

Our Strength is our Reason Museum of the People's Memory Scenario, East Timor¹

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Video: Our Strength is our Reason



<https://youtu.be/6CLE1AWV8cM>

This paper is a reflection on the construction of the *Museu Cenário da Memória do Povo* (Museum of the People's Memory Scenario) in East Timor, encompassed in the national policies for the safeguarding of memory.

By 2002, independency is restored in East Timor, after 24 years of Indonesian occupation and 500 years under Portuguese colonization. The occupation by Indonesia gives way to a struggle of 24 years of resistance war, which today requires its proper historical reading.

It is in this context, that in 2003, a group of citizens belonging to *Frente Clandestina* (Clandestine Front) begins the construction of the Museum of the People's Memory Scenario in Salamari, Bacau's District. This is an example of community museology, raised from a double effort: a demand for History integrating different voices and a demand for the benefits awarded by the Government, within the scope of the policy of compensation to the *Combatentes da Libertação Nacional* (National Liberation Combatants).

At the present moment, East Timor undertakes a policy of memory, whereby the enlargement of testimonies and the systematic recollection of oral sources must take place necessarily.

A country where tradition is passed on orally cannot depend on written documents to write its History.

Additionally to this paper, there is a 10-minute film bearing the same title.

¹ This paper corresponds to the communication presented at the International Oral History Conference - IOHA, Bengaluru – India, 27th June to 1st July 2016.



Photo 1: Max Stahl interviews Alex Daitula at the shelter in Salamari, 8th November 1991.

In this text, we want to underline the extraordinary role of Oral Sources for the writing of a more just and accurate past, as well as the role of community museums as places for engaging and to value its people.

In our view, the Museum of the People's Memory Scenario de Salamari represents an example of good practices. We believe a community movement for the recollection, safeguard and, socialization of memory, will open pathways to mutual trust and understanding, critical to broadening the democratic process.

This study integrated the framework we developed at the *Centro Audiovisual Maxh Stahl* (Max Stahl Audio-visual Centre), in 2013 and 2014, underpinning the gathering of testimonies to the Museum of the People's Memory Scenario.

The Clandestine Resistance

On the 8th of November 1991, David Alex Daitula,² Falintil Deputy Chief of Staff and responsible for the II Region, met the journalist Max Stahl.³ He arrived at Timor to gather information on a country occupied since 1975. A complex network of people, belonging to Clandestine Front, allowed Max to reach Bacau, *suco* of Salamari-Ossuga village. There, he had an appointment with the Armed Front, in a natural shelter.

Indonesian forces are in the proximity. Whispering, Daitula speaks of fight objectives, of the complexity of living in the proximity of the enemy and, the role of the community, the Clandestine Front, who they owe their subsistence and the data that will enable defensive and offensive movements. In Alex Daitula's words:

"We have people who are following the enemy movement. When the enemy does something in any place, quickly reaches

² David Alex, better known as Daitula, was born in 1940 in Bualale, Quelicai, Bauca. At the end of 1976, he becomes Interventions' Force Commander 701, located nearby Matebian. In the beginning of 1977 David becomes the 2nd in Command of Schock Company (KC). Remaining in this area, he will later on become Falintil Deputy Chief of Staff and head of II Region. He was captured at dawn on the 25th June 1997. The fact that the body was never retrieved sets controversy over this event related to the circumstances of his arrest, or to his death.

³ Max Stahl was born in 1954 in the United-Kingdom. He came to Timor, for the first time in 1991, as war journalist.

the ears of our messengers. They come to inform us, or (...) they warn our colleagues, to prevent them. To not fall into ambushes that enemy has done, not only for us but also for the population, our patriots. (...) When walking alone, they are captured and interrogated.” (Alex Daitula, 1991)

The risk of receiving a journalist would be compensated as long the international community saw and perceived exactly what was happening there.

The opening of Timor abroad, authorized since 1989, had allowed the Resistance to dream that the wider world would know the reality lived in East-Timor, with reliability. In this context, priority was given to actions aimed at bringing journalists into the territory, who could take abroad, not only the reasons for guerrilla leaders but also the pains of the victims.

After the interview, Max Stahl left Alex Daitula to return to Dili, where, on November 12 he recorded images of the Santa Cruz Massacre, with which East-Timor was finally exposed in the eyes of the world.

The 24-year Resistance Struggle against Indonesian occupation was made possible with the involvement by 3 Struggle Fronts: Armed, Clandestine and Diplomatic.⁴

The Clandestine Front was constituted by a complex web of men, women, and children that ensured the circulation of information, as well as the provision of food or other goods, despite the on-going violence, arrests and death.

In Baucau, the Sub-Region of Vivake protected Alex Daitula’s shelter. Not being allowed free transit, “caixas” (boxes) were used, sometimes a small tin buried, to circulate the correspondence. The task of depositing and collecting information was carried out by couriers or “caixas”, through the compliance of codes expressed in sounds or marks on the roads. Subsequently, transport to more distant places would

be in charge of “vias” (routes). Responsibility was huge, so was the risk.

Alex Daitula was captured and killed in 1997, at the dawn of the Restoration of Independence. “We became orphans”, say some members of “clandestina”, questioning themselves: “He knew what we had done, who then, will tell our story?” (Augusto Gusmão, 2014).

Memories of the Fight

After Independence, the new country undergoing reconstruction initiates measures for the safeguarding of the memory. In the article 11⁵ of the Constitution of the Republic of East-Timor, the State commits to value, protect and compensate all of those who fought for independence. Under these circumstances, measures are taken for the preservation of the documents, through the creation of archives. Thus, a collection of historical documents started in 2000.

The public information related to the Portuguese Colonial Administration (1945-1975), along with the Indonesian Administration (1975-1999), was at the responsibility of the National Records and Archives Services Section (NARAS), changed in 2002 into *Arquivo Nacional* (National Archive), falling under the competence of the Ministry of Interior.

Private documents of the East Timor Resistance, donated by members of the Military and Clandestine Fronts, were destined for the Archive & Museum of Timor Resistance, created in 2005.⁶

In the same year, was established the Post-Commission Technical Secretariat of the Reception, Truth and Reconciliation to safeguard the archive formed during the years of research, among other functions. This institution has at its custody thousands of records of violations of human rights in East Timor during the occupation period.

⁴ For more developments on this subject: Abílio Pires Lousada; António José Oliveira; Carlos Dias Afonso (2014). *A Luta Armada Timorense, na Resistência à Ocupação Indonésia (1975-1999)*. Portugal: Tribuna.

⁵ *Constituição da República de Timor-Leste, República Democrática de Timor-Leste*. Accessed: May 2016. http://timor-leste.gov.tl/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/Constituicao_RDTL_PT.pdf

⁶ For more information regarding *Arquivo & Museu da Resistência Timorense*: <http://amrtimor.org/>.

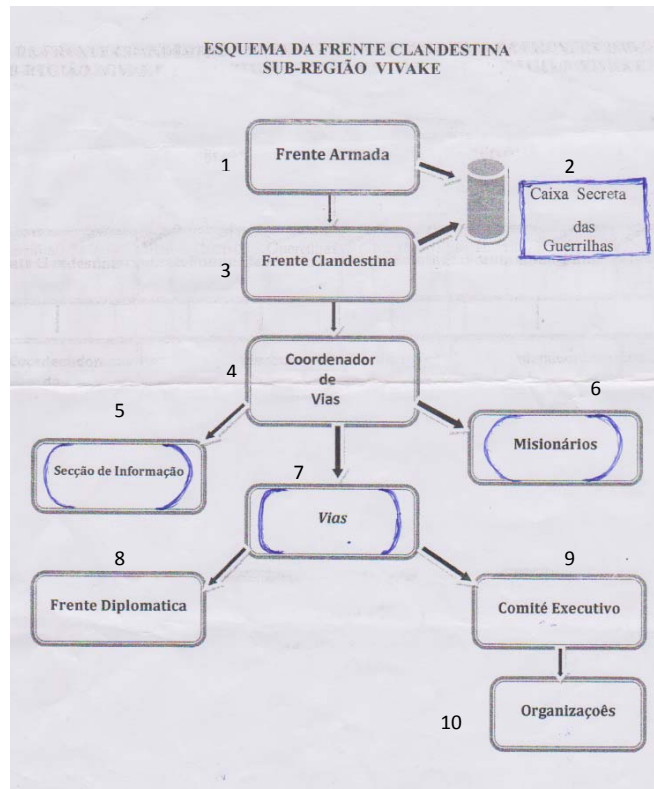


Photo 2: Conceived by Julio Sequeira, “via” Baucau, 2014

1 – Armed Front; 2 – Guerrillas’ Secret Box - “caixa”; 3 – Clandestine Front; 4 – Route’s Coordinator - “vias”; 5 – Information Sector; 6 – Missionaries; 7– Routes - “vias”; 8 – Diplomatic front; 9 – Executive Committee; 10 – Organizations.

A non-official action, but noteworthy in this context, was the constitution in 2003 by Max Stahl of the Max Stahl Audio-visual Centre, with UNESCO’s support. The Centre conserves the main assets of audio-visual documents dated from 1991 until today. In 2013 was classified by UNESCO as “World’s Memory” .⁷

The Memory of the Struggle was translated into imagery and into facts arranged chronologically, in a narrative fixed in books and exhibitions.

By 2006, the approval Law 3/2006 which created the National Liberation Combatants Statute (amended in 2009 and 2011) will allow the implementation of compensation measures; namely, payment of pensions to war veterans, widows and other relatives, grant scholarships and, employment support. ⁸

On the National Development Strategic Plan (2011-2030), published in 2011, is written:

⁷ Max Stahl filmed different phases of the construction of Museum of the People's Memory Scenario. All documents are accessible in the Centro Audiovisual Max Stahl, Díli.

⁸ Lei n.º 3/2006, de 12 de abril, Estatuto dos Combatentes da Libertação Nacional, *Jornal da República*, Série I, n.º 7, de 12 de abril de 2006. Accessed: May 2016, http://timor-leste.gov.tl/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/DL_2006_10_Regime_Juridico_Actividade_Assistencia_Escala_1.pdf
Decreto-lei n.º 8/2009 de 15 de janeiro, Regime de atribuição de bolsas aos filhos dos Combatentes e Mártires da Libertação Nacional, *Jornal da República*, Série I, n.º 2, de 15 de janeiro de 2009. Accessed: May 2016, <http://mj.gov.tl/jornal/lawsTL/RDTL-Law/RDTL-Decree-Laws-P/Decreto-Lei%2008-2009.pdf>
Lei n.º 2/2011, de 23 de março, Segunda alteração da lei n.º 3/2006, de 12 de abril, *Jornal da República*, Série I, n.º 11 de 23 de março de 2011. Accessed: May 2016, < http://www.mj.gov.tl/jornal/public/docs/2011/serie_1/serie1_no11.pdf>
Jornal da República, Série I, n.º 40, de 16 de novembro de 2014. Accessed: May 2016. http://www.mj.gov.tl/jornal/public/docs/2014/serie_1/SERIE_I_NO_40.pdf
Proposta do Decreto-Lei do “Conselho de Combatentes da Libertação Nacional”, 14 de abril, 2015. Accessed: May 2016, <http://www.mss.gov.tl/resources/Konsellu%20Kombatentes%20Libertasaun%20Nasional.pdf>

“As a nation, we are honouring our past and our war veterans. We inaugurated in Metirano the Garden of Heroes [Jardim dos Heróis] as a national memorial and a place for reflection, together with the expansion of the Museum and Archive of Timorese Resistance [Arquivo e Museu da Resistência Timorese]. The State establishes a record of the fighters of armed resistance and secures a level of social protection thru the payment of pensions to war veterans and their respective families (...). We will continue to provide for the official recognition (...) thru medals award to the warriors of the national liberation. We will continue to secure the social protection and pensions to our veterans and their families. This includes a Scholarship Grant System for the children of the National Liberation Combatants and Martyrs (...).” (Plano Estratégico de Desenvolvimento Nacional, 2011: 50).

The pension's award, that constitutes one of the central measures of recognition and compensation, demands the performance of complex record procedures, by presenting evidences which state the exclusive dedication to the resistance fight. It will benefit, mainly, the Military Front. They possess, as a testimony, not only the words of their comrades-in-arms, but also, many times, have written documents and photographs, flowing in abundance, as symbols of the strength and dynamics of the Armed Resistance.

The Clandestine Front, despite the fact that they allowed the circulation of those same documents, doesn't have, however, any record of its activity. For the sake of security, one member would only know about 3 other members. Fear imposed that not even his family would know about his involvement. Even with many years of devotion to *“clandestina”*, namely building and keeping the shelters of the Military Front, making and feeding the *“caixas”* with information, how to show evidence? How to defend as true, what few knew and, in many cases, did not survive to tell?

This reality sets up an element of tension between the members of the Armed Front and the Clandestine

Front. The Clandestine Front, who feel they have been wronged, take into their own hands the responsibility to bring about the past.

The national policies of homage to war veterans in East Timor have been under study by authors, such as Lia Kent (2011) and Michael Leach (2008). They reflect on the effort developed by the community to maintain alive the memory of all those, who in the past sacrificed themselves. Evidence that, even with the goodwill shown by the efforts of the Government, this is considered to be, still, an unfinished task.

“These dynamics, which are evident in civil society campaigns for victims' rights and reparations, and in the political tenor of local memorialization practices, suggest that East Timorese survivors are in various ways reproducing, resisting and transforming 'official' discourses of justice and nation building.” (Kent, 2011: 436)

Fights for Memory

In the established narratives, there is still the absence of who *“lost”*, on the timelines, thousands of data, on which, dissenting voices and conflicting information did not take place yet. Massacres yet not referred, symbolic places not identified, thousands of people, whose sacrifice, is still unknown.

It is in this context, that Saturnino Belo⁹ starts involving the Salamari community for the construction of a Museum, at a place close to David Alex Daitula's shelter. *“A place where visitors may know what was done. Sacrifices might be valued”*, he claims. (Saturnino Belo: 2014)

But, not only that, we know that is important, at the same time, to raise a monument that constitutes a motivation to gather people to affirm and confirm their engagement, claiming the benefits of the statute of the National Liberation Combatants. The thorough

⁹ Saturnino Belo (1959) is *“vias”* coordinator, Ossoluga, Baucau. He finishes his studies in 1974, dreaming of becoming a teacher, but the political context won't allow it. In 1975, Baucau's airport is occupied and he, with his family, go to Uaibobo, sub-district of Ossu. In 1976, he is captured, along with his family, and they are taken to Uailili siege. In 1980, he joined the *Movimento da Frente Clandestina da Sub-Região de Vivake* (Vivake's Clandestine Front Movement). He and his brother, Alcino Freitas Somodok, are responsible for *“caixa 1º de Outubro”*. In 1986, the *“caixa”* is discovered and all members are caught. Saturnino remained in prison until 1990. He returns as *“vias”* coordinator, being responsible for the *“via”* that streamlines *“caixa de Inglaterra”*, which will allow the meeting between Max Stahl and Alex Daitula. He was arrested again in 1991, on the 30th of November, for his involvement in the demonstrations in Santa Cruz. In 1998 he is released from prison. Saturnino Belo, from 1980 to 1985, had the code name of *“Huluk keds”* (*“works since before”*), name given by José Leutéri, Alex Daitula, later replaced by *“Brani Nafatin”* (*“always brave”*).

lists of participants in the network, the connections scheme, the testimonies, and, the public ceremonies for the certification of the “caixas” and “vias”, all attest to the above.

The Museum starts to be built in 2003, and six years gone by, already in the context of 3/2006 law enforcement, at a meeting close to the site construction, José Sequeira “Somotcho”, of the Military Front of Region IV, states:

“Organize yourselves to demand your rights. The right that the state of Timor gives to all of us. Today, we cannot forget (...) this is a space to all come to remind the organizations that we built in the past. Was build a big organization, the Clandestine Front, the Armed Fro and the Diplomatic Front.” He goes beyond, suggesting: “we, that in the past were in the Armed Front, and, you in the Clandestine Front, have to work together again. To identify well the veterans, to not open the door to opportunists.” (José Sequeira “Somotcho”, Construção do Museu, 2009).

Museum of the People's Memory Scenario

The Museum inaugurates in 2012. On the walls are glued copies of the photographs of the armed front, of the prison and massacres. A little cabinet keeps a container with documents. It's the correspondence and the circular letters. On a shelf are arranged some items. Amongst them, two pistols, four grenades and a dozen of bullets. One year after, those same walls exhibit a chronology of the most important actions performed by the Clandestine Front of that area.

Saturnino Belo says: *“We want to write our History to show here at the museum. To stay here from generation to generation”* (Saturnino Belo, 2014). *“We may die, but the person who survive will tell our struggle. This was the message of Kakai and Alex Daitula”* recalls Egídio Mauloi (courier) (Egídio Maloi, 2014).

At the end of his interview, Marcelino Freitas “Wairia” (courier) assert: *“Now the President Taur Matan Ruak has already inaugurated, the State already knows”* and repeat *“the State already knows”* (Marcelino Freitas, 2014).

After a few months the interviews were conducted, ¹⁰this group of men or “the citizens’ collective that hid the Sub-Chief of the Falintil David Alex Daitula”, at Ossoluga is awarded with the *Medalha de Ordem de Timor-Leste* (East-Timor Medal of Honour).¹¹

The Museum of the People's Memory Scenario constitutes a monument to the Clandestine Front. A symbol, in the territory, of the men and women that fought in the past for the national liberation and that today are at the margin of governmental measures to support war veterans.

“It's necessary to Keep on resisting”, a lot of them say. This once, against the oblivion and injustice.

Heirs to Alex Daitula's memory, who a lot of them call father, seem to persist in the conviction of his words: *“Surrender we do not surrender (...). Our strength is our reason”* (Alex Daitula, 1991).

¹⁰ Max Stahl Audiovisual Centre conducted 60 interviews for members of the Clandestine Front of Vivake's Sub-Region. It was used a methodology of training young people in the community for the collection, transcription and translation of testimonies, which is not developed here. The interviews were made in tetum and makasae languages. All documents are accessible in the Centro Audiovisual Max Stahl, Díli.

¹¹ *Jornal da República, Série I, n.º 40, de 16 de novembro de 2014.* http://www.mj.gov.tl/jornal/public/docs/2014/serie_1/SERIE_I_NO_40.pdf Accessed: May 2016



Photo 3: Interview to Marcelino Freitas “Wairia” (courier), Salamai, Baucau, 2014

Video Credits:

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Edition: Cristina Prata, Eddy Pinto, Horácio Henriques

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Imagens: Centro Audiovisual Max Stahl

Participants:

Alex Daitula, Sub- Chefe do Estado Maior das Falintil

Custódio Freitas ‘Bia Mate’, Estafeta

José Sequeira ‘Somotxo’, Frente Militar - Região IV

Saturnino Belo ‘Brani Nafatin’, Coordenador de Vias Região – II

Marcelino Freitas ‘Wairia’, Estafeta – Região II

Egídio da Costa Gerónimo, Mauloi, Estafeta – Região II

Timor-Leste, 2016

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Marcelino Freitas “Wairia”, 2014, _14_0152

Saturnino Belo “Brani Nafatin”, 2014, HD_14_0063; HD_14_0153

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