

Ruth Streicher

The Construction of Masculinities and Violence: „Youth Gangs“ in Dili, East Timor

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Ruth Streicher

Abstract

It was the sudden resurgence of violence in 2006 that brought Southeast Asia's newest nation – East Timor – back to the forefront of public attention, and spotlighted the role of youth gangs as main perpetrators of street violence in East Timor's capital Dili. Based on fieldwork conducted in 2007, this paper challenges conventional myths about an aggressive East Timorese 'youth bulge' by using theoretical notions on the construction of masculinities and violence as tools for analysis. The paper will portray gangs against the structural background of major socio-economic transformations accelerated by the international intervention and experiences of violence during Indonesian occupation as active agents strategically using violence as resource for (identity) politics.

About the author

Ruth Streicher studied Political Sciences at the Freie Universität Berlin (FU) and the University of Melbourne, from where she had the first opportunity to visit East Timor in the course of a film project. After finishing her studies, Ruth worked as Acting Country Director of the German Heinrich Boell Foundation (HBF) in Cambodia and started her PhD project on the violent conflict in the South of Thailand at the Berlin Graduate School for Muslim Cultures and Societies in October 2009. She can be contacted at ruth.streicher@gmail.com.

Note on citations: Information from interviews is cited by indicating the name of the interviewee and writing the line number in the original interview documents in brackets, e.g. James (83-87).

Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	6
1. Research Overview	9
2. Theoretical Outline	15
3. Analytical Framework: Gendered and Gendering Youth Gang Violence	20
4. Methodology and Methods	24
5. Contextualising Masculinities, Violence and Gangs in East Timor and Dili	28
6. Gendered and Gendering Youth Gang Violence in East Timor and Dili	46
7. Conclusions	65
<i>References</i>	72

Glossary of Terms and List of Abbreviations

aldeia	sub-village, hamlet
AMKV	Alliansa Mane Kontra Violoensia (Men's Association Against Violence)
bairo	suburb
barlake	traditional East Timorese dowry system
CAVR	Comissao de Acolhimento, Verdade e Reconciliação de Timor Leste (Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in East Timor)
chefe de aldeia	sub-village head
CPD-RDTL	Council for the Defence of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste
ema boot	'big people', term used to describe influential members of society (i.e. political, religious, traditional leaders)
ema beik	'common people', term used to describe the non-elite population
ETSSC	East Timor Student Solidarity Council
ETIS	East Timor Insight (Non-Governmental Organisation in Dili)
firaku	'Easterner', term used to describe people from the Eastern region of Timor-Leste
Falintil	Forças Armadas para a Liberação Nacional de Timor Leste
Fretilin	Frente Revolucionaria do Timor Leste Independente
F-FDTL	Falintil-Força Defesa Timor Lorosae (Timor-Leste Defence Force)
GFFTL	Grupo Feto Foinsae Timor Lorosae (Young Women's Section of the ETSSC)
JPC	Justice and Peace Commission (Non-Governmental Organisation in Dili)
kaladi	'Westerner', term used to describe people from the Western region of Timor-Leste
KORKA	Kmanek Oan Rai Klaran (Ritual Arts Group)
KS	Kera Sakti (Martial Arts Group)
liurai	traditional East Timorese ruler of a kingdom (rai)
lorosae	'East', term used to describe Eastern part of East Timor
loromonu	'West', term used to describe Western part of East Timor
MAG	Martial Arts Group
NSD	National Statistics Directorate of Timor-Leste
OPE	Office of the State Secretary for the Promotion of Equality in Timor-Leste (Gabinete Da Promosaun Da Igualidade)
OPMT	Organização Popular de Mulher Timor (Popular Organisation of East Timorese Women; Women's Organisation of Fretilin)
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PNTL	Polícia Nacional de Timor-Leste (National Police of Timor-Leste)
PSHT	Perguruan Silat Setia Hati (Martial Arts Group)
RAG	Ritual Arts Group
RDTL	Republica Democrática de Timor-Leste (Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste)
TNI	Tentara Nasional Indonesia (National Indonesian Military)
UDT	União Democrática Timorese (Timorese Democratic Union)
suco	village
uma lulik	traditional sacred house

Introduction¹

‘It was the darling new nation, born from the ravages of occupation: East Timor had become the world’s newest county after a quarter of a century of Indonesian occupation. But six years after independence it remains a volatile place [...] This is the story of the part played by a new generation of East Timorese youth and how rather than building their nation they seem hell-bent on destroying the country their fathers created.’²

This extract, taken from a documentary on ‘gang warfare’ in the East Timorese capital of Dili, builds on a narrative that is commonly repeated both in research and the media. After the violent Indonesian occupation came to a devastating end in 1999, the new nation-state of East Timor was promoted as the ‘poster child’ of the international community. It represented one of the first successful state-building operations of the United Nations (UN), and was depicted as ‘moving along at a steady, if slow, pace towards a series of development goals’ (Kingsbury 2007: 19). With the eruption of violence in the crisis of 2006, however, ambitious development aspirations were abruptly turned to disillusionment: a conflict between soldiers from the Eastern and Western regions of the country was taken to the streets of Dili, resulting in violent street fights, burning and looting of houses, the displacement of about one tenth of the population and the government finally calling for the support of international forces.

‘Youth gangs’ emerged as the main actors held responsible for the bulk of street violence perpetrated during the crisis in Dili (cf. Scambary et al. 2006), grabbing the attention of scholars, reporters and international consultants almost overnight. Most publications have constructed the violence as result of political manipulation, unemployment, poverty and demographic pressures from the ‘youth bulge’ in Dili (e.g. Curtain 2006; ICG 2006; Kostner/Clark 2007). Implicitly, many authors thereby draw a simplistic causal connection between unemployment and gang violence, informed by an overarching rationale of modernisation. Underlying this rationale is a simple equation of ‘youth’ with ‘young males’,

which reflects the lack of examining gang violence on the ground, and leaves the gendered nature of these groups unquestioned.

This apparent gender-blindness, together with the ubiquity of simplistic accounts about gang violence, propelled me to investigate the issue of gender in youth gang violence. By asking how the violence of young men in youth gangs in Dili can be understood from a gendered perspective, I hope to contribute an interpretation substantially different from most accounts published so far. Besides a lack of reflection about gender, there is a lack of detailed qualitative case studies of gang violence in Dili. While James Scambary et al. (2006) provide an excellent overview survey of the different groups, including membership and affiliations, they do not examine the issue of gender. A number of articles published by Myrntinen (2007a, 2007b, 2008) offer valuable empirical background knowledge on gangs and masculinities in East Timor, but lack a profound theoretical basis to analyse gang violence. By contrast, my analysis aims at a more textured picture by qualitatively analysing a single case from a gender theoretical perspective and locating it within the East Timorese context.

I gathered empirical data by conducting qualitative interviews with a number of NGO workers in Dili and gang members during a research period of about two months at the end of 2007. My theoretical perspective is based on the idea that we socially construct what it means to be a man or a woman, and that multiple constructions (i.e. masculinities and femininities) exist in any given setting. Most existing approaches connecting the construction of masculinities to the practice of violence can be roughly divided into the one of two major strands: they either view violence as resulting from gender structures in society or look at how individuals use violence to create gender structures. In Bourdieu’s concept of habitus I found notions useful for examining both sides of the story. Bourdieu assumes that gender is a power structure that needs to be constantly reproduced through agency, so that violence emerges as both a result of and a means to construct gender structures. Moving to the second part of my title, these theoretical thoughts will be applied to youth and gangs: I will establish that constructions of adolescence are intertwined with constructions of gender, and that gangs constitute potent gendered spaces of experience.

On this theoretical basis, I have formulated four analytical points of departure. First, the notion of positioning describes the idea that gendered patterns of thought position men and women differently with respect to the practice of violence. Since gang respondents saw the community as a central refer-

¹ This study was partially funded by the ‘German National Academic Foundation’, and widely supported by a large number of individuals, of whom only a few can be named here. I want to give thanks to the Kulau community and Gang Kulau, the researchers and NGO workers I interviewed in Dili and Melbourne, Angela Smith, Lea Kehr, Laura Grünewald, Lucienne Damm, Jörg Wischermann, Damian Grenfell, Cilja Harders, Henri Myrntinen, James Scambary, Monika Schlicher, Wim Carton.

² Extract take from the ABC documentary ‘Gangland Dili’ (Bormann 2008). The terms East Timor (the common name in English) and Timor-Leste (the official name since 2002) will be used interchangeably in this work.

ence point in their actions, I have drawn on theory about positioning of men in a community context. Second, given the fact that most gang members grew up during the Indonesian occupation, I will introduce approaches relating the experience of violence to the normalisation of violent practices. Third, East Timor is going through a period of major social change: unemployment and urbanisation were the two issues mentioned most often by respondents in relation to gang violence. Gender approaches assume that social change can weaken male domination in society, so that men resort to violence in order to construct masculinities. Fourth, the fact that gang violence in Dili seemed to continue well into 2007 with constantly shifting alliances prompted me to consider theory which conceptualises violent practices as stakes in competitive masculinity games. The critical discussion of the interview results will qualify some of these theoretical assumptions, and question the use of the terms ‘youth’ and ‘gangs’ in this context.

As already mentioned, publications that directly address gang violence in East Timor are rare (see Scambary 2006 and Myrntinen 2008 for notable exceptions). By the same token, the category of youth has remained significantly underexplored in research on East Timor. Except for book chapters discussing youth organisations during resistance (Pinto 2001) and today (Wigglesworth 2007), the only useful information on youth in East Timor that I could find was in a thesis by Babo Soares (2003). Apart from one early structural anthropological work that interprets gender relations in East Timor according to the ideas of opposition and complementarity (Hicks 1976), the large part of work on gender in East Timor focuses exclusively on women. Regarding historical research, there have been attempts to give voice to women who suffered in the East Timorese civil war prior to invasion or during the Indonesian occupation (e.g. CAVR 2005), and several authors have explored women’s contribution to the clandestine resistance movement (e.g. Franks 1996). Women’s status in Timor-Leste has also been mapped statistically (e.g. OPE 2007b), and numerous reports have been published on different aspects of women as victims of gender-based violence (e.g. Swaine 2003; Hynes 2004).

When talking about violence in the public realm in East Timor, by contrast, the issue of gender has hardly been touched upon. To take the example of the Indonesian occupation, there has been extensive debate about Indonesian military violence in East Timor (e.g. Cribb 2002), criticism of the international community’s exertion of symbolic violence by covering up the human rights violations during the violent regime (e.g. Nevins 2005), discussion about how to deal with the perpetrators of violence in

the aftermath (e.g. Schlicher 2005) and an extensive documentation about the different violent crimes committed during occupation (CAVR 2006). Again, exploring gender in this context for most authors means examining women as victims of sexual violence, while the main perpetrators of the violence have been left unexamined. Starting from these gaps, the following analysis offers both a theoretical and empirical exploration that argues for a gendered re-reading of the issue of gang violence in Timor; and challenges conventional assumptions about ‘a new generation of East Timorese youth’ seemingly determined to destroy their country.

1. Research Overview

Besides some approaches developed in peace and conflict studies, useful perspectives that could help to disentangle the gender/violence nexus inherent in the majority of works are hardly to be found in political sciences. The following sections therefore provide a broad interdisciplinary overview of existing research on the construction of masculinities and violence, particularly in connection with youth and gangs.

1.1. Gender in Peace and Conflict Studies

The introduction of gender concerns into the realm of peace and conflict studies has had two important implications.³ Firstly, different attempts have been made to re-formulate conventional theoretical concepts and criticise their masculinist underpinnings in order to reveal the ‘gendered nature of violence’ (Moser 2001: 30) and practically ‘en-gender’ analyses on the ground (Harders 2004: 461). Secondly, these efforts have necessitated a widened analytical scope taking in the micro-level beyond the state and the subjective perspective of actors themselves (e.g. Seifert 2003).

Notwithstanding, most authors concerned with gender in peace and conflict studies have only written about ‘women’ – often implicitly operating on the basis of essentialised gender binaries. With women stereotyped as ‘inherently peaceful beings’ and ‘men as aggressive warriors’, any meaningful analysis

³ Critical gender approaches still comprise a marginalised minority in the ‘malestream’ of peace and conflict research (Goldstein 2001: 38). Good overviews of the current state of the art in this debate are provided by Goldstein (2001); Harders (2004); Seifert (2001).

of men as perpetrators of violence has been lost (Goldstein 2001: 331).⁴ Only a few studies have looked into the construction of masculinities in relation to violence, and two main empirical fields are worth mentioning: research on (1) militarised masculinities as well as on (2) discourse and representation, especially in terms of constructing national identities.

(1) Historical and sociological works have inquired into the interrelationship between masculinities and violence within the institution of the army. Through the development of mass armies in the course of modern nation-state formation, national militaries became exclusively male institutions (Eifler 2000: 39).⁵ Seifert, who has crafted several studies on the construction of militarised masculinities in Germany (e.g. Seifert 1996), has demonstrated how practising violence and fighting became constitutive to marking the male gender in the military profession (Seifert/Eifler 1999: 13). On an international level, masculinities in UN peacekeeping operations are increasingly taken into focus (e.g. Eifler 2000; Whitworth 2004).

(2) Discursive approaches suggest that the symbolic connection between a certain notion of masculinity, the national military and the imagined national community is of crucial importance. Fighting is often legitimised by referring to the soldier's duty of protecting a nation's 'women and children' (Yuval-Davis 1997: 111), and constructed as 'an attractive and exciting opportunity for men to prove themselves' (Nagel 2007: 626). Moreover, the symbolic figure of the male warrior is central to discourses of national identity and national memory (Engels/Chojnacki 2007: 8). These powerful discursive constructions have been traced back in different public realms, including literature (Phillips 2006), media representations (Schlieter 2005) and public 'war talk' (Hardman/Taylor 2004).

What is lacking in the debate so far, however, is a profound gendered analysis of 'non-state actors' like gangs (cf. Cohn/Enloe 2000: 11).⁶ Despite the heightened awareness of these actors in current mainstream debates, gender issues are often either ignored altogether or taken up in a misleading

way (Engels/Chojnacki 2007: 2), with the majority of works avoiding methodological discussions and implicitly remaining state-centred. In addition, the category of age (and its entanglement with gender) has been completely ignored. An interdisciplinary broadening is therefore indispensable.

1.2. Gang Research

Gang research has been strongly shaped by the US-American tradition: starting from the 1920s, the pioneering works on gangs were produced by the Chicago School of Sociology, and subsequent research in Europe followed this tradition (Kühnel 2003: 1167). It is worth citing Park, who edited Thrasher's famous thesis on 1313 gangs in Chicago as early as 1927, to demonstrate a number of elements still apparent in gang research today. According to Park, gangs are

'composed of those same foot-loose, prowling, and predacious adolescents who herd and hang together, after the manner of the undomesticated male everywhere. Gangs flourish on the frontier, and the predatory bands that infest the fringes of civilization exhibit, on the whole, the same characteristic traits displayed by the groups studied in this volume [...] Gangs are gangs, wherever they are found' (Park 1927: ix).

Very early on a connection between masculinity ('the undomesticated male') and gang violence was drawn. For a long time since, gangs were simply assumed to be 'male' (Bruhns 2003: 213). It is only recently that the construction of gender in gangs has been examined explicitly (e.g. Franklin 2004), and that girl gangs have come into focus.⁷ Underlying the notion of gang members as violent young men is the gendered construction of youth as male: since research on youth and adolescence has long implicitly been oriented towards young men, the explicit focus on masculinities in adolescence is fairly new (King/Flaake 2005: 9).

The Chicago School explains the emergence of gang violence by looking at macrostructural factors like migration, social inequality and processes of social disorganisation caused by urbanisation (Kühnel 2003: 1168). In many contemporary studies, gang violence is still associated with the 'fringes of civilisation' and interpreted as deviant, unsocial behaviour (Hafeneger 1994: 8). The notion that gangs are the

⁴ Most work thus examines, for instance, women's different experience of conflict, women's participation in violence or women's special interest in peace (Cockburn 2007: 238). In addition, many feminist peace movements strategically use the notion of 'peaceful women' for legitimising their political action (Goldstein 2001: 331).

⁵ Eifler writes about how the participation of women in European armies used to be typical throughout the 14th to the 19th century. With the process of professionalisation, their recognised positions in providing supplies for the army were abolished (Eifler 2000: 39).

⁶ According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 'armed non-state actors include, but are not necessarily limited to, rebel opposition groups, local militias and warlords, as well as vigilante and civil defence groups, when such are clearly operating without state control' (accessed at: <http://www.sipri.org/contents/conflict/nonstateactors.html>; 08/05/2008).

⁷ Bruhns describes that many studies of girls in violent groups simply interpreted their violent behaviour as mimicking male practices and argues against such stereotypical interpretations (Bruhns 2003: 213).

same ‘wherever they are found’ is today reflected in academics struggling to find a universal definition of the term ‘gang’, often based on US-centred notions like ‘the street’, ‘drugs’ and ‘illegal behaviour’.⁸ These earlier works are problematic since they explain violence ‘on the ground’ only with structural factors, work with a concept of violence as deviant behaviour, and fail to examine the categories of gender and youth.

There are, however, a number of more sophisticated recent studies. One example is Salo’s (2006) anthropologically inspired article on ganging practices in a South African community. In Salo’s view, gangs should not only be seen as expression of alienation and resistance, but also as an ‘expression of social cohesion in peripheral communities’, as they ‘exist within, and are an integral aspect of, both the cultural and the economic reproduction of personhood in a township community’ (Salo 2006: 149). Pure structuralist analyses cannot capture these complex relationships: gang members, writes Salo (2006: 149), are also ‘sons, brothers, husbands, fathers, lovers, friends and social mentors’; and the gang rites of passage like violent beatings and painful tattooing serve to mark the transition of men into adulthood.

1.3. (Youth) Subcultures

One of the main paradigms of subculture research is encapsulated by the prefix ‘sub’: It is meant to describe cultural groups that are smaller, less powerful and opposed to the mainstream values of a larger cultural group (Berard 2007: 4872).⁹ In terms of youth, subcultures were seen in their emancipatory potential – as a ‘magical’ avenue for young people to escape everyday constraints of their real life working-class background (Poynting 2007: 379) and to define their own culture vis-à-vis the parental generation. In this sense, youth subcultures were interpreted as symbolic resistance to hegemonic adult culture in society (Berard 2007: 4874). Subculture researchers therefore tended to romanticise and politicise violence in subcultures as resistant practice (Amit 2001: 16657), effectively using the structural focus of earlier sociological approaches for a different political interpretation. Pioneering subculture scholars often left the issue of gender and youth unexplored (McRobbie 2000: 26).

⁸ For instance, researchers from the ‘Eurogang’ research project (obviously exploring gangs in Europe) agreed to work with the following definition of a ‘street gang’: ‘A street gang is any durable, street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity’ (Decker/Weerman 2005: 3).

⁹ The concept of subcultures was first introduced by representatives of the Chicago School of Sociology, but further developed by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham in the 1970s.

Since then, however, subculture research has theoretically developed and empirically gained a much more complex picture of violent subcultures, providing (1) alternative theoretical and methodical ways to analyse violence, (2) interesting empirical results of studies on the construction of masculinities in (violent) youth subcultures, and (3) reflective impulses to think critically about the discursive construction of the terms ‘youth’ and ‘gang’.

(1) Despite earlier ideological undertones, subculture research helped to dismantle determined and dysfunctional notions of violence by redefining it as a constitutive everyday practice for a number of subcultures and examining it in terms of cultural agency (Koch/Behn 1997: 117). Contrary to psychoanalytical approaches, scholars do not view violent styles as expression of an individual, but are interested in their collectivity and social meaning (McRobbie 2000: 40). Against this theoretical background, it was especially the German research community that developed methodical innovations in trying to grasp how groups collectively define gendered meanings of violence (e.g. Bohnsack 2003; Bohnsack et al. 1995).¹⁰

(2) While pioneering feminist subculture researchers were primarily concerned with girls in subcultures (cf. McRobbie 2000), a number of empirical studies have also touched upon masculinities and the normalisation of violence in youth subcultures. In his ethnographic study of a gang called ‘Turkish Power Boys’, Tertilt (1996) describes how gang members habitually reacted to challenges of their masculinity with violence (Tertilt 1996: 207). Research has also shown that the nexus of masculinity constructions and violence is important in subcultures of right-wing extremist groups (Möller 2003; Schroeder 2004) as well as hooligans and rockers (Bohnsack et al. 1995).

(3) Cultural studies have developed important tools to reflect critically upon the framing of issues like ‘violent youth gangs’ in different spheres, including media and academia. By analysing British print media, Alexander argues that the picture of ‘the Gang’ is used as ‘the ultimate symbol of crisis, deviance and threat’ (Alexander 2000: 20). De-constructing the academic discourse on ‘youth gangs’ and ‘masculinity’, Collier (2001) claims that ‘the category of criminogenic male youth’ participates in the construction of male subjectivities. In addition, historical research has revealed a strong historical

¹⁰ Bohnsack (2003: 51-54) primarily conducted group interviews to examine how collective orientations of groups are manifest in communicative styles and expressions. While I have used a different method for data gathering, I have borrowed tools from Bohnsack’s data analysis method, the so-called ‘documentary method’ (see also Nohl 2006).

contingency of both popular and academic representations of the ‘gang’ (cf. Bühler-Niederberger 2003; Hafeneger 1994).

Notwithstanding these useful insights derived from the study of violence in youth subcultures, there is one big disadvantage: regionally, it is very much focused on Europe, and therefore carries a number of problematic underpinnings. While the consideration of youth is a big strength of subculture research, the field simply seems to assume that youth is a given generational category marked by the will to break away from the parental home. Scholarly work on youth gangs, gender and violence in non-Western contexts can help to qualify these assumptions.

1.4. Regional Perspectives on Gender, Youth, Gangs and Violence

East Timor has been a subject of research by regional specialists of both the Indonesian and Melanesian regions. Authors writing about violence, youth and gender in these regional contexts challenge the ‘meanings of the very categories’ used in Western research (Dinnen 2000: 1). Amongst others, Jolly (2000) advocates researching historical entanglements between the West and ‘Other’ regions rather than using Western categories to research the ‘Other’. Christianity and colonialism, she writes, had deep impacts on both notions and practices of gender and violence in Melanesia.

Yet while these influences are rarely acknowledged, Melanesian men today are commonly depicted as aggressive and violent warriors, reflecting a colonial legacy of representation (Jolly 2000: 305). Similarly, Strathern found that people in Mount Hagen, Papua New Guinea (PNG) did not associate violence with chaos and disorder, but considered it an integral part of a social order built on violent self-defence (described in: von Trotha 1997). Regional scholars have also contested the assumption that adolescence inevitably constitutes a period of ‘storm and stress’, emphasising that ‘coming of age’ can be experienced very differently in different contexts (e.g. Côté 1994).

Local specificity, however, should not be interpreted as cultural determinism, as stressed by authors writing on violence in Indonesia (Colombijn 2001; Coppel 2006). There is nothing specifically Indonesian about violence, concludes Colombijn (2001: 40), except for a unique combination of historical, social and cultural factors. Inspiring work has also been produced on gangs in PNG and Fiji (Goddard 2005; Monsell-Davis 2000; Myrntinen 2007a). Goddard counters the view that unemployment ‘causes’

crime, arguing that gang leaders use violence as a threatening device to pressure politicians for more employment. Most importantly, Goddard interprets gangs as re-constructions of the traditional ‘big man’ social structure in PNG, which is marked by enterpreneurism and relationships with the kin-group (Goddard 2005: 88).

To sum up, the interdisciplinary approach has revealed that – besides newer works in gang research – subcultural studies offer useful theoretical and methodical approaches to fill existing gaps in peace and conflict studies by deconstructing conventional notions of violence and locating the phenomena within the context of both youth and gender. However, most authors are clearly biased towards the European region and lack a profound gender theoretical foundation questioning the construction of masculinities and its interrelationship with violence in the context of youth gangs. In what follows, I will therefore develop my own theoretical outline.

2. Theoretical Outline

Ontologically, I take a feminist constructivist stance assuming that gender is socially constructed and built on inherent power relations. The huge variety of different feminist constructivist perspectives can be divided into approaches that analyse the construction of gender, i.e. look at the structural side, and approaches that target the constitution of gender; i.e. take agency into focus (see Pühl et al. 2004). Consequently, after introducing (1) ‘hegemonic masculinity’ as an example of a structural approach, and (2) ‘doing masculinity’ as an agency perspective, I will introduce (3) Bourdieu’s notion of habitus to establish a theoretical position that recognises the co-constitution of both agency and structure.¹¹

2.1. Hegemonic Masculinity, Doing Masculinity and Gender Habitus

(1) The concept of hegemonic masculinity has become the leading paradigm in masculinity studies (Döge/Meuser 2001: 18).¹² First developed by Carrigan/Connell/Lee (1985) following a critique of sociological

¹¹ The differentiation between structure and agency is a classical distinction drawn by sociology. While agency approaches focus on how social actors create the social world, structural approaches concentrate on how the social world shapes social actors. Whether a theoretical focus is put on structure or agency and how structure and agency are assumed to be related has great normative implications, carrying assumptions about society vs. the individual or determinism vs. free action (Loyal 2003: 51, 71).

¹² Hegemonic masculinity has found widespread application in a variety of different academic fields, amongst them historical research (Tosh 2004), discursive psychology (Wetherell/Edley 1999), criminology (Messerschmidt 2004) and sociology (Döge/Meuser 2001).

gender role theory, it was later mainly R.W. Connell who further spelled out the concept.¹³ Transferring Gramsci's idea of hegemony to gender relations, hegemonic masculinity is meant to describe a dynamic structure of social relations (constituted of norms and institutions) that guarantees the (re-) production of men's authority over both femininities and subordinated masculinities (Cardigan et al. 1985: 587; Tosh 2004: 51). With regards to asking about violent youth gangs, however, Connell's primarily structural view of violence can only grasp violence as an outcome of hegemonic gender structures, but fails to address how gender structures are translated into social agency.

(2) The idea of doing masculinity was born out of theoretical notion of 'doing gender', a concept developed in the 1980s by West and Zimmermann (cf. Wetterer 2004). Coming from an ethnomethodological tradition, the authors established the idea of gender as a verb, 'a routine we must work at in everyday interaction' (Holmes 2007: 54). In contrast to the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity', the 'doing gender' approach has been crucial for pointing to the aspect of social agency in the construction of gender, and revealing the repetitiveness and ordinariness of these constructions. Nonetheless, by focussing exclusively on how people do gender, analyses often remain rather descriptive, leaving out structural power-conditions under which gender is done. Rather than viewing violence as an outcome of structures, violence is seen as an (everyday) resource that individuals can draw on in certain contexts to construct their gender identity, and thus is attributed the capacity to create (gender) structures.

(3) In his concept of habitus¹⁴, Bourdieu offers a way to conceptualise agency and structure as co-constituted, i.e. combine the focus on structure from hegemonic masculinity with the focus on agency from doing gender. He demands his theoretical concepts be used in a very context-specific way as practical analytical tools, rather than applying a large-scale context-unrelated theoretical framework to empirical analysis (cf. Engler 2004). – an approach that has triggered productive re-formulations and methodical innovations in studies about youth violence (cf. Bohnsack 2003; Bohnsack et al. 1995) and has proven

¹³ In their famous essay 'Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity' Cardigan, Connell and Lee criticised the feminist tendency to treat men as homogeneous category and presented their first attempt to formulate a concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Cardigan et al. 1985: 589). In later works, most notably 'Gender and Power' (Connell 2002a), Connell spelled out some of the ideas intimated in 1985. After two decades of publications referring to and also criticising the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity', Connell and Messerschmidt engaged with the critique and suggested some re-formulations (Connell/Messerschmidt 2005).

¹⁴ Bourdieu first formulated the concept of habitus on the basis of empirical research, not as a theoretical solution to general sociological problems (Schwingel 1995: 53). In later works, habitus became a central notion for explaining the social re-production of class in connection with Bourdieu's concepts of social field and the different forms of capital (Meuser 2006a: 113).

very productive for my own work. In a widespread feminist debate, his theoretical notions have been further spelled out to bring back issues of social theory (i.e. a concern with power and social context) into a rather culturalist understanding of gender in cultural and literary studies (Adkins 2004a: 4).¹⁵

2.2. Using Gender Habitus to Conceptualise Masculinities and Violence

Central to the concept of habitus are Bourdieu's assumptions about the subject as radically social (Bourdieu 1997: 168), and the social as radically relational (Bourdieu 1998: 7) as well as his concern with power relations in social practice (Engler 2004: 222). The socialised body (what we call an individual), in his thinking, is not the opposite of society, but one of its forms of existence (Engler 2004: 224). Habitus reflects this double logic binding together structure and agency as mutually constitutive. In a very general definition, Bourdieu describes habitus as 'system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures' (Bourdieu 1976: 165).¹⁶ As the interface between structure and agency, habitus is both product and producer of social agency. It is both generated by, as well as generating, social structure. Importantly, habitus can generate similar patterns of social agency but does not necessarily determine it.

In order to connect this general definition to notions of gender, however, habitus needs to be read more explicitly in terms of the workings of power. In a Foucauldian reading, habitus basically establishes that power relations are not only repressive, but can be productive, i.e. generate social agency; and that they can be re-productive, i.e. generate structurally similar patterns of social agency. In fact, Bourdieu himself sees gender as one of the crucial power structures shaping the habitus, and talks about habitus as 'gendered and gendering' (Bourdieu 1997: 167). Gender thus has to be seen as a socially constructed power relation that encompasses both structure and agency. 'Doing gender', therefore, only works as 'gender is done' in society (Holmes 2007: 58).

With Bourdieu, we can conclude that the gender power structure is the generative core of the gender habitus, which can produce a wide variety of structurally similar, but still not identical, social practices

¹⁵ Bourdieu has also been criticised by feminists, e.g. for overstating the unconscious (Adkins 2004a: 16), presenting an androcentric and structuralist account of the world (Witz 2004: 221), or conceptualising bodily incorporation as too straight-forward and giving causal priority to the social over the linguistic (Butler, cited in: Fowler 2007).

¹⁶ English translation taken from Reed-Danahay (2005: 107).

of femininity and masculinity. Consequently, ‘doing masculinity’ only works on the basis of ‘masculinity being done’ in society. To emphasise the variety of possible social constructions, I will use ‘masculinities’ in plural. Multiple and competing masculinities can exist within any particular setting (Cornwall/Lindisarne 1994: 18). All masculinities are marked by (and tend to reproduce) a structural power position of the male gender, since they are always constructed on the basis of a powerful hegemonic model as reference point (Connell 1987). Both the heterosocial and the homosocial dimension are crucial for the construction of masculinities. On the one hand, masculinities are constructed vis-à-vis both femininities and ‘subordinated masculinities’ (Meuser 2006a: 124). In this case, the construction of masculinities is based on a double-structure of distinction and dominance (Meuser 2004: 372). On the other hand, they can be generated in homosocial competitive practices. While competition can produce hierarchy, it can also be a source of commonality and equality ‘between men’ (Meuser 2007: 2).

To conceptualise the connection between the construction of masculinities and violence in an analytically clear way, I work with a concept of violence as corporeal power practice. In contrast to Bourdieu himself and a number of feminist authors (e.g. Moser 2001; Sauer 2002), I am thus using a narrow definition of violence as ‘physical violence’, which is also employed in the more recent German sociological debate about violence (cf. von Trotha 1997).¹⁷ In this understanding, violence emerges as a practice of power that leads to a corporeal violation.¹⁸ It is this corporeal dimension that differentiates physical violence from other practices of power: other than, for instance, material damage, it targets the person as a whole, as one cannot escape one’s own body (Wobbe 1994: 185).

Against this background, Bourdieu’s notion of the ‘gendered and gendering habitus’ offers four theoretical reference points crucial for conceptualising different perspectives on the construction of masculinities and violence: the working of the structural ‘dispositions’ of habitus through the gendered patterns of thought connecting masculinities to violence; the gendered experience and normalisation

¹⁷ I still consider cultural and structural factors important in terms of violence. Nevertheless, rather than collapsing all these phenomena under one heading, I think that it is more fruitful to analytically distinguish them (for a similar argument, see Sutterlüty 2002: 16).

¹⁸ When talking about violence as an act of power, most authors I have consulted refer to Popitz (1986). He defines violence as ‘an act of power which leads to an intentional corporal violation’ (Popitz 1986: 73). Already apparent in this quote, Popitz works with a Weberian definition of power based on the idea of intention, and stresses the aspects of powerful repression and subordination through violence. In my reading of Bourdieu, however, these two assumptions have to be revised. Firstly, Bourdieu qualifies ideas of intentionality by his emphasis on the unconscious dimensions of the habitus. Secondly, in my view, habitus has to be understood in terms of the productivity of power. Consequently, violence as practice of power does not necessarily always have to be intentional, nor necessarily always lead to subordination and repression.

of violence; violent reactions to a perceived ‘cleavage’ of habitus and the construction of masculinities through ‘games of competition’. These theoretical notions centrally connect with theoretical and empirical work about (youth) gang violence and will be elaborated in the description of the analytical framework after the following clarification of the terms (1) youth and (2) gangs.

2.3. Constructing Youth and Gangs

(1) Biological and developmental approaches conceptualise ‘adolescence’ as a stage of hormonal ‘storm and stress’; i.e. an unstable and insecure period of life between child- and adulthood in which certain biographical tasks have to be dealt with in order to ‘come of age’ (Harwood 2005: 913). These ideas of adolescence carry a number of homogenising gendered and heteronormative assumptions, claiming that boys/girls have to experience the same developmental stage defined in a certain age range in order to go from ‘innocent childhood’ to ‘civilised adulthood’ (Harwood 2005: 914). With the help of the habitus-theoretical foundation of this work, a more nuanced gendered approach to youth can be formulated. Gender critics have pointed out that the category of youth itself is a gendered social construction of society (cf. McRobbie 2000: 35), which is historically contingent. Historical research has furthermore shown that changing structural conditions (like socio-economic changes, but also violent conflict) alter the experience of the period between child- and adulthood, so that different generations experience ‘youth’ very differently. Research from non-Western regions adds the insight that adolescence is not necessarily marked by ‘storm and stress’, since ‘youth’ in many societies have to take on adult responsibilities at a very young age. Young people themselves also actively use certain gendered social constructions of youth as resources for self-expression. In other words, ‘doing gender’ and ‘doing adolescence’ are inextricably linked (Breitenbach 2001), because social power structures not only position people differently according to gender, but also according to generation. With violence being a more legitimate form of expression for young males, they can draw upon violence to do gender and adolescence.¹⁹

(2) In the same constructivist vein, gangs should not be seen as static groups, but as co-constructed by structure and agency. As demonstrated above, discursive representations construct gangs as popular

¹⁹ Ethnographic research, for example, emphasises that the practice or experience of violence can be given the cultural meaning of ‘male rites of passage’ from ‘being a boy’ into mature male adulthood (cf. Salo 2006; Peteet 2002).

symbols of deviance and threat in media and academia, carrying connotations of gender (male) and generation (youth). Nevertheless, gangs are not entirely ‘imagined’ communities constituted through discourse. In fact, they form an important collective space of experience for gang members, providing ‘habitual security’ crucial against the background of insecurities caused by socio-economic change (cf. Bourgois 1996). Importantly, as Bohnsack (2003) has shown using the example of Turkish youth gangs, these collective ‘spaces of experience’ are highly gendered. In male youth gangs, for example, the search for a sense of community can take the form of a search for a communal understanding of masculinity.²⁰ In short, gangs provide members with a gendered space for both experiencing and creating masculinities, and offer ‘habitual security’ in the face of socio-economic insecurity. Whilst the ‘gang’ is a powerful discursive code signifying deviance and threat, gang members themselves creatively play with this code and strategically perform their membership depending on the context.

3. Analytical Framework: Gendered and Gendering Youth Gang Violence

Decisive in constructing this framework for analysis was Bourdieu’s idea that the dimensions of structure and agency are mutually constitutive and always have to be thought together in order to interpret the social world. The violence of youth gangs thus has to be seen in light of the gender habitus which is both gendered (focus on structure) and gendering (focus on agency). Consequently, I will introduce two theoretical notions focussing on the idea of violence as an ‘outcome of structures’, and two theoretical notions emphasising the idea of ‘violence as identity resource’.²¹

3.1. Positioning

Structural ‘dispositions’ of habitus work through gendered patterns of thought that classify the world into ‘male’ and ‘female’, and define masculinities and femininities (cf. Bourdieu 1997: 169). These gendered patterns of thought cause an unequal positioning of male and female genders towards the prac-

tice of violence. The ‘power to violation’ and the ‘openness to vulnerability’²² are distributed unequally between the genders (Wobbe 1994: 187).

Expressed in Bourdieu’s terms, the male gender habitus implies that the potentiality to practice violence should appear more ‘natural’ and ‘normal’. The female gender, by contrast, is marked by the potentiality to experience violence (Wobbe 1994: 192). Going beyond Bourdieu, Wobbe applies these thoughts to the construction of communities, which is based on the notion of potential outside threats.²³ Since the female gender is constructed as more susceptible to the experience of violence, it is the women of the community who mark its vulnerability. Men, in turn, are positioned as its powerful protectors (Wobbe 1994: 193). As outlined above, the issue of generation needs to be stressed here as well, since there are deeply gendered expectations of how different generations of men should be and are allowed to behave in a community; often making violence a form of expression socially more accepted for young rather than old males.

These insights are relevant to understanding youth gang violence on two levels. Firstly, on a broader societal level, homosocial fights between young men are often socially accepted to a certain extent in many societies (see Meuser 2002), while the violence of young girls is either ‘portrayed as an aberration (masculinised, pathologised), or redefined as part of the natural feminine condition (adolescent girls as emotional, irrational and out of control)’ (Burman et al. 2003: 74). Secondly, as ethnographic research on a more localised community level has shown, male youth gangs can be positioned to be the protectors of a community (cf. Salo 2006). Although based in the capital of East Timor, Gang Kulau, whose members I interviewed, can be classified as community-based gang: members very much defined themselves and their activities in relation to their community; and despite being called an urbanised centre, Dili has a village-like character in which the community is of crucial importance. Additionally, in studies on gender-based violence in East Timor, the community has proven to be highly significant to the social acceptance of violent practices.

²⁰ For the Turkish youth gangs Bohnsack (2003) examined, a certain notion of ‘male honour’ was central, and the use of violence to defend the ‘male honour’ was normalised to an extent that it remained unreflected.

²¹ I will show in my final discussion how the different aspects gained through employing these perspectives are interconnected, and how structure and agency interplay within each category.

²² In the German original source, these two terms are ‘Verletzungsmächtigkeit’ and ‘Verletzungsoffenheit’ (Wobbe 1994: 185), the English translation is taken from a different text of Wobbe (cf. Wobbe 1995).

²³ While Wobbe herself mainly refers to Anderson’s ‘imagined community’, I think that her notion can be applied to smaller communities as well.

3.2. Experience/Normalisation/Anticipation

The major part of gendered ‘dispositions’ gets integrated into the unconscious ‘practical sense’ through practical experience, i.e. habituation and incorporation (Bourdieu/Wacquant 1996: 166). Thus the experience of violence can cause the incorporation and habituation of violent practices. From a gendered perspective, men and women are positioned differently towards the practice of violence, so that their experience of enacting and suffering from violence is different. Accordingly, empirical works have shown that violent conflict functions as ‘very dense space of violent experience’ (Schlichte 2006: 5) through which different models of masculinity are linked to the enactment of violence (e.g. Dolan 2002: 57). The gendered experience of violence causes the gendered normalisation of violent practices. In Bourdieu’s words, violence can become a ‘habitualised disposition’, a potentiality which gets integrated into and therefore ‘make sense’ in certain – deeply gendered! – cultural settings (von Trotha 1997: 34) and is re-activated in situations similar to those of the initial experience. Jeganathan adds another crucial dimension: the anticipation of violence. Conducting ethnographic research in Sri Lanka, he observed how the experience of violent conflict lead people to expect, and even wait for, violent outbreaks. This anticipation – often more powerful than the actual perpetration of violence – created an imagined space for future violence. Since the experience of violence is gendered, its anticipation causes the emergence of particular masculinities (Jeganathan 2000: 117).

As research on youth gang violence has shown (cf. Bohnsack 2003; Tertilt 1996), gangs as collective spaces of experience can habituate practices of violence that are connected to specific notions of masculinity. Violence is regarded as normal and masculine in practices of right-wing extremist groups (Möller 2003; Schroeder 2004), groups of hooligans and rockers (Bohnsack et al. 1995) or in the hard-rock scene (Inhetveen 1997). While still lacking an empirical basis, it seems convincing that the anticipation of violence in a community not only causes the emergence of specific masculinities, but also legitimates the existence of (youth) gangs as powerful protectors of communities (see positioning). Against the historical background of East Timor, these notions seem useful in view of the brutality of the Indonesian occupation as the formative period for young people living in the country today. The everydayness of (gang) violence in East Timor moreover hints towards a certain degree of normalisation

of violent practices. Lastly, a gendered approach to the anticipation of violence is especially relevant in the East Timorese context, where rumours of violence are widespread and can have huge impacts.²⁴

3.3. Re-Establishing

This approach assumes that violence can be activated as an identity resource for ‘doing masculinity’ to re-establish male domination, which has been weakened by socio-economic developments. The basic idea of this approach is taken from Bourdieu’s notion that (gender) habitus can be ‘taken over’ by social change (e.g. unemployment), resulting in a ‘cleavage’ of habitus that is experienced as suffering (Bourdieu/Wacquant 1996: 161). Henrietta Moore (1994), adds a power dimension to this assumption: gendered patterns of thought define a power relationship, and are therefore necessarily ‘linked to fantasies of power and agency in the world’ (Moore 1994: 65). Social change can inhibit men from complying with these patterns, resulting in the loss of social power, social approval and material benefits. The concept of re-establishing emphasises the creative capacities of violence in this situation of disempowerment: violence can be used as a potent identity resource re-establishing a gender order that has been altered by social change.

Taking up Moore’s approach, Dolan found that the context of war and a very weak state in Northern Uganda impeded men from living up to a normative model of masculinity especially in economic terms, so that a lot of young people decided to join the war to re-construct their masculinities with violence (Dolan 2002: 74). Many gang researchers follow a similar argument, claiming that gangs do masculinity with violence in reaction to economic and social marginalisation (e.g. Bourgois 1996: 414). The whole of East Timor, but Dili in particular, has undergone huge social changes in the post-independence era. Accordingly, the most often cited factors for gang violence in Dili – in literature as well as both NGO and gang interviews – were unemployment and urbanisation. These assumptions will be scrutinised through a gendered lens.

²⁴ In an excellent analysis, Gonzalez Devant shows how rumours of violence led to anticipatory displacement of Dili residents in the course of the crisis 2006 (Gonzalez Devant 2008: 23).

3.4. Competing

In terms of learning masculinities, Michael Meuser (e.g. 2002, 2006) has further developed Bourdieu's remark that 'men acquire their masculinity in serious games of competition' (Bourdieu 1997: 204), emphasising the homosocial dimension of the male habitus. Homosocial group fights are a typical constellation of the 'serious games of competition' in certain male youth subcultures. Characteristic of these fights is a reciprocal setting (i.e. both groups have the same size and strength), and young men using their own body as a stake in the game (Meuser 2006b: 270). When employed as resource in group fights, violence 'serves to maintain group solidarity, reinforces friendships, affirms allegiances and enhances personal status' (Burman et al. 2003: 85) and can therefore have socialising effects (cf. Inhetveen 1997).

The idea that violence between groups of men can help to construct masculinities has been documented in a number of empirical works, such as in studies of hooligans (Bohnsack et al. 1995), of groups of Turkish young men in general (Bohnsack 2003) and, specifically, the 'Turkish Power Boys' (Tertilt 1996). Group fights were also constitutive for the earlier British male youth subcultures, and are central to male youth culture of the ruling class, especially in elite private boarding schools (Poynting 2007). One of the most striking features during my stay in East Timor was the constantly shifting alliances that gangs drew upon as reasons for violent fights: while East/West categories were of importance during the crisis of 2006, party alliances seemed to have gained higher relevance in 2007, with gang rivalries underlying these cleavages. Some gangs seemed to merely fight for the sake of it. These four analytical notions outlined will be taken up, discussed and qualified in the interview analysis (see 6.).

4. Methodology and Methods

In terms of epistemology, I take a feminist post-positivist stance.²⁵ Interestingly enough, the male-stream debate on methods in political science (e.g. reflected in: Alemann 1995) hardly ever touches upon the power problematic in the process of research. Regarding methodology, I have thus referred to qualitative and feminist methodological literature, particularly feminist ethnography (cf. Skeggs 2001) and

²⁵ Based on the basic premise that science can never be neutral and value-free, this stance prefers a *political positioning of the researcher* to a metaphysical claim to truth (Harders et al. 2005: 22), implying an awareness of (gendered) power relations in the context in which knowledge is created, the political purposes that knowledge serves and the privileged access to knowledge of a small scientific community (Locher/Prügl 2001: 122).

identified four key points: (1) I decided to do field research and tried to choose adequate methods based on a qualitative research paradigm (Flick 2006b), (2) I included a number of different participants and perspectives (cf. Kimmel/Crawford 2001: 753). Also, (3) my research was shaped by the notion of reflexivity (Hark 2007), which includes (4) raising concerns about ethics.

4.1. Methodological Outline

(1) *Qualitative Case Study*: From September to December 2007, I spent about eight weeks mainly in Dili, East Timor, to conduct research on masculinities and youth gang violence. While it was only because of the long period of time I spent in Dili that I had access to certain interview partners, I did not conduct 'classical' ethnographic field research, but used different methods of qualitative interviewing for gathering data. Apart from these interviews, I informally gathered data in broad observational work, occasional field notes, and informal talks. The qualitative research paradigm²⁶ also informed the character of the research process: I did not deductively derive my research questions from theory, but iteratively went from reading theoretical texts to gathering empirical data and back (cf. Flick 2006a: 19). With Lamnek, my research can be qualified as an 'explorative case study', because it is meant to help investigate (in my case, from a gendered perspective) important aspects and dimensions of a topic that has hardly been researched (Lamnek 2005: 304). Moreover, it has a snapshot character (Flick 2006a: 142): although I will include a historical perspective in my description of the East Timorese context, the interviews conducted at the end of 2007 give a description of youth gang violence at that time of research.

(2) *Triangulation of Perspectives*: While some qualitative researchers have only recently invented the term 'triangulation of perspectives' (Flick 2004), the idea to integrate perspectives of very different participants in a social setting is a common practice in ethnography. I have integrated different perspectives on youth gang violence in Dili by interviewing both members of NGOs and gangs themselves, and combining the results with existing academic research.

²⁶ Qualitative research directly connects with post-positivist epistemology, as it presupposes that both the researcher and the research subject are involved in the social construction of knowledge in an interactive process of communication and interpretation (Harders 2002: 59). It does not seek to eliminate, but to recognise and negotiate the power effects involved in research (Behnke/Meuser 1999: 14). The topic examined defines the methods used, and the integration of the research subjects into the research process is explicitly called for (Flick 2006a: 16).

(3) Self-Reflexivity and Intersectionality: As apparent in my style of writing, I have decided to self-reflectively include myself in the analysis, recognising that I entered research in Timor with ‘economic and cultural baggage, [...] discursive access and the traces of positioning and history’ (Skeggs 2001: 434). I had been to East Timor in the course of a film project two years before and decided to go back for research on my final thesis in political science. All in all, my position as researcher can be described as structurally privileged in multiple ways. In my case, as I will discuss in the chapter on interviewing, it was not only gender, but the intersection of different categories, especially age and race, that had a great influence. For instance, I was provided easier access to a number of institutions and interviewees due to my whiteness.

(4) Ethical Concerns: Feminist ethics in ethnography call for a ‘sensitivity to the power effects of the researcher’ (Skeggs 2001: 437). Besides remaining mindful and accountable, feminists demand that the purpose of research be questioned – in whose interest is it conducted? This question is especially pressing when conducting interviews and doing field research: although power effects can be recognised, they can never be eliminated. I informed interview participants about the purpose of research, the possibility of not answering questions, and the fact that my research was not conducted in the course of a development project. I have remained in contact with some of the NGO members I talked to and have sent them the results of my work. In the end, however, a number of ethical dilemmas remain, the most tangible being the assumption of some onward benefit to the community whose members I interviewed.²⁷

4.2. Methods of Data Gathering and Analysis

For conducting interviews with NGO workers and gangs I employed two different interview types, which both can be seen as variants of semi-structured interviews working with flexibly handled lists of

questions. Interested in gathering context-centred knowledge, I chose to conduct ‘expert interviews’²⁸ (Meuser/Nagel 1991) with NGO workers. I used this type of interview to ask experienced NGO workers both about their experiences with youth as well as about which contextual factors they considered relevant in terms of youth and gang violence in Dili, and why. Since there is limited literature available, these interviews also covered questions about gender relations and violence in East Timor.

For interviews with gang members, by contrast, I chose to follow Witzel’s concept of the problem-centred interview (Witzel 2000). This interview type can be used to grasp the respondents’ subjective constructions of the social world and was therefore useful to find out how gang members constructed their masculinities in relation to violence. Qualitative researchers have listed a number of potential problems that can occur when conducting interviews but mostly ignored problematic issues in a cross-cultural context, which constituted the biggest challenge in my case (cf. Ryen 2001). For instance, I had initially intended to use different interview techniques with gang members, which did not work out in the East Timorese cultural context.²⁹ Also, the need for translation and lack of interview experience constituted further difficulties. In terms of the influence that issues of gender/race/age exerted on my research, race seemed to have a bigger impact than gender. For NGO members, my whiteness marked myself as part of the ‘expat’ community, while gender did not seem to play a big role. When conducting gang member interviews, my whiteness clearly marked my powerful position as coming from a developed country, overriding my powerless position as a young woman. Presumably, a young East Timorese female researcher would have had many more problems in terms of interviewing gang members.

For the analysis of interviews of NGO and gang members I also combined two different methods of analysis. In order to analyse the interviews with NGO respondents, I took usage of analytical tools developed in constructivist re-interpretations of grounded theory. Grounded theory was initially formulated as a ‘general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and

²⁷ Because of the sheer volume of NGO activity in East Timor, many communities are familiar with ‘being surveyed’ in one way or another, so despite my explanations and disclaimers, there still seemed to be a lingering anticipation that I may be connected to some real tangible benefit for the community, or might at least spark some NGO interest in their situation. The other dilemmas can only be shortly listed here. For instance, it is questionable if this work will ever be read by the gang members I interviewed. They have not been able to correct the ways they are represented in this work. Moreover, I will probably not be able to go back to East Timor and discuss the work with them.

²⁸ The word ‘expert’ here does not describe members of an elite, but refers to a person who has privileged access to certain kinds of knowledge relevant to the research project (Meuser/Nagel 1991: 443).

²⁹ On the one hand, I had intended to conduct life history interviews with gang members. This idea turned out not applicable, as interviewees (probably also because of the whole setting including the fact that answers had to be translated) generally would reply to questions about their own life in a very brief way. Therefore, it would have been impossible to do a narrative analysis of the answers. Moreover, the idea of life history interviews is connected to Western ideas about subjectivity (i.e. that individuals construct their own life history and talk about it). On the other, I had planned to do focus group interviews with the gang as group. However, the social hierarchies in the group proved very hard to overcome in the interview situation, so that the first group interview I did turned out to be an interview of the gang leader, with some additional comments from other gang members.

analysed' in the late 1960s (Clark 2005; Strauss/Corbin 1994). Not interested in the development of theory from codes, I have followed constructivists that advocate a flexible handling of grounded theory tools (e.g. Charmaz 2006; Clark 2005; Strauss/Corbin 1994). In an abductive proceeding typical for grounded theory, I have selectively coded answers of interviewees relevant to my research question and assessed their relevance through constant comparison with answers of other respondents. More precisely, I have taken the theoretical points described in my analytical framework as overarching codes to which I have assigned different interview sections.

For analysing gang member interviews, I combined these grounded theory tools with the so-called documentary method to grasp constructions of masculinities and violence of gang members themselves. Central to the idea of documentary method is a two-step process: besides looking at what interviewees said, this method is designed to reflect upon how respondents express and frame certain issues.

In this process, the documentary method tries to methodically grasp what Bourdieu calls the unconscious side of habitus: it aims at extracting habituated, unreflected knowledge that can generate social practice (Bohnsack et al. 2001: 9). Consequently, it seemed fruitful to apply this method in order to explore habituated knowledge in constructions of masculinities and violence of youth gang members (e.g. applied in Bohnsack 2003; Breitenbach 2001).

5. Contextualising Masculinities, Violence and Gangs in East Timor and Dili

To contextualise my analytical framework as well as the interview results presented below, a number of issues have to be described. Firstly, especially the Indonesian occupation and recent developments form a relevant historical background to gangs and in terms of the experience of violence (5.1.). After that, the crisis in 2006 will be described, as it was during the crisis that the bulk of gang violence occurred in Dili (5.2.). A socio-economic snapshot of East Timor and Dili provides background data necessary for highlighting problems like urbanisation and unemployment (5.3.) – both of which were often mentioned in the interviews as reasons for gang violence (and are relevant to the idea re-establishing). The ubiquity of violence against women and children in Timorese society (5.4.) shows that violent practices are not exclusively confined to gangs in East Timor (an aspect picked up under the heading of the normalisation of violence). The controversial role of youth in East Timor, elaborated in the next subchapter (5.5.),

is strongly connected to discussions about gangs, which are primarily male institutions in East Timor. To gather information on masculinities in this context, I have combined responses of NGO interviewees and gender literature on East Timor (5.6.). Lastly, I have compiled existing research and information from my interviews to give an overview of gangs and gang violence in Dili (5.7.).

5.1. Historical Background

Having gained independence only in 2002, East Timor is often termed Asia's 'youngest nation'. Marking the Eastern part of the island of Timor, the territorial boundaries of 'East Timor'³⁰ were defined in the course of the Portuguese colonial occupation. Portugal had integrated East Timor into its colonial regime as early as the 16th century, but played a rather marginal role marked by entrepreneurial co-operation with the local rulers (liurais) for about three centuries. It was only with the Carnation Revolution in April 1974 in Portugal, that East Timor was given the right to self-determination. In the course of de-colonisation, a brief – albeit bloody – civil war broke out, led by the two opposing parties 'Frente Revolucionara do Timor Leste Independente' (Fretilin) and 'Uniao Democratica Timorese' (UDT). Shortly after the victorious Fretilin had finally declared the independent 'Democratic Republic of East Timor' in November 1975, however, Indonesia launched a naval, air and land invasion of East Timor, and eventually made East Timor the 27th province of Indonesia in 1976 (Taylor 1999: 202), starting a violent occupation that would last over 30 years.

The Indonesian occupation can be considered the most formative period for the large part of today's population of East Timor, especially given the low average age (Abdullah/Myrntinen 2007: 8). Due to the extensive development of basic infrastructure and state institutions, manifest in the installation of educational and military institutions in even the smallest villages, the occupation was central to the development of an imagined East Timorese community (Anderson 1993). Regarding gang violence in East Timor, three aspects are necessary to point out: (1) the emergence of the clandestine independence movement, (2) the Indonesian-led creation of paramilitary units, and (3) the brutality of the occupation.

³⁰ To give a short geographical introduction, the island of Timor is the biggest of the Lesser Sunda Islands and located at the Eastern end of the Sundas in the Malayan Archipelago, about 500 km north of Australia. Today, the official territory of Timor-Leste comprises the eastern part of the island (14,000 km²) together with the exclave of Oecussi (815 km²) in the west as well as the islands of Atauro (141 km²) and Jaco (11 km²) (NSD 2004: 16).

(1) Fretilin had been prepared for the Indonesian invasion and remained in control of the majority of the East Timorese territory for the first few months with the help of its military wing, the 'Forças Armadas para a Liberação Nacional de Timor Leste' (Falintil).³¹ The Indonesian forces responded with a counter-insurgency movement, resulting in the guerillas losing about 80% of their troops and 90% of their weapons in 1978 (Skrobek 2003: 25). The resurrection of the resistance movement was largely due to civil clandestine networks on a local level, which made use of traditional structures within the villages (Taylor 1999: 116) to help build up reliable organisational structures involving large parts of the civilian population. Moreover, large-scale women's organisations like the Organizacao Popular de Mulher Timor (OPMT) as well as youth and student organisations were created in the course of the resistance, supporting the movement in a myriad of ways. East Timor is an extreme example of a successfully organised resistance under the worst conditions: without access to external sources of weapons or money, the movement was able to survive the occupation (Meier 2005: 32).

The common cause of independence and the construction of the Indonesian enemy became central ideological points of reference for constructing a collective Timorese identity (Meier 2005: 33), and despite women's participation in the movement, the heroes and icons were exclusively male (Abdullah/Myrntinen 2007: 9). Both these ideological constructions as well as the organisational structures built up during resistance are of crucial importance for analysing gangs in East Timor.

(2) The development of militia equally goes back to the Indonesian invasion in 1975, when elite members of the Indonesian military established the group 'Halilintar' (Dunn 2002: 66). The idea behind 'Halilintar' and later militia units was to use willing Timorese in Indonesian military operations, in order to mask the leading role of the military and break both Timorese armed and civil resistance (Dunn 2002: 68). In addition, they were supposed to keep the country in a perpetual state of conflict, creating the necessity for armed security forces and opening up possibilities for illicit business activities (Myrntinen 2003: 134). While different militia units were further developed in the 1980s, the extensive formation of units covering the whole territory of East Timor was decisively pushed in the months before the 1999 referendum, with the aim to prevent a favourable vote for independence by the use of

force and coercion. A number of gangs are known to have links to former militia groups, and some forms of gang violence resemble militia tactics.

(3) With the international community covering up and, in part, supporting the Indonesian occupation, gross human rights violations and massacres by military and militia could continue as a strategy of Indonesian rule in East Timor (Chomsky 2001: 140).³² The most extensive documentation of the varying scales and types of violent practices employed during the Indonesian occupation can be found in 'Chega!' (CAVR 2006), the final report of the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in East Timor (Comissao de Acolhimento, Verdade e Reconciliação de Timor Leste, CAVR). These practices included systematic extra-judicial executions, forced disappearances, detention of political opponents and torture, forced displacement, rape and sexual slavery, as well as massacres of civilian population. The death toll of Timorese who died in the course of the occupation is still the subject of academic debate (cf. Cribb 2001), but is estimated by CAVR (2006: 44) to be as high as 102,800.³³ When talking about (gang) violence in East Timor today, the brutality of the Indonesian occupation constitutes a context that cannot be overlooked, and is often cited as reason for a certain degree of normalisation of violence.

The end of occupation came with the fall of Indonesian president Suharto in the course of the Asian crisis in 1997-1998. The newly elected president Habibie agreed to hold a referendum on the question of East Timorese independence in August 1999 (Chomsky 2001: 141).³⁴ When the result that an overwhelming majority of voters had voted for independence was announced on 4th September, Indonesian military and militias started 'an unprecedented campaign of violence, burning, and looting in all the major towns in the territory, including Dili' (Robinson 2001: 57). About a quarter of the East Timorese population was removed to Indonesian West Timor (Taylor 1999: xxxi). Finally, on 20th September, the international community responded with a humanitarian intervention. The East Timorese population, however, was faced with a full-scale humanitarian crisis. The years of brutal occupation, together with the extremely violent campaign marking its end, resulted not only in huge material damage, but also caused a dissolution of the social fabric that had held Timorese society together. Huge parts of the

³² Besides the US and Britain, Australia is widely assumed to have played a crucial role in secretly supporting the Indonesian invasion (Nevins 2005: 62).

³³ This includes an estimated 18,600 total killings (+/-1000) as well as an estimate of 84,200 (+/- 11,000) deaths due to hunger and illness.

³⁴ The Indonesian military (Tentara Nasional Indonesia, TNI) and military-led militia, however, disagreed with the official agreement from the outset and 'followed a different track', strategically implementing violence in order to target guerrilla forces and civilians and eventually 'eliminate the independence movement' (Chomsky 2001: 142).

³¹ Falintil was founded in August 1975 and comprised about 10.000 armed soldiers at that time (Meier 2005: 25).

population were traumatised by experiences of violence, many were internally displaced from their home communities, a lot of families were torn apart between Indonesia and East Timor, and former opponents (such as militia members) had to be re-integrated into communities (Loch 2007: 22).

The intervention constituted the beginning of what Chopra (2000) has termed the ‘UN’s kingdom of East Timor’. For the first time in UN history, the UN was exercising sovereign authority over a territory, until East Timor was finally granted full official independence in May 2002. Having preferred to ignore the catastrophic human rights situation of the country for decades, the international community now made East Timor the target of a huge development initiative, importing ‘large sums of capital, technological hardware, foreign expertise and administrative systems’ (Shepherd 2004: 100). This development initiative has had a profound impact on East Timor. Not only has the idea of development become deeply intertwined with notions of East Timorese nationhood (Shepherd 2004: 114), but the population has been faced with great political and socio-economic changes (see Hohe 2002).

Despite big aspirations of future ‘development and happiness’, however, the post-independence era saw unemployment rising, while problems with former combatants and issues of justice for past atrocities were largely left unresolved (Babo Soares 2003: 306). Nevertheless, most accounts were optimistic: only four years after official independence, Timor-Leste was celebrated as the first example of a successful UN nation-building project, and the size of the UN mission was radically reduced. By the beginning of 2006, however, the first signs of the subsequent crisis were appearing.

5.2. The Crisis of 2006

What was later assessed as ‘the worst crisis in Timor-Leste’s short history’ (ICG 2006: 1) started as an internal military dispute between soldiers from the East (lorosae) and their peers from the West (loromonu), but spilled over to the streets of Dili at the end of April, with a second wave of violence at the end of May, when initially peaceful protests of soldiers ended in fierce street fights and shootouts between the so-called ‘Easterners’ (firaku) and ‘Westerners’ (kaladi).³⁵ Crucial to the further devolve-

ment of the crisis was the complete breakdown of the security situation in Dili (Prueller 2008: 9). With the dissolution of effective law enforcement, torching and looting of houses in Dili became common practice and people were forced out of their Eastern or Western neighbourhoods. Many people fled their homes in fear of violent attacks, resulting in the internal displacement of an estimated 100.000-150.000 people – about 10% of the population. At the end of May 2006, the Australian-led peacekeeping forces, the International Stabilisation Force (ISF), arrived and together with a relaunched UN Mission helped to significantly contain, albeit not eliminate, the violence in Dili. The months of April/May 2006 had marked ‘the beginning of a period of instability that continued more than a year later’ (Grove et al. 2007: 1). Even during the period of research at the end of 2007, street fights and gang violence were part of everyday life in Dili.

Moreover, the crisis had significantly altered the city landscape of Dili: ‘trouble spots’ built up in areas around camps of internally displaced people (IDP), in areas where rivalling gangs were frequently fighting for their territory, as well as in border areas between mainly Eastern or Western neighbourhoods.

While many analyses scrutinise state elites and institutions (e.g. Brady/Timberman 2006; ICG 2006; Kingsbury 2007) hardly any of the reports have asked what really happened ‘on the ground’ (for an exception, see Grove et al. 2007). Since the dynamics of gang violence in Dili will be described later, only two aspects are worth mentioning at this point. Firstly, due to the high number of street fights, it was only with the crisis that East Timorese ‘youth gangs’ rose to the broader consciousness of media and academia. The ‘high involvement of young people’ was depicted as one of ‘the most visible elements of the crisis’ (Kostner/Clark 2007: 1), and came as a surprise to most. Unfortunately, however, most accounts of ‘youth gang violence’ during the crisis remained rather generalising and superficial. Secondly, a deeper analysis reveals that terming the crisis an ‘ethnic conflict’ obscures the myriad of underlying socio-economic and political factors causing it (cf. Prueller 2008). Notwithstanding, the speed at which these East/West categories could be mobilised in 2006 points at their latent existence well before 2006 (Myrtilinen 2007b: 17). These categories got linked to party alliances and had a significant impact on the urban landscape, with markets and neighbourhoods being defined as Eastern or Western. Before,

³⁵ The crisis was triggered by soldiers of the national army ‘Falintil-Força Defesa Timor Lorosae’ (Timor-Leste Defence Force, F-FDTL). In January 2006, a number of F-FDTL soldiers submitted a petition to the government, alleging discrimination in the armed forces against soldiers from the Western part of the country (in East Timorese terms, *loromonu*). These so-called ‘petitioners’ abandoned their barracks in February and provoked the government’s announcement that 591 soldiers – around 40% of the country’s armed forces – were

to be sacked. Violence erupted at different spots in Dili on April 28th, leaving seven dead and more than 20 wounded. Another 27 people died in May 2006 (Prueller 2008: 8).

during and after the crisis, the East/West categories have provided important reference points for some gangs in Dili.

5.3. Socio-Economic Snapshot of East Timor and Dili

The total population of East Timor amounts to about one million people, with a fertility rate of 7,8 in 2004 – the highest total fertility rate of any country in the world (NSD 2004: 29, 80). Timor-Leste is classified as the poorest country in Southeast Asia and belongs to the group of the poorest countries in the world, ranking 150th of 177 countries with data on the scale of the Human Development Index (HDI) and an average GDP per capita of \$358 USD (UNDP 2007). While the list of development challenges in Timor-Leste is endless, two socio-economic issues were of high importance for interview respondents in the context of gang violence: (1) urbanisation and (2) unemployment.

(1) During Indonesian occupation, Dili had already become the target of rural-urban migration. According to Moxham (2008: 9), the East Timorese capital had grown to be the ‘engine of economic growth, generating construction, trade, transport and utilities and jobs in the civil service’. Aside from being the economic centre, Dili was the centre of government functions and higher education institutions. However, the city was greatly affected by the Asian crisis in 1998, and in the course of the September 1999 violence, large parts of Dili were destroyed. Thousands had to flee the capital, resulting in a chaotic land and property situation when the refugees returned. After independence, Dili exploded in size: from 2001 onwards, the capital was growing at a rate of 12,58% per year (NSD 2004: 29). Moxham (2008: 6) attributes this urban growth largely to the reconstruction boom: Dili had been made capital of a UN kingdom, ‘receiving almost unprecedented levels of political and material support’, while at the same time agrarian production in the rural areas was stagnating (Moxham 2008: 6). The scale of urbanisation in Timor-Leste can be exemplified by taking a closer look at the origins of the Dili population: only about half of the population was born in Dili. The Dili population sex ratio shows a high concentration of young males, reflecting their movement to the capital in search for work (NSD 2004: 32). Gonzalez Devant (2008: 36) moreover assumes that the crisis and the subsequent international intervention triggered another wave of urban migration, with people hoping to find jobs with the intervening international agencies. Dili district today has the highest population density in East Timor

counting about 173,500 inhabitants (NSD 2004: 22, 27).³⁶ Despite being called an urbanised centre, Dili has a remarkable village-like and semi-urban character (Prueller 2008: 70). Administratively divided into 31 villages (sucos), the smaller units of the suburb (bairro) or the sub-village (aldeia) probably constitute the most important community structure for most people. Due to the violence occurring at different ‘troublespots’ during and after the crisis, some Dili areas were soon stigmatised as ‘extremely dangerous’ (Myrntinen 2007b: 15).

(2) With only 41% of its residents working in agriculture, Dili constitutes an exception to the agriculture-based economy of East Timor: in the rest of the country, the majority of the active labour force (an average of 78%) work in subsistence-farming (NSD 2004: 48) and about 90% of the population rely on agriculture and subsistence activities for their livelihoods (ILO 2007: 12). In the capital, by contrast, particularly the high international presence has created a different situation. Here, the UN and other donor agencies employ about 14,3% of the workforce, and there is a high demand for multi-lingual and well-educated staff (Moxham 2008: 13), which contrasts with large-scale unemployment of the lower-educated majority. As the formal sector accounts for only 12% of the labour force, the majority work or seek employment in the informal sector (ILO 2007: 13). According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), unemployment has significantly increased since independence, and is especially high among 20-24-year-olds. On a national average, this age group is twice as likely to be unemployed than the general working age population (ILO 2007: 35). The crisis in 2006 constituted a major disruption to both formal and informal economic activity (CIA 2008), but the precise employment effects of the crisis have yet to be measured statistically.

5.4. Violence against Women and Children

Another important contextual factor interviewees referred to is the ubiquity of physical violence in East Timor. Besides gang violence and street fights, two further main types of violence can be distinguished according to the groups of victims: violence against women, often researched under the heading of ‘gender-based violence’³⁷, as well as violence against children. Without wanting to draw direct connec-

³⁶ For a good overview of population density in Timor-Leste, see the map ‘Distribution of Occupied Dwellings’ in the Census (NSD 2004: 23).

³⁷ Most reports employ a very broad definition of gender-based violence (GBV), encompassing ‘physical, sexual and psychological violence’ (Hynes et al. 2004: 295). Although GBV technically covers ‘all members of society who have experienced violence deriving specifically from their “gendered” role in society’ (Swaine 2003: 8), studies so far have solely focussed on women.

tions (e.g. by claiming that perpetrators of sexual violence also engage in street fights), it is crucial to demonstrate the ubiquity of violent practices in Timor-Leste in order to deny statements that classify gang violence as a phenomenon of the ‘periphery’ of Timorese society.

There have been numerous surveys examining the scale of gender-based violence in East Timor. The high rate of gender-based violence (of about 25%) in households (Hynes et al. 2004: 294) is supported by the widespread attitude that gender-based violence is ‘normal’ and can be excused by referring to ‘traditional beliefs’ that violence should be part of a domestic relationship (Robertson 2005: 7).³⁸ The community level is particularly decisive for the social acceptance of gender-based violence (Schroeter-Simao 2003: 5). In many cases of sexual assault or rape, ‘the need to cover a woman’s and her family’s shame and find support for a child born out of wedlock’ is given higher priority than the need to seek justice with official or traditional systems (Swaine 2003: 3).

Violence is also a popular disciplining technique used by both teachers and parents. In an explorative study of violence in East Timorese schools, two thirds of the children were found to have experienced beating with a stick by their teachers, with about 40% reporting that teachers had slapped them on the face (UNICEF 2006: 12). A slightly higher percentage (55%) had experienced beating by their parents. The fact that many children themselves considered being beaten a ‘positive disciplinary strategy’ shows the high acceptance of violent practices for disciplinary purposes (UNICEF 2006: 14).

5.5. Youth in East Timor

The category of youth is a highly contested concept in East Timor. As mentioned above, it was particularly during the crisis that young people were blamed for perpetrating the majority of street violence in Dili, with international reports talking about the Dili ‘youth bulge’ as a ‘lost generation’ engaging in ‘mob violence’ because of ‘frustration’ and ‘alienation’ (e.g. Curtain 2006). Implicitly, the category of youth was thereby assumed to be male: it was (young) men who were blamed for violence. On this basis, different (mostly male) figures presented themselves as youth leaders, demanding political changes in the name of ‘the youth’. The extent to which it was really largely ‘youth’ that engaged in violent clashes

during the crisis, however, still remains questionable. The term ‘youth’ is very flexibly defined by researchers, politicians and alleged youth themselves alike.³⁹

Although many authors claim that the involvement of youth was a very ‘visible element’ (Kostner/Clark 2007: 1), there has been no baseline study examining this claim. A study that asked youth themselves about their perspectives on the crisis emphasises that most young people tried to stay away from the fighting – the respondents said that only 10-15% of young people were involved in violence (Grove et al. 2007: ii). The notion of the Dili ‘youth bulge’, however, also reflects the imbalanced age demographic structure of East Timor. Of the total population, 43% are under 15 years and a quarter is aged 15-30 years, making up about one third of Dili’s inhabitants (Curtain 2006: 6). The National Statistics Directorate (NSD) therefore talks about the ‘youthful subdistricts in and around Dili’ contrasting with a high proportion of elderly living in the rural areas (NSD 2004: 44).

Yet while statistical research sets different age limits, the societal construction of youth in East Timor sets the gendered institution of marriage as marker of adulthood: an unmarried man is referred to as a young man (Babo Soares 2003: 235), which means that even a 35-year-old can be classified as young. According to Babo Soares (2003: 233), the traditional age structure of East Timor is hierarchically organised, with elders being traditionally considered to ‘possess more knowledge than younger people’. This generational classification is also manifest in terms of the Timorese language⁴⁰ and decisive for political leadership structures. Despite this traditional differentiation between young and old members of society, it is not clear when the category of youth emerged in East Timor. The struggle for independence probably provided an important context for the collective self-discovery of youth. Especially in the late 80s, youth groups began to organise themselves in the clandestine movement, building up a diverse landscape of community-based groups, student groups, civil society groups and groups with links to political parties (Pinto 2001; Wigglesworth 2007: 51). The mass organisation of Timorese youth was founded, providing food supplies for Falintil guerrillas and helping to evacuate villages in the 1999

³⁸ As a study conducted by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) detected, 51% of their female respondents agreed with the statement that ‘a man has good reason to hit his wife if she disobeys him’ (Swaine 2003: 13).

³⁹ While the ILO talks about a high unemployment of the 15-19-year-olds, the World Bank assesses a high fertility rate of the 12-29 age group, and the National Census measures the literacy rate of young people between 15-24. All these factors are drawn together in a study aiming to explain the high involvement of youth in the crisis (without offering any definition of youth itself) (cf. Kostner/Clark 2007).

⁴⁰ For instance, the terms ‘maun’ (older brother), ‘mana’ (older sister) as well as ‘alin’ (younger brother or sister) are necessary prefixes to individual names.

wave of militia violence. While the majority of these groups comprised male members, there were also girls groups (Wigglesworth 2007: 55).

This historical background constitutes another significant area of contestation in terms of the category of youth in East Timor. Certain events and narratives of the resistance fight have been politically abused to define political leaders as historical heroes against the younger, inexperienced and immature generation (Babo Soares 2003: 233). In fact, authors talk about a ‘generation gap’ which opened up after independence, with many of the older resistance fighters becoming part of the political elite, leaving their younger peers ‘struggling to find a place in society’ (Wigglesworth 2007: 61). In the era of post-independence, the idea of youth thus had to be reinvented without the project of national resistance. On the one hand, this resulted in linking the category of youth to notions of immaturity, exclusion and powerlessness. On the other, many youth organisations themselves declared a change of ideology. Now, the fight for liberation from Indonesia had to be replaced by a fight for liberation from poverty (Wigglesworth 2007: 62). The fact that the urban migration flows to Dili were primarily made up of young males reflects not only certain constructions of youth, but also of masculinities in post-independence East Timor.

5.6. Masculinities in East Timor

Timor-Leste can be described as ‘a strongly patriarchal society’ (de Araujo 2004; Hovden Bye 2005; OPE 2007b). Although a lot of reports and articles about a variety of different gender issues have been published, they are mostly concerned with *women*, and there is hardly any research on the social construction of gender in East Timor. To gather ideas about *masculinities* in this patriarchal system, I have drawn together literature on gender in East Timor with the results from my interviews with NGO workers in order to describe both the gendered patterns of thought and the gendered practices common in East Timor (1-6), and qualify common assumptions.⁴¹

(1) *Labour is sexually divided*: Many interviewees stated that traditionally men were supposed to ‘do the hard work’ like farming or building houses (e.g. Joanna 78-79; Maria 110-112). According to Mericio (49-52), doing these ‘masculine jobs’ (Josh 3; 78) serves as proof for being a good, strong and real man in

front of the community. Women, by contrast, are expected to do both agricultural and domestic work (including caring for younger and older members of the family, see Alita 199-203). Generally, men are expected to provide the family income (Josh 78; Maria 112).

(2) *The sexual division of labour is often accompanied by a sexual division of space*: while men are supposed to be ‘outside’, women are mostly expected to be in and around the house (Joanna 29-30), and it is mostly only men who are seen gathering in groups in public. As will be described later, this division of space is especially relevant in terms of enacting violence. While in the domestic sphere both women and men are known to be perpetrators of violence (e.g. James 242), it is mostly only men acting as perpetrators in public.

(3) Men are the *main perpetrators of violence* against women, children and other men. Historically, although women were active participants in the resistance fight, resistance groups were still predominantly male, and so were their opponent militia groups. Moreover, there are no female gangs known so far in East Timor, and while the high involvement of youth during the crisis is always mentioned, it needs to be stressed that people are implicitly talking about young men.

(4) Men are constructed as the *traditional leaders* both of families and communities (Victorino-Soriano 2004: 5). Interviewees stated that men were not only expected to be decision-makers (Alita 3-4, see also Schroeter-Simao 2003: 5), but also responsible for establishing and building ‘good’ families and communities (Mericio 30; Joanna 72-73). Consequently, women’s public political participation is especially low on a community level, despite a number of governance structures implemented to secure a stronger representation of women, and a comparatively high percentage of female membership in the national parliament (Trembath/Grenfell 2007: 12).⁴²

(5) The idea that *barlake*, the traditional dowry system in East Timor, is a source of women’s discrimination, is very often reiterated in gender literature on East Timor, but was contested by a number of my respondents (e.g. Alita 39-49). In the eyes of Balthasar (12-15), *barlake* was not meant to construct

⁴¹ For a description of the background of my interview partners, see 6.1.2.

⁴² In 2006, only 7 of the total of 446 *chefe de suco* (Heads of Village) of Timor-Leste were women.

women as a commodity, but served to establish a relationship of mutual responsibilities between different families and/or communities (see also Loch 2007: 120-123).⁴³

(6) Although the existence of a *men's* organisation working on gender issues in East Timor, 'Alliansa Mane Kontra Violensia' (Men's Association Against Violence, AMKV), illustrates that not all men are victims of the patriarchally shaped culture, the experiences of the AMKV founding fathers demonstrate a number of patriarchal conventions.⁴⁴ While many women's organisations welcomed the establishment of AMKV, a lot of men criticised members for using their energy to work on a marginal issue like gender, and ridiculed AMKV members as being 'gay' (de Araujo 2004: 142) and not 'genuine men' (Mericio 9-11).

Notwithstanding, AMKV's claim that 'men have complete control and dominate all aspects of social, economic, and political life' (de Araujo 2004: 140) in Timor-Leste needs to be replaced by a more complex and fluid picture. A careful reading of the interviews reveals that some respondents referred to gendered patterns of thought that are not necessarily always reflected in practice. Firstly, East Timor is marked by high regional differences: a number of communities are matrilineally organised, so that women in these communities have traditionally played a much more important role in many ways (Balthasar 8-11). Many interviewees highlighted that women were often working in the fields like men, and that they were the most important decision-makers in the family (Maria 122; Josh 79). In this respect, Siapno stresses that although East Timorese society is primarily patrilineally organised in terms of kinship, it is still largely matrifocal in the domestic realm. Accordingly, there is disagreement about whether it is men or women who control the household finances (de Araujo 2007: 22). Lastly, stereotypical gender roles are slowly changing, albeit on a very low level, and mainly in Dili. Alita (73-74), for example, described how stereotypical gender roles in households are being re-arranged due to women entering the labour market.

⁴³ Unfortunately, I have not been able to find any discussion about the impacts of the system for men in East Timor, but some gang respondents expressed concern that they would not be able to marry if they stayed unemployed (see 6.4.).

⁴⁴ AMKV was established in April 2002 and is the only NGO that explicitly works on masculinities and violence in East Timor. Their main focus, however, remains on changing practices of domestic violence (for a description of their activities, see Trembath/Grenfell 2007: 20-23).

5.7. Gangs and Gang Violence in East Timor and Dili

As mentioned above, the debate about 'youth gangs' only started with the 2006 crisis.⁴⁵ While it seems clear that these groups consist largely of males, the use of both the terms 'youth' and 'gangs' in this context is contested. Firstly, not all gang members are of young age – in fact, many gang leaders fall outside of even generous statistical definitions of 'youth'. Secondly, most observers agree that the term 'gang' is inadequate to capture the variety of different groups (e.g. Mario 51-52; Fidelis 2-3; Myrntinen 2008), but continue to use it as a collective term out of a lack of adequate alternatives.

5.7.1. Typology of Gangs

To map the variety of groups covered by the term 'gang', I have slightly modified the classification suggested by Myrntinen (2008), and will distinguish between (1) Martial Arts Groups (MAGs), (2) Ritual Arts Groups (RAGs), (3) Veterans' Organisations and (4) Community-Based Gangs.

(1) *Martial Arts Groups* (MAGs) define groups that come together to practice a certain form of martial arts, for instance taekwondo, karate, judo or 'pencak silat'⁴⁶ (Myrntinen 2008). While claiming to be solely sporting organisations, many MAGs have turned 'to "extracurricular" activities such as street fighting and extortion' (Myrntinen 2008), and a number of them are said to have links to political parties. Many of the 15-20 MAGs in East Timor are organised on a national level, and comprise a relatively high membership (Whande/Galant 2007: 12).

(2) *Ritual Arts Groups* (RAGs) emphasise the Timorese nature of their rituals in opposition to the imported Indonesian practices exercised by the MAGs. Many of the RAGs were established as clandestine organisations under the Indonesian occupation – the leader of KORKA, for instance, is the former resistance fighter Nuno Soares, and Colimau 2000 fought in the clandestine movement for decades. While Colimau 2000 is assumed to have only a few hundred followers, KORKA members amount to as many as 10.000 (Scambary et al. 2006: 14).

⁴⁵ Crucial in this respect was the publication of the 'Survey of Gangs and Youth Groups in Dili' (Scambary et al. 2006), in which James Scambary and his team traced the history of a large variety of different groups (see also James 43-90).

⁴⁶ Pencak Silat is 'a form of martial arts indigenous to the Malay derived ethnic groups that populate mainland and island Southeast Asia'. Pencak Silat is not only a form of self-defence, but can be seen as a pedagogic method meant to teach the practitioner certain cultural and social ideals (see Wilson 2003).

(3) *Veterans' Organisations* are groups of disaffected former Falintil fighters or other members of the clandestine movement, and have been involved in a number of violent incidents before, during and after the crisis (Myrntinen 2008). Many of the former guerrilla members also set up groups in the name of maintaining security over a certain area (Babo Soares 2003: 226). The total support base of these groups is believed to be between 2.000 and 10.000 (Brown et al. 2004: 8).

(4) *Community-Based Gangs* mostly consist of members from a certain neighbourhood that, on the one hand, engage in activities like sports or music, but are also actively involved in violence. The line between criminal and licit activities often becomes blurred with these groups (Myrntinen 2008). Many provide their communities with 'privatised security services' based on the extraction of 'taxes' from shopkeepers and residents (Scambary et al. 2006: 18). Membership numbers are usually small, but due to the groups' rather informal organisational character, it is hard to determine definite numbers.

5.7.2. Rituals, Magic, Graffiti

Western notions of gangs carrying assumptions of crime, street, and drugs are inadequate to capture gangs in the East Timorese context. RAGs in particular are feared to have the power to do 'black magic' – or believed to be able to cure illnesses with traditional healing (Whande/Galant 2007: 14). 7-7 members, for example, have the practice of injecting themselves with medicine that is supposed to cause both invincibility and invisibility to rivals (Scambary et al. 2006: 15). The former Falintil commander and purported spiritual leader of 7-7, L-7, is rumoured to have strong magical powers, and a community member interviewed by Whande/Galant (2007: 18) describes his belief that RAGs can ignite people's hearts to fight by using their poisoned voices in a supernatural way.

Bodily marks are common signifiers of gang membership, especially among the RAGs: members of the 'number RAGs' like 7-7 or 5-5 can be identified 'by a series of cicatrices running longitudinally up their arm, or in clusters, the number corresponding to the group' (Scambary et al. 2006: 6). These scars are allegedly cut into the body with 'magic powder' (Myrntinen 2008). 'Colimau 2000' is a good example of how some groups also make creative use of Catholic influences. According to their Secretary-General, Colimau is based on what he calls the 'New Testament Doctrine' (Whande/Galant 2007: 19): the members

believe that former resistance fighters will return from the dead to lead them to victory (Scambary et al. 2006: 4).

An aspect similar to gangs in the European region, by contrast, is the spread of graffiti in Dili.⁴⁷ As Myrntinen (2008) emphasises, the practice of covering the walls of Dili bairros with graffiti is not a new phenomenon, as it was already occurring during the last years of the Indonesian occupation. While in Indonesian times the slogans were often carrying a pro-independence message, today it is commonplace to encounter graffiti connected to gangs and graffiti and marking 'gang territory'.

5.7.3. Historical Roots

Gangs did not suddenly emerge out of nothing during the crisis. While a few sources claim connections of gangs to Portuguese colonialism, links of some of the gangs to the era of Indonesian occupation are more obvious.⁴⁸ Firstly, as mentioned above, many MAGs practice a form of martial arts 'imported' from Indonesia, often by members of the Indonesian military. Secondly, there are a number of connections between gangs and former militia groups. On a general level, the low-tech character and style of violence used by gangs in the 2006 crisis reminded many of the militia violence in Indonesian times (see below, e.g. Gonzalez Devant 2008: 34). More directly, some individuals who are known to be former militia members are rumoured to be involved in more recent gang violence (Abdullah/Myrntinen 2007: 26). Many groups were ideologically and organisationally tightly connected to the clandestine resistance movement. Not only are some of the MAG and RAG leaders, like those of 7-7 and KORKA, well-known former guerrilla fighters, many gangs saw themselves as fighting against militia and for the resistance by protecting their communities, training in martial arts or practicing certain rituals (cf. James 227-232, Luis 148-150). Significantly, the clandestine network provided an organisational framework with national and even international linkages.

The post-independence era has probably been the most influential in the establishment of Veterans' Organisations and Community-Based Gangs. As Abdullah/Myrntinen (2007) point out, the UN-

⁴⁷ For a comprehensive photographic documentation of gang graffiti in Dili, see the pictures compiled by Chris Parkinson on <http://www.flickr.com/photos/maleye>, accessed on 02/05/2008.

⁴⁸ Some of the gangs, like Twelve-Twelve, one of the smaller RAGs, claim to have been founded in Portuguese times. In fact, the Portuguese colonisers used small armies or militia groups, the so-called 'moradores', of the ruling *liurai* to increase their own military influence (CAVR 2006: 6).

organised process of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of the former guerrilla fighters and the formation of the new East Timorese police and armed forces did not go smoothly. As a result, disaffected former guerrilla fighters provided the perfect membership basis for the newly established Veterans' Organisations. Lastly, the failure to build stable law enforcement mechanisms has – even before their complete breakdown in 2006 – created space for the establishment of gangs offering community-based 'security services', and provided the opportunity for gangs to infiltrate police and private security services (Myrntinen 2008).

5.7.4. Gang Violence in Dili

Gangs allegedly 'perpetrated the bulk of the destruction' in the 2006 crisis (Scambary et al. 2006: 1), but there are hardly any more precise descriptions available about the scale and exact kind of gang violence: most authors simply formulate that (gang) violence suddenly 'erupted' and plunged the country into a crisis (e.g. Brady/Timberman 2006: 5). Whilst reports cite numbers about buildings burnt (1000) the deaths caused by fights (38) and the people internally displaced (100.000) during the crisis (Schlicher 2007: 10), violent clashes between gangs remain a rather unspecified characteristic of the crisis.⁴⁹ A rare exception is Gonzalez Devant (2008: 33), who highlights the remarkably low-tech character of violent gang practices in Dili, which resembles former militia practices. Although civilians had access to arms distributed by the military in the turmoils, she writes, the technical arsenal of gangs was mostly confined to 'arson, stoning, "rama ambon"⁵⁰, machetes, knives, roadblocks and checkpoints (asking whether one is from the east or west), and occasionally guns (sometimes homemade).' Despite the scale of violence having peaked during the crisis, sporadic fighting was still part of everyday life in Dili at the end of 2007. The following list comprises a great variety of issues that – according to the existing literature and my interview respondents – gangs in Dili fight about:

- East/West divisions: Contested by some, others confirmed that certain gangs were associated with East/West loyalties (e.g. Luis 166-167), despite the groups themselves not clearly declaring their associa-

tion. In the case of Gang Kulau, members even claimed that these East/West loyalties overrode rivalries between gangs (e.g. Eduardo 87-95).⁵¹

- party linkages, money: A common narrative with both gang members themselves and observers is the idea that political leaders – the so-called *ema boot* ('big people') – authored the crisis (e.g. Grove et al. 2007: 5). According to rumours, leaders have been paying groups in order to carry out violent attacks for their own political purposes (e.g. Maria 193-197).

- gang rivalries: Constantly shifting in some cases, gang rivalries are nevertheless a key reason for fights. Long-standing rivalries, like between KORKA and PSHT, are often caught in cycles of payback, which can take on national dimensions (e.g. a gang branch in Dili can take revenge for an attack in a different district, cf. Myrntinen 2008).

- extortion rackets/territorial disputes: Some gangs have developed criminal activities, allegedly controlling cock-fighting and gambling rackets in certain areas (Scambary et al. 2006: 15) or forcing local shopkeepers to pay 'taxes' in return for security (James 103). Consequently, some fights are assumed to be turf wars about the control of territory.

- (cycles of) payback: As James (185) confirmed, gangs often have to carry out strong obligations of payback that sometimes go back four generations. In many cases, gangs take revenge for highly localised or even private problems.⁵² The original reason often gets lost once the fighting between bigger groups has begun (Grove et al. 2007: 12).

- girls, community parties, alcohol: Substance abuse in the form of drinking alcohol is named by many as a fuelling factor for fights (Myrntinen 2007a). This is especially obvious in the context of local 'dancing parties', in which men's alcohol consumption features as necessary ingredient. Here, violent gang fights are frequently triggered by conflicts about girls.⁵³

⁴⁹ There are hardly any numbers available about how many of such incidents of violence occurred during and after the crisis. The number of 38 deaths caused by gang fights only refers to the period between April and June 2006 – by the beginning of 2008, gang fights were estimated to have caused about 100 deaths (personal correspondence with Henri Myrntinen, 14/05/2008).

⁵⁰ 'Rama ambon' are arrows shot from slingshots, sometimes dipped in antifreeze or other poisonous substances, see Gonzalez Devant (2008: 33).

⁵¹ Eduardo explained that although there were members of different rivalling martial arts groups in Kulau, they would 'fight together' against groups from the East.

⁵² For instance, one youth interviewed by Grove et al. (2007: 12) reports how gang fights started because 'one boyfriend and girlfriend, they had been together for a long time but the older brother did not accept her boyfriend.'

⁵³ These dancing events are a popular opportunity for dating regulated by certain social rules. For instance, a girl that has been asked by a guy to dance and denied his offer is not supposed to accept another invitation during the same song (e.g. Joaquino 127-130; Eduardo 59-60). For a similar description of a typical scenario, see Loch (2007: 435).

6. Gendered and Gendering Youth Gang Violence in East Timor and Dili

To understand the gang violence described above from a gendered perspective, I have talked to members of the community-based gang ‘Gang Kulau’ as well as a number of NGO workers, and will employ the gendered analytical lens formulated above to discuss their responses. Whilst a number of results are therefore confined to the community of Kulau, or can help to interpret community-based gangs in Dili, others are meant to shed light on broader issues regarding gang violence in Dili and East Timor from a gendered perspective.

6.1. Interview Sample

With the methods of interviewing and analysing already presented and critically discussed in chapter 4, the description of interview samples provide important context-sensitive background to understand the results presented below.

6.1.1. Interviewing NGO workers

In total, I conducted 12 interviews with 9 male and 3 female NGO workers. I chose to talk to people with experience working on gang violence or in the field of gender in East Timor. Contacts were taken from an excellent recently compiled directory of both national and international NGOs and agencies working in the field of gender in Timor-Leste (cf. Trembath/Grenfell 2007) and – using the snowball technique – from recommendations of contacts and interview partners. Although I did not record them, a number of informal conversations with a wide variety of different NGO members in Dili were very instructive for my work.

To quickly describe the background of my interview partners: I talked to Maria from ‘Rede Feto’, an umbrella organisation of NGOs working on gender in Timor-Leste. Alita was my respondent from ‘Alola Foundation’, one of the biggest East Timorese NGOs working on gender. Joana works at ‘Ba Futuru’, a small NGO mostly active against violence in schools and homes, but starting work with youth in Dili as well. Both Mario and Mericio are board members of the only men’s organisation working primarily on domestic and sexual violence, AMKV. Kiera has founded ‘East Timor Insight’ (ETIS), an independent research body in Dili, and has participated in research projects on domestic violence and

youth violence during the crisis. Josh and Fidelis are independent researchers in Dili who have been involved in different research projects including issues of gang violence. Both Joao and Luis work at the ‘Justice and Peace Commission’ (JPC) and have been involved in conducting a number of trainings and workshops with gangs in and outside of Dili. In Melbourne, I interviewed Balthasar, an East Timorese lecturer at a Melbourne University, who provided a more academic view of violence in Timor. Also in Melbourne, I had a number of informative and inspiring talks with James. He has published the first overview survey of gangs in Dili.

6.1.2. Interviewing Gang Kulau

I was provided access to Gang Kulau by Luis from JPC. He recommended that I talk to members of Gang Kulau mainly because he had previously had good experiences when working with Gang Kulau in the context of an active non-violence training. Therefore, I could build upon an already established positive relationship, which proved very important for the reception in the community. Supported by one translator and one research assistant, I conducted one group interview and 6 individual interviews with a total of 9 gang members.

Gang Kulau can be classified as a community-based gang: their name Kulau is derived from their neighbourhood, the sub-village (aldeia) Kulau Laletek in the suco Becora in Dili. Becora is a peri-urban area of Dili to which a lot of villagers from the rural areas moved in order to find a better life in the capital (Abdullah/Myrntinen 2007: 5). Becora has about 7000 inhabitants, with approximately 700 living in Kulau (Eduardo, Group Interview 86-90). Maria (72-91), who has lived and worked in Becora for her whole life, described how people in Becora were mainly working in agriculture when she was born in Portuguese times. The Indonesian occupation brought education in the form of new schools to Becora, but also drove a big part of the young people into the clandestine movement, especially in the 1980s. Due to increasing urbanisation, there is not enough land left to do much agricultural work in Becora today.

According to Scambary et al. (2006: 17), Gang Kulau is alleged to be responsible for the bulk of the violent clashes in the Dili areas of Becora, Bidau and Taibessi during the crisis. Moreover, while there have been reports of a violent incident in 2005 (Scambary et al. 2006: 17), the most important violent clash gang members themselves talked about was in 2001 (see below). The group started as a base

for the clandestine network during Indonesian times but only became known as ‘Gang Kulau’ in the context of the East/West rivalry after independence. Since Gang Kulau members define themselves as ‘Westerners’, they talked about gangs from the East as their endemic rivals. The leader of Gang Kulau is a former resistance fighter. In a violent clash with a gang from the Eastern side in 2001,⁵⁴ he killed one of his opponents and was sentenced to prison for seven years, but was released in 2005. When he returned from prison, he resumed his old position as leader of Gang Kulau.

Membership of Gang Kulau is rather informal, with most of the respondents estimating a total of about 100 gang members.⁵⁵ While some members are working in paid jobs (e.g. the gang leader), most others are unemployed. The age of Gang Kulau members varies, with the leadership belonging to an older generation, and the group includes both married and unmarried men.⁵⁶ Although some members declared that girls would be accepted as members, the girls I informally talked to in the community denied such statements. Only when asked explicitly would gang members talk about their involvement in violent clashes. Otherwise, they mentioned a number of different gang activities, such as sitting and talking together, playing sports and music (Eduardo, Group Interview 16-17). Regarding community activities, most members said the gang would carry out gardening, clean up the roads of Kulau or engage in otherwise ‘positive’ activities for the community (e.g. Eduardo, Group Interview 16-19; Enrico, Group Interview 43-45). Despite these positive community contributions, gang members recognised that Gang Kulau has a bad image with other groups, who perceived them as ‘a negative gang’ (Eduardo, Group Interview 32). The power and decision-making structure of the group seemed to be based on a mixture of former resistance power structures and current leadership structures in the community. Eduardo previously led the clandestine youth movement in Kulau before becoming leader of Gang Kulau. Enrico, the administrative head of the sub-village (chefe de aldeia), is both part of the group and integrated into decision-making processes of the group leadership. Most interviewees agreed that the ‘leaders’ would come together when important decisions had to be taken. These would then be discussed with the wider gang membership (e.g. Antonio 167-172).

⁵⁴ This clash happened in the aftermath of a dancing party in Kulau. According to Kulau gang members, they had invited friends from other communities to join in the party. In their view, it was these foreign guests who provoked the violent clash (e.g. Antonio 20-26).

⁵⁵ Members denied my questions about certain membership rituals as well as clothes or other markers symbolising gang membership.

⁵⁶ The age of gang members interviewed ranged from 24 to 48.

From the interview experience, a few points provide an important context for understanding the group. Firstly, at the initial group interview, we were quite surprised about the presence of the sub-village head of Kulau. As it turned out, he is part of the gang leadership structure, and made sure that Gang Kulau was presented as ‘gang of the community’ Kulau. Also, the interview atmosphere was not ‘aggressive’, and I was not ridiculed for being a female researcher. Rather, I encountered a very friendly and open reception, which was certainly also due to the good experiences the gang members had had with our initial contact person Luis. In the living room of the gang leader, where the group interview and some individual interviews were conducted, the overall atmosphere was one of domesticity: the noise of crying babies in the background and family photos as well as religious paraphernalia on the wall added to our overall impression that the gang was not seen, nor saw itself, as something deviant from these type of normal family/societal values. Nevertheless, it was obvious that – as a white girl – I was able to enter spaces normally confined to men. When conducting the group interview the gang leader’s wife would only appear to serve coffee.

In this final presentation, I will discuss interview results of both NGO and gang respondents together. Although I have always tried to indicate from which group of respondents the statement is taken, a list of people’s names can provide additional assistance. I have changed the gang respondents’ names into: Eduardo (the gang leader), Enrico (the head of the village), Justino, Mariano, Antonio, Joaquin, José and Roberto. The NGO respondents are Maria, Joao, Alita, Josh, Joana, Mericio, Kiera, James, Fidelis, Luis and Balthasar (see above). In the following, the results will be presented and analysed according to the theoretical notions described in the analytical framework.

6.2. Positioning Men as Community Protectors and Youth

To understand gang violence from a gendered perspective, it is necessary to look at the structural positioning of young men according to gendered and generational patterns of thought. Regarding a broader societal level, a number of NGO respondents expressed that it was not considered ‘part of women’s traditional role’ (James 246) to engage in violence. This notion implicitly included a separation of space: while women are supposed to be ‘inside the house sleeping’ (Joanna 29-30), men are positioned to be outside the house watching to secure and ‘protect the honour of the house’ (James 248). In Mario’s words, ‘women [are] just talking about different attitudes [...] but for men it’s implementation [...] like burn-

ing the house and fighting, and killing each other: it's men, it's not women' (Mario 18-20). NGO worker Alita (91-92) added that men were not just the main actors but also usually the targets of violent attacks.

This division of roles in relation to violence was often highlighted in a community context: men, especially young men, are responsible for the protection and defence of the community, said NGO member Joao (83). In the words of Eduardo, the leader of Gang Kulau:

“This is the custom, the culture of Timor. When you live in this area you have responsibility to protect this community. So we assure that the young men [are] supposed to protect, and we will fight if the other groups come and attack’ (Eduardo, Group Interview 220-222).

This notion of protection was outlined by other gang members as well. Enrico (Group Interview, 39-40) constructed Gang Kulau members as the ‘sons of the community’, who nevertheless had to take on the responsibility of parents who ‘will not abandon their children’ and ‘take care of them’. By referring to the metaphor of the family, Enrico graphically expresses two notions crucial to his idea of being a paternal community protector: responsibility and belonging. Gang members belong to the community as sons, and take on the responsibility to protect it as parents.

It was mainly NGO workers who emphasised the enormous social pressure involved in positioning men in terms of the ‘power to violate’. According to Joanna (56-60), pressure can be built up in the community neighbourhood:

‘If they [men] do not go, the other neighbours will come [and say:] “Why don't you come to defend our community? [...] you are the man, and you don't want to go and save our community, you just wait at home and enjoy people's work, you just get the profit!” [...] Some people don't want to do it [engage in violence], but they get the influence from the others.’

Pressure can, however, also be exerted in a family context. ‘So if the husband is not too old, the wife will suggest him to defend their community’ said Kulau member Antonio (156-157). Whereas some NGO workers still held the view that women had the connotation of inducing ‘something positive and good’ (Joao 57) and therefore normally try to ‘reduce the violence’ (Maria 138), others qualified these stereotypes. In both the contexts of the community and the family, said James (195-196), women can be among the main instigators of violence. NGO respondent Mericio (126-130) agreed that ‘women support some

violence [...] by men.’ He described that ‘when there are problems between two families, many times women give their support against other families. Sometimes they say: go, go, go, you will win!’ Lastly, pressure to engage in violence and thereby fulfil ‘male responsibilities’ is especially high in the context of a group or gang. If gang members try and escape violent fights, ‘they say, in Tetum [...] “tauk ten”⁵⁷, you are not a gentleman, you are stupid, you cannot defend yourself and your community and [...] you betrayed your group’, said NGO worker Joao (98-100). Besides describing peer pressure, Joao's statement is interesting because he is connecting being a man (a ‘gentleman’) with defending both oneself and the community, as well as being loyal to the group.

Kulau gang members expressed this peer pressure in more positive terms of group solidarity and unity. Joaquin (30-31) stressed that his group was always ‘united’, especially in the case of a violent attack from other groups. Similarly, Antonio (118) stated that ‘as part of the group’, he had to do whatever the group did, regardless of these actions being ‘bad or good.’ This unity of the gang was also seen as a survival strategy, as is exemplified by the gang members’ belief that only getting involved in violence could guarantee them protection. In Eduardo's eyes (Group Interview 230-231), refusal to participate in fights could have lethal effects: ‘those who don't want to involve themselves in the violence, they get killed’. The idea of an outside threat to the community was of crucial importance in these statements. On the whole, members only talked about violence when framed as a necessary reaction to an ‘attack’ or ‘provocation’ by other groups (in the Kulau context, these ‘other’ groups were mostly groups from the East): ‘But when [...] other groups come to attack our group, we have to do something to protect our community’, explained e.g. Enrico (175-177).

As a consequence, they constructed their own violent behaviour not as aggressive, but rather as a necessary part of being a ‘good’ and respectable man for the community. Only ‘if we behave good, then the community will respect us’, clarified Antonio (125-126). Joaquin (27-28) only joined the group because he felt the leader wanted ‘to organise the youth to [engage in] good behaviour.’ In the case of a violent attack, it was their community duty to respond with violence, gang members stressed: in their view, the Kulau community respected Gang Kulau for their violent reaction. The gang leader stated that he was gaining respect ‘when the other groups attack, and I can organise the young men to fight against them’

⁵⁷ ‘Tauk ten’ can be translated as (being a) coward (Loch/Tschanz 2005: 71).

(Eduardo, 61-62). In combination with the construction of an outside threat, violence thus becomes an indispensable part of being a good community protector.

This gendered positioning is intertwined with positioning according to age categories. In fact, the idea of ‘youth’ as less powerful and influential than the older generation was a central reference point for both NGO and gang interviewees. According to NGO respondent Mario (28-30), people in East Timor often expressed that ‘the “big people”, the people with power, from political part[ies], [are] just talking. And after that, “small people” will be fighting each other.’ Youth were constructed as part of the ‘small’ or ‘common people’ (*ema beik*), who are more generally defined as the non-elite population. Besides being attributed a powerless position, youth were also portrayed as lacking the ability to reflect upon their actions, making them vulnerable to exploitation by *ema boot*: ‘So if a political party or people with their own interests provoke them or use them to fulfil their interests, they [the young people] just follow because they have no [ability to] think, they just follow’ (Joao 19-21).

The gang members themselves used the position of ‘youth’ to deny responsibility for violence. ‘It takes the leaders to stop the violence’, said Roberto (58), because the youth themselves ‘have no power’, added José (175). Enrico (46-47) accused the leaders of creating the East/West divisions, while Eduardo (Group Interview 138-139) detected that the *ema boot* have power, influence and money but ‘don’t care much about the lives of people.’

In sum, NGO respondents stressed that men in East Timor are generally attributed the position of powerful protectors (e.g. of women) who have to use violence to ensure protection. Social pressure to assume this position can be exerted by other community, family and group members. The members of Gang Kulau positively construct this social pressure as group unity and solidarity, frame their involvement in violence as necessary reactions to attacks upon the Kulau community, and legitimise their violent behaviour with the necessity of being a ‘good and respectable man’ for the community. Tied up with this powerful positioning in terms of this ‘good community man’ version of masculinity is the contrasting powerless positioning of gang members as ‘youth’. While gang members take on responsibility for protecting their own community, they blame the *ema boot* – the national elite – for inciting youth to engage in violence. These statements reflect underlying social age hierarchies in East Timorese society: the positioning of youth as less powerful and unthinking puts *ema boot* in the position to take

on the responsibility for a ‘good’ leadership of the youth. Precisely because of these hierarchies, violent behaviour among young men enjoys a higher degree of social acceptance. By referring to their own youthfulness, gang members can thus legitimise (violent) actions and deny their own responsibility.

These contradictory positions help to shed light on the complex power relationships that evolved in the post-independence era. During the Indonesian occupation, a lot of community groups like Gang Kulau were involved in the clandestine movement, and could therefore define themselves as part of the national fight for independence. Not only did this national cause bridge generational gaps, it also enabled positive masculinity constructions on a national level: young men could position themselves as fighting together with old men for the national community. With the end of resistance and the increasing divisions and conflicts of the post-independence era, this positive national ‘resistance narrative’ has been replaced by the notion that the national elite manipulates youth. While positive masculinity constructions of young men therefore no longer work on a national level, the violent defence of a small-scale community enables the positioning of young men as powerful, positive and masculine community protectors.

Elaborating only on these two positions already shows three important points: there are a myriad of different positions connecting masculinity and violence available to gang members in different contexts, they always need to be seen in relation to their empowering and disempowering effects (e.g. the empowering position of ‘community protector’ vs. the social pressure involved), and there are central differences between the community and the national level. Kulau gang members are thus not complete victims of a hegemonic gender discourse, but actively reproduce the gendered patterns of thought that structurally position them towards the practice of violence; and there is not one single hegemonic model of masculinity available to them, but a myriad of different constructions which they creatively use in different contexts.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ As I will show later using the example of the ‘male bread-winner’ position, however, some constructions are supported by powerful structural constraints (e.g. socio-economic pressures), decisively reducing the degree to which gang members can creatively ‘play’ with different constructions. In this respect, Cornwall/Lindisarne (1994: 20) talk about *different hegemonic masculinities* operating in different contexts.

6.3. The Gendered Experience, Normalisation and Anticipation of Violence

With positioning focusing on the gendered patterns of thought, the following remarks offer ways to understand youth gang violence in Dili by looking at the gendered experience and practice of violence. NGO respondents in particular understood youth gang violence partially as a result of experiencing violent practices. Arguing on a broader level, they often referred to the ubiquity of violent experiences in the East Timorese historical context.

‘First, you know, 24 years of violence, all the violence to get the Indonesian military out of our country... They learn the violence, every day! Our attitude: violence! This is, I think, in 2000, now we are in [a] post-conflict and post-traumatic [era]. How to transform our attitude, our mentality, now [that] we [have] independence?’ (Maria 167-170).

In Maria’s view, violence had become an everyday practice during the years of Indonesian occupation, which cannot be easily unlearned in post-independence times. NGO respondent Joao (138-142) offered a more precise explanation of how, in his view, young men in East Timor learned to practice violence during the Indonesian occupation:

‘Actually, [they did] not teach [violent practices] like a lecture: “you must throw stones like this or like that”, but [...] they show[ed it], no? [...] For example in Indonesian times, we ha[d] no guns, but we f[ou]ght like this, and the children, they saw. Not because they [we]re trained, because they saw. [...] Like they internalised what they experienced. They don’t have to practice. They already know. Because it always happened in their life.’

His statement reflects the idea that an everydayness of violent practices can have effects on socialisation, and leads to normalisation. Even today, as especially manifest in the 2006 crisis, East Timorese were living in a ‘very violent environment’, remarked Luis (58). A lot of young men had themselves been part of the clandestine movement. ‘Either they were directly involved as fighters, or they had to provide food and links in the city, or they were organising in the underground’ (Alita 154-157). Gang Kulau members were ‘involved to help the resistance, to assist the resistance, like Falintil, in the forest, by food, or money, to support them’. While no one had explicitly taught young men how to fight, ‘during occupation everybody learn[ed] how to protect their community’ (Eduardo, Group Interview 132-133).

Some of the gang members reflected on their experience of suffering from violence in this context: José (87-90), for instance, talked about how the Indonesian army caught and beat him. When asked about their own engagement in violence, however, members only referred to gang fights after independence, especially the violent clash with Eastern groups in 2001.⁵⁹

Normalisation was also apparent in the ways Kulau gang members talked about violence. Eduardo (Group Interview 116-117, 178), for instance, made several jokes about the violent behaviour of Gang Kulau. Referring to the Christian majority in the community, he joked that ‘in the name of God, we kill each other’ [laughing], and moreover warned that ‘if other groups come, we simply kill them’ [laughing]. José (120-122) laughingly explained the weapons Gang Kulau used: ‘normally [...] we just get stones and throw them. If we have bomb[s] we use bomb[s], but we don’t’ [laughing].

Another significant indicator that violent practices have become normalised for Gang Kulau members is their practice of framing violence as being just one of their normal gang activities. They constructed themselves as not having ‘negative intentions.’ Members would just ‘gather together and sit and talk about [...] positive activit[ies]’ (Enrico, Group Interview 27-30), like cleaning and gardening (Eduardo, Group Interview 16-19). Thus, crucially, enacting violence was not the exclusive purpose of Gang Kulau. Rather, the violent role of the gang and its members was embedded and socialised within other mundane, habitual, everyday community practices.

In Kulau, certain organisational and leadership structures were set up during the Indonesian occupation, ensuring a more effective response to violent attacks of the community. These structures are still kept intact, which demonstrates the degree to which violent practices are both normalised and anticipated. When the community is attacked, community members ‘ring the bell’ of the community, which hangs in the community’s main square (e.g. Enrico, Group Interview 241). A specific way of ringing the bell with iron announces the attack and calls upon community and gang members to gather together. ‘We have [a] sign, this is, to ring the bell, to collect everybody. We concentrate in one place, make a meeting and decide how to react’ (Eduardo, Group Interview 205-206). The fact that the community has

⁵⁹ A lot of NGO respondents moreover drew attention to the fact that the young people’s involvement in the clandestine movement often prevented them from receiving proper education (e.g. Alita 142-143). When the young people grew up, explained Josh (94-96), ‘that was when all the tensions happened, they could not go to school’ and therefore had no ‘opportunity to learn anything at all’, including ‘any traditional value, or any modern value.’

developed certain rituals to announce a violent attack shows the degree of normalisation of violence. The experience and normalisation of violence has also ensured that old leadership structures survived in the post-independence era. According to the gang leader himself, he was chosen as a leader of Gang Kulau because of his important role in the resistance fight (Eduardo 72-74). The community of Kulau trusted him because he could effectively organise the youth. Besides organising sports and gardening, this also involves the organisation of violent activities. Accordingly, he admitted that in 2001, he had been the one who ‘organised the youth here to attack the youth from the Eastern side’ (Eduardo 100-102).

The establishment and survival of these organisational power structures moreover shows that experience and normalisation of violence go hand in hand with its anticipation. Gang members emphasised that they ‘always have to be ready to fight [...] because the other groups maybe will also come and attack us’ (e.g. Joaquino 67-71). According to Joaquino (73), gang members therefore always have their weapons – arrows, knives and swords – ready for action. Rumour is an important mechanism through which the anticipation of violence is disseminated, highlighted researcher Fidelis (16-17). In his view, people were often tense and afraid because of rumours of violence. Gang Kulau members themselves saw rumours as a common way of announcing violent attacks: ‘Maybe we will just hear: “Oh, the other groups will come and attack us!” And then we will just go’ (Joaquino 73-75). Joaquino’s statement demonstrates how normalisation and anticipation are intertwined – a violent attack of another group is seen as nothing special, therefore gang members have to be ready to ‘just go’ and use violence.

To summarise, a lot of links can be drawn to theoretical notions outlined by Bourdieu. The fact that violence has become an everyday practice can be understood by referring to Bourdieu’s ideas of social learning: due to the ubiquity of violence in the East Timorese historical context, people have learned to see the practice of violence as a potentiality that can be re-activated in certain situations. In the words of many interview partners, the brutality of the Indonesian occupation has led to a ‘culture of violence’ in East Timor: people learned violence ‘every day’ (Maria 173) so that they ‘internalised what they experienced’ (Joao 153). Regarding gangs, violence can be seen as a normalised aspect of gang culture – for instance, Kulau gang members’ ways of talking about violence hint at a certain degree of normalisation. The anticipation of violence ensures the survival of certain community structures. The fact that the Kulau community can always be attacked legitimises the violent reaction of Gang Kulau.

From a gendered perspective, these notions need to be connected with gendered patterns of thought (see positioning). Crucial in this respect is the public/private divide as well as the corporeal construction of gender – ideas of men being physically stronger and therefore outside as protectors of weaker women at home. If men are positioned as having the ‘power to violate’, and as powerful protectors of communities, their experience of violence is substantially different from that of women, who are expected to stay in the house and ‘be protected’. As a consequence, it becomes more ‘normal’ for men to engage in violent practices in the public realm; and structures regulating the reaction to violent attacks ‘normally’ organise men as the ones supposed to fight. In the Kulau community, the anticipation of violence has created space for the emergence of ‘good man’ community protector masculinities, legitimating the violence enacted by Gang Kulau.

To re-connect with Bourdieu, it is worth describing the ‘loop effect’ of habitus with the help of this example: gendered patterns of thought connect masculinity with violence and are powerful to an extent that they can shape both the experience and practice of violence. As a result, the habituation and anticipation of violent practices are significantly gendered, and help to re-create gender structures. This loop effect, however, only works if men actively (re-)enact violence, and thereby help to normalise certain practices. Kulau gang members are not passive objects of the community’s defence mechanism, but actively use the imagined space of violent anticipation for (re-)enacting their roles. This re-enactment of gendered practices helps to reproduce and normalise gendered patterns of thought: gang members ‘always have to be ready to fight’ both because they are expected to defend the community, but also because they have actively engaged in fighting before.

6.4. Re-Establishing Masculinities? Gendering Unemployment and Urbanisation

The theoretical notion of re-establishing conceptualises gang violence as an identity resource for ‘doing masculinity’ in the face of socio-economic developments that cause a change of gender power structures, and thereby weaken male domination. Socio-economic developments were named by a number of NGO and gang interviewees as crucial factors in fostering gang violence. Mostly, they referred to urban growth and unemployment in Dili. In Fidelis’ (38-39) opinion, many young men migrate from rural areas ‘because they think they have better opportunities in Dili than in the districts.’ These hopes are often destroyed right after their arrival at the East Timorese capital, as described by James (283-287):

‘Back in the rural areas they help on the farm, cultivating the land and there’s all the different rituals surrounding the harvest and they have a part in all of that. Then they come to Dili and quite often they are living with their relatives, they can’t help with rent or buying food or supporting the families so they feel useless.’

James elaborates on the different disempowering effects that the migration to Dili can have on young men. On the economic side, young men in Dili often cannot live on subsistence farming as they used to do in the rural areas. In terms of family and community structures, they are faced with very different conditions in the capital, where they often live with remote relatives, and are not integrated into traditional community rituals and leadership structures any more (e.g. Joao 128-136).

Urban migration is tightly linked to the problem of unemployment: the hopes of young migrants looking for work are bound to be disappointed in Dili, where job opportunities are rare. Researcher Josh (236-238) connected unemployment to low education, with youth caught in a vicious circle of marginalisation and disempowerment:

‘Like if I’m a young man here and I can only read and write, trying to find a job even as a security guard is very, very difficult. So what should I do in this situation? [...] I think all these processes disempower them.’

James (279-281) formulated a similar standpoint. In his opinion, many young people were coming to Dili ‘looking for jobs hoping to cash in on the development or the UN presence and that [doesn’t work] out that way, cause they don’t have the skills.’ As a consequence, elaborated NGO worker Maria (2-4), many young men felt bored and frustrated.

Gang Kulau members also mentioned the problem of boredom in the context of unemployment. Unemployed youth, expressed Enrico (Group Interview 258-259), ‘just sit and talk.’ In his view, boredom thus could lead to violence because bored young men would ‘drink, become drunk, [...] beat someone, [and] provoke [violent] situations.’ For unmarried Gang Kulau members, unemployment was problematic in terms of future family plans: José (153-156), for instance, said that he wanted to marry but was lacking the money to pay the bride price in the traditional *barlake* system.

Employment was therefore one of the solutions proposed most often to tackle the problem of gang violence in Dili, both in NGO and gang interviews. NGO worker Kiera (88) expressed his opinion that gang violence was all about economy and education: ‘In urban areas, it is purely, [that young men have] no job.’ Similarly, Joao (17-18) analysed that ‘the root cause of this problem [of gang violence] is that most [...] young people don’t have work.’ Employment, said NGO worker Maria (39-40), would help stop gang violence, because it could provide youth with ‘something to be occupied every day.’ Enrico (Group Interview 257), another Kulau gang member, predicted that employment could ‘automatically reduce the violence.’

NGO workers and gang members thus referred to urban migration and unemployment as the most important socio-economic trends creating a sense of disempowerment. From the theoretical angle of re-establishing, these processes would have to be analysed in their gendered implications, assuming that unemployment and urbanisation could have caused a change of gender structures in society and inhibited men from living up to certain models of masculinity. In this interpretation, gangs and violence in East Timor could be interpreted as having the function to re-establish male domination. Notwithstanding, taking a closer look at Gang Kulau members’ statements led me to qualify this theoretical assumption, and suggest a more complex gendered interpretation.

Gang Kulau members themselves emphasised that in their view, there had been ‘no significant change after independence’ in terms of socio-economic development. ‘Before there was unemployment, and now it’s still the same’ (Enrico, Group Interview 141-142). Consequently, ‘many people who used to suffer are still suffering’ (Eduardo, Group Interview 138-139). Similarly, there had been no significant change in terms of urban migration in Kulau. Although the majority of my Gang Kulau respondents stated that they were originally from another district, they had mostly migrated with their parents at a very young age and grew up in Dili, so that they now felt integrated into the community.⁶⁰ In Kulau, both unemployment and urban migration were seen as long-term developments rather than new post-independence phenomena.

⁶⁰ Most interviewees stated that their parents used to work or were still working in agriculture. When asked about where they felt at home, most named both their original ‘rural’ district and Dili.

By contrast, the end of the resistance fight – coupled with the unfulfilled promise of employment and development – can be seen as a major source of disempowerment that came with independence. NGO respondent Maria (90-96) expressed people’s disappointed expectations after independence:

‘Now [we have] independence and we can be free, and we can receive anything, that [was] something in our mind. Everything. And in 2000, 2000-2003, a lot of international NGOs [came] here, [and had] trainings [...] And after [that], when in 2004, 2005, the international NGOs [...] went, everything [was] very... now we want to have... receive something, but no.’

Against this background, it makes sense to look at masculinities by gendering and historicising the idea of (un-)employment in the East Timorese context. In a society largely based on subsistence agriculture where the whole family had to contribute to securing the household income, the idea of (un-)employment, combined with the notion that ‘being a man’ means ‘having a paid job’, has to be seen as a relatively new invention.⁶¹ Lecturer Balthasar (136-138) confirmed this notion: ‘now, [...] in Dili, [there is] the demand [that] men have to become bread-winner. That’s the concept of the modern western society.’ Since paid jobs have only been available in the capital of Dili, the ideal of the male bread-winner can be seen as having endorsed urbanisation.

While ideas of development and modernisation had previously also been promoted by Portuguese and Indonesian development and modernisation projects, socio-economic development became the new national project of the imagined East Timorese community after independence, and replaced the national cause of resistance. The struggle for national independence had offered national masculinity models according to which the enactment of violence for the cause of the national community could automatically be constructed as ‘positive activity’. Ideas of the modern new nation, however, not only carried modern masculinity models such as the male provider, but also assumptions about employment having ‘civilising effects’ on ‘violent men’.

These modern masculinity constructions were reflected in several statements of Gang Kulau members. As described above, many agreed with the widespread opinion that young men were fighting because of

unemployment. Gang Kulau member Antonio (216-217) stated that young men were supposed to work for the family and in a paid job according to their set role, but unemployment hindered them. The assumption that employment can have civilising effects is perhaps best reflected in the following demand advanced by the gang leader himself: ‘Men mostly involve in violence because of unemployment. It is the fault of the government. If they are all employed, it will be reduced, the violence will disappear’ (Eduardo, Group Interview 252-254). Education was another crucial aspect in this respect. According to Eduardo (Group Interview 165-167), families in the Kulau community ‘want the young men to be a man. To be a good man, for the future. But because of the economic problems sometimes they cannot send them to school, that’s a problem of the community.’

Some NGO workers more explicitly drew the link between employment, masculinity and a common national project, suggesting that unemployment was especially tough for the new generation of young men. Alita (148-150) described how young men involved in the clandestine movement ‘were not able to get proper education, [and] no vocational training, and now they have no job and say “I don’t belong to this country!”’ Josh (101-103) suggested that unemployment had driven youth into an identity crisis, because they had no job and no national project to believe in. ‘They are like the lost generation, of course they will do violence [...], because they don’t feel they belong to something.’ In order to stop the violence, suggested Maria (133-134), the people of East Timor ‘must work hard, reduce the fertility rate, and [...] create job[s].’

In this environment of disempowerment and insecurity due to the end of resistance fight and unfulfilled promises of development, gangs can take on an important empowering function. NGO respondents highlighted particularly the social empowering aspects of being in a gang. Joao (47-49) expressed that ‘sometimes they [young men] involve themselves in [...] group[s] so that people know them and know they are strong.’ The fact that gang membership signified masculine strength and belonging was underlined by some gangs’ bodily marks like tattoos (Joao 162-163). In the eyes of Fidelis (65-67), the empowering effect of gangs for gang members was most relevant in a community context: ‘You gain respect in your community when you are in a gang; being in a gang gives you a sense of belonging.’ Luis (196-198) stressed another empowering cultural function of gangs, stating ‘in Timorese culture, the idea of men coming together in a group is very strong already’. Young men in Dili were no longer part of traditional ceremonies in which men would come together and discuss everything. Therefore, ‘coming

⁶¹ According to Neupert/Lopes (2006: 15), unemployment requires ‘the development of a modern economy with predominantly monetary commercial operations, labour relations based on contracts or formal arrangements, production diversification, and an increasing demand for a more qualified labour force.’

together as a gang is maybe like a mini ceremony' (Luis 214-215), which would replace traditional ways of gathering. As described above, gang members themselves expressed this empowering effect not only in terms of group loyalty and solidarity, but also in relation to gaining respect in the Kulau community.

To sum up, I have contested the idea that violence was used by gang members as an identity resource to re-establish traditional masculinities in the East Timorese context: urbanisation and unemployment have to be seen against the background of promises of development and modernisation. To interpret with Bourdieu, promises of modernisation and development have already significantly altered gendered patterns of thought and generated gendered practice. If masculinity ideals are linked to ideas about power and agency in the world, old masculinity models of the national resistance fighter were replaced by modern masculinity models promising power and agency with employment and further endorsing immigration of young men to Dili. Furthermore, the modern idea of employment is underpinned by a connotation of maturity. Therefore, large-scale unemployment is a manifestation of the broken promise of modernisation and has deeply disempowering effects, since it is perceived by young men as inhibiting them from being both modern and mature. Although social change in East Timor has changed gendered patterns of thought, gendered power structures have been left well intact. As manifest in the existence of male gangs like Gang Kulau, men can retreat to these structures.

It is only on the basis of still-existing gender structures that Gang Kulau can provide 'habitual security': gang members are positioned as powerful (male) protectors of the (female) community, and respected for taking on this role, even if it involves employing violence (see positioning). Rather than viewing violence as an identity resource to re-establish male domination, however, I would argue by referring to the idea of normalisation in this case. In the community context, violence is not a direct reaction to unemployment, but habitualised practice enclosed in gang member masculinities, which also involve taking part in other everyday community activities.

6.5. Competing for Male Honour with Violence

This theoretical approach is based on the idea that masculinity is acquired through 'serious games of competition', which can take a violent form especially in the context of certain youth subcultures. It is 'common sense', said NGO worker Joao (22-27), that 'the young people of East Timor, sometimes [...]

just say, oh we go fighting, and they just follow. After that, they don't know what's the problem.' Whereas Gang Kulau members themselves always named different reasons for their involvement in violent fights, Joao's statement was confirmed by a number of other NGO respondents. Frequently, the original reason triggering the violence got lost, so that gangs ended up fighting for the sake of fighting. Researcher James (188-189) stressed that gang members constructed themselves as victims of the political elite and unemployment, but were often 'active' and 'enthusiastic' instigators of violence. NGO member Mericio (91-93) similarly emphasised that many young men enjoyed engaging in violence, because they could prove their strength in front of their peers. Fidelis (41-42) remarked that young men were often looking for an exciting opportunity to escape everyday boredom. Lastly, the enactment of violence is often embedded in other fun activities, like singing, drinking and hanging out on the street (Maria 75-76).

Another aspect of gang violence in Dili is the linkage to martial arts. The competitive games that are normally fought out on a sporting level changed to be fought out with violence in the course of the 2006 crisis, said Kiera (114-119). According to him, martial arts groups were 'living together peacefully before the crisis. There was some fighting, but not much, [...] But the crisis was just like fuel burning up everything, and it was a disaster.' Although others denied that martial arts groups had been peaceful before 2006 (e.g. James 16-18), the violent fights between these groups exemplify the blurred line between what counts as violence and what counts as sports, with both being different forms of the serious games of competition.

NGO respondents remarked that for many groups engaged in the clandestine support network, the original reason for their very existence got lost with the end of the Indonesian occupation. 'Before that, there was a clear objective – resistance and independence', said Luis (144-147). James (276-279) agreed that 'after independence these groups don't have a role any more'. Now, 'sometimes, the groups just fight each other and attack each other' (Luis 155-157). In other words, the serious games of competition that were fought out with the Indonesian army during the occupation continued after independence, albeit in the form of inner-Timorese gang fights. Gang Kulau members themselves confirmed this notion. During Indonesian times, stated Antonio (223-225), 'Timorese were fighting the Indonesians, they were not fighting each other. Now, starting from 2001, people from different groups – maybe martial arts – fight each other.' For Kulau gang members, the violence after independence was tightly connected to the East/West conflict, which had 'divided people into two groups' (Eduardo, Group Interview 150-

151). While the Indonesian army had constituted a clear enemy before independence, the enemy after independence, however, was not that clear (Eduardo, Group Interview 156).

In fact, some aspects of the East/West conflict itself can be seen as a masculine game of competition about the male national heroes of the resistance fight. Particularly gang members themselves constructed the 2006 East/West cleavage in this vein. Eduardo (94-96) described how Easterners had accused Gang Kulau as Westerners that they were ‘not the heroes, you [did] not contribute [to] the struggle to get independence’. Against these allegations, however, Gang Kulau was able to prove its strength and defend its honour in the course of the crisis. Since members resisted gangs from the East and successfully defended the community of Kulau, Gang Kulau ‘became more and more famous’ (Eduardo 42-43).

Implicitly hidden in these statements about the crisis and the East/West conflict is a notion of an injured male honour that needs to be defended with violence, also apparent when gang members talked about causes for fights on a local level. Mostly, they referred to ‘provocations’ by other groups. Explaining gang fights in post-independence era, Antonio (93-94) said that ‘now, there is really no enemy here, after the independence, but some of our friends always provoke the [violent] situation, that’s why we create enemies’. The entanglement of the notion of provocation with that of male honour became obvious when gang members talked about the different kinds of provocations, which could take the form of threats with weapons, but could also be about girls:

‘So when the other groups [from other communities] have a party and we [go] there and there is a lot of girls and we want to dance with them but maybe they refuse to dance with us, that maybe also create[s] conflict’ (Joaquino 123-125).

Joaquino’s statement is implicitly based on the assumption that girls are the ‘property’ of communities, so that conflict about girls becomes a competition about both, the honour of the men and the honour of the community. Interestingly, gang members talked about their new enemies after independence mostly as ‘friends’ or ‘brothers’. Also, they did not see the gang fights in opposition to an imagined East Timorese national community. Gang Kulau ‘has good interest [...] for the nation, for the country’, declared Justino (Group Interview 59-60), for instance. One of the Kulau interviewees, moreover, was wearing a T-shirt declaring ‘Unidade Nasional’ – national unity.

To sum up, a variety of gang fight elements can be understood by referring to the theoretical approach of competing. The fact that gangs continued to engage in violent clashes even after independence demonstrates that gangs were also active instigators of violence, even though the enemies had suddenly changed to be their own ‘brothers’. Male pride and honour are furthermore central components of the East/West conflict, with mostly men now fighting about their constructed male heroes of independence. The fact that gang members did not refrain from stating that they were all fighting for one common East Timorese nation, points to the idea that violence can be a practice effecting both distinction and conjunction.

Again, competing needs to be connected to positioning and normalisation: violence can only be used in the serious games of competition between groups of (young) men because men are put into a position in which it is socially acceptable to draw on violence as corporeal power practice in the public realm; and because homosocial group fights have become an unquestioned and very normal practice. In other terms, positioning enables men to compete with violence in groups, so that competing in serious games has been normalised. At this point, competing can be linked up with the observations made in re-establishing: gangs provide habitual security for young men in the current disempowering context. One aspect of the gangs’ provision of habitual security is their habitualised engagement in the serious games of competition, which constitute a source of empowerment. Importantly, the enactment of violence here needs to be seen in its socialising effects: it not only helps both sides of the violent relationship defend their male honour, but also constitutes an exciting and ‘fun’ activity in the context of boredom. Gang Kulau members thus have both parties and fights with their ‘friends’ from the Eastern side. Also, groups from both sides would probably share the will to build a common East Timorese nation, and agree on demands for more employment.

7. Conclusions

Having discussed the interview results theoretically, I will use these results together with a critical reflection upon the terms ‘youth’ and ‘gangs’ to provide some concluding food for thought. In addition, I will point to the limits of my analysis and suggest avenues for further research by re-connecting with the different research areas summarised in the first chapter, before making some final remarks about gang members strategically performing their membership.

7.1. Questioning the Terms ‘Gangs’ and ‘Youth’

‘Youth gangs’ have been held ‘responsible for East Timor’s violence, political intimidation, extortion and crime’ (Murdoch 2006), especially during the 2006 crisis. This way of talking about ‘gangs’ as a generalised bloc in Dili or East Timor conflates very different groups into one blurred entity, carrying notions of crime, the street, drugs and violence and constructing the gang as the ‘ultimate symbol of crisis, deviance and threat’ (Alexander 2000: 20). Following earlier attempts of researchers (e.g. Myrtilinen 2008), these groups not only need to be further differentiated, but also studied as different single cases. After all, the background of Veterans’ Organisations differs greatly from that of Martial Arts Groups.

While existing research tries to investigate the membership, names, alliances and criminal behaviour of the different groups, a gendered perspective asks questions about power and identity: gangs are not only discursive constructions represented in media and academia, but comprise potent ‘gendered spaces of experience’. In the case of community-based gangs, like Gang Kulau, it makes sense to look at these questions within a localised community context. Despite being located in the East Timorese capital of Dili, Kulau community has a village-like character – gang members do not ‘hang out on the street’, but in the community centre. In contrast to notions that conceptualise gangs as standing at the fringes of society, Gang Kulau is very much embedded and respected in the Kulau community, and takes on important community functions – the enactment of violence is a community protection mechanism. Gang members are thus not disenfranchised from their community, but form an integral part of it, and are bound by certain responsibilities and loyalties.

Another myth in need of deconstruction is the youthfulness of East Timorese gangs: ‘youth’ is a category equally loaded with highly gendered notions of deviance and threat. Fears that the growing ‘youth bulge’ in Dili could destroy the development of the new nation reflect an underlying link between demographic determinism (that population growth harms the development of a country) and developmental assumptions of adolescence (as period of ‘storm and stress’). At least in the case of Gang Kulau, however, it is questionable how young the members of gangs really are, and whether a certain idea of adolescence is an important factor to consider. Here, the employment of ‘youth’ as an ideologically charged and politicised category was much more obvious than any age-limited category of ‘youth’. Gang Kulau members actively referred to themselves as ‘youth’ (regardless of their actual age or family

status) to express their subordinate power position against the elder leaders and remind them of their responsibilities. This position has also enabled them to deny their responsibility for violent acts and blame the ‘big leaders’ for inciting the violence on the streets.

7.2. The Myriad Constructions of Masculinities and Violence

Inherently underlying both the constructions of researchers and gang members is the assumption that ‘youth’ are male. It was this gender-blindness in many publications about youth gang violence in East Timor that prompted me to further scrutinise the apparent gender/violence nexus by asking about the construction of masculinities and violence. The focus on masculinities and violence, however, risks obscuring an important fact. The idea of multiple masculinities includes both violent and non-violent masculinities, the latter probably constituting the majority of masculinity constructions. Salo’s (2006: 149) formulations for gangs in Manenberg can be transferred to Kulau: gang members are also ‘sons, brothers, husbands, fathers, lovers, friends, and social mentors.’

On our second visit to Kulau, for instance, the gang leader Eduardo asked to be excused – he had to return back to his house, where his wife had just given birth. And while he was the one inciting Gang Kulau members to fight in violent clashes, he also organised non-violent gang activities. These non-violent masculinities constitute an important background for analysing the varying constructions connecting masculinity and violence. As I have highlighted, gang members are both pressured to assume certain positions, but also actively re-enact them. In the case of Gang Kulau, three different levels of community were crucial for constructing these positions: the community of Gang Kulau, the Kulau community as direct neighbourhood, and the national community of an imagined East Timor.

Gang Kulau as a ‘gendered space of experience’ can be said to provide a sense of belonging to its male members in multiple dimensions, and a certain sense of ‘habitual security’. Gang members collectively experienced their involvement in violent clashes, but they also collectively engage in playing sports and music. In terms of the resistance movement, members primarily stressed their role as logistical providers of guerrilla fighters. This collective experience of both violent and non-violent masculinities is constitutive to the constructed unity of the gang: gang members are always ‘united’ in whatever they do, regardless of their actions being ‘bad or good’ (Antonio 118). In the case of violent clashes, gang

loyalty compels members to carry out violence, yet they also actively enact violence as a sign of taking on responsibility for their peers.

A similar conclusion can be drawn at the level of Kulau community. Community members put gang members in the position of community protectors, and the gang is an important part of a very localised ‘defence mechanism’ that is employed when violent attacks are anticipated. Being a ‘good’ and respected member of Kulau community and of Gang Kulau cannot be disconnected from enacting violence in certain situations. Again, the community protector version of masculinity is one of ambiguity: it offers belonging and respect, but comes with social pressure that can be exerted by family, community and gang members alike.

The connection of gang members to an imagined national community has decisively changed with the end of the clandestine struggle for independence. During Indonesian times, the national resistance fight constituted an important reference point for the construction of gang member masculinities in addition to the community and the gang. When the fight for liberation from Indonesia evolved into the fight for liberation from poverty in the post-independence era, the masculinity model of the national resistance fighter was replaced by that of the employed male bread-winner working for national development. Large-scale unemployment, however, impedes gang members from taking part in this national project, and one way of expressing their feelings of disempowerment and frustration is their employment of the category of youth. The ambiguity of this position works the other way round: gang members’ exclusion from a national project releases them from responsibilities, and they actively reconstruct this position as young, irresponsible and unthinking youth to deny responsibility for violence. Significantly, gang members blame the ema boot as youth belonging to an imagined national community, not to articulate of alienation from the nation. Whilst they position themselves as ‘good boys’ of the gang and the community, they express their sense of belonging to the nation as ‘bad boys’.

While these gendered patterns of thought relate constructions of masculinity to violence in different ways, I have also scrutinised violence as corporeal power practice that can be experienced by men and needs to be seen as a form of social interaction between men. It is out of the question that gang members have been socialised in the violent environment of the Indonesian occupation, and that they have normalised violent practices to a certain extent: the enactment of violence is merely one of their

habitualised mundane community activities. Nevertheless, it is questionable whether gang members themselves were involved in violent clashes during the occupation and are therefore today repeating violent practices they directly experienced in the past. For Gang Kulau members, the experience of non-violent activities during resistance was probably of higher importance to their membership today.

The practice of violence was normal and natural not only for members of Gang Kulau. In Kulau, it seemed that violence had become a gendered mainstream phenomenon, and an everyday potentiality with highly gendered effects. The community has developed certain mechanisms to deal with violent attacks, because it is normal to deal with them. Rumours anticipating violence derive their truthfulness from people’s previous experiences of violence, they can only unfold their power in an environment where violent attacks have been normalised. Gang Kulau itself can be seen as product of this normalisation, an effective mechanism to respond to violence and protect the community.

The normalisation of violence, however, requires active re-enactment. Gang members are not only passive community protectors, but actively use the imagined space opened up by the anticipation of violence for (re-)enacting it. Also, they actively provoke fights with other groups. These fights can be understood as ‘serious games of competition’ about male honour and pride, opening up the view for violence as resource for doing masculinity. The enactment of violence in the serious games can be an empowering, fun, exciting and socialising activity for gang members: they have both parties and fights with their friends from other groups. Crucially, the serious games are a power resource only available to men in the public realm, an insight important against the background of the current socio-economic context.

The arguments I have advanced in terms of the disempowering socio-economic context help to shed light on Dili as the main stage of violent gang performances in 2006. Contrary to the popular narrative, I think that the crisis occurred because of –not despite – the huge development efforts of the international community. Accordingly, the causal chain assuming that unemployment and urbanisation caused violent reactions of gangs needs to be deconstructed from a gendered perspective. I have argued that the huge project of national development in post-independence times came with modern models of masculinity, especially that of the male bread-winner. Employment also promises a new

way of relating to the nation, for the resistance fight has been replaced by economic development as collective national enterprise.

The development initiative has decisively altered gendered patterns of thought and thereby encouraged urbanisation, with Dili being the only place in East Timor where aspiring male providers can hope for job opportunities, but left promises of employment unfulfilled. In Dili, the employed male bread-winner is not just one of many masculinity options, but about to become the only alternative for economic survival. Ironically, with the project of national modernisation reinforcing modern masculinity models and elevating the idea of the male bread-winner to a national level, the conditions to fulfil these aspirations have worsened especially in Dili.⁶² I have consistently talked about ‘promises’ of modernisation, because they have remained promises for the majority of Gang Kulau members. Most had not been in a paid job during Indonesian times, but were hoping for employment after independence. The fact that the huge international presence and support in Dili has only created jobs for a small, educated, English-speaking elite is perceived as deeply disempowering by gang members. While I think that Gang Kulau can provide ‘habitual security’ in this context of disempowerment, I have contested the idea of violence as a direct reaction to unemployment. The existence of gangs actually manifests that gender power structures are well intact (and do not need to be re-constructed by using violence), and violent practices can be seen as part of habitualised gang member activity.

In sum, a gendered reading of the example of Gang Kulau contests a number of assumptions about the disaffected, alienated, unemployed youth forming gangs during the crisis to express their dissatisfaction by engaging in gang warfare. As men, Kulau gang members are bound by different loyalties and responsibilities in relation to the gang and the community, which include a habituated enactment of violence. Gang Kulau is integral part of the gendered structure in the Kulau community, not deviant from it, and it did not suddenly emerge during the crisis, but traces its roots back to the resistance fight. By blaming their own national leaders for inciting gang violence, gang members express a negative sense of belonging, not alienation, from the national community. Lastly, large parts of the ‘gang warfare’ are better described as violent games of competition about male honour and pride.

⁶² As Moxham (2008: 19) formulates, ‘those seeking opportunity in Dili were increasingly faced with acutely unequal and stagnant employment markets, a housing squeeze, unaffordable basic commodities and exposure to the volatile global rice market.’

7.3. ‘Youth Gangs’ and their Creative Construction of Masculinities and Violence

There is one last aspect of gang violence that needs to be investigated in greater depth: the ‘spectacular’ aspect of violence as a symbolic means of communication (cf. Goldstein 2004). I want to stress this aspect at the very end, as it puts an ironic twist to the issue of youth gang violence in Dili, and shows how gangs creatively construct masculinities and violence by inventing themselves as ‘youth gangs’.

Some of my NGO respondents emphasised that gang members struggle to find a voice in society. Luis (120-121), for instance, said that gang members often ‘have the feeling that the government doesn’t listen to their demands’. In the course of the crisis, however, Gang Kulau members have learned just how much attention they can grab by being known as violent – they have become famous due to the crisis. On this basis, government representatives, NGOs and international researchers (including myself) suddenly became interested in the group, giving voice to demands that would never have been heard without the violent clashes.

Crucially, the modernisation project starting to be implemented in East Timor created the very conditions for a certain interpretation of gang violence and the fame of Gang Kulau. Since East Timor was deemed to be the new UN ‘poster child’, and this construction carried with it the idea that a country which had suffered from decades of a violent regime could be ‘civilised’ in a very short period of time, the violent clashes symbolically marked a huge (inter-)national disappointment. The scale of this disappointment created the need for the government and international observers to listen to the demands of gangs. In this context, violence has proved a powerful tool to open channels of communication normally closed for members of Gang Kulau.

This modern framework of interpretation has also shaped ideas for containing gang violence: employment has emerged as one of the major strategies with which government and (inter-)national organisations hope to civilise the youth ‘gone wild’.⁶³ Ironically, on that count, gang members completely agree with international consultants (notably, both are also inherently referring to young males). Regardless of the actual reasons for violence, they are actively using the direct connection drawn between unemployment and violence to advocate one of their major interests: employment. In this sense, the violent crisis

⁶³ For instance, together with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the government rapidly launched a cash-for-work programme that was meant to mostly benefit youth (cf. Kostner/Clark 2007: 1).

of 2006 has politicised both the gendered categories ‘youth’ and ‘gang’. Gang members know that the name ‘gang’ evokes certain potent imaginations of threat and violence, enabling them to make powerful claims. As (male) scapegoats being held responsible for perpetrating the bulk of violence in the 2006 crisis, they can play on people’s fears, and threaten that an unchanged situation of unemployment will lead to more violence. Similarly, they make political usage of the category of ‘youth’, arguing that, in order to educate the ‘bad boys’, the ‘big leaders’ should provide them with employment.

When asked about political intentions, Gang Kulau members themselves, however, denied any political affiliations, and talked about themselves as ‘political party zero-zero’ (my emphasis, Eduardo, Group Interview 96-97). The contradictory nature of this statement is obvious (Gang Kulau members describe their group as an unpolitical political party), and hints to a smart way of making politics beyond the arena of political parties: the category of the ‘youth gang’ provides Gang Kulau with a ‘zero-zero’ position from which they can make powerful political claims and advocate for employment. Gang members thus actively re-appropriate the omnipresent narrative of unemployment causing gang violence and help to create a collective social meaning of fights. By performing their ‘youth gang membership’ in this way, they are doing both gender and adolescence, pressuring the government to implement the promise of development that goes hand-in-hand with the promise of ‘becoming a modern and mature man’. Rather than being ‘hell-bent on destroying their country’, Gang Kulau members thereby seem to seek integration into the national project of modernisation.

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