

Beloved Land: Stories, Struggles and Secrets from Timor-Leste

Gordon Peake

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Peake's book is a brilliant and attractive *vade mecum* for scholars and travellers on their way to Timor-Leste. As suggested by its title, this colourful history, memoir and reportage tells the fascinating story of the first new country of the twenty-first century. This work conveys the energy of the East Timorese and the beauty of their island according to the author's perceptions.

Gordon Peake teaches in Canberra at the Australian National University (ANU) College of Asia and the Pacific. He spent four years in Timor-Leste, and also researched in West Timor from the Oecusse enclave ("a place with water" in the local Meto language) which is a special economic zone of the East Timorese Government.

The book is divided into ten chapters. "A land of Babel" tells of Timor-Leste's incredible variety of languages: including Eastern Makassae from Baucau, the second city, Kemak spoken in the West by Gastaõ Salsinha, a Lieutenant who became a rebel against his will, and Meto in Oecusse, which is the only indigenous language with a complete and accurate translation of the New Testament. More than 30 local teachers and Timorese friends improved Peake's proficiency in the national language of Tetum or Tetun, a must for collecting stories and secrets.

Relating other examples of Timor-Leste's linguistic diversity show a shortcoming of Peake's narrative style. According to him, a "handful" of members of parliament "are the only ones who feel comfortable speaking" Portuguese on television (p. 145). I am not inclined to agree with this comment concerning the importance of Portuguese. The creolized form of the national language, Tetun Prasa or Tetun Dili, is classified as "a hybrid language, basically Austronesian, but with a heavy Portuguese superstratum" according to Geoffrey Hull in his *Standard Tetun-English Dictionary* (1999). Around 40 per cent of the Tetun language comes from Portuguese and the media have the tendency to use new words derived from the laws in Timor-Leste, which are written only in Portuguese, or they simply borrow from the Lusophone world, from Portugal, Brazil, parts of Africa and even from Macau. The Summer Olympic Games in 2016, and the victory of Portugal in the 2016 UEFA European Championship (Euro 2016), have boosted the prominence and contributed to the impact of Portuguese on modern Tetun.

The "purchase of a large TV" is a notable Timorese fashion (p. 216). However, the nature of watching television in Dili has also to be mentioned. Bahasa Indonesia continues to be an important language of education in Timor-Leste, but this influence is not officially encouraged or clearly recognized. Modern and more global Indonesian television franchises attract many Timorese families who want their children to get university degrees from Indonesia. A TV channel such as Metro TV, which offers lifestyle programming, or others



such as JTV, Bali TV and Global TV that provide entertainment, are watched in the East Timorese capital of Dili. The youth of Timor-Leste want to be modern and the creativity of Indonesian TV shows is attractive to them.

Concerning migration to Europe, and particularly Timorese migration to Northern Ireland, Peake's Irish experience explains his capacity to relate to the East Timorese people's resilient resistance (*funu*) and their poignant forgiveness. During his short travels across the border into West Timor, Peake, as an Anthropologist, interviewed prominent and fearless Militiamen such as Eurico and Joanico Cesario Belo to demonstrate the incredible capacity of the Timorese for forgiving and forgetting. Family links and networks with West Timor had returned to normal as if nothing had happened less than ten years after guerrilla war against the invading Indonesians had ended (pp. 130-131).

One of the best chapters analyzes the resilience and courage of the Timorese. "Down from the Mountains" tells the story of outnumbered Falintil guerrillas and "their long hair [...] never cut for fear that doing so would diminish their ability to deflect bullets" (p. 57). Peake, as usual, plays with interviews, travel tales and stories from the road. For instance, Peake makes a psycho-anthropological study of Alfredo Reinado, a former Major and "chief rebel". He was not a Falintil Fighter, but as a child served under the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) carrying supplies for them. In 1995, he eventually escaped, managed to reach Australia, studied to become a skilful Seaman and later became a Leading Officer in Timor-Leste's Armed Forces, the Falintil-Timor-Leste Defence Force (F-FDTL). On 3 May 2006, Reinado deserted the F-FDTL. After being arrested by Australian and Portuguese troops, he was imprisoned. The following August, he escaped from Dili prison along with some 50 other prisoners.

Between 2006 and 2008, Reinado was on the run with a group of petitioning soldiers, claiming discrimination in the national forces. A total of 591 soldiers – or 42 per cent of the army – were dismissed.

"Up in the hills, Alfredo Reinado was giving swaggering interviews to journalists," but who was this man? "It was really exciting, like in a Hollywood movie, recalled Tito, who was one of Alfredo's bodyguards. [...] The story of Reinado had a plot that became more melodramatic with each passing month" (pp. 72-73).

For almost two years, from 2006 to 2008, Reinado became the central player in the petitioner movement, but he only survived because of his powerful political backers. The "petitioners" were a group of disaffected F-FDTL personnel – mainly from the western part of the country – who were excluded from service in the armed forces. Their complaint became part of the serious political crisis that emerged in 2006 and lasted for two years and across two different Timor-Leste Governments and an election campaign.

To show that Timor-Leste reform meetings generate "amusing anecdotes but few results" the author, practising participant anthropology, mentions the story of a committee led by the former Minister of Defence, Roque Rodrigues. The new Minister of the Interior at that time, Alcino Baris, recognized the necessity and importance of a "national-security policy", but indirectly admitted his failure to elucidate one (p. 74).

A case in point that exemplifies Baris's failure is given by the death of the rebel Reinado at the president's residence. On 11 February 2008, President José Ramos-Horta was badly wounded in an assassination attempt, but his life was saved thanks to Australian surgeons and divine intervention.

Peake has a knack of getting interviews with previously unapproachable people such as Marcello Caetano, the man charged with shooting the president who had no idea why his name was linked to the crime. "It was just after noon and he was hungry" (p. 76) [...] "I was the first foreigner with whom he had ever had a conversation [...] We settled on a cheeseburger and some fries. We talk of his home high in the mountains of Atsabe [South of Ermera] [...]"

He had not said anything of substance [...] He spoke with Alfredo's histrionic style, and did not fasten his discourse to names and facts [...]:

We fought for justice because we were suffering [...].

(The president said he remembered Marcelo shooting him, but later said his memory was faulty):

"I didn't kill him!" he said. Caetano was found not guilty by the court.

Timor-Leste's "lure of easy money" did not solve the 2006-2008 crisis, which resulted in "destroyed homes, [...] displaced persons and petitioners" (p. 172) amongst other things. Unfortunately, the dream of "easy money" has also had ongoing economic consequences. The old sacristan from the Church of Beasu asked Peake what he was doing in the far southern district of Viqueque. Peake explained:

Trying to see for myself what the current reality was like in towns that the government [the Alliance with a Parliamentary Majority (AMP), called *Ahi Mate Permanente* or "electricity always off" by the opposition] promised to transform into "petro-cities". The reality [...] the Strategic Development Plan is not working.

"Our politicians go to Dili and forget us", the sacristan said. It was feared that the planned future liquefied natural gas (LNG) liquefaction plant for Beasu would be transferred to Darwin, Australia.

The current government, (and the 7th National Council of Timorese Reconstruction (CNRT) or Fretilin government in 2017), "would not approve any development plan unless it included a pipeline to Timor-Leste and a LNG plant on the south coast. It refused to negotiate" (p. 184). Only attention and investments in education, health, planning and infrastructure and the building of a well-planned economy "can sustain the people of Timor-Leste after the oil runs out" (p. 186).

"Like many things in Timor-Leste, the future is the son of the past" (p. 182). However, it is difficult to be optimistic about the current Timor-Australian disagreements. Oil and gas reserves "are projected to run out by 2024" (p. 188).

In Australia, this innovative way of telling Timor-Leste's story moved the ACT Book of the Year Awards jury in 2014 and Peake won both the ACT Judges and People's Choice awards.

The book is missing an index, but the bibliography ("Sources and Further Reading") rightly cites Jill Joliffe, James J. Fox, Emeritus Professor of the ANU and Paul Cleary, an Economist.

Timor-Leste traditions are different. Following more than 20 years of travels as a Representative of the Fretilin Government in Cambodia in Lisbon where he explained how the Khmer Rouge "were simply misunderstood" in China, Vietnam and Mozambique, Rogerio Lobato, later Minister of the Interior in Timor-Leste said:

This is not Australia [...] We look for people with familiar titles, but think too little about who people are, where they come from, and what they have been through (pp. 55-56).

Rogerio Lobato "is the consummate survivor". In the spirit of *Beloved Land*, we do hope that Timor-Leste will also be a "consummate survivor" and will be able to join ASEAN as a new nation-member.

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