

# Communal Conflict in Viqueque and the 'Charged' History of '59

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*This paper seeks to demystify the failed uprising against the colonial administration in 1959 in remote south-eastern Portuguese Timor, an event which later was ably used as propaganda by Indonesian revisionist historians and pro-integration Timorese during the Indonesian occupation. Providing a historical context for the rebellion and a narrative of events based on archival sources and interviews with local informants, the paper shows how to this day memories of the rebellion are linked to ongoing rivalries in Viqueque District and Uatolari subdistrict in particular.*

*Keywords: Portuguese Timor; Rebellion; Uatolari; Uatocarbau; Afaloicai; Lima Sembilan; Makassae; Naueti; APODETI; Pro-integration*

It was twenty, ten years, it was  
one year ago that this happened.

(‘Second Meditation’, Ruy Cinatti 1970)

## Introduction

By 2002, Uatolari was a place where the police—both Timorese and foreign—were not the intimidators, but the intimidated. In December of that year I sat with Mark, a soft-spoken but tough American United Nations (UN) police officer on the long veranda of the biggest house in Matahoe, the subdistrict seat of Uatolari in Viqueque. It was late afternoon and the sky was unusually orange and pink. He took pride in the fact that, as of December 2002, he was the longest-serving UN police officer in the

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post. This corner of south-eastern Timor was not an easy place, he explained stoically, as he snacked on instant noodles. Recently the tin roof of his 'mansion' had been showered every night with stones, by a group of aggressive youths he believed wanted to draw him out so that they could burn the house down. Mark knew that he was not the target of their anger. It was his landlord, one of the richest men of Matahoe, who had benefited from collaborating with the Indonesian military and administration. The youths had already killed the man's dog, according to his distraught wife.

Within a 5-kilometre radius of Mark's house, there were a number of long-running property disputes and frequent thefts of buffalo. While not claiming to understand fully the instability in the subdistrict, Mark saw that there were people who perceived themselves to be the 'have nots', who felt wronged in the past by the 'haves'.

From the land conflict in the paddies surrounding Matahoe to the harassment of rich, pro-Indonesian families in the town and the infamous attack on Viqueque town by a Uatolari-based martial arts gang in 2001, the subdistrict had a deserved reputation. Major aid agencies had all but abandoned Uatolari by 2002. Most outsiders—Timorese and foreigners alike—adopted a simplistic view of intractable 'ethnic' conflict as the source of instability.

Focusing on the time of the *avo sira*, the grandparents, allows deeper understanding of the communal conflict in eastern Viqueque district. Perhaps more so than in other regions in Timor, competing clans in Uatolari see their recent history as a dialectic of victimisation and victory: the meaning or significance of remote events is manipulated by competing groups and the distortion affects the perception of subsequent events.

There is no better example of this distortion than the perception of the 1959 rebellion in Viqueque. This event could have been remembered by Timorese as just another colonial tragedy with several hundred headstones in the vast cemetery of pre-independence martyrs. Timorese casualties numbered in the low hundreds, mostly victims of their neighbours—some of those who resisted the pillaging and looting of their modest possessions and the burning of their houses were killed. For most survivors, the material losses alone were devastating. Yet the punitive reaction, while disproportionate to the small scale of the rebellion, was not unusual in the history of the colony. The Portuguese administration carried out extra-judicial executions, and a number of Timorese died in prison after sustaining harsh beatings.

However, in contemporary East Timor, events following the uprising, comprising a combination of factors including opportunism on the part of a few of the original participants, the competition over newly opened rice fields in the district of Uatolari and the influence of Indonesia in East Timor, would distort and magnify the importance of '59'.

This paper revisits the failed uprising against the Portuguese administration in 1959, providing a narrative of events based on archival and oral historical sources and analysing the manner in which current memories of the rebellion are linked to ongoing factional conflict in Viqueque in general and Uatolari in particular.

## The Colonial Context

Viqueque became a 'district' of its own later than most others in Portuguese Timor, a sign of its relative insignificance in the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The unsealed road linking the northern coast road and Baucau to Viqueque bore the destructive force of the south coast's double rainy season. Landslides often made the road unpassable. For Portuguese administrators and Chinese merchants, only rugged four-wheel drive vehicles could make the journey from north to south. Residents of the district remember that well into the 1960s even privileged Timorese relied on horses rather than vehicles to cross the Mundo Perdido mountains.

After the 'reoccupation' of the territory following the Second World War, the Portuguese administration (headed by Oscar Ruas, former local administrator in Viqueque) deemed it politically expedient to divide this region of the island between Manatuto and Lautem, limiting Baucau district to the north and making Viqueque a separate district to the south.

Viqueque had one *concelho* (municipality)—the district capital (also named Viqueque)—and four subdistricts. The two subdistricts to the east of the *concelho* were Uatolari and Uatocarbau. The Uatocarbau/Uatolari region is a broad coastal plain, fringed by the southern 'heel' of Mount Matebian and a series of mountains extending east, and fertile foothills to the south. Until the early 1960s, most of the population of Uatolari lived in the foothills to avoid malaria, and the plain below remained virtually uncultivated.

While the inhabitants of the subdistricts speak two unrelated languages, Naueti and Makassae, the speakers share the same system of marriage alliance called the *fetossan-umane*, and there are villages in the eastern Matebian valley where both languages are spoken as mother tongues. Through a slow, mostly peaceful process of intermarriage and inheritance, some Makassae speakers had descended from the mountainous central region to live next to Naueti speakers.

Processes of military and administrative domination arrived late to the area immediately east and south of Matebian. Both the requirement of forced labour and conversion of elites to Christianity were relatively new to the people of the region when the Second World War began. Both subdistricts suffered the ravages of the war, as Australian guerrillas took shelter from Japanese forces in the central mountain ranges and their foothills. The Japanese required the 'cooperation' of local chiefs in the region, carving out roads using whole communities as corvée labour. The battle over more remote regions had caused animosities between neighbouring clans that persisted in the decades following the war (Vieira da Rocha 1994; de Oliveira 2004). Harsh punishments for 'collaboration' with Japan in remote Uatolari and Uatocarbau left some nobles in the region bitter towards the colonial administration.<sup>1</sup>

Little documentation is available about Viqueque before the Second World War and immediately after.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, the Portuguese police archive<sup>3</sup> contains a great deal of archival material about the revolt which started in Viqueque town on 6 June 1959. The documents suggest that it was the unplanned last gasp of a conspiracy

discovered in its early stages by Portuguese authorities. The revolt would not have occurred without the active participation of three sets of actors: disgruntled civil servants; minor royalty from Uatolari and Uatocarbau subdistricts; and a group of tough-talking, self-styled ‘rebels’ from Indonesia.

### Events of the 1959 Viqueque Rebellion

On 27 March 1958, fourteen men (mostly West Timorese youth accompanied by one Sumatran and one Menadonese) fleeing what appears to have been a Jakarta crackdown on a separatist movement in Kupang, West Timor, arrived in Oecussi in a boat laden with guns and ammunition.<sup>4</sup> Seeing these men as living propaganda against decolonisation, the Portuguese government granted them asylum and sent them to live in Baucau with a generous daily subsidy (Themudo Barata 1998). A few months later four of the men moved south to Viqueque, where they befriended José Manuel Duarte, a mestizo Timorese civil servant in the Weather Service, and Amaro Loyola Jordão de Araújo, a Timorese retired Treasury employee who had major complaints against the colonial administration.

Luis ‘Xina’ da Costa Rêgo, a young Chinese-Timorese driver for the Agriculture Department based in Dili, was the driving force behind a growing civil servant conspiracy against the Portuguese administration. On a routine trip to Uatolari in February 1959, he sought allies, and found them in minor royalty in the eastern regions. One supporter was António da Costa Soares, known as ‘António Metan’ who was descended from the rulers (*liurai*) of Afaloicai, a kingdom in the foothills along the Baucau–Viqueque border. At the time he was a village head (*chefe de povoação*), with less status and responsibility than the reigning *liurai*. António Metan had grievances against the acting subdistrict head, a mestizo named Eduardo Caeiro Rodrigues. Aside from the latter’s demands for animals for slaughter, which were almost never compensated, António Metan and others were angry about perceived corruption at the subdistrict post of Uatolari. They alleged Caeiro Rodrigues was taking a huge share of the salaries paid to the *posto* by the Australian firm Timor Oil, which was surveying for petroleum at Aliambata.<sup>5</sup>

Luis Xina convinced António Metan that there was a colony-wide plan to take all members of the Portuguese administration hostage and demand a new government from Lisbon. To succeed it would require the cooperation of people across Timor. According to one of his peers, Luis Xina’s plan was intended to be peaceful—violence would be employed only if necessary (Almeida 2002).

The Viqueque cell of the conspiracy developed under the leadership of Gerson Pello, a Rotinese ‘lieutenant’ from the group of Indonesian exiles.<sup>6</sup> Pello promised Indonesian support in vague and grandiose terms, influencing young Luis Xina’s plan. In his confession, António Metan said he first met Pello one month after the February meeting with Luis Xina. At this meeting, António Metan reported that, in Uatolari, thirty-four men were prepared to fight the Portuguese.

But, in late May, the Portuguese caught wind of the slowly growing conspiracy based in Dili, with ties to Manatuto, Baucau and Viqueque (and tenuous ties to Aileu, Liquiça and Ermera). An angry wife of one of the three principal conspirators denounced her husband's subversive activities to officials in Baucau. The Dili Police Commander wasted little time, detaining the ring leaders—Luís 'Xina', João 'Chiquito' Pereira da Silva, a nurse from Manatuto, and José 'Zeca' de Sousa Gama of Laga—on 1 June 1959. They were held under suspicion of planning a territory-wide rebellion to be carried out on New Year's Eve.<sup>7</sup>

The police alleged that plan involved a dramatic slaughter at a New Year's party in Dili, the release of dozens of Macau-Chinese prisoners and the take-over of the largest armoury and barracks in the territory (Themudo Barata 1998). None of the conspirators ever freely confessed to such a gory plan. The Portuguese also suspected the Indonesian Consul's active leadership in the rebellion, but the only 'proof' authorities uncovered was circumstantial at best: Consul Nazwar Jacob's mail order of an unusual amount of photographic equipment, his friendly relationship with the Indonesian exiles and an anti-Portuguese statement he made when his wife died in Dili at the under-equipped hospital (Sagran 2003).

Dili was without a daily newspaper and provided fertile ground for wild rumours. In the days that followed, as word of the foiled uprising spread across town, a huge dragnet began. The overzealous police commander, Sgt. Manuel Da Câmara, from Madeira, arrested dozens of people, including Chinese, Arabs, mestizos and African civil servants. Arrests were often based on little more than the mention of a name during interrogations; some confessions were obtained by threat of force. The accused included: three employees of the Post and Telegraph, three 'driver's assistants', three employees of the Indonesian Consul, two from the *Imprensa* (the national press), two from the health services, two sailors, one person from the Mission of the Study of Endemic Diseases, one official of the Banco Nacional Ultramarino, a customs official, a teacher's assistant, a catechist, a waiter and a 'painter'. The rest had no stated 'profession'. Many were illiterate farmers, or unemployed friends of civil servants. At least twelve of the sixty-eight did not know the exact year they were born.<sup>8</sup> The arrest that most shocked Dili was that of one of the few Timorese members of the *Concelho do Governo* (Council of Government), a 'cultured', elderly gentleman named Francisco Araújo.<sup>9</sup>

On the evening of the 6 June the authorities in Dili called Administrator Artur Ramos, in Viqueque, asking him to detain António 'Metan' da Costa Soares, who had been mentioned in interrogations in Dili. By chance, Ramos had been playing soccer earlier that day with the men allegedly involved, and he told his superiors in Dili that he thought their behaviour was 'entirely normal'. Reluctantly, he asked his *cipaios* (indigenous police) to arrest António Metan.

However, Ramos declared fatefully that António Metan should bathe in the Viqueque River before spending the night in a cell, probably not aware of the belief (as noted by the prisoner in his confession) 'in Timor to take a bath in the river means death.'<sup>10</sup> To buy time and presumably to save his life, António Metan asked the

Timorese *cipaios* if he could first collect a suit he kept at his friend Amaro Araújo's house. When they agreed, he immediately found 'Lieutenant' Gerson and the other civil servant-conspirators to tell them the plot had been discovered. At this point, the 'rebellion' began. Pello sent another Indonesian exile with the escaped António Metan back to Uatolari, and the fugitive arrived home shortly after nightfall, to rally his men. António Metan's first symbolic gesture was to ask the chief *cipai*o (his cousin) to lower the Portuguese flag and cut the telegraph wires.

In Viqueque town, a group of civil servants, coconut plantation workers and the Indonesian exiles met near the district administration building. Their plan was to rush through the open gate and up the stone stairs to the administration building, overcome the *cipaios* and remove the rifles from the small armoury next to the main building. The administrator and his family were to be taken hostage. However, the group of men (who, legend has it, were groggy from palm wine) were not able to prevent the administrator, his family and his assistant from escaping. The weapons the men had taken from the armoury were Kropatscheck 8-millimetre rifles, designed at the end of the nineteenth century, and many of the bullets were so old they did not fire. Their attempts to stop the fleeing jeep (which included cutting a tree to block the road) did not prevent District Administrator Ramos from reaching Ossu, the mountain *posto* known for its long-time loyalty to the Portuguese. There Ramos telephoned to Baucau and Dili. From that moment on, the 'rebellion' became a race against the Portuguese response.

Back in Uatolari, António Metan's band of men was preparing to march to the neighbouring *posto* of Uatocarbau. There, António's brother-in-law, Fernando Pinto, also a minor royal and chief of his village, had promised to gather supporters for the rebellion. The rebels intended to go from Uatocarbau through the wide mountain valley to Baguia, another *posto* lying in Baucau district. From Baguia, the logical destination would have been Laga, due north on the coast. The Portuguese suspected that the rebels had arranged for some rendezvous on the coast with armed Indonesian accomplices coming from either Wetar or Kisar, islands north of Timor.<sup>11</sup>

In order to take the fort at Baguia, the rebels needed firepower and the element of surprise. But the campaign developed too slowly to surprise Baguia<sup>12</sup> and the antique rifles and ammunition they stole from Viqueque were hopelessly inadequate. By the time the group of fewer than 100 men marched to the fortified *posto* at Baguia, professional troops (*primeira linha*) were waiting for them. And, as the rebels began their 'siege', a military truck with a machine gun arrived from Baucau.

There were no casualties that day. According to various accounts, the Indonesian exiles then fled to a cave at the foot of Mount Matebian. The Timorese rebels dispersed. Those who survived stayed in the jungle, having anticipated a Portuguese attack.<sup>13</sup> Those who revealed themselves immediately, either by surrendering or putting up a fight, were killed, including one of the Indonesian exiles.<sup>14</sup>

On 17 June, Administrator Ramos and a small party of Portuguese military personnel executed seven men, including Abílio de Meneses (the *liurai* of Afaloicai-Uatolari),

at the Bebuy River, below the subdistrict office. Standing in the river, the men were shot in the head and their bodies were swept to the sea.<sup>15</sup>

The Portuguese incited neighbouring groups (who harboured grudges following events in the Second World War) to form punitive expeditions, or *arraiais*. Ramos invited punitive columns of highland Makassae from Ossu and Venilale and Tetun-speakers from Viqueque town to attack Uatolari. A simple view of the intra-Timorese conflict would conclude that the Portuguese exploited tensions between Makassae and Naueti speakers. But Makassae and Naueti speakers lived side by side in Uatolari and Uatocarbau, and Makassae residents of Uatolari also suffered at the hands of their distant highland relatives.

The invaders looted everything of value, including rice saved for seed, livestock and clothes. One woman (a girl at the time) saw men tear the sarong off a noblewoman, leaving her in her underclothes (Soares Amaral 2003). The overwhelming majority of victims were in Uatocarbau subdistrict. José da Serra Frazão, Administrator of Lautem, invited people from Baguia, Iliomar and Lospalos to form an *arraiais* to help put down the rebellion and mete out punishment. When Frazão arrived on 13 June, he sought out the head *cipaio*, João Mariano, who wrapped himself in a Portuguese flag—a gesture of loyalty and surrender—as he left the subdistrict office to greet Frazão. In the most commonly recounted incident of the rebellion, Frazão allegedly ordered João Mariano to remove the flag and then shot him at point-blank range.<sup>16</sup>

As was the case in Uatolari, the invaders pillaged freely. Every item of value was taken. Some who lived there estimated that up to 200 people were killed or burned to death in the mayhem at the *posto* and surrounding villages. In the chaos, the *liurai* of at least three of the villages in the Matebian valley were killed by disgruntled subjects; severed heads were presented to the Portuguese in Baguia (Guterres 2003). From eleven affected *sucos*, at least five *liurai* were killed. The uprising, or ‘war’ as it was known by the local population, provided a pretext for settling personal grudges.

### Interpretations of the Conflict

At both local level and national level, there are competing views of the rebellion. The first, more fearful view of the event emphasises either the inter-ethnic or the inter-personal aspect of the violence, the memory of which is then blamed for inflaming tensions to the present. The violence affected both Naueti and Makassae, however, and to portray the conflicting groups as drawn along ethno-linguistic lines is an oversimplification. The second view is that the whole episode amounted to little more than cowboy antics—it was a gigantic, fatal *cowboiada* by a band of ridiculous East Timorese men who believed the lies of a band of foolish Indonesian men. The only significance of their shared misadventure is that it would later become the basis for a flimsy, revisionist Indonesian propaganda for ‘integration’. This interpretation, while significant today, reflects a distortion of the events.

The actions that are today known in East Timor simply as ‘59’, or the ‘Viqueque rebellion’ as experienced by participants and witnesses, were in fact improvised

responses to the Portuguese discovery of a premature conspiracy. It is true that those who rebelled in Viqueque thought little about the potentially tragic outcome of their actions. Yet this unforgiving view of the leaders of the uprising tends to ignore that they were motivated by a desire for fairness and justice, and were articulate enough to air their grievances.<sup>17</sup>

In an eloquent ‘memorandum’ explaining the rebellion to authorities, which made its way into Dictator António de Oliveira Salazar’s office, conspirator José Manuel Duarte wrote: ‘Until today we have still not been introduced to liberty, equality and fraternity, as we are treated like slaves’ (1960). In interviews, several of the surviving participants said that they were motivated by the lack of rule of law in Portuguese Timor, being unable to enjoy their basic rights as Portuguese citizens and facing issues of daily discrimination and inequality. Civil servants and ‘assimilated’ people were taxed as citizens under Portuguese law, but felt they were treated with disrespect both socially and professionally, with no chances for promotion in life.<sup>18</sup> In this memorandum, Duarte attempts to speak for all Timorese regardless of social origin. He and his peers were concerned about issues that affected the masses, including Portuguese favouritism towards the Chinese in trade and commerce, the heavy tax burden and the lack of primary education. But they failed to gain wide support because they lacked the awareness, the time and the venue to enunciate their complaints fully.

Only weeks after the end of the rebellion, sixty-eight alleged conspirators were sent by Salazar’s international police, the *Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado* (PIDE), to a distant prison in Angola. Most served three years or less there before being released. None of the Timorese prisoners were given much assistance to return to Timor, but over the years some found their way back.<sup>19</sup> During their wait, many witnessed the unfolding of one of the last colonial struggles in Africa, exposing them to anti-colonial ideas which had not reached isolated Portuguese Timor. Secret police files indicate that a handful of men became more politicised during their exile. Some learned Indonesian in prison from their Indonesian co-conspirators, listened to Indonesian shortwave radio and later wrote cryptic letters in Indonesian back to Timor. When they returned to Timor, they remained under the watchful eye of the PIDE (INTT, Arquivo da PIDE-DGS, SC CI(2) 5102 Caixa 7379).

Meanwhile, major economic changes took place in eastern Viqueque during the 1960s. In 1964, the *chefe de posto* of Uatolari pressured the leaders of the area to open the plain below for rice cultivation (Metzner 1977). New high-yield varieties of rice were introduced, and rice exports from the subdistrict increased dramatically in the years that followed—a seventy-four-fold increase from 1961 to 1969. By the end of the 1960s, Uatolari came to be known as the bountiful ‘cellar of Timor’.

The opening of the large rice paddies of Uatolari in the 1960s created the conditions for disagreements over land tenure and labour. Local elites had little experience cultivating such large parcels of land but it is clear that, on the eve of huge political changes in East Timor, the riches from the rice paddies made the struggle for political influence in the region all that more important.

In the four decades following the rebellion, the original motives of the rebels have become clouded by fear and disdain. In the final section I will document the changing perception of '59', and attempt to explain how the event is remembered so differently from how it was actually experienced.

### **The 'Charging' of *Lima Sembilan***

In his study of the Boxer Rebellion, historian Paul Cohen (1997) coined the term 'historic valence' to describe the changing significance of historical events decades after their occurrence. Borrowing the notion of valence from atomic physics, Cohen argues that historical events may become retroactively 'charged'.

During the demise of the Portuguese colonial era, the events of June 1959 were deemed best forgotten, a failure and a tragedy. The 1959 uprising in Viqueque gained new 'valence' in the years following Portugal's departure, both in Viqueque and nationally. It was consciously manipulated by a few opportunistic individuals from eastern Viqueque who worked with Indonesian officials, distorting the event into a militant call for Indonesian intervention in East Timor, even becoming the mythical origin of the Timorese movement for 'integration' with Indonesia. *Lima sembilan* ('59) began to colour conflicts over resources and political power in eastern Viqueque, where pro-Indonesian clans ruled.

In 1974, the peaceful April revolution in Portugal signalled the beginning of the end of Portuguese colonialism. In East Timor, clans and groups scrambled to align themselves with new political parties. Some Timorese implicated in the 1959 rebellion—specifically those who constituted the 'politicised' group of returned exiles—were not willing to imagine immediate independence for Timor, and they remained distrustful of Portugal. So they endorsed Indonesian intervention in East Timor, becoming founding members of the party Associação Popular Democrática Timorense (APODETI) or Timorese Popular Democratic Association.

These men perceived the moment of change in Timor as a time to reassert their historical importance. APODETI members had a brochure published in Jakarta entitled *O célebre massacre de Uato-Lari e Uato-Carbau Verificado No Ano de 1959*, a 'memorandum' authored by Loyola Jordão de Araujo.<sup>20</sup> By divulging the story in 1974—this time without even a mention of the Indonesian conspirators—APODETI wished to elevate some of the party's founders to hero status. Conspirator João 'Chiquito' Pereira da Silva's photo appears in the first pages of the brochure and António Metan, who returned from exile in Angola in 1970, is prominently featured. The party attempted to present itself as a product of the first legitimate Timorese political actors, pre-dating the 'new' parties established in 1974. Nevertheless, these men did not yet directly link the 1959 rebellion with the idea of rule by Jakarta.

This was the first attempt to 'charge' the 1959 uprising with new meaning. By 1975, many of the families that had been involved in the uprising openly declared their support for APODETI. The party was not directly implicated in the civil conflict between the Fretilin and União Democrática Timorense (UDT), but APODETI's

rhetoric helped provide the justification for the annexation of Timor. In late 1975, as the Indonesian invasion of Dili was imminent, APODETI supporters were detained by the new Fretilin government. Soon after the Indonesian invasion, Fretilin leaders executed hundreds of detainees in Aileu, Maubisse and Same. António Metan was among those killed in Aileu and buried in a mass grave. His death 'martyred' him for his support for Indonesia. From then on, his famed role in the 1959 rebellion became retrospectively associated with his pro-Indonesia stance of 1975.

Following the Indonesian invasion of East Timor, Fretilin evacuated much of the civilian population of the district of eastern Viqueque to the slopes of Matebian. As Indonesian forces encircled the communities on the south coast in the late 1970s, other non-Fretilin Uatolari *liurai* were imprisoned by order of Fretilin commanders. Some Uatolari nobles were executed or held prisoner, and many of this group were inevitably connected with the uprising of 1959.<sup>21</sup> In addition to polarising the country and the district of Viqueque politically, the events of 1974–5 effectively aligned the rebellion of 1959 with the pro-Indonesian clans of eastern Timor.

The struggle over resources on Matebian was severe. During the late 1970s, when much of the civilian population of eastern Viqueque lived on the slopes of Matebian, both highland and lowland buffalo herds were combined (Trinidad 2003). The lowland Uatolari herds were huge—a reflection of the prosperity from rice cultivation. The APODETI-aligned *liurai* of Uatolari considered the steady slaughter of their buffaloes for food as yet another loss to their highland neighbours. From the grave losses of 1959, to the material gains of the 1960s, to their subjugated fate during the early Timorese resistance to Indonesia, the Uatolari rebel clans of 1959 began to see their history as a dialectic of victimisation. In their view of events, this second perceived loss on Matebian—the thinning of their herds—would dramatically inflate the importance of the first 'victimisation' in 1959.

When the civilian surrender and descent from Matebian occurred in late November 1978, these 'victimised' Naueti leaders suddenly found themselves able to reap the benefits of their political alignment with Indonesia,<sup>22</sup> in terms of mobility, educational opportunity and jobs. The first subdistrict administrator of Uatolari was António Metan's son, and he enjoyed the authority to redistribute buffalo and resolve land disputes (Guterres 2003). The wealth of this group grew during the 1980s and 1990s through clientelistic relationships with the Indonesian bureaucracy and military. And some of this group were the self-proclaimed descendants of the rebels of 1959.

Outside Viqueque, the historical valence of the Viqueque Rebellion was heightened by the efforts of several participants and Indonesian textbook writers to promote the story of the rebellion as an early call for 'integration' with Indonesia. For dramatic effect António Metan's fictionalised raising of the first Indonesian 'Merah-Putih' flag to be flown in East Timor<sup>23</sup> was added to the story of Uatolari.

According to an employee of the Indonesian Department of Education in East Timor, there was a great interest during the 1990s in resurrecting the story of 1959 and promoting it as proof that East Timorese yearned for 'integration' long before

1975 (de Jesus Soares 2002). Fascination with the Viqueque Rebellion peaked in 1996 when Indonesian officials invited several of the original Indonesian participants in the rebellion to return to East Timor and 'veterans' honours were granted to those who had been exiled by the Portuguese.<sup>24</sup>

The final magnification of the Viqueque Rebellion's historical importance occurred in April 1999, when militia leader Eurico Guterres—António Metan's nephew—created the Viqueque militia. He unambiguously linked the pro-Indonesia side to the rebellion forty years before by naming the group '59/75'.<sup>25</sup> As a result, the majority of East Timorese had developed an extremely negative view of the rebellion of 1959 by the time the UN took custody of Timor in late 1999.

The road to independence for East Timor signalled a dramatic swing back to 'victimisation' for the pro-Indonesia, mostly Naueti-speaking clans which continue to associate themselves with the Viqueque Rebellion. First there was the uncertainty of their position upon return from West Timor post-1999. Even as this is written, some remain in Kupang, West Timor. More than seven years after the violence of 1999, of those who returned to Timor-Leste, many have stayed in Dili rather than return to Viqueque District.<sup>26</sup> Pro-Indonesian clans also experienced a catastrophic loss of status—the immediate removal of their members from administrative and political positions on a national and local level. Long-standing battles over rice paddies and buffalo herds re-emerged in the years following independence, with pro-independence residents of Uatolari asserting claims over property that remained dormant during the Indonesian occupation.

In 2002, a series of buffalo thefts in Uatolari gained national notoriety and became the subject of concerned comment by legislators and even President Xanana Gusmão. Pro-Indonesian Naueti lamented their weak position, invoking the story of 1959 and their original 'victimisation' at the hands of their neighbours. The mention of the Viqueque Rebellion only served to increase nervousness about the thefts. The allusion to '59' tied these bitter conflicts over resources to the political divisions of the region, specifically the question of reconciliation with pro-integration Uatolari families. The return of the descendants of the Portuguese-era rebels who later promoted 'integration' with Indonesia is not only a political issue. The eventual peaceful reception of these people, many of whom remain in Kupang and Dili, will also necessitate careful legal and economic mediation.

## **Conclusion**

In examining the ongoing troubles of Uatolari, it is instructive to remove the retrospective association with Indonesian 'integration' that the Viqueque Rebellion subsequently acquired. When it is seen as an improvised event, resulting from the actions of a curious combination of renegade Indonesians, principled Timorese civil servants and daring leaders from eastern Viqueque, it becomes clear that the uprising had very little to do with Indonesia. Moreover, the struggles over rice paddies and buffalo which followed were due neither to residual animosities from '59' nor to

intractable ethno-linguistic strife. A new, less ‘charged’ perspective on 1959 could help contextualise the ongoing contest for wealth and influence in Uatolari. There, more recent events and choices have led to the dramatic reversals of political and economic fortune of neighbouring groups over the past forty years.

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### Notes

- [1] Upon ‘reoccupation’, on Governor Ruas’s order, many of the nobles in the region (and all over Timor) were accused of collaboration with the Japanese, and exiled to Ataúro Island where they were starved for years before their repatriation (AHU, MU/GN/GNP/84 Pt. 14).
- [2] Portuguese colonial administrations during the Salazar regime produced very little written documentation. The only incident that received any attention in Viqueque following ‘reoccupation’ was the so-called ‘Vicarda’ incident, stemming from strange rumours of a Dutch-Indonesian invasion in western Viqueque (Arquivo Histórico Militar (AHM), see file 39/61/717/1499).
- [3] See at Instituto Nacional Torre do Tombo (INTT) Arquivo da PIDE-DGS (PC 25/60 Caixa 461, PI 25390, SC CI(2) 5102 Caixa 7379, PC 634/59 Caixa 5291, PC 604/59 Caixa 5288, PC 636/59 Caixa 5292).
- [4] See AHU (MU/GM/GNP/084/Pt.15 [p.15]). An Indonesian army history refers to a peaceful uprising in Kupang, inspired by anti-Jakarta sentiment from PERMESTA, in April 1957 (Atmuja 2000, pp. 70–2).
- [5] In the Portuguese colonies it was not uncommon for the subdistrict heads to require salaries from private enterprise to be paid through them, thus keeping salaried workers ‘attached’ to their home *posto* and supplementing their own salaries.
- [6] Although Pello declared that he was a Lieutenant in the Indonesian army to Portuguese authorities in 1958, the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs denied this (see AHU, MU/GM/GNP/084/Pt.15 [p.15]). Gerson retired from the Indonesian military as a sergeant-major (Pello Toan 2003).
- [7] This is confirmed by Themudo Barata, as well as documents from INTT, Arquivo da PIDE-DGS.
- [8] Many of this poor, ignorant group of accused were from the neighbouring districts of Dili, Liquiça and Aileu.
- [9] The council was designed to meet once a year for two sessions of thirty days, during which time it was expected to rubber-stamp legislation. Of the eleven members, three were Timorese and presumably nominated, three were picked by a vote of ‘registered’ (most likely ‘assimilated’) people, one was picked by white Portuguese voters and four were nominated by the Governor (Felgas 1956, pp. 312–16).
- [10] The sequence of events leading to António Metan’s arrest is confirmed by Themudo Barata and the second round of depositions of the suspects, conducted freely and without coercion, in Angola (see INTT, Arquivo da PIDE-DGS, PC 25/60 Caixa 461).
- [11] This fear may not have been entirely unfounded. José ‘Zeca’ de Sousa Gama the third conspirator, was from Laga. Portuguese military security documents from May 1959 indicate

clandestine activity between the Indonesian island of Kisar, 60 kilometres away, and Laga (see Arquivo Histórico Militar, file 39/11/595/404).

- [12] In Uatocarbau, the Indonesians tried to win local support by cutting down coconuts from tall palms with throwing-knives and showing images of promised military support—fighter jets, boats and armed forces (Fernandes Carvalho 2002).
- [13] Many were beaten while in custody, and some were exiled to Angola with the larger group from Dili. A small number appear to have been exiled within Timor for up to five years (Mascarenhas 2002).
- [14] See AHU (MU/GM/GNP/084/Pt.15 [p.15]). His death caused tensions between Portugal and Indonesia. See Arquivo Histórico Diplomático (AHD) (PAA809-948-46).
- [15] Portuguese poet Ruy Cinatti memorialised these executions in his poem ‘Segunda Meditação’ (1970), pp. 67–71) According to witnesses, the following men were executed: Alberto Ribeiro, Abílio de Meneses, João Soares, Feliciano Soares and Paulo. Nara-Leque of Viqueque and Armindo of Ossu-Una were also allegedly executed (Ribeiro 2002).
- [16] There are few Portuguese accounts of the destruction in Uatolari and Uatocarbau. Martinho da Costa Lopes, a Timorese priest chosen to be Timor’s Member of Parliament, carried out an investigation in Uatolari and sent an unsigned memo to Governor Themudo Barata to relay his findings. In his subsequent correspondence with Lisbon, Barata distanced himself from the document and made efforts to see that Lopes was promptly recalled to Portugal (see AHU, MU/GM/GNP/034 [E.7.1].) The only written mention of the story of João Mariano is found in Amaro Loyola Jordão de Araújo’s pamphlet (1974). The story was retold by many Timorese, including João Mariano’s children. No surviving eyewitnesses were found (dos Reis Amaral 2002; Soares Amaral 2003).
- [17] Aware of these motivations, then Fretilin Central Committee member Abílio Araújo elaborated a ‘nationalist’ version of 1959 while in exile in Lisbon in 1977. This text is now out of print. Araújo’s subsequent ‘betrayal’ of Fretilin has relegated this interesting text to the margins of Timorese historiography (Araújo 1977).
- [18] Living members of the group exiled to Angola confirm these motives (de Almeida 2002; da Costa Belo 2002).
- [19] INTT, Arquivo da PIDE-DGS (PC 604/59 Caixa 5288, fl. 199–205, fl. 208–13, fl. 250–55).
- [20] The text was probably written in an Angolan prison in 1960, when the prison director requested the Timorese inmates to write ‘memos’ recounting their version of events.
- [21] Xanana Gusmão comments: ‘Our commanders constantly arrested [the APODETI *liurais* who were products of the 1959 rebellion] and I kept freeing them. Finally they got tired of arresting them because they realized I would just set them free again’ (2000, p. 44).
- [22] The Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation Report indicates that at least one of these fifty-nine APODETI noblemen collaborated in the culling and execution of Fretilin and FALINTIL sympathisers after the civilian surrender from Matebian in November 1978 (CAVR 2006).
- [23] See the Indonesian history text, *Sejarah Perjuangan Rakyat Timor Timur untuk Sekolah Menengah Atas* (Gonggong & Zuhdi 1994). This story was refuted by even pro-Indonesia Timorese who reside in Kupang, including Armindo Mariano Soares Amaral (now a pro-integration leader), who was in neighbouring Uatocarbau.
- [24] It is ironic that the honoured Indonesians were originally persecuted by Jakarta for their militant demands for greater autonomy for eastern Indonesia. One Indonesian participant politely refused to confirm or deny his association with PERMESTA (Pello Toan 2003).
- [25] Antara News Agency (2006) reported that Guterres referred to the uninvestigated injustices of 1959 in a speech to supporters in May 2006 shortly before his incarceration.
- [26] Some of these have been affected by 2006’s wave of ‘*lorosa’e-loromonu*’ (east-west) violence. Bairro Pite, a popular neighbourhood for those from Uatolari and Uatocarbau, has suffered visible damage. Yet it is too early to assess the impact of the ‘crisis’ on the families of 1959.

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