, whether in Dili or the smaller provincial towns, concrete slabs of foundations are still visible, as are the side and often the front and back walls of buildings - but no windows, doors, or roofs. The houses are hollow, scorched clean of paint, wiring, or fixtures of any kind. In some neighborhoods, the dwellings are intact; in others, every house has been gutted" (Traub, 2000).

On May 20, 2002, East Timor became the world's newest nation, stepping from a three year United Nations Transitional Administration (UNTAET).

In December 2002, six months after the dream of independence, riots broke out in Dili against the use of force by the police against a student (Wigglesworth, 2013).

In 2005, the Catholic Church staged a three-week long demonstration in the capital, Dili. Initially opposing a policy change to compulsory religious education, the demonstration resulted in demands for the resignation of then Prime Minister, Mari Alkatiri.

In March 2006, tension within East Timor's F-FDTL or FALINTIL – Forças de Defesa de Timor Leste swelled to a divisive crescendo.

On April 28, demonstrators stormed the country's Palácio Do Governo (Government House), foreshadowing an

internal conflict that escalated and resulted in: the internal displacement of some 150,000 people across the country; triggered ethnic violence, mostly perpetrated by gangs of young men identified as being from the east (Lorosae) or the west (Loromuno) of the country (Scambary, 2006, 2009; Arnold, 2009); ousted a Prime Minister; swapped a President and a Prime Minister; shot a President; shot and killed a rebel leader; and advanced a narrative of a "poorly defined national identity, particularly in the absence of a common enemy post-1999" (Trinidad & Castro, 2007, p 14).

Resultant analysis of this cycle of resistance and violence in East Timor's history sees young people as both venerated and maligned, central and peripheral (See Scambary, 2006, 2009; Arnold, 2009; Wigglesworth, 2013; Bexley, 2007; Bexley & Tchailoro, 2013).

At one point central to the fight for independence from Indonesian occupation and 'hope for the nation' (Bexley & Tchailoro, 2013, p 407), the symbolic category of youth, in the new nation, finds them teetering at the periphery of the national narrative, "detached from the solidarity experiences of East Timor's resistance era that is largely founded on the struggle for independence" (Arnold, 2009, 380).

Tension in the uncertainty about the role of cultural identities defining national membership (Holston & Appadurai, 1996), particularly evident in Dili, the country's capital, belies the oft-held belief that a common national identity would develop organically from the identity base of resistance to colonial rule.

"The nation may maintain the envelope of citizenship, but the substance has been so changed or at least challenged that the emerging social morphologies are radically unfamiliar and force a reconsideration of the basic principles of membership" (Holston and Appadurai, 1996, p 188).

Consequently, graffiti in East Timor reveals itself as a cultural product addressing these challenges of nation-building and citizenship through its capacity to identify with, and simultaneously critique, the dominant culture of the post-independence state established by the older generation (Arthur, 2015) revealing the ongoing power of historical, urban and regional identities in presenting a unified national story (Leach, 2009).



Fig. 3. Bemori, Dili, East Timor, August 2006, East Timor, Image: Chris Parkinson.⁴

Palimpsests

“What are you doing?” a man asked.

With camera in hand, I had shuffled as close as I could get to a wall, composing the painted marks upon it in my viewfinder.

“I’m photographing the wall and the words upon it,” I replied.

“I like this wall,” the man smiled.

“Why do you like this wall?” I asked, withdrawing my face from my camera’s viewfinder to revisit the broader context.

Bullet holes, smears of human excrement, limb like wires protruding from flaked rendering, glass concreted into the top of cinder blocks, etchings of history singed by the relentless sun upon its surface, rubble gathered at the ground around my feet, a molten fan hanging in the hot air.

“Because it reminds me of what we endured to find peace. I will never fix it” (Parkinson, 2010, p 186).

In this guise, the walls of East Timor are “living, historical palimpsests,” (Irvine, 2012, p 8) conferring upon the wall aesthetic qualities of resistance, conflict and aspirations of nationhood.

4 - Image appears in Parkinson, C. (2010) *Peace of Wall: Street Art from East Timor*, Affirm Press, Melbourne, pg 28.



Fig. 4. Balide, Dili, East Timor, November 2006. Image: Chris Parkinson.⁵

“Are you a journalist?”

“Not really.”

“Are you studying?”

“No.”

“What do you do?”

“I’m photographing the walls in your country and the way they change.”

“Why?”

“Because I think it helps a wider movement towards understanding.”

“Photographing us won’t bring peace. Justice might.”

(Parkinson, 2010, p 168).

Hold Onto Justice In Our Country



Fig. 5. Comoro, Dili, East Timor, March 2008. Image: Chris Parkinson.⁶

5 Image appears in Parkinson, C. (2010) *Peace of Wall: Street Art from East Timor*, Affirm Press, Melbourne, pg 73.

6 - Image appears in Parkinson, C. (2010) *Peace of Wall: Street Art from East Timor*, Affirm Press, Melbourne, pg 169.

These palimpsests tell us something about the dynamic pluralities that are dialogic components of peace, urban space and reconciliation in East Timor.

Of the Public

The public transcript represents the “open interaction” between the dominant and subordinate, “shaped to appeal to the expectations of the powerful...it is, however, unlikely to tell the whole story about power relations.” (Scott, 1990, p 2)

Symbols of peace, depictions of unity, messages of development and hopes of harmony flooded East Timor’s walls, in particular the capital, Dili, through the 2006 crisis, with young artists from East Timor’s free art school, Arte Moris, responding to a call from the then President of the country, Dr Jose Ramos-Horta to “produce a graffiti campaign promoting peace, unity, mutual tolerance and friendship” (Parkinson, 2010, p 4).

These “assisted” works, as Dr. Ramos-Horta refers to them, promulgated a government-backed vision of peace and unity that contested the growing “alternative versions of history that do not align with the national narrative of unity pertinent to the nation-building project and instead focus on the coercive, conflicting and often violent nature of the resistance movement” (Bexley & Tchailoro, 2013, p 406).

“We use our art and our music to communicate with the population because this kind of art and music can gather people. It can bring people together...It can give good to the community to keep them clear from problems” (Parkinson, 2010, p 164).

This “open interaction” between the government and the country’s young artists and the adaptation of graffiti for state sanctioned social purposes, however coercive the implications of such a union are, initiate an ongoing proliferation of messages of peace, harmony and unity across the walls, suggesting “a continued desire from the artists to advocate peace, stability and national unity years after the 2006 crisis was resolved” (Arthur, 2015, p 12).

“My dream about art is for tomorrow. Through art you can find peace. For everyone” (Parkinson, 2010, pg. 190).



Fig. 6. Motael, Dili, East Timor, April 2008. Image: Chris Parkinson

We Are One



Fig. 7. Bemori, Dili, East Timor, August 2006. Image: Chris Parkinson.⁷

Create Stability



Fig 8. Comoro, Dili, East Timor, March 2008. Image: Chris Parkinson

⁷ - Image appears in Parkinson, C. (2010) *Peace of Wall: Street Art from East Timor*, Affirm Press, Melbourne, pg 177.

Conflicting with this proliferation of peace, however, spooled the formerly hidden articulations of the population, directly and publicly responding to a complicated local and geopolitical context mired in the teeth of power (Scott, 1990).



Fig. 9. Suai, East Timor, December 2007. Image: Chris Parkinson⁸



Fig. 10. Becora, Dili, East Timor, March 2007. Image: Chris Parkinson.

Whilst aspirational works multiplied, so too did works that painted a more complex picture of East Timor's reality. Impassioned sedition countered East Timor's public projection, bringing to the public eye a posturing of the streets that demonstrated political allegiance, ethnic identity and the fundamental frustrations of subsistence.

It is in these works, where the transcripts of resistance are amplified, that the lineage of East Timor's mark-making practice materializes from the hidden.

8 - Image appears in Parkinson, C. (2010) *Peace of Wall: Street Art from East Timor*, Affirm Press, Melbourne, pg 47.

Of The Hidden

"Since ideological resistance can grow best when it is shielded from direct surveillance, we are led to examine the social sites where this resistance can germinate" (Scott, 1990, p xii). Origins of East Timor's graffiti tradition begin in the cave paintings found on the most eastern point of the island (See O'Connor et al, 2010; O'Connor & Oliveira, 2007; O'Connor, 2003; Pannell & O'Connor, 2005). Dating back some 35,000 years, representations of life were scribed into these caves, evidencing existence and integration with the land. Caves were often used as temporary headquarters for the resistance, also, reflecting the "important material and political recolonization of traditional spaces" (Pannell & O'Connor, 2005, p 198) as part of the country's resistance struggles.

Tantamount to preserving the memory of human rights abuses during the country's resistance are the 65 preserved examples of graffiti found in Dili's Comarca Balide Prison, a former prison during Indonesia's occupation and now the home to the national headquarters of East Timor's Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (Comissão de Acolhimento, Verdade e Reconciliação de Timor-Leste, or CAVR). The walls that blocked the freedom of its prisoners became their last medium for expression, cataloguing an intensely personalized lived present of suffering (Leach, 2009).

Life Is A Memory, Death Is A History



Fig. 11. Balide Prison, Dili, East Timor. March 2008. Image: Chris Parkinson.

The lineage of East Timor's graffiti suggests a flipped perspective of contemporary understandings of graffiti as an act performed in the public sphere. In East Timor, some of the most powerful examples of its graffiti occur in the private sphere, hidden transcripts illuminating the struggle inherent in the cycle of resistance and recuperation. The vestige of Indonesia's scorched earth policy, however, very literally removed the walls that delineate the private from the public, developing an interstitial space where these voices spool into public focus. John Schofield likens graffiti, in a heritage context, to an "alternative archeology, or alternative geography, creating a documentation of interstitial places, the social meaning of which is confined to certain (often excluded) groups in society." (Schofield, 2010, p 78).



Fig. 12. Bairo Central, Dili, East Timor, April 2008. Image: Chris Parkinson.⁹



Fig 13. Atauro, East Timor, April 2008. Image: Chris Parkinson.¹⁰

9 - Image appears in Parkinson, C. (2010) *Peace of Wall: Street Art from East Timor*, Affirm Press, Melbourne, pg 88.

10 - Image appears in Parkinson, C. (2010) *Peace of Wall: Street Art from East Timor*, Affirm Press, Melbourne, pg 65.



Fig. 14. Bidau, Dili, East Timor, May 2008. Image: Chris Parkinson.¹¹

This interstitial space is an important one in the context of East Timor's cultural heritage.

Graffiti's capacity to relate the biography of the ruin as something more than a vestige, but as an active account and witness to lives unfolding, transfigures East Timor's "unintentional or 'immanent' cultural heritage landscape – consisting of the unrestored wreckage of houses and buildings burned or damaged by departing TNI and their militia in 1999," (Leach, 2009, p 156) into an aesthetic realm through the "objective discovery of the new within the given, immanently, through a regrouping of its elements." (Buck-Morss, 1977, p 132).



Fig. 15. Taibessi, Dili, East Timor, July 2007. Image: Chris Parkinson.

11 - Image appears in Parkinson, C. (2010) *Peace of Wall: Street Art from East Timor*, Affirm Press, Melbourne, pg 74.

This landscape of “art doesn’t have its sources in reason,” Milan Kundera writes in *Life is Elsewhere*. The “subconscious whispered these shapes to him – forms which are strange, yet far from senseless. Don’t you think there is a kind of mysterious link between Jaromil’s visions and the War?... Didn’t the War rob man of his face and his head?... Isn’t a so-called realistic view of the world the greatest illusion of all? I ask you – isn’t there more truth and reality in your son’s drawings?” (Kundera, 1987, p 38)



Fig. 16. Marconi, Dili, East Timor, April, 2008. Image: Chris Parkinson.

Transfiguration And Circulation: Storytelling

“In a given culture of circulation, it is more important to track the proliferating co- presence of varied textual/cultural forms in all their mobility and mutability than to attempt a delineation of their fragile autonomy and specificity” (Gaonkar and Povinelli, 2003, p 391). At around 8:30pm on a Friday in October 2004, a heavy pre-wet season sky teasing rain yet delivering none, I nervously entered the Café Alpha Omega, behind East Timor’s Palácio do Governo (Government Palace). A smattering of predominantly East Timorese sat in the awkwardly abiding circle formation.

Francisco Borja da Costa was a revolutionary poet of East Timor who died at the hands of the Indonesians in 1975. Tonight, a group of Timorese ranging from 20ish to 40ish was delivering interpretations of his work in Tetun, English and Portuguese.

Jil Jolliffe wrote of Borja Da Costa, in her 1976 book *Revolutionary Poems in the Struggle Against Colonialism*, “Francisco Borja da Costa was not a military man; he was like a gentle deer, the *bibi rusa* which the Timorese love to hunt in the mountains. As Secretary for Information of FRETILIN’s Central Committee his task was to propagate ideas. After independence he hoped to study ‘ethnology and linguistics’...On December 7, 1975, just nine days after East Timor had declared itself independent, Indonesian regular forces landed in Dili, the capital...On that day Francisco Borja da Costa, the poet who wrote of all the beautiful things of Timor, of the spiraling mountain peaks, of the chickens in the *knuas* (villages), of the rivers which divided and re-united endlessly...was mutilated and murdered by Indonesian paratroopers” (Jolliffe, 1976, p 16 - 17).

Coordinating and hosting this event was Abe Baretto Soares, a contemporary East Timorese poet. Over the next four years, Abe and I translated one another’s poetry and spoke often of resistance and creativity. I wrote reviews of his spoken word performances and he approved or rejected my naïve enquiries into poetry in the context of East Timor and the poetics I felt was occurring on the country’s walls.

This same evening was the first time I would enter the grounds of Arte Moris, East Timor’s free art school. On this night, I met Etsou Caminha.



Fig. 17. Eton Caminha, Melbourne, May 2010. Image: Chris Parkinson.

Over the next four years, indeed in an ongoing way, Eton has been a central point to my understanding of East Timor's contemporary visual voice. In late 2005, his childhood friend, Alfeo Perreira moved from Tutuala, on the country's far eastern tip, to Arte Moris. With Mely Fernandes and Osme Goncalves, these four creative forces advanced my understanding of East Timor's contemporary creative expression. They inspired the pursuit to collect and complete *Peace of Wall: Street Art from East Timor*, and form the foundation of what has become the Animatism collective.¹²

¹² - Animatism is a collective of artists and curators from Australia, East Timor and Indonesia. They are: Chris Parkinson, Chris Phillips, Amanda Haskard, Bryan Phillips, Michael Fikaris and Liam Barton (AUST), Eton Caminha, Alfeo Perreira, Tony Amaral and Osme Goncalves (East Timor), Djuwadi Awhal (Indonesia). Embedding the wild and the primal in contemporary artistic collaborations, their work explores the East Timorese, Indonesian

When *Peace of Wall* was published in 2010, little could I predict the momentum that would ebb and flow over the next five years, consistent with an idea of artistic research and creative practice where "relations between different modes of knowing which, though in dialogue...are not subject to commensurate criteria of validity but which might affirm each other by way of resonance" (Nelson, 2013, p 58). Upon its release, *Peace of Wall* was described as "an evocative piece of photojournalism - capturing an important moment in East Timor's history through its walls... this book alerts us to the cultural value of graffiti and street art for public expression, rehabilitation and community building... This is not a typical "Graffiti" book - it is more focused toward understanding the community and the way it expresses its concerns and dreams" (Manco, 2010).

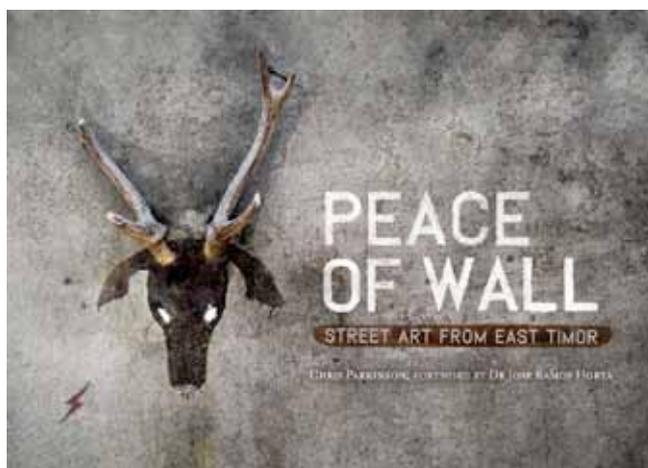


Fig 18. *Peace of Wall* Book Cover, May 2010. Image: Chris Parkinson.

and Australian relationship across shifting generations and political contexts.

Immersive video and projection works, burning drums, street art, experimental theatre, comic book conversations and folk music investigations bent through electronic production and design have proven the pivotal role of art in initiating dialogue on reconciliation, artistic resilience, peace and the creative articulation of contemporary, regional relationships.

The collective has overseen the publishing and distribution of four books; coordinated the painting of 13 murals across East Timor and Melbourne; developed award winning video works; activated an annual series of reciprocal creative exchange residencies and presented their work publicly in Brazil, USA, Australia and East Timor.

Animatism presents a creative platform where culturally diverse artists challenge their practice and move into new artistic territories, both geographically and metaphorically.

Please visit: <http://www.animatismart.com>

In May 2010, to launch *Peace of Wall*, Etson Caminha, Alfeo Perreira and Xisto da Silva flew to Melbourne to collaborate with me on exhibiting and launching the book at the Until Never gallery in Hosier Lane. Their first time in Melbourne, Etson, Alfeo and Xisto adorned Hosier Lane with a fitting painted tribute to their homeland, bringing a politically charged flavor of East Timor's graffiti to an Australian audience for the first time.



Fig. 19. Etson Caminha, Alfeo Perreira and Xisto Silva, Melbourne, May 2010. Image: Chris Parkinson.

This first exchange sparked further collaborative ambition and in 2012, with the release of a children's book called *The Boy and The Crocodile*¹³, the Myths and Murals project began.

Designed to distribute 4,000 copies of *The Boy and the Crocodile* to schools and libraries across East Timor and mark the project's imprint through painting collaborative murals in each of the country's 13 districts, based upon images gleaned from the book, Myths and Murals drew together literacy, mythology and murals to engage diverse audiences in the country around art, peace-building and national identity.

13 - A children's book and parable about kindness drawn from the creation legend of how the island of Timor got its curious shape. The book was illustrated by children from the Familia Hope Orphanage in East Timor, led by senior students from Arte Moris. Many of these children lost their parents in the country's violent struggle for independence. All proceeds from sales of the book were donated to the orphanage.



Fig 20. Myths and Murals, Gleno, East Timor, July 2012. Image: Chris Parkinson.

One might imagine my enthusiasm when, in 2013, Iliwatu Danebere, Arte Moris's East Timorese Director, and senior artist Gil Valentin arrived in Melbourne to participate in another collaborative exchange that saw them deliver the final mural of the Myths and Murals project in Melbourne's Literature Lane, symbolically sign-posting the converging dialogue between literacy and graffiti.



Fig. 21. Iliwatu Danebere and Gil Valentin, Melbourne, January 2013. Image: Chris Parkinson.

"How firmly should lines be drawn between graffiti or cartoons on the one hand, and video installation within a gallery context on the other?" (Crimmin et al, 2014, pg 10) asks Michaela Crimmin in her introduction to the Culture and Conflict Organisation's publication, *Art and Conflict*, when reflecting upon art's role in response to and despite conflict.

Such questions aptly describe what fuels the Animatism collective today, where foundations in East Timor's graffiti have evolved into an amalgam of regional voices producing video art, conceptual installations, poetry, comic books, sound design, performance and murals.

Conceived of as a project name, originally, in November 2013, Animatism grew from the visual ethnography of Peace of Wall, Myths and Murals and growing threads of connection between myself, Arte Moris, independent artists, the University of Melbourne's Center for Cultural Partnerships and members of its Community Cultural Development alumni.

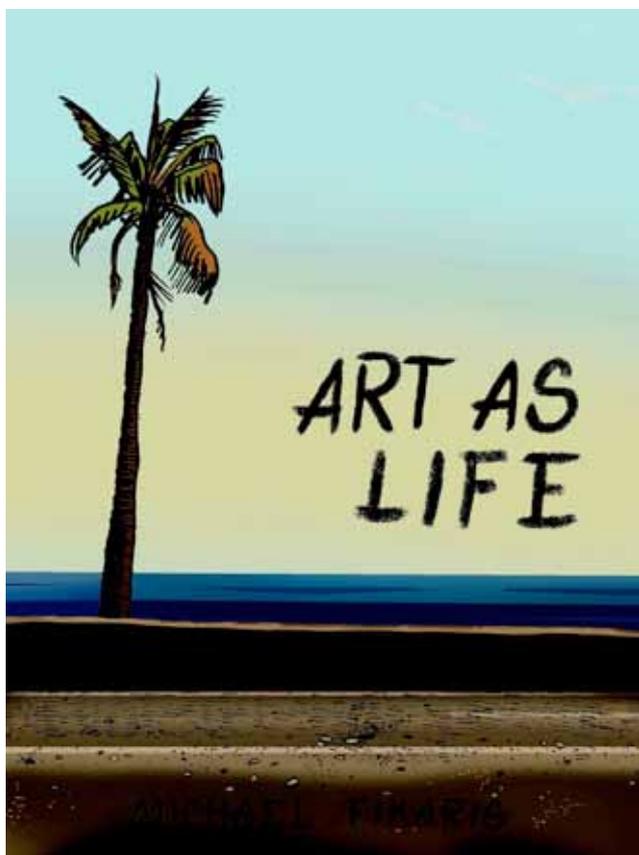


Fig. 22. Art as Life Book Cover, August 2014. Image: Michael Fikaris. Used with permission.

As a project, it launched Peace of Wall for the first time in East Timor in 2013 with a series of public events, performances and exhibitions.

As a collective, Animatism drew on our individual creative voices to deliver the 2014 Gertrude Street Projection Festival Judge's Prize, merging our video interests - as both art form and documentary device¹⁴ - into a presentation that captured our practice, collaboration and conceptual intent, integrating our final video into a 20 foot mural.



Fig. 25. Animatism, Melbourne, Australia, July 2014. Image: Chris Parkinson.

Grappling the contemporary East Timorese dream during this collaboration, Alfeo Perreira smiled at me saying, "sure we have our dreams, but somebody else holds the key to them."

In 2014 for the Gertrude Street Projection Festival his series of drawings depicting this quandary drove our conceptual intent.

For Arte Publiku! East Timor's inaugural Public Arts Festival in 2014, Animatism re-presented the work in a new context, encouraging a deeper dialogue between the work and its presentation space. In this instance, a shipping container as exhibition space spoke to the different understandings of movement, home and conflict in East Timor; shipping

14 - The aspect of video as both art and documentation is an important aspect of *Animatism* and is featured in an upcoming book by Dr Anne Harris, *Video as Method: Understanding Qualitative Research* (Oxford University Press, 2016). *Animatism* is viewed as a project that is methodology itself; a living, breathing contemporary, cross-cultural collaboration. Our videos capture this intent and represent, on one hand, a visual ethnography of *Animatism's* research whilst, on the other, demonstrate our use of ethnography as art.

containers have been used across the country for emergency response and innovative, crisis-led housing in addition to being an ongoing resource for the shipping of aid and assistance between Australia and East Timor.



Fig. 26. Animatism, Melbourne, Australia, July 2014. Image: Alfe Perreira. Used with permission.

Transfiguring the container for projection as part of Arte Publiku! circulated a new understanding of the shipping container as cultural vessel and exhibition space, furthering dialogue on the diverse location of cultural production in times of peace with a gaze on the inescapable contexts of conflict.

It was during this festival that Animatism, chiefly through the film work of Chris Phillips and performances of Osme Goncalves and Abe Barreto Soares, amongst other East Timorese poets, brought poetry into firm focus as part of the collective's creative collaborations.

Ita Nudar Ema (We as People)¹⁵ would become a moving video poem of a spoken word performance delivered by Osme during Arte Publiku!

15 - Available at: www.animatismart.com



Fig. 27. Animatism, Dili, East Timor, August 2014. Image: Chris Parkinson.



Fig. 28. Osme Goncalves, Dili, East Timor, August 2014. Image: Chris Parkinson.

Osme is no stranger to being the focus point of people's attention. His embodiment of culture has been critically addressed in the past by Angie Bexley, who writes of Osme "express[ing] through speech, song and bodily movements the postcolonial predicament that many younger East Timorese face in regard to belonging in independent East Timor" (Bexley, 2007, pg 287-288).

Osme's stark performance juxtaposed with evocative documentation footage of *Arte Publiku!* and previous iterations of Animatism (another example in the use of video ethnography/documentation as art) illustrated Animatism's conceptual concerns as a creative research project building knowledge in the region about life through art.

"Save your grief," Osme intones. "Hide your sadness. Create laughter. That's what we need. That is what we must feel. Because that is good for our dreams. That is good for our spirit. Tell your dream when you wake that you, as an individual, can tell your dream's story that comes from your mind."¹⁶

Resonance

As a researcher using art to generate knowledge, my interest in the openness of resonance usurps any finality, any conclusion.

Drawn from the illustrations of research and practice provided in this paper one can say that graffiti in East Timor demonstrates both the aspiration of a new nation and the contesting clandestine creativity emerging from a cycle of resistance, trauma and recuperation in the country.

The story of graffiti in East Timor vividly captures the past, the present, the future and its ugly truths and haunting legacies. More than a narrative of art and personal expression, however, East Timor's graffiti provides an epistemology for the understanding of citizenship, democracy and the public sphere in a context punctuated by colonialism, conflict and a unique quest for identity and nationalism fought for from the debris of these circumstances.

Through an understanding of East Timor's graffiti as an elaboration of the performances of James C Scott's public and hidden transcripts, and the contemporary forms of expressions that have circulated from the country's graffiti, here demonstrated through the Animatism collective, a broader insight into the nature of culture, identity, the city and citizenship in East Timor is revealed.

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