

## East Timor Revisited Once More

(through the poetry of Francisco Borja da Costa and Celso Oliveira)

In the year 2000 I published an article entitled 'De Vuelta a Timor' in the Spanish journal *La balsa de la Medusa*, which began: 'Han vuelto a Timor las tropas portuguesas'.<sup>1</sup> The peacekeeping mission in East Timor which has involved Portuguese troops since that year is now coming to an end, as reported by the online news service of the Portuguese radio station, TSF, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of January 2004:

Os primeiros 256 homens do agrupamento que vão render o destacamento militar português em Timor-Leste partem hoje às 23:30 para o território. Esta missão marca a despedida da presença militar portuguesa em Dili.

A missão da unidade termina em termos operacionais em 20 de Maio, passando o controlo para as mãos das Forças Armadas e para a Polícia Nacional timorenses.<sup>2</sup>

With the country's official independence on the 20th of May 2002, the long years of colonial oppression appeared to have ceased, bringing with it the hope of a peaceful and prosperous future and the final realisation of an independent national identity, for which so much had been sacrificed in the struggle against colonialism. The desire for a future that now seems to have become a reality is intensely vivid in the revolutionary poetry produced by Timorese poets under the colonial yoke, while the memory of the sacrifices that achieving that objective entailed, as well as an early judgement of what independence

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Soares, 'De Vuelta a Timor', in *La balsa de la Medusa*, 55/56 (2000), 107-120 (p.107).

<sup>2</sup> 'Timor-Leste. Militares portuguesas em missão de despedida', 18 January 2004, <http://tsf.sapo.pt/>

has brought the Timorese population, can be found in Celso Oliveira's volume of poetry, *Timor-Leste: Chegou a Liberdade*.<sup>3</sup>

In that earlier article I had examined the transformations that had taken place in the image Portugal had of itself and of its role on the world stage, and how that had been reflected in its literature. I also questioned to what extent Portugal had relinquished its role as colonizer in view of its presence in East Timor as part of a United Nations contingent. Now, I intend to analyse the images of the East Timorese people as participants in the struggle against colonial oppression, and what independence has meant to the population, as portrayed by Francisco Borja da Costa, and Celso Oliveira. In choosing these particular poets two distinct periods in the history of East Timor are reflected in the poetry they produce: Borja da Costa was killed on the 7<sup>th</sup> of December, 1975, on the first day of the Indonesian invasion, so his work may reflect concerns that deal with Portuguese colonialism, whereas Celso Oliveira's poetry is written during Indonesia's illegal occupation of East Timor and his country's subsequent attainment of independence. Therefore, by analysing some of the work produced by these two poets I hope to reveal the poetic expression of the colonial experience, and whether independence has brought with it a distinct rupture from a colonized past.

Certainly, the desire for independence is vividly inscribed within the poetry produced during Borja da Costa's 29 years of life, but the oppressors he was reacting against were the Portuguese colonizers, and not the Indonesian invaders which most of his posthumous audience would posit in the place of the aggressors to be repelled. In other

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<sup>3</sup> Celso Oliveira, *Timor-Leste: Chegou a Liberdade (39 poesias para Timor Lorosa'e) Edição bilingue – português/inglês*, trans. by Maria Teresa Maia Carrilho (Lisbon: Soroptomist International: Clube Lisboa – Sete Colinas, 2003)

words, Borja da Costa envisaged an independent East Timor in reaction to its colonization by the Portuguese, whereas his post-1975 readers would identify with the poet's vision of a free homeland, but would strive to achieve that goal against different opposition. Nonetheless, what the East Timorese possess both before and after Borja da Costa's murder is a desire to be free, which, as Jill Jolliffe explains in her introduction to *Revolutionary Poems in the Struggle Against Colonialism*, was something the poet wanted to represent: '[Abilio de Araujo] and Borja da Costa worked together to create poems and songs expressing the long-suppressed national sentiment of their people'.<sup>4</sup> Does, then, this representation of national feeling, as well as the reactions to colonialism contained within his poetry signify that there is a significant overlap between the lyrical landscape presented and the reality of East Timorese society at the time it was written?

Jill Jolliffe's statement regarding the activities of authors and musicians belonging to FRETILIN in 1975, such as Borja da Costa, suggests that such an overlap does indeed exist:

writers and musicians of FRETILIN were hard at work: revolutionaries were poets, poets were revolutionaries. At the front at Batugadé in late September, the soldiers of FALINTIL passed around a poem written by their commander Rogerio Lobato, exhorting them to an unyielding defence of their homeland (p.12).

East Timorese poets appear, in the feverish atmosphere of the post-11 August UDT coup, to be actively engaged in the armed defence of a FRETILIN vision of the future, and even use their work as a direct means of enjoining others to participate in that defence. It is this

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<sup>4</sup> Francisco Borja da Costa, *Revolutionary Poems in the Struggle Against Colonialism: Timorese Nationalist Verse*, ed. by Jill Jolliffe, trans. by Mary Ireland and Francisco Borja da Costa (Sydney: Wild & Woolley, 1976), (p.10).

active participation in the struggle for independence that leads Jolliffe to identify a blurring between the roles of revolutionary and poet. Indeed, the idea of a romantic view of the poet, as someone who is detached from the society he observes, has no place in the production of revolutionary poems, or 'Poesia de Libertação', as this FRETILIN preface to the volume of poetry, *Timor-Leste*, testifies:

A Poesia de Libertação é rica de aspirações humanas justas e profundas. Nela, o poeta abstrai-se e subtrai-se dos seus próprios interesses para se identificar com os do seu Povo. Nesta relação abstracção/identificação, o poeta encontra o seu próprio EU na Luta, através da sua participação directa e quotidiana na transformação política e sócio-económica do meio humano a que pertence (p.5).<sup>5</sup>

This view of the revolutionary poet goes beyond a simple identification with the population's struggle for independence, evidenced through poetry, entailing an active engagement in that struggle ('participação directa') that does not allow for mere observation. Furthermore, there is an assumption that poets involved in the creation of such poetry have left behind their own interests ('o poeta abstrai-se e subtrai-se dos seus próprios interesses') and have identified completely with the struggle ('o poeta encontra o seu próprio EU na Luta'). Although it is highly debatable and questionable whether a revolutionary poet, or indeed any poet, can ever detach themselves completely from their own interests to become completely identified with a particular struggle or group, it will become clear that the poems of revolution written by Borja da Costa give an immediate sense of what the East Timorese struggle meant. Therefore, it is a legitimate basis for extracting images of that struggle against colonialism and its objectives.

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<sup>5</sup> *Timor- Leste*, (Maputo: INLD, 1981).

The first stanza of Borja da Costa's poem 'O Grito do Soldado Maubere'<sup>6</sup> immediately sends the reader outside of it, to a concrete event, on a concrete date, immersing him in the political violence of 11 August 1975. It begins:

#### SEGUNDA-FEIRA

Alta madrugada  
11 de Agosto  
Repentinamente  
O silêncio da noite  
Foi quebrado  
Por tiros de espingarda (ll.1-6).

Throughout this poem there are references to specific East Timorese political organisations (UDT, FRETILIN), and to the Maubere people, whom Jolliffe describes in *Revolutionary Poems in the Struggle Against Colonialism* as, 'the illiterate mountain people, despised under the Portuguese regime. Under the FRETILIN regime, the Maubere became a symbol of national pride' (p.10). Therefore, the reader is encouraged to identify the distressing scenes described in the poem as belonging to a specific time and place, although that would entail the reader having prior knowledge of the history and politics of East Timor: that UDT stands for União Democrática Timorense, which is perceived as a right-wing reactionary political party, whereas FRETILIN denotes the Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente, which was fighting for a completely independent East Timor.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> In *Enterrem Meu Coração no Ramelau: Poesia de Timor Leste*, ed. by Amável Fernandes, (Luanda: União dos Escritores Angolanos, 1982), pp.27-30.

<sup>7</sup> Although the East Timorese reader would more readily have such knowledge, it is important to remind ourselves that much of this poetry's qualities derives from the fact that, as Jolliffe states, 'most of the poems [...] are meant to be spoken or sung: the printed form does not do them justice. They are written primarily for an illiterate people, who operate from a rich oral tradition in which the words are not generally fixed, but can change according to the circumstances of performance' (p.12).

With or without such prior knowledge, the reader is left in no doubt as to with whom his/her loyalties should lie, leading one to the belief that the poet is attempting to follow the role laid out for him in the FRETILIN preface quoted above. The UDT and its loyalists are clearly identified as ‘esses vândalos da UDT’ (l.26), ‘reaccionária UDT/E seus lacaios criminosos’ (ll.35-36), ‘criminosa UDT’ (l.73), and ‘carrascos da UDT’ (l.86). These negative epithets are assigned to them as the perpetrators of such acts as are described in the second stanza:

Indivíduos armados  
Transportando-se em carros  
Provocam tiroteio ensurdecador  
Fazem prisões arbitrárias  
Assaltam a PSP por obra e graça do seu Comandante  
Matam à traição soldados de 2a linha  
Saqueiam (ll.8-14).

But these acts, dated to the first day of the coup, are overshadowed by the intensification of the descriptions of violence that come in the following days. Hence, we are told that on Wednesday the UDT were ‘violando jovens, mulheres e crianças/Matando esposas e filhos de meses/De militantes da FRETILIN’ (ll.39-41), and that between the following Sunday to Tuesday,

[...] os homens  
As mulheres  
As crianças  
Os bebés mauberes  
Vão tombando em poças de sangue  
Atravessados pelas balas assassinas  
Dos carrascos da UDT (ll.80-86)

As the list of atrocities made by Borja da Costa increases, and the blame for those awful acts is laid squarely before the UDT, we are also left in no doubt as to the victims who suffer these attacks: they are the ‘Povo Maubere’ (l.23) and the families of ‘militantes da FRETILIN’ (l.41). In other words, they are the true representation of the East Timorese people (the maubere), and the families of those who are seeking to free them from colonialism (the FRETILIN party members). Borja da Costa’s vivid demarcation between aggressors and innocent victims, the latter being associated with the “real” representatives of East Timorese nationhood, consequently posits the UDT as a falsehood meant to lead the people to a tragic future. However, this could not be allowed to happen, as the concluding stanza tells us:

#### QUARTA-FEIRA – 20 DE AGOSTO

O sangue vertido  
Não deixou de escoar  
Nas veias dos soldados mauberes  
E o soldado maubere  
Ergueu a sua espingarda  
E sacudiu das suas costas  
O peso da criminosa influência  
Dos galões colonialistas  
    Em defesa do Povo Maubere  
    Enfrentou as balas assassinas  
    Encurralou os criminosos  
    E enchendo o coração de estoicidade heróica  
Gritou  
- NÃO ao assassínio  
- NÃO ao colonialismo  
- NÃO às garras dos vândalos na carne do Povo Maubere e no  
    [solo de Timor Leste  
SIM com FRETILIN para a LIBERTAÇÃO TOTAL! (ll.92-  
110).

The successful FRETILIN counterattack referred to here describes the bravery and sense of self-sacrifice of those who took part in it, and, again, uses the designation ‘maubere’ to describe them, underlining their nationalistic credentials, and portraying them as guardians of the ‘Povo Maubere’. The poem’s structure assists in making it clear to the reader how much violence had been shown towards the innocent, cataloguing the crimes perpetrated against them day after day, and how it took over a week of such suffering before armed resistance overcame the aggressors.

Those aggressors were not external, but East Timorese themselves, involved in what Borja da Costa refers to as ‘chacinas fratricidas’ (l.67). However, the first stanza of ‘O Grito do Soldado Maubere’ reveals that members of the UDT ‘Assaltam a PSP por obra e graça do seu Comandante’ (l.12), while the second stanza tells us:

E incompreensivelmente  
As autoridades  
O governo  
Cruzam descansadamente os braços  
E nada fazem  
Para impedir os abusos  
Ou defender os indefesos (ll.15-21).

What could appear to be a civil war fought between East Timorese, is shown by Borja da Costa to be more complex than that. His poem implicates the Portuguese colonial authorities who, whilst not actively participating alongside the UDT in their attacks on FRETILIN supporters, did nothing to prevent them from taking place.<sup>8</sup> Borja da Costa

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<sup>8</sup> The Portuguese dictatorship of Salazar’s Estado Novo had been overthrown some time before the events chronicled in this poem (25 April 1974), and Portugal’s Movimento das Forças Armadas was in the process of overseeing the decolonization of its empire and the transition to independence of the former colonies. This was the position in East Timor at the time of the UDT coup, although it is highly debatable how diligent the Portuguese authorities were in their handling of this process (see John G. Taylor, *Indonesia’s Forgotten War: The Hidden History of East Timor*, (London: Zed, c1991) pp.35-51).



makes that accusation of complicity a refrain throughout the poem, with the repeated line ‘E O GOVERNO CONTINUA A CRUZAR OS BRAÇOS’. This refrain ends the account of the atrocities committed by the UDT for each day of the coup attempt, except for the first (11 August), the day of the successful counterattack (20 August), and Thursday 14 August. On this last date, the same line appears, but as the opening line of the stanza, which reads:

O Governo continua a cruzar os braços  
E cinicamente  
E hipocriticamente  
E sadicamente  
  
E criminosamente  
E traiçoeiramente  
Quer sentar o criminoso  
Com a vítima ensanguentada  
O carrasco armado  
Com o representante do povo desarmado (ll.44-53).

The positioning of the refrain at the beginning of the stanza highlights the significance of the particular event it portrays, which is promoted further through the use of anaphora in the lines containing adverbs describing the Portuguese government’s wish to bring together the UDT and FRETILIN to jointly administer the country. But these poetic devices are in line with the Timorese poetic tradition of the use of parallelisms, and, as this stanza illustrates, serve their purpose well, which is to bring something to the foreground. Jill Jolliffe states:

Borja’s poetry stands squarely in the classical tradition. The parallelisms operate in many ways: within lines as well as between lines, sometimes between stanzas. The insistent drum-like repetition that characterises the parallel is often used to

create dramatic effect or irony which hinges on the changed form (pp.14-15).

That repetition certainly manages to create that dramatic effect, and to implicate the Portuguese in the horrific consequences that drama brings, whilst the change to the placement of the repeated line is also evident in the above stanza. But, although the reader may be made aware through these poetic effects that the event described here is of significance, and that the Portuguese government is acting ‘cinicamente’, ‘hipocritamente’, ‘sadicamente’, ‘criminosamente’ and ‘traíçoeiramente’, he/she may not be conscious of the exact nature of that event. Why would the Portuguese authorities desire the UDT to form part of East Timor’s administration even after its role in the violence the poem vividly describes?

The answer lies in the shared vision of the country’s future held by the government in Lisbon and the leaders of the UDT. John G. Taylor describes the party in the following terms:

the Timorese Democratic Union (*União Democrática Timorense*, UDT) [...] exhibited the Portuguese perspective of progress toward independence through the gradual acquisition of metropolitan culture by elites whose members would be recruited from the indigenous system. The co-existence of the colonial and indigenous systems would thus be superseded by the gradual assimilation of the latter into the former.<sup>9</sup>

It is this vision, shared by the UDT and the Portuguese authorities, that is so vehemently criticised by Borja da Costa, and his poem concludes with the victorious resistance to the imposition of that future of assimilation and subjugation of East Timorese national

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<sup>9</sup> John G. Taylor, ‘The Emergence of a Nationalist Movement in East Timor’, in *East Timor at the Crossroads: the forging of a nation*, ed. by Peter Carey and G. Carter Bentley (London: Cassell, 1995), pp.21-41(p.33).

identity in face of the colonial power. Such resistance avoided the continuation of a link between a metropolitan centre (Portugal) and a periphery (East Timor) that, whilst no longer having the outward trappings of colonialism, may still have had the same relationships of power and exploitation. But ‘O Grito do Soldado Maubere’ definitely rejects that possibility in its final lines, declaring ‘SIM com FRETILIN/para a LIBERTAÇÃO TOTAL’ (l.110). In fact, as a consequence of the events portrayed in this poem, the Portuguese authorities abandoned the territory because of the violence, leaving FRETILIN to govern East Timor, which it proclaimed as independent on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November 1975.

Whilst the defeat of the UDT coup successfully avoided the danger of East Timorese national identity being assimilated into that of a Portugal that no longer identified itself as a colonial power after the overthrow of its dictatorship, Borja da Costa had previously pointed to the consequences of the lack of national identity after his experiences of the effects of Portuguese colonialism. In ‘O Rasto da Tua Passagem’<sup>10</sup> Borja da Costa tells the colonizer that ‘Silenciaste minha razão/Na razão das tuas leis/Sufocaste minha cultura/Na cultura da tua cultura’ (ll.1-4). These opening lines attest to the colonized’s experience of losing their voice, as the colonizer replaces the indigenous social structures and codes for ones that reflect those of the metropolis, as well as introducing a system of values that does not recognise the culture of those it is colonizing. If this process is resisted, the consequences are evident in these lines: ‘Abafaste minhas revoltas/Com a ponta da tua baioneta/Torturaste meu corpo/Nos grilhões do teu império’ (ll.5-8). The poem goes on to accuse the colonizer of further

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<sup>10</sup> *Revolutionary Poems in the Struggle Against Colonialism*, p.22.

crimes, saying ‘Saqueaste/Assassinaste/Massacraste/Pilhaste’ (ll.11-14), where this accumulation of oppressive and violent acts is reminiscent of the strategy used in the poem ‘O Grito do Soldado Maubere’, where the reader was presented with a growing list of crimes perpetrated by the UDT. ‘O Rasto da Tua Passagem’, however, also has a subtitle: ‘Poesia sobre a acção do colonialismo e a forma de libertação dos povos colonizados’, which suggests that the poem will not only reveal the effects of colonialism, but also how the colonized may free themselves.<sup>11</sup> But the means of ridding oneself of the oppressor is only presented in the final lines of the concluding stanza:

Na ponta da baioneta  
Assinalaste o rasto da tua passagem  
Na ponta da minha baioneta  
Marcarei na história a forma da minha  
Libertação (ll.20-24).

So the poem foresees a violent but successful uprising against the colonizer, just as the maubere soldier was able to fight back and defeat the UDT.

But if ‘O Rasto da Tua Passagem’ is addressed to a colonial oppressor, and ‘O Grito do Soldado Maubere’ acts as poetic witness to the violence of the UDT perpetrated with the connivance of the Portuguese authorities, then other poems of Borja da Costa serve other purposes and have other addressees. According to Jill Jolliffe, Borja da Costa’s poems are ‘very much a product of political struggle, for daily use’, and that, along with other FRETILIN writers, he produced ‘poems of inspiration and explanation’ (p.12), which are aimed at the East Timorese people themselves. The nature of this audience

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<sup>11</sup> This subtitle is included in Jill Jolliffe’s edition of Borja da Costa’s poems, but is not present in the version of this poem contained within *Timor Leste*.

influenced the nature of the poetry produced for it, as the vast majority of the East Timorese were illiterate at this time and relied on a strong oral tradition to transmit their culture and social values.<sup>12</sup> Hence Jill Jolliffe's warning:

It should be borne in mind by the reader that most of the poems printed here are meant to be spoken or sung: the printed form does not do them justice. They are written primarily for an illiterate people, who operate from a rich oral tradition in which the words are not generally fixed, but can change according to the circumstances of performance (p.12).

An example of such poetry of 'inspiration and explanation' aimed at the East Timorese themselves, is 'O Povo Maubere Não Pode Ser Escravo de Mais Ninguém',<sup>13</sup> which begins all but the concluding stanza with the words 'É preciso'. The fourth stanza is particularly revealing of the poem's explanatory objectives, declaring that, 'É preciso/Este povo/Ensinar/P'ra entender/Quem o quer/Explorar' (ll.19-24), which is also the task that Borja da Costa himself had been given. The poem outlines what needs to be done in order to achieve a new and independent East Timor, and the sacrifices and risks that must be borne. Therefore, the third stanza tells us that, 'É preciso/Este solo/Regar/Com suor/Com amor/A estrumar' (ll.13-18), indicating that the East Timorese must work hard and devotedly in order to achieve their free country. This will also, according to the second stanza, entail 'Lutar/P'ra vencer/E acabar/Com o medo/Servil' (ll.8-12), and that, in the sixth, 'É preciso/Destruir/E acabar/Com o peso/E opressão/Colonial' (ll.31-36). But in this exhortation to fight, we must bear in mind the inevitable consequences of offering armed resistance to the colonial power, which, although not present in this poem, were apparent

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<sup>12</sup> In fact, by 1974, 93% of the population remained illiterate in Portuguese, which disproves the propaganda of Salazar's Estado Novo that Portuguese colonialism was a civilizing mission.

<sup>13</sup> *Timor Leste*, p.37.

in 'O Rasto da Tua Passagem' in the lines already quoted above, 'Abafaste minhas revoltas/Com a ponta da tua baioneta'.

The sacrifices that the above undertakings will ultimately mean are ceremoniously acknowledged in the poem 'Um Minuto de Silêncio',<sup>14</sup> where the reader is left in no doubt as to the price that some had to pay in order to achieve a free East Timor. The opening three stanzas each begin and end with the imperative 'calai', whilst the intervening verses identify the addressees of that imperative, which all form part of the natural landscape of East Timor. So, the first stanza reads:

Calai  
Montes  
Vales e fontes  
Regatos e ribeiros  
Pedras dos caminhos  
E ervas do chão,  
Calai (ll.1-7)

Once the following two stanzas have ordered other parts of the physical landscape to be silent, the fourth stanza addresses the reader and includes the poet himself as part of the community that will be as silent as its surroundings, in acknowledgement of those who sacrificed their lives, and, using anaphora (pela/pela/pelo/pela), the reasons why they were prepared to make these sacrifices:

Calai  
Calai-vos e calemo-nos  
POR UM MINUTO

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<sup>14</sup> *Revolutionary Poems in the Struggle Against Colonialism*, pp. 42-45. In Jill Jolliffe's note to this poem she writes: 'First published in the post-independence issue of the newspaper *Timor Leste*, which appeared three days before the Indonesian assault on Dili, 'one minute of silence refers to the declaration of independence on November 28, when one minute of silence was observed for those who had died in the fight for independence. It was thus written in the days between November 28 and December 4.

É tempo de silêncio  
No silêncio do tempo  
Ao tempo de vida  
Dos que perderam a vida  
PELA PÁTRIA  
PELA NAÇÃO  
PELO POVO  
PELA NOSSA LIBERTAÇÃO (ll.22-32).

The final line of this stanza also serves to underline the sense of indebtedness of those who have survived to see this day, as it emphasises that it is *our* freedom paid for by *their* lives. But those who fell in the struggle have also left a free nation which must build on a sense of nationhood that, ironically, the colonial oppression of the Portuguese helped to engender, as Elizabeth G. Traube explains in her essay, ‘Mambai Perspectives on Colonialism and Decolonization’:

It was Portuguese colonialism [...] that engendered a wider sense of unity. Out of the common experience of subordination to a particular European power there arose among the subjugated peoples a heightened awareness of their mutual ties to one another, an awareness that was eventually to provide an enabling condition for East Timorese nationalism.<sup>15</sup>

This implies that the ‘povo’ and ‘nação’ referred to by Borja da Costa are not terms that could always have been applied to East Timor and its people(s) throughout its history. In fact, the Timorese are made up of different groupings, with their own languages or dialects, and their own social structures.

However, the common colonial enemy that oppressed them all served to unite them in their resistance to the Portuguese, even if that union needed to be consciously maintained. Such is the effort called for by Borja da Costa’s poem, written in Tetum

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<sup>15</sup> In *East Timor at the Crossroads*, pp.42-55 (p.45).

Terik, 'Kdadalak', which is subtitled, 'Poesia de apelo à unidade do Povo',<sup>16</sup> where the poet refers to 'timores' (l.3), acknowledging the diversity of the people of Timor. But the opening stanza offers an image that seeks to inspire the Timorese: 'Regatos convergindo transformam-se em rios/Os rios juntando-se qual a força que se lhes opõe' (ll.1-2). By using traditional Timorese poetic references to the natural world, the poet suggests the overwhelming power that can be created through the merging of smaller units (the streams which become rivers) into a larger force (the different rivers converging to become one). The second stanza then leaves this natural metaphor to present a course of action to be followed by the people themselves: 'Assim os timores devem juntar-se/Devem unir-se para se oporem ao vento que sopra do mar' (ll.3-4). By joining together, the Timorese will be able to oppose this 'wind that blows from the sea', which is representative of the Portuguese in particular, but could also stand for colonialism or imperialism in general. Borja da Costa ends the poem with the verses, 'Regatos convergindo transformam-se em rios/TIMORES UNIDOS ERGAMOS A NOSSA TERRA' (ll.9-10), calling the Timorese to work together in building a new nation.

But how does Borja da Costa see this new nation that so many of his people are asked to fight and die for? What benefits will it bring that will be worth the sacrifices that have to be made? We have already seen in 'O Povo Maubere Não Pode Ser Escravo de Mais Ninguém' that, once the weight of colonial oppression has been thrown off, then the Timorese do not want to be anyone else's slaves or to be exploited. But an independent future will also bring benefits to East Timorese women according to the poem, 'Ela

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<sup>16</sup> In *Revolutionary Poems in the Struggle Against Colonialism*, (p.32). "Kdadalak", along with four other poems in this volume, are in Tetum Terik, accompanied by a free translation in Portuguese by Borja da Costa.



Vencerá’,<sup>17</sup> which opens by outlining their present condition: ‘Ela que sempre consideraram/Objecto de luxo e também de lixo,/Após servida, logo esquecida/No vazio do quotidiano’ (ll.1-4). After listing a series of injustices committed against women, the poem concludes by referring to the future, where a Timorese woman ‘Encontrará a justiça/No derrube da falsidade/E implantação da igualdade.//ELA... ELA VENCERÁ’ (ll.18-21). Therefore, it is foreseen that, once the colonial rule that does not allow for equality of the sexes has been overthrown, then Timorese women will be valued as much as men and, consequently, all the injustices listed in this poem will come to an end.

The women of East Timor are also highlighted in ‘O Amor’,<sup>18</sup> which makes similar references to those in ‘Ela Vencerá’, but is much more vocal in placing them as partners in the struggle to overthrow colonialism, and East Timorese men as secondary victims of the exploitation of women. The poem begins by questioning the nature of love under colonialism, and calls both sexes to take up the fight against the colonizer:

O amor  
Na era actual  
Está entronizado  
Num pedestal de barro  
Nada o justifica dignamente  
Se não a luta em comum  
De agressão ao agressor (ll.1-7).

It is only through the violent resistance to the oppressor by both men and women that their love will become worthy, as the view of love conveyed by the colonizers is on a ‘pedestal de barro’ which is ‘Mascarado de branco’ (l.10). The propagators of this dubious love are

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<sup>17</sup> *Timor Leste*, p.13.

<sup>18</sup> *Timor Leste*, p.29.

‘cambiantes da falsidade/Interesseira e pedantesca’ (ll.13-14), which is reminiscent of ‘Ela Vencerá’, where East Timorese women would become victorious after the ‘derrube da falsidade’. But in ‘O Amor’, the false love under colonialism is one where ‘Explorando a mulher/Explora o homem’ (ll.16-17), affecting both sexes and tying them to an erroneous image of love which leaves them open to exploitation. Therefore, the poem calls everyone to take action, declaring that, in order to ‘Restituir-lhe a face’ (l.19) of love, the following steps must be taken:

É missão de todos nós  
Destruir-lhe o agressor  
É libertarmos a terra  
Da opressão colonial  
É libertarmos o povo  
Da exploração pelo capital  
AVANTE CAMARADA (ll.20-26).

So, the restoration of a love that is genuine, and that does not exploit or introduce inequality between the sexes, depends upon the successful overthrow of not only colonialism, but of the exploitation by capitalism. Consequently, the resulting society would be free of both, and would embrace equality in all its aspects. However, Francisco Borja da Costa himself would not be able to determine whether his fellow countrymen would succeed in making these visions a reality, as his murder by the Indonesian army on the first day of their invasion prevented that.

The effects of that invasion, and the further sacrifices that the people of East Timor were forced to ignore, form part of the subject matter of Celso Oliveira’s 2003 collection of poems, *Timor-Leste: Chegou a Liberdade*. The poet himself states, ‘aqui, nesta pequena coleção de 39 poemas de Lorosa’e, eu queria transmitir aos leitores o que foi a nossa vida

ao longo da ocupação indonésia e o nosso desejo para o futuro dum Timor-Leste independente desde 20 de Maio 2002' (p.6). However, not only does Celso Oliveira transmit to the reader the experience of colonial repression where, this time, the colonizers are the Indonesians, but he also reflects on the independence of his country in 2002. In her preface to this volume, Maria Teresa Carrilho writes:

É inegável, pois, que a poesia de Celso Oliveira apresenta uma identificação catártica, um estado de espírito em que o eu poético se coloca na posição de grande sofrimento, mercê dos acontecimentos vividos, observados ou partilhados num passado muito recente para, finalmente, deixar antever uma visão diferente, mesmo que se trate apenas de vislumbres de um novo estado de alma, aqui e ali ensombrados por um certo desencantamento/desapontamento no novo mundo em que se encontra (p.8).

Carrilho justifiably points to the fact that the lyric voice in Oliveira's poems is one that suffers greatly due to the events it experiences in a 'passado muito recente', which is that of the Indonesian occupation. It is also reminiscent of the poetic path laid out in the FRETILIN preface to *Timor Leste*, referred to earlier in this article, where it was stated that 'o poeta encontra o seu próprio EU na Luta, através da sua participação directa e quotidiana na transformação política e sócio-económica do meio humano a que pertence'(p.5). Just as Borja da Costa's poetry seemed to speak directly of the experience of colonial suppression under the Portuguese, and to identify with its victims, so too does Oliveira's, but, whereas the population that is being subjugated is the same, the aggressors are now the Indonesians. Carrilho has also recognised that the poet has included within his vision of the free East Timor occasional traces of disillusionment.

Just as in Borja da Costa's poems, Celso Oliveira's poetry contains many references that indicate a significant overlap between the lyrical landscape that they construct and the realities experienced by the East Timorese. This is evident in the poem 'Cronologia' (p.20), transcribed below in its entirety, which also serves to place temporally the experiences contained within the volume:

7 de Dezembro de 1975:  
a invasão da República da Indonésia.  
30 de Agosto de 1999:  
o referendo em Timor-Leste.  
20 de Maio de 2002:  
a independência de Timor-Leste.

“Reconciliação e Progresso”

The dates that this poem marks as significant events in the history of East Timor begin where Borja da Costa left off, and it is mainly to events and experiences within these limits that Celso Oliveira refers to in the poems. But the simplicity and starkness of this poem's structure also lead the unfamiliar reader to seek the importance of the dates listed and, perhaps, to note the long time interval between the Indonesian invasion and the next significant date. Many of Oliveira's poems reflect on what occurred during those intervening years.

'O desespero dum prisioneiro timorense' (p.12) is one of those poems which, through its use of both the present and past tenses in describing the poet's emotions whilst in prison in Jakarta, suggests that those memories are still very fresh. The poem's opening stanza begins, 'Estou desesperado, aflito e com medo./Os meus olhos cheios de lágrimas,/Suor no meu corpo' (ll.1-3), initially suggesting, through the present tense

'Estou', that the emotions of despair and fear are being felt at this moment. However, the concluding line of this stanza reads, 'Eu chorei, chorei muito' (1.4), where the action of crying is now being described as having taken place in the past, introducing an element of doubt as to whether the first stanza is describing things that took place at the same time, or whether they are separate events. And yet, the fact that the second line refers to 'meus olhos cheios de lágrimas', and the final line states that the poet had cried, may lead us to believe that a single experience is being evoked here.

The second stanza begins in the past tense, stating that 'A minha morte não era por meu querer' (1.5), and ends 'Mas por querer dos outros' (1.7). As the lyric voice refers to past events, this death that others had desired for him cannot have been realised, but its possibility may have been the cause of the emotions described in the first stanza. Further information is then given which adds to the belief that the poet is reliving a past experience, the location of which is revealed in the opening line of the third stanza: 'Quando eu estava na prisão em Jacarta' (1.8). It is with this specific geographical positioning that relevant extratextual knowledge encourages the reader to identify the 'others' from the second stanza that desired the poet's death as Indonesian, and to infer that he has been imprisoned for his pursuit of an independent East Timor. His interest in his country of origin is kept alive after his release from jail, as his mother, he explains in the fourth stanza, 'deu-me um rádio de 12 bandas./Com ele acompanhei as notícias de Lorosa'e todos os dias' (ll.12-13). These lines also suggest that he does not immediately return to East Timor, but that his thoughts are continually with his country's struggle and his people, even as he lies in his prison cell, as the fifth stanza describes:

Na verdade, na cela em Jacarta  
Eu pensei nelas: a minha pátria,  
a minha mãe,  
a minha namorada (ll.14-17)

Once again, the above stanza describes a past event, evident through the verbal element ‘pensei’, which the poet is now describing to us. However, the poem ends with the lines, ‘Vai morrer a minha alma./Oh... coitadinha da alma maubere’ (ll.18-19), where we are now confronted with a reference to the future. In projecting these feelings to an immediate future, Celso Oliveira is condensing time, as the heartbreak he says he is going to feel is, at the same time, a consequence of the emotions that the retelling of these events are raising within him, and also a projection of himself back to that time and that place, in his prison cell in Jakarta, where those emotions were first felt.

By revealing to the reader the experience of imprisonment and the fear of death, and the emotions that these evoke in the poet, we become conscious of the sacrifices made in the struggle for the ‘pátria’. The very process of writing is revealed as an act that demands its own hardships, but one which is intended as another weapon in the struggle for freedom. In his introductory remarks to *Timor-Leste: Chegou a Liberdade*, Celso Oliveira writes:

Desde pequeno que eu sonhava escrever um livro. Infelizmente, o meu sonho foi interrompido pela guerra ao longo de 20 e tal anos em Timor-Leste. Apesar disso, colaborei sempre nos jornais e boletins na resistência e clandestinidade, tanto em Timor-Leste e Jacarta, como em Portugal (p.6).

Here the poet remarks on the impossibility of publishing a book despite the Indonesian occupation, but how he still managed to write for newspapers and pamphlets during the

difficulties brought about by the struggle for independence. The sacrifices that the act of writing demands in this case are far from the Romantic image of the suffering poet who struggles for his art. Celso Oliveira must face the dangers of producing written material that may lead to his imprisonment by the Indonesian authorities, and the difficulties of writing while in hiding.

The poet reflects on the experience of producing his poetry during this period in 'Foi assim que a minha obra nasceu' (p.14), and the sources of his inspiration. These are made evident in the first stanza, which reads:

No meu abrigo,  
Escrevi os meus versos,  
Tudo o que senti  
Sobre o povo e a Pátria Lorosa'e (ll.1-4).

Whereas the signifier 'abrigo' does not necessarily denote discomfort, the suggestion of impermanence is raised, whilst the poet's subjects are clearly defined as the feelings he experiences in connection with his people and his country. However, the second stanza refers to elements that begin to add to the state of impermanence and induce discomfort in the poet, as the 'Chuva e vento faziam-me frio' (l.8). These are not the usual concerns for the archetypal romantic poet, but rather those of one directly affected by a physical struggle, as becomes apparent in the fourth stanza where we read that 'A chuva parou e chegou o dia./Mais um dia, mais uma batalha armada./E mais um verso no meu abrigo' (ll.14-16). Although these lines do not necessarily indicate that the poet is himself directly engaged in the armed daily conflict, he is, nevertheless, dealing with its consequences. Moreover, through the anaphoric elements 'mais um dia', 'mais uma batalha', and 'mais

um verso', the reader is directed towards seeing the act of writing poetry as being concurrent with that of the armed conflict, and that, in its own way, it is contributing to the struggle for an independent East Timor.

Once again, the need to endure hardship in order to attain such an objective is present in the third stanza, adding to the earlier references to impermanence ('abrigo') and physical discomfort ('Chuva e vento faziam-me frio'). In this stanza, once the poet has put out his lantern, there is 'Silêncio' (l.10), and he is 'Sozinho' (l.11). Though there may be apparent similarities here between the romantic image of the poet and Celso Oliveira's references that indicate solitude and quiet, these are quickly dispelled in the stanza's concluding lines which position the poet within the physical landscape around him, where he says that, 'Ouvi os mosquitos cantarem na noite silenciosa, e/Os cães uivarem longíssimo' (ll.12-13). The use of the superlative 'longíssimo' is significant in measuring the distance that separates the poet from the barking dogs, as this could be interpreted as his separation from the towns where most of his fellow countrymen and their pets dwell. However, that separation is not the result of the romantic poet whose art has distanced him from all those that do not share his artistic temperament, but instead, as the fourth stanza has shown, the result of the poet's involvement in the struggle to achieve his people's freedom from colonialism.

The fifth stanza underlines the sacrifices that have to be made in that struggle, and also reveals to the reader that the experiences described in the previous stanzas are not out of the ordinary, but actually a routine matter in the daily life of the poet. It reads:



Tinha que deixar este abrigo  
E esconder-me noutro abrigo.  
Foi assim que eu resisti.  
Foi assim que a minha obra nasceu (ll.17-20).

The anaphoric structures in this stanza help in transmitting to the reader the sense of repetition in the poet's movements, as well as identifying these as the manner in which he resisted colonialism and as the source of his poetry. By ending the first two lines with the phrases 'este abrigo' and 'noutro abrigo', we are encouraged to view these shelters as belonging to a long series of hiding places, and how the poet has forsaken stability in order to participate in the resistance against his country's oppressors. This act, through the anaphora 'Foi assim', is not only shown as the inspiration for his work, but also as the place from which he is writing. That is to say, unlike the romantic vision of the poet, sitting at his desk in his study, facing internal demons in order to produce his verses, Celso Oliveira pictures himself in makeshift shelters, suffering from the cold weather, and hiding from those who would imprison him for his political views. These are evident in the poem's final stanza, which simply reads, '- Timor-Leste independente./Um livro por Timor-Leste' (ll.21-22).

Of other poems in this collection that articulate the sacrifices made in the struggle against the Indonesian occupation, there are those, such as 'A nossa vida "era" fazer manifestações contra a Indonésia' (p.21), where the lyric voice was part of a collective effort on which it is now reflecting. On recalling that past, the second stanza declares, 'É, somos nós os jovens, prontos para morrer./É, somos nós os jovens que devíamos estudar' (ll.7-8); and these youngsters, instead of leading carefree lives were, according to the third stanza, 'Nós preparávamos clandestinamente manifestações contra a Indonésia' (l.12). The

poem also makes clear in the fourth stanza how single-minded these youngsters were in the very moment of their acts of defiance, and how the struggle itself became the most important thing in their lives:

Já nos protestos, esquecíamos tudo:  
Pai, mãe, filhos, irmãs, irmãos, avô, avó, escola, trabalho, prisão, tortura e morte.  
O pensamento era só um:  
A Independência de Timor-Leste (ll.13-16).

But, as this poem is reflecting back on these past events, it can also testify as to their positive outcome, as it concludes:

Agora, quando abrimos a página da nossa história,  
Lá está escrito:  
“Jovens timorenses manifestaram-se em todo o território contra Jacarta” (ll.17-19).

However, whilst this poem validates the actions of a younger generation of East Timorese against their Indonesian oppressors, two poems, both called ‘Sem título’ (p.19 and p.30), recall the ultimate sacrifice made by the lyric voice’s father.

In the first (p.19), the incomprehension felt at the time of the father’s death (‘Certo dia, perguntei à minha mãe:/ “Porque é que o meu pai morreu?”/Mas ela não respondeu./ - Eu continuo sem perceber nada’ (ll.10-13) ), is replaced by a realisation as to the cause of that death: ‘24 anos depois, percebi que o meu pai morreu por causa da guerra./E eu fiquei sem ele para sempre’ (ll.14-15). Yet these lines do not make clear whether the father was a passive victim of the war, or if he had actively participated in it. The answer is given in the second poem ‘Sem título’ (p.30), which, in its entirety, simply states, ‘O meu pai lutou, sofreu e morreu./E eu gozei esta liberdade’. In these two lines the poet conveys to

the reader that the father's ultimate sacrifice was not in vain, as the son is now living free of the colonial aggressors. Furthermore, in the light of poems such as 'A nossa vida "era" fazer manifestações contra a Indonésia', we are made aware of the trans-generational nature of the struggle, and that the sacrifices made by the older generations were echoed by the younger, and that these ultimately led to the freedom of East Timor.

Included by Celso Oliveira among those who suffer is the figure of the woman in the poem 'E ela ficou viúva' (p.25), which is significant in the light of Borja da Costa's poems 'Ela vencerá' and 'O amor', analysed earlier, as Oliveira's work depicts the female figure in roles that were not foreseen by Borja da Costa. In 'Ela vencerá', the description of the woman as 'Após servida, logo esquecida/No vazio do quotidiano', was presented as something that was to be overcome once freedom was achieved. However, Celso Oliveira's poem describes the woman as a widow whose husband 'Deixou a mulher e os filhos' (l.6), and who 'morreu nas mãos dos seus irmãos, camaradas' (l.5). The passive nature of the woman, reinforcing patriarchal stereotypes, is underlined in the opening line of the third stanza, where it is stated that 'Ela contou o tempo que se passou' (l.7), and her sacrifices in educating her children are rewarded by them in the sixth stanza:

Os filhos tornaram-se jovens,  
Deixaram-na sozinha,  
Voaram sem destino  
Para todo o lado do mundo (ll.22-25).

Therefore, it appears that the woman's role continues to obey what Borja da Costa had hoped independence would repudiate, and she still lives in the 'vazio do quotidiano'. She does not actively participate in the struggle against the colonizers, as was hoped for in

Borja da Costa's 'O amor'. And even if Oliveira's portrayal of the woman in traditional patriarchal roles may still be, on the whole, temporally located within the experience of colonialism, which could explain the lack of equality, the final stanza does not appear to undermine this view:

Um dia, um filho voltou  
Com um livro na mão e disse:  
"Mãe, a minha primeira obra é para si" (ll.30-32).

The son's return, and the gift to her of his literary work, still place the woman in the position of passive participant in the social world who must await those who are actively engaged in it to come into her presence. Furthermore, the fact that he has had a book published would suggest that this event took place after the departure of the Indonesians, and therefore, in a period where equality between the sexes could have been hoped for.

While the figure of the widowed mother waits passively for events to unfold, poems such as 'O tempo da acção' (p.36) and 'O sentido da vida' (p.27) return to a sense of sacrifice endured by a collective that actively resists the aggressors. The widowed mother shares in the experience of painful sacrifice, but she is not included in 'A luta armada,/A luta clandestina,/A luta estudantil,/A luta diplomática' (ll.3-6) of the opening stanza of 'O tempo da acção'. Once again, this poem catalogues the hardships endured during the struggle, and in its fourth stanza there are lines strikingly similar to verses from 'A nossa vida "era" fazer manifestações contra a Indonésia'. In 'O tempo da acção' we read, 'Quando lutamos, esquecemos tudo:/Pai, mãe, filhos, estudo, trabalho, irmãos, prisão, tortura e morte' (ll.13-15), whereas 'A nossa vida "era" fazer manifestações contra a Indonésia' states, 'Já nos protestos, esquecíamos tudo:/Pai, mãe, filhos, irmãs, irmãos,

avô, avó, escola, trabalho, prisão, tortura e morte' (ll.13-14). Nevertheless, although in 'O tempo da acção' there are some who accuse those who have made these sacrifices of being a 'grupo frustrado, sem estudo' (l.17), the poem concludes with an optimistic view of the future: 'Mas acredito que o grupo frustrado e sem estudo,/Libertará a Pátria./Acredito' (ll.18-20). This positive evaluation of the sacrifices made in this poem differs from that given in 'A nossa vida "era" fazer manifestações contra a Indonésia', as the latter offered its judgement retrospectively when the history books already showed these actions as having been successful. That is also the position of the poem 'O sentido da vida' (p.27), where the final stanza states that 'Agora é tempo de Paz' (l.6). In this case, what had to be endured in order to achieve this peace is again recalled throughout the poem, but is also to be forgotten according to the closing stanza:

Agora é tempo de Paz,  
Vamos esquecer o passado,  
Porque foi de dor, muito doer,  
Lágrimas a cair  
Todos os dias (ll.6-10).

Though the poem calls for the erasure of painful memories, it is of course, in its very act of asking for it to be forgotten, recalling that pain once more, and the tears that are shed 'Todos os dias', may be in all the days of that violent past, but also in those of a peaceful present.

Such tears were also shed during the times of enforced exile that are recalled in poems such as, 'O candeeiro branco' (p.26), 'As prendas de Natal' (p.28), 'Orgulho-me de escrever por meu mundo' (p.39) and 'O clandestino' (p.48). Whereas the place of exile is made explicit in these poems, 'No meu quarto' (p.35) does not recall anywhere specific,

although the objects that fill the restricted space inhabited by the poet are presented to the reader and lead us to believe that they are foreign to the East Timorese space. The poem begins:

Aqui no meu quarto, no sítio onde estou a  
Escrever o meu mundo, é um quarto de 4x4 m2  
E tem casa de banho no interior (ll.1-3).

There is nothing that points explicitly to a place of exile, but the fact that the last line chooses to indicate the presence of an indoor bathroom suggests that this is not customary. And yet it must be noted that the poem also includes from the outset a reference to the act of writing, a constant presence in Oliveira's poetry, even in the precarious setting of the 'abrigo' in 'Foi assim que a minha obra nasceu'. The second stanza then offers the reader an inventory of this bedroom's contents:

Tem uma cama para dormir, que está tapada com um lençol vermelho.  
Tem uma mesa cheia de livros, documentos que vieram do mato, da cidade e do exterior, tem fotocópias, boletins, *biskuit* e leite, lenços de papel e uma fotografia.  
Tem um armário de roupas vazio (ll.4-7).

These verses simultaneously convey the sense that the lyric voice is not in his native land through the simplicity and emptiness of the bed and wardrobe, and through the presence of objects that have been brought to this place from elsewhere. Despite this transitory life, the poem concludes that,

Aqui, neste quarto  
Ajuda-me a estudar  
E a escrever qualquer coisa que sirva  
Para a minha pátria, Timor Lorosa'e (ll.12-15).

So, although not explicit, this poem conveys the sense of a poet writing his world ('estou a/Escriver o meu mundo' (ll.1-2) ) whilst in exile from it.

In 'O candeeiro branco', on the other hand, the location of the poet's exile is clearly suggested in the second stanza as being the Portuguese capital, Lisbon: 'O candeeiro branco de 7 euros,/Único que comprei na Rua Augusta, Rossio' (ll.7-8).<sup>19</sup> This simple desk lamp enables the poet in his exile to write of his homeland and so to reconnect him to it despite the distance that separates them: 'Ajuda-me a sonhar sobre a minha pátria,/E escrever as minhas poesias' (ll.9-10). Portugal is also the location of 'As prendas de Natal', as revealed to us through references to major writers of that country in the concluding stanza: 'na terra de Luís de Camões, José Saramago/Manuel Alegre e outros lusitanos' (ll.26-27). The importance of literature is again a factor in this poem of exile, where the pain and tears that this situation causes ('Chorei pela minha pátria,/Longíssima' (ll.4-5) ) are soothed by friends offering volumes of poetry as Christmas gifts: 'Os meus amigos ofereceram-me livros de poesia e de esperança' (l.28). The pleasure brought by the reading of poetry helps to attenuate the hardships brought by exile, which, in turn, enables those hardships to be turned into the subject of the poetry written by the lyric voice in the hope that this will contribute to his country's struggle.

However, in 'Orgulho-me de escrever por meu mundo', there is doubt expressed as to the worth of his creative output, although the poem begins by suggesting otherwise. Its opening lines reveal the writer seeing for the first time a book he has had published, as he states that 'Na minha biblioteca/Encontrei o meu primeiro livro' (ll.1-2). This 'Livro de poesia' (l.3) is described in the second stanza:

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<sup>19</sup> This is a well-known area of central Lisbon.

Um livro que pronuncia:  
Os pensamentos reais,  
Os desesperos, as ternuras e as aflições  
Dum jovem timorense (ll.9-12).

The author of this book has identified himself clearly as a young Timorese, whose own experiences and feelings are the basis of the book, of which, according to the third stanza, he is proud:

Orgulho-me de ler o meu próprio livro.  
Orgulho-me de ver a minha primeira obra  
Na minha própria biblioteca.  
Orgulho-me de escrever qualquer  
Coisa... por Timor (ll.13-17).

The anaphoric repetition of ‘orgulho-me’ underlines the high value put upon this work, which is also reinforced by the three verbs that follow the anaphora: ‘ler’, ‘ver’ and ‘escrever’. The pleasure that is induced by reading the volume of poetry, as well as by seeing it as a material presence, is also brought about by the belief that what has been written will in some measure benefit East Timor.

Having expressed gratification over the production of this book, and attaching a sense of value to it, the poem’s tone suddenly changes with the single verse stanza, ‘Mas quem sou eu, para ser feliz na terra de Camões?’ (l.18). The happiness that was present up to this point disappears as the present situation of exile in Portugal is remembered, and an element of self-doubt is introduced with the question ‘quem sou eu’. This comes in the verse that uses the name of Camões as the identifier of the lyric voice’s place of exile, which could be interpreted as signifying a double exile: exile from East Timor, and exile from the Portuguese literary canon. The following stanza indicates that the lyric voice,



despite the pride originally felt on having had a book of poetry published, does not now feel that he can call himself a poet or writer: ‘Eu devia ser poeta./Eu devia ser escritor’ (ll.19-20). It is as if living in the land of Camões has made him doubt his own value as a young East Timorese poet who does not belong to the tradition of the writer of *Os Lusíadas*. This interpretation gains validity in the light of the poem’s concluding stanza, which reads: ‘Afinal, sou apenas um escritor primitivo/Que vivo no mundo moderno’ (ll.24-25). Despite this, he writes in the previous verse that ‘Por meu mundo, continuarei a escrever’ (l.23), therefore the apparent doubts raised as to his worth are not going to prevent him from continuing to write for ‘his world’, which is set against the ‘modern world’ in which he is living. That is to say, whatever feelings of inferiority are raised in him by living in Portugal, he will continue to write in order to help East Timor.

The theme of exile is dealt with again in ‘O clandestino’, but here the act of writing is no longer portrayed, and other acts of resistance take the foreground.<sup>20</sup> The first stanza reveals the poem’s setting, as well as making an important distinction between the leaders of a colonizing nation and its people:

Jacarta não é o nosso país.  
O povo é bom  
Mas o regime, o poder é mau (ll.1-3).

The poem reveals to the reader the experiences and feelings of an East Timorese living clandestinely in the capital of his country’s oppressors, where he is actively engaged in opposing them. One constant feeling is that of fear, which appears throughout the poem:

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<sup>20</sup> It is interesting to note that the poems of Borja da Costa analysed earlier, in comparison with those of Celso Oliveira, do not appear to reflect on the act of writing as another form of resistance, or on the difficulties of the resistance writer in a colonial situation.

‘Com medo’ (l.4), ‘Só há medo’ (l.9), ‘Para nós há medo’ (l.10), ‘Mas há medo’ (l.14), ‘Com medo fazemos política’ (l.15), ‘Este medo não é nosso’ (l.18). Again, as in other poems, the sense of fear does not prevent those living clandestinely in Jakarta from carrying out their actions. Thus, the fifth stanza states that, ‘Com medo fazemos política:/Comunicamos com os estrangeiros, produzimos boletins, transportamos documentos,/conversamos e traçamos estratégias’ (ll.15-17). Indeed, by the opening line of the following stanza the sense of fear is rejected as not being an intrinsic part of their characters (‘Este medo não é nosso’ (l.18) ), and the seventh stanza opens with the verse, ‘Esta coragem é nossa’ (l.21), where bravery has now replaced the earlier sentiment. This enables those involved in the struggle to live with the knowledge of the danger their clandestine presence in Indonesia brings, and to declare in the eighth stanza: ‘Jacarta não é o nosso país./Mas vivemos com ele porque a pátria nos chamou./Estudamos, vivemos e lutamos’ (ll.25-27). Therefore, whilst they would prefer not to be living there, their duty to their country has led them to choose a dangerous life in Indonesia.

As in earlier poems, ‘O clandestino’ is clear in its belief that the hardships and the risks experienced in Jakarta will ultimately be repaid:

Um dia  
Gritaremos “Viva a Liberdade”.  
Cantaremos o nosso hino nacional.  
Içaremos a nossa bandeira nacional.  
Orgulhar-nos-emos com os nossos heróis nacionais.

Acreditamos (ll.28-33).

This belief in the ultimate success of those who are involved in resisting the colonial oppressor is reminiscent of some of the poems by Borja da Costa analysed earlier. He

called for sacrifices to be made in order to achieve the independence of East Timor, which Celso Oliveira can depict as an attainable reality.

That reality is also present in some of Oliveira's poems as something retrospectively experienced, and therefore as a reflection on his country's successful fight for independence. It is in poems such as, 'É o dia da liberdade' (p.24), 'A esperança de uma filha' (p.29), and '4 de Setembro de 2002', that particular dates gain importance. They mark important events in the history of East Timor, and so, just as some of Borja da Costa's poems did, they encourage the reader to go beyond the confines of the poems themselves, and to link their contents to extratextual knowledge.

Thus, 'É o dia da liberdade' ends with the verse, 'É o dia da Liberdade. 30/8/99' (l.10), simply concluding with the date that refers to the result of the UN-sponsored referendum, in which the overwhelming majority of the people of East Timor voted to begin the process towards independence. The lyric voice adds to the significance of this date, underlining its credentials as an event that should become part of the country's history by revealing that it was written on the same day: 'Porque hoje é o Dia da Paz' (l.9), therefore suggesting that its importance immediately inspired the poet to write. Its overall tone is one of hope, and that a better future lies ahead, thereby seemingly validating all the sacrifices that are detailed in other poems. The opening verses contribute to the idea that there is a desire for things to change, especially in the change of verbal tenses from the first to the second stanzas:

Havia razões escondidas.  
Havia oportunidades perdidas.

Agora, é tempo de recuperar o perdido (ll.1-3).

The anaphoric use of the verb ‘haver’ in the imperfect tense helps to create the sense of what had been the case for a considerable period of time, which the second stanza then disrupts with its reference to a present (‘Agora’), and whose positive theme is of the recovery of what had been lost in the opening stanza. Amongst the things that this present will now allow people to engage in, as listed in the third stanza, is ‘De dar maior atenção à família’ (l.6), which recalls verses from ‘O tempo da acção’ and ‘A nossa vida “era” fazer manifestações contra a Indonésia’ (discussed in p.31), where the poet confesses to having ignored his family in order to engage in the struggle. But the positive tone of this poem leads the reader to believe that having to temporarily sacrifice one’s family in favour of resisting colonial oppression was ultimately worthwhile, as their country is now free.

Confirmation of this is offered in the poem ‘A esperança de uma filha’, where a daughter validates the father’s decision to put the struggle for his country before his family. This is the poem in its entirety:

Pai,  
Valeu a pena lutar  
Valeu a pena sofrer,  
Valeu a pena morrer,  
Porque hoje é o dia da Liberdade.  
30/8/99.

This validation by the daughter of her father’s actions comes on the same day that was the theme of ‘É o dia da liberdade’, thereby focusing on freedom as the value that was bought

with the sacrifices she lists: 'lutar', 'sofrer' and 'morrer'. She is retrospectively assessing her father's actions in the light of an independent future that at this moment (30/8/99) seems hopeful, but the poem '4 de Setembro de 2002' (p.15) reflects on the events that followed the referendum, revealing that, at the time the daughter is addressing her father, that future is still not secure.

The poem begins by providing the reader with temporal and spatial settings, placing itself within a specific timeframe and geographical position, which refer to extratextual factors:

Na noite de 4 de Setembro de 2002,  
Eu passei pela estrada de Taibessi, Santa Cruz, Vila Verde, Farol e Pante Kelapa.  
Encontrei a cidade de Díli na escuridão.

Initially, the discovery that Díli is in darkness may arouse the suspicion that something has happened in the Timorese capital, but the second stanza tells us that everyone is out on the streets, holding candles, and that they are all 'em alegria' (l.7). But that happiness is overshadowed by the event referred to in the following stanza:

A população lembra a memória do Setembro Negro de 1999.  
Díli na escuridão.  
Mas o povo em liberdade.

Here, the city in darkness, while its people are free, can be applied to the lyric voice's present in September of 2002, or to the Black September of 1999, when Díli was devastated by terrible violence following the result of the referendum. During that month Indonesian-backed militias terrorised the East Timorese population, killing many and

forcing others to hide in the mountains, or to seek safety in refugee camps across the border in the Indonesian half of the island.

The following stanza returns the reader to the lyric voice's present, and to a peaceful East Timor where the terrible events of September 1999 are now remembered as part of the hard road to independence. It begins by contrasting the past to the present, declaring, 'Após 24 anos de silêncio,/Agora, uma conversa sem medo, sem segredo' (ll.11-12). Added to the lack of fear in speaking freely which were not available under the Indonesian occupation, are the leisurely activities that open the fifth stanza: 'Um copo de cerveja,/Um cigarro na mão' (ll.16-17). These help to present an image of a country finally at peace, which the final stanza claims as a right: 'Queremos gozar esta liberdade, vitória e independência... /Porque a ela nós pertencemos' (ll.21-22). It should be noted that the past of hardships referred to in this poem belongs exclusively to the period of Indonesian colonialism, and does not refer to the colonial experience under the Portuguese. Nevertheless, the '24 anos de silêncio' that it recalls could also be extended further back in time, to include the hardships and sacrifices endured by the generation of Borja da Costa.

But Borja da Costa was not able to assess whether those hardships and sacrifices had delivered the kind of free East Timor he had fought for, whereas Celso Oliveira has survived to see his country gain its independence. However, the younger poet is at times severely critical of this new East Timor, and questions whether what he and others like him had endured was worthwhile in view of the country that was now before them. This sense of doubt is evident in poems such as 'Regressei' (p.16), 'O tempo de regressar' (p.17), 'Era uma coisa/Agora é outra coisa' (p.44), and 'Dois caminhos difíceis' (p.45).

And yet, before we analyse these poems as examples of a critical appraisal of the independent East Timor, it must be borne in mind that both Borja da Costa and Celso Oliveira do not offer in their poetry a clear vision of what that nation should represent, or what kind of society it should contain. Both poets call for freedom and independence, but without specifying what these should give rise to. Borja da Costa is especially adamant on the kind of East Timor he does *not* want, but not as vociferous on the details of what his ideal nation would look like. Nevertheless, it is legitimate to assess the success of the independent East Timor that Celso Oliveira has witnessed by this poet's own views, and by detecting whether there are elements within it that Borja da Costa had declared as undesirable.

Celso Oliveira's poem 'Regressei' contains brief references to particular sectors of East Timorese society that have not been fully satisfied with the state of affairs since independence. However, these only arouse a sense of disquiet in the reader who has the relevant extratextual knowledge related to the particular references that are made by the poet, especially since the poem exudes a general feeling of someone returning to a free and peaceful homeland, where normality has been restored. This is evident in the opening stanza, where the lyric voice declares that 'Regressei à minha pátria,/Encontrei a minha knua,/Encontrei a minha família' (ll.1-3),<sup>21</sup> indicating a return journey that heads increasingly inwards, to more intimate surroundings: homeland, village, family. Through the lyric voice's senses of hearing, touch and sight, we are presented with the image of peace and tranquillity, and that things have returned to a state of calm that had been interrupted:

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<sup>21</sup> *Knua* means 'village' in Tetum.

Ouvi a minha língua falada,  
Ouvi a minha knananuk.<sup>22</sup>

Senti o calor da minha terra,  
Senti a frescura d'água da minha quinta.

Vi as crianças no meu bairro a jogar bola, a brincar, a correr e a rir  
(ll.4-8).

These verses evoke a return to things that were familiar to the lyric voice, and the children playing and laughing underline the transformation that has taken place in comparison to the poems that refer to the Indonesian occupation. Stanza seven, through the naming of individuals known by or related to the lyric voice, emphasises the re-establishment of social trends that had been forcefully interrupted. Indeed, the last verse suggests that this transformation is welcome:

O Alcino continua a correr na cidade de Díli,  
A Bitakai continua a passear na estrada de Díli,  
O cemitério de Santa Cruz cada vez mais cheio,  
O padre João Felgueiras cada vez mais velho.  
A avó madre Laurinda está mais contente do que antes.  
(ll.12-16)

The return to the normal functioning of society is transmitted through the anaphoras 'continua a' (ll.12 and 13), and 'cada vez mais' (ll.14 and 15), where the first indicates the continuation of a custom, and the second the natural processes of death and ageing.

However, the following stanza upsets the image of a society returning to old certainties that had been temporarily taken from them: 'As FDTL mostraram parada no 20 de Agosto de 2002./E as ex-Falintil continuaram a exigir o seu direito' (ll.17-18).<sup>23</sup> Here

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<sup>22</sup> *Knananuk* means 'music' in Tetum.

<sup>23</sup> FDTL: Forças de Defesa de Timor-Leste; Falintil: Forças Armadas de Libertação Nacional de Timor-Leste.



we have the new, the FDTL, which have replaced the old, the ex-Falintil, where the latter do not share in the contentment expressed by ‘a avó madre Laurinda’ in the previous stanza. While the new East Timorese defence forces parade during a national holiday to mark the 27<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Falintil, ex-members of the latter organization are demanding their rights, as demonstrated by the following TSF article, entitled ‘Segurança reforçada na festa das Falintil’:

Já durante as comemorações, um ex-comandante das Falintil desferiu fortes críticas à ONU, à comunidade internacional e às forças de segurança timorenses. Ologari Asuain criticou, ao longo de hora e meia, o período de transição do território e os primeiros meses de independência, onde considerou que o executivo não aprovou medidas concretas para lidar com problemas dos ex-combatentes (<http://tsf.sapo.pt/>).

So those who had taken part in the armed struggle which resulted in an independent East Timor, and whose sacrifices have been recorded in some of the poems we have seen, now constitute an element that is in discordance with the sense of harmony that the poem ‘Regressei’ had been reflecting in its opening stanzas. And the ninth stanza adds to the hint of disquiet, as another group that had actively resisted the Indonesian occupation (as depicted in poems such as ‘A nossa vida “era” fazer manifestações contra a Indonésia’), voices its own concerns: ‘Os jovens e estudantes gritavam no palácio do governo:/ - Caso “boder control”, - “propinas” e – “a reforma (?)”’ (ll.19-20). Nevertheless, despite these groups’ concerns, the concluding stanzas of the poem restore a positive note, referring to ‘Díli e dilienses em festa, em liberdade’ (l.24), and in the final verse, ‘Todos em liberdade’ (l.29). There is the suggestion, therefore, that, although there may be those who

are discontented, they now share in the freedom that allows them to demonstrate that fact publicly.

But the feeling of discontent looms more intensely in the poem 'O tempo de recompensar' (p.17) which takes the events of 4 December 2002 as its point of departure, and ends with a call for unity. It begins with a negative initial assessment of the new East Timor, stating 'Se eu soubesse que "era" assim o nosso destino, eu não lutava/(após 4/12/2002, novo confronto na cidade de Díli)' (ll.1-2). As in previous poems, we are directed outwards, towards a date that is considered to be important and knowledge of which will provide a particular context for what follows. In fact, the second verse offers some additional information beyond the date, referring to another confrontation in the East Timorese capital. These events are described in a TSF article from that date, entitled 'José Luís Arnaut "comanda" protecção a portugueses':

Apesar da situação já estar mais calma, a cidade mergulhou no caos, depois de estudantes se oporem à detenção de um colega acusado de homicídio. Modesta Lopes, secretária da embaixada portuguesa explicou à TSF que "está tudo na rua e começaram a incendiar casas e a destruir lojas, cafés e restaurantes. Estão a partir tudo. Aqui na embaixada só passaram e não fizeram nada", disse (<http://tsf.sapo.pt/>).

In view of these violent confrontations, the lyric voice questions whether the sacrifices he made in the struggle for East Timor were in vain.

We have seen other poems by Celso Oliveira (as well as those of Borja da Costa) that refer to the hardships endured in resisting the Indonesian occupation, but the second

stanza of 'O tempo de recompensar' is more explicit than others in evaluating the price that was paid in order to achieve independence. In it, the lyric voice tells us:

Eu que andei na luta, que perdi a minha infância, a juventude, a minha formação e o futuro.

Eu que assisti à guerra, aos sofrimentos, às dores, às tristezas e às lágrimas.

Eu que vi a morte dos meus pais e as violações das minhas irmãs.

Eu que chorei pelo meu pai morrendo, pela minha mãe violada, pelo meu filho perseguido, pelo meu irmão desaparecido, pelo meu íntimo amigo esfaqueado, pelo meu tio que chorou por causa da minha tia que foi violada e pelos meus bens que foram saqueados (ll.3-10).

Having listed these and other violent acts committed against the lyric voice and those close to him, as well as the sacrifices he made in order that his country should gain its independence, their validity is then questioned in the face of a new reality that does not reflect what the lyric voice had fought for: 'Se eu soubesse que tu ias praticar a corrupção e o nepotismo, eu não lutava./Se eu soubesse que "era" assim o nosso destino, eu não lutava' (ll.18-19). It appears that there are those behaving in a way that does not conform to the standards that had been hoped for the independent East Timor, which leads the lyric voice to declare, 'Eu não lutei para a injustiça e a incerteza do meu futuro' (l.28), and he warns 'Se continuarmos assim, não seremos livres e independentes./Se continuarmos assim, a Indonésia rir-se-á' (ll.31-32). Implicit in this warning is the view that the injustices brought about by colonialism have not been eradicated following East Timor's independence; corruption, nepotism, injustice and uncertainty are still present within a country that has declared its autonomy, but that, in the reality presented in this poem, has yet to become truly free.

In the light of this, the poem calls for a change in attitude from the East Timorese that will end internal conflicts that are jeopardising their hard-won liberty. Thus, stanza nine reads:

Agora, é tempo de repensar...  
BASTA!!!:  
De guerra civil entre nós.  
De confrontações entre nós.  
De manipulações e explorações entre nós.  
(ll.34-38)

The internecine nature of the difficulties being experienced in East Timor is underlined through the anaphoric repetition of ‘entre nós’, which could serve as a reminder that internal conflict in some ways provided a platform for the Indonesian invasion of 1975. Nevertheless, however fragile it has become due to these difficulties, the East Timorese are pointed to the fact that they now have a shared freedom, as well as a shared past: ‘Agora, a liberdade já é nossa./As cinzas também são nossas’ (ll.39-40). The past is referred to through ‘cinzas’, which highlights the extreme sacrifices that were made in order to achieve the present state of independence that is now being risked through internal strife. Therefore, the concluding stanza simply declares, ‘Com a união se faz a força’ (l.41), encouraging an end to weakening divisions, as well as echoing Borja da Costa’s own call for unity in ‘Kdadalak’, analysed earlier, where the following exhortation was made: ‘Assim os timores devem juntar-se/Devem unir-se para se oporem ao vento que sopra do mar’ (ll.3-4). Although Borja da Costa’s call for unity is clearly made in order to oppose an external enemy (‘vento que sopra do mar’), Celso Oliveira’s poem also

refers to Indonesia in line 32, indicating that some outside of East Timor will rejoice in its disunity.

If, after having reminded the reader that East Timor is now free, ‘O tempo de recompensar’ ends with a plea for unity in the hope of overcoming internal tensions, then the poem ‘Era uma coisa/ Agora é outra coisa’ suggests that that appeal was not heeded. Beginning with the title, it contrasts an unsatisfactory present state of affairs with the realities of the past, and the lyric voice commences with a reflection on his former and current friendships:

Era. Os meus amigos eram:

Os pescadores, taxistas, vendedores de modo tahan, jovens e estudantes, crianças abandonadas, ferik mama malus, padres e madres, etc.

Agora os meus amigos são:

Os empresários, deputados, ministros, políticos, administradores, directores, embaixadores, etc. (ll.1-6)

Whereas before the lyric voice had ties of friendship with those who could be considered as ‘ordinary’ members of East Timorese society, his friends are now the leaders of that society. If, then, present conditions are not seen as favourable for the majority of East Timor’s citizens, then among those who can be held responsible are the leading minority described above.

After the first two stanzas have dealt with the shifting personal friendships of the lyric voice, the following two stanzas address a further change in alliances, but the latter also suggest that the poem’s ‘I’ is not a stable entity with permanent characteristics. Whereas the opening stanzas described the exchange of friendships with ordinary East

Timorese for those with a ruling elite, stanzas three and four reveal a rupture in the relations with the Indonesian military in favour of those with the population that these had oppressed:

Era. Os meus amigos eram:  
Os soldados e generais indonésios.

Agora os meus amigos são:  
Os próprios timorenses (ll.7-10).

Therefore, within the first four stanzas we have a lyric voice that describes a past that simultaneously contained friendships with ordinary members of East Timorese society, and with members of the Indonesian military who were violently repressing the population of East Timor, as well as a present that allows the lyric voice to have friends in the ruling elite and the general population. These changing and contradictory alliances contribute towards a sense of instability and of distrust within the reader, who begins to doubt the integrity of the lyric voice.

As the poem progresses, further changes from the past are indicated, but in these stanzas the indications are that the values of the present society of East Timor have been modified so that those who had fought for the country's liberation are no longer respected:

Era. Todos nós quisermos ser presos, sofrer e voar por todo o lado do mundo.

Agora quem tem dinheiro é que manda.

Era. Todos nós quisermos ser heróis.

Agora quem era herói é traidor, quem era traidor é herói (ll.16-19).

These verses depict a society that is no longer willing to make communal sacrifices for the benefit of the nation and, instead, has become one that values material wealth. These changes can only be considered as undesirable, given the tone of many of the other poems in this collection, and if we remind ourselves of Borja da Costa's poem, 'O Amor', analysed earlier, the attitudes of East Timorese society presented here by Celso Oliveira are contrary to what the earlier poet had hoped for. One of the objectives of the struggle for liberation listed in 'O Amor' was 'libertarmos o povo da exploração pelo capital' (ll.24-25), which, according to Oliveira's 'Era uma coisa/ Agora é outra coisa', does not seem to have been attained, as 'quem tem dinheiro é que manda' (l.17). The result of power being in the hands of those who possess monetary wealth and of the inversion of society's value system, whereby former heroes are now traitors, and erstwhile traitors are now heroes, is that communal effort has been replaced by individualism, as the lyric voice reveals when he declares, 'Era. Rezei pela minha pátria.//Agora rezo por mim e pela minha família' (ll.20-21). This leads to the ominous warning, 'Se esta independência não é para o povo,/Então lágrimas cairão para sempre' (ll.22-23).

If, then, much of Borja da Costa's and Celso Oliveira's poetry depicts the sacrifices made and hardships endured in order to attain an independence which only the latter poet has been able to experience, how do Oliveira's reflections on the present fit in with the hopes he and Borja da Costa had for an independent East Timor? Is today's East Timor, as portrayed by Celso Oliveira, free of the effects felt under Portuguese and Indonesian colonial rule? One gathers from the latter works analysed above that much of the joy reflected in poems such as '4 de Setembro 2002', or 'É o dia da liberdade', has been replaced by doubts raised by the disappointment many feel in the lack of concrete

improvements independence has brought for the ordinary citizenry of East Timor. It appears that the exploitation that colonial rule had brought has now been exchanged for continued exploitation in an independent country that has embraced the market economy. Alongside that exploitation is the sense that freedom has not brought with it security for all, and that some of those who had fought and sacrificed so much for their country's independence now feel rejected or even persecuted. This leads Celso Oliveira to ask in 'Dois caminhos difíceis' (p.45), 'Será que nós não somos capazes de ser independentes?' (1.13). Let us hope that all East Timorese are allowed to develop the capacity to experience the full fruits of independence, and that a reading of the poetry Celso Oliveira or other East Timorese poets produce in the future will reveal a more positive and confident country, because, as we have seen, the people of East Timor deserve it.



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