

Timor history 1974-1999: Finding, preserving and accessing primary sources

John Waddingham

Large collections of primary source material on the history of East Timor's traumatic path to independence exist in many countries. Some of these materials are publicly accessible but many are still held privately. Very few of these materials, whether public or private, are easily accessible to students, researchers and educators in Timor-Leste. The CHART Project (Clearing House for Archival Records on Timor) is an Australian attempt to locate such materials and to ensure copies of key items are accessible in Timor-Leste. Much work remains to be done, but CHART may prove a useful model for organisations and individuals in other countries to facilitate access to their Timor records.

The documentary source materials of any people or nation are an essential part of its existence. Such materials play a crucial role in exploring and understanding the origins, shared experience and identity of a people.

The new State of Timor-Leste arose from the ashes of a traumatic journey between 1974 and 1999. The trauma of a brief fratricidal civil war in 1975 and the much more disastrous 24-year-long Indonesian military occupation is bound to mark Timor-Leste for generations. Knowing about and understanding this history is crucial to current and future generations of Timorese and, indeed, wider humanity. Recording the experiences and memories of those who experienced this period is an urgent task for the present generation. Similarly, locating, preserving and getting access to existing documentary records of the struggle for self-determination are essential tasks.

Timor-Leste already has emerging institutions holding important historical materials which need to be carefully protected and made available to Timorese students, historians and teachers. Many more materials exist outside Timor-Leste and how these might also become available to the Timorese is the subject of this paper.

The documentary record: what are we talking about?

Between 1974 and 1999 huge volumes of information about East Timor's path from Portuguese colony to independent country were generated in many parts of the world. Governments, international and national non-government organisations, media companies, solidarity and advocacy groups and individuals researching, supporting or opposing East Timorese self-determination created and collected materials on the issue.

These materials are in every physical format imaginable - from formally published hard copy materials through to internal organisational communications, newspaper clippings, photographs, audio-visual materials and computer files.

The content of these materials falls into two broad categories. The first is reports from Timorese or others about actual developments in the territory of East Timor - from the emergence of political groups in Timor in 1974 through civil war in 1975, 24 years of Indonesian military rule and Timorese resistance and suffering through to the final post-ballot cataclysm in 1999. The second category is the internal records and output of the vast range of non-Timorese actors internationally who were engaged in some way with the Timor issue.

The first category is of primary importance to the East Timorese themselves. It is the record of what happened to the people in the country in those dramatic, disastrous years. The second category will be of interest to Timorese as well - especially those who knew little about what was happening outside Timor in those years. What happened outside Timor then is necessarily a part of the record of Timor's history, but the records of the work done by individuals and organisations in their respective countries is also part of the history of those countries.

The critical tasks facing Timorese and all others with an interest in these materials are to locate, preserve and provide access to them for the long term. These tasks are multi-faceted and multi-national. The experience of the CHART (Clearing House for Archival Records on Timor) project in Australia is described here as an example how such work might proceed internationally.

CHART: An Australian project

CHART was originally created by John Waddingham and Pat Walsh in Melbourne in 2000. It arose from conversations between them following Walsh's seminal paper on the question of how to preserve and make overseas historical materials available in newly-independent Timor-Leste (Walsh 1999). Walsh envisaged a Timorese-directed project to identify materials held outside Timor with the ultimate aim of collecting all such materials together in a dedicated institution in Timor-Leste. Waddingham supported the case for access to the materials in Timor-Leste but also saw that significant private Timor collections in Australia contained extensive materials about Australian history – that is, records of Australian government and especially non-government and individual actions for and against East Timorese self-determination – and might well remain in Australia (Waddingham 2000a)

This difference of emphasis was resolved in CHART's foundation document (Waddingham 2000b). Accepting that it would be some time before institutions in Timor-Leste would be ready to receive materials from overseas, CHART's initial work focussed on locating and documenting the content of Timor materials held in public repositories and private hands in Australia. CHART was not to be a collector of archival materials in private hands but rather an advisory service for collection owners on care of archival materials and options for long-term storage and public access. The decision on where a collection might eventually go – to an Australian or East Timorese or other institution – remained in the hands of the owner. CHART recommended that “to enhance the long-term security of original and rare materials being sent to Timor”, archival-quality copies be retained in Australia (Waddingham 2000b 2).

Since its start in 2000, CHART work has been largely conducted by the author on a voluntary basis as time and personal resources permitted. In 2011 CHART moved to a more formal structure to allow it to seek external funding to accelerate its aims, especially digitisation for eventual access in Timor-Leste. The CHART Board includes individuals with long-standing connections to Timor¹; current Timor-Leste President Jose Ramos Horta and former Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri are Patrons.

Public collections in Australia

A large volume of Timor materials is available in Australian repositories. What follows is a brief, selective guide.

The largest single collection lies in the National Archives of Australia (NAA). NAA is the legal repository for records of the Australian national government, parliament and associated agencies. Australian interest in the neighbourhood, particularly its long-standing security interests, means defence and foreign affairs agencies created extensive records about East Timor during the Portuguese colonial period. Many of these are available in digital form through NAA. Australia's deep involvement in the East Timor issue from Prime Minister Gough Whitlam onwards means many records about Timor's transition from Portuguese colony to independent state are also held by NAA. While access to these records is subject to a 'thirty year rule'², increasing volumes of records since 1974 are becoming available, some in digital form, via the internet (see for example NAA 2000).

In addition to a growing collection of Indonesian-sourced literature about East Timor, the National Library of Australia holds a number of private manuscript collections with significant Timor content. These include the papers of prominent pro-independence activist Denis Freney, federal politicians such as Ken Fry, Alan Missen, Neville Bonner and Bill Morrison, and a leading Indonesian studies scholar, Herb Feith.

Also in Canberra, the National Film and Sound Archive has a growing collection of Timor materials, including Clive Scollay's raw footage of immediate post-civil war Dili (1975), recordings of Radio Maubere broadcast from the mountains of Timor by the FRETILIN-led resistance (1976-78) and raw video footage from Timor (1994-2000) by well-known pro-independence activist Dr Andrew McNaughtan.

¹ Bill Armstrong AO, former CEO of Australian Volunteers International, Pat Walsh, long-time internationally recognized advocate on East Timor and special advisor to East Timor's Commission for Reception, Truth & Reconciliation 2001-2010, Assoc. Prof. Michael Leach of Swinburne University and Timor researcher Susana Barnes

²Records younger than 30 years are not yet public; access after 20 years is being phased in between 2010 and 2020 - by which time many records up to 1999 will be available for scrutiny.

The Mitchell Library in Sydney holds the papers of Andrew McNaughtan and some Timor-related records of the Communist Party of Australia. The University of Melbourne Archives has the papers of David Scott and Community Aid Abroad (which also include some early original records of Melbourne's Australia East Timor Association). Jill Jolliffe's large collection of materials accumulated over thirty years of research and writing on Timor is available in microfilm format at a number of Australian libraries.

Private collections in Australia

Of non-government archives about Timor, there are almost certainly more still in private hands than are deposited in public repositories.

CHART has assisted in the preservation and documentation of a range of collections still in private hands. Significant among these are the papers of Senator Gordon McIntosh and the Timor Information Service, the 1975 work of professional photographer Bob Hannan and the especially rich files of the Melbourne-based Australian Council for Overseas Aid Human Rights Office. Some work has been done on the papers of solidarity organisations like Melbourne's Australia East Timor Association and Perth's Friends of East Timor.

The legendary Timor bibliographer and collector, Kevin Sherlock, is an institution in his own right and is a standard reference point for all researchers seeking colonial and post-colonial Timor references and records (CHART 2011). Many other individuals and non-government organisations in Australia are known to have relevant Timor records. CHART is negotiating with a number of these collection holders; others are yet to be approached.

Access in Timor-Leste

Locating and documenting the content of public and private collections in Australia is a relatively easy task. Providing access to these materials in Timor-Leste is much more challenging.

A fundamental assumption underlying providing access in Timor is that it must be done through formal institutions there. *Ad hoc* arrangements through individuals, no matter how committed and able, are too risky to consider in any country, let alone in the fragile environment of Timor-Leste.

Early in the life of CHART, very basic questions arose on how best to identify and choose appropriate receiving institutions. Are there adequately staffed institutions ready to receive such materials? Do they have the expertise and resources to care for fragile items in East Timor's challenging environmental conditions? Is the political, institutional and security environment sufficiently stable to reasonably guarantee the survival and integrity of the materials over the long term?

In the view of most Australian-based collection owners and many East Timorese with whom the author discussed these questions over the past decade, the short answer in the early years of independence was 'not yet'.

Archival institutions in Timor-Leste

After a decade of independence, a number of Timorese archival institutions are evolving. Each has the potential to be a suitable repository for overseas materials. As at 2011, the most significant functioning institutions are the Arquivo Nacional, the library and archive of the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (CAVR), the Resistance Archive and Museum, and the Centro Audio-visual Max Stahl Timor-Leste (CAMS-TL). [Individual foreign words are usually put in italics, but not names of institutions] A fifth significant player on the archival scene is still to emerge; the well-resourced, planned National Library is expected to include archives in its collection development policy.

The Arquivo Nacional holds Portuguese, Indonesian and Timorese government administration records, though access to these materials does not yet appear possible. CAVR has a stunning, unique collection of primary source materials on the experience of Timorese during the 1974-1999 period which, along with the monumental report of its research, *Chega!*, is a virtual Domesday Book of Timorese experience in those years.

The principal holdings of the Resistance Archive and Museum are a vast collection of internal documents of the resistance (particularly since 1980) as well as photographs and other materials gathered from such important external organisations like *Tapol* (UK). Much of this material has been digitised and is available through the internet and stand-alone computers in Dili.

Max Stahl's internationally influential footage of the 1991 Santa Cruz massacre is the centrepiece of the collection at CAMS-TL. The centre also holds other Stahl 1990s footage and film, as well as a growing collection of footage depicting politics and social conditions in independent Timor-Leste, 2002-present.

All these institutions are still in development and their final form remains unclear. CHART has reported on their development since 2003 (see Waddingham 2003; CHART 2009). At the time of writing, the Resistance Archive and Museum appeared to be the best resourced in terms of building infrastructure and access to archival expertise, but is still a work in progress (personal observations, June-July 2011).

Viability and trusted institutions

Whether this multiplicity of archival institutions in Timor-Leste proves viable in the longer term remains to be seen. It will depend in part on whether these institutions can command sufficient resources and earn the trust and active support of their users to create and maintain a long term archival entity and service.

Since 2002, archival institutions have developed largely in isolation from each other. Ultimately this means each will compete for a share of limited resources. Each is more likely to survive if they all seek to cooperate in areas of common interest such as professional training, policy development and delivery systems for archives access.

Each institution already holds significant primary documentary materials. There is anecdotal evidence, however, that many Timorese still hold important historical materials privately because they don't sufficiently trust the institutions to receive these items. Building trust in the archival institutions will take time. Hopefully these emerging institutions will seek to understand the sources of this mistrust within Timor-Leste and address those concerns where possible.

The conditions required to build trust are well established in international archival practice. In the words of a recent writer:

The act of acquiring and preserving archives is a service that must be performed in an accountable and structured fashion, with respect not only for the archival materials but also for the individuals and groups that created them and the people who may wish to access them, now and into the future...

The archivist...makes available archives so that society can always turn to a trusted source of authentic and reliable documentary evidence in order to substantiate claims, prove assertions, share memories and foster a sense of identity (Miller 2010, 45-46).

The adoption of Timor-suitable transparent policies and procedures to implement such ideals will go a long way to building trust in its archival institutions.

Digitisation: an interim solution

Until the archival institutions in Timor-Leste become more settled, along with the security, political and legal environment in which those institutions operate, the consignment of original materials to Timor-Leste remains somewhat risky.

It is also unclear how much original material from Australia and elsewhere will be offered to Timorese institutions anyway. Collections already consigned to Australian public repositories will be retained there. Significant privately-held collections documenting the Timor work of Australian individuals and non-government organisations may more properly be held in Australia for the long-term. It remains to be seen which path collection owners will take in deciding the long-term disposition of their materials.

These uncertainties, which will be problematic for Timor-based researchers seeking access to important materials in Australia, may be long-lasting. To overcome this problem, CHART has decided to initiate a program to copy some Australia-held Timor materials for more immediate access in Timor-Leste.

Direct access to original documents in their original context of creation or collection is critical to primary research. Digital surrogates can suffice for research if the integrity of the copies can be

assured and sufficient information is provided with them to attest to the authenticity, origins and context of the original.

CHART will digitise extensive selections of primary source materials, with an initial focus on privately-owned materials under its management. Initial pilot projects have included the digitisation of the 1975 post-civil war images of Bob Hannan, independence advocacy newsletters like East Timor News (1977-1985) and Timor Information Service (1975-1983) and the Australia East Timor Association's weekly radio program East Timor Calling (Melbourne, 1977-1981).

In addition to making these digital materials available on the internet, CHART is seeking agreements with existing Timorese archival institutions to receive these digital materials for Timorese researcher access through stand-alone computers in Dili.

This program is a work in progress and the year 2012 will be critical to determining whether the project will succeed. Sufficient funding will have to be found to fund equipment, staff and access to archival and other expertise. Emerging relationships between CHART and Australian collection-holders as well as institutions and key individuals in Timor-Leste will need nurturing and consolidation. Decisions will need to be made, in consultation with collection owners in Australia and receiving institutions in Timor-Leste, on priority targets for digitisation. Details of the developing project and its digital output will continue to be published on the CHART website.³

Access to public collections

CHART digitisation of privately-held materials in Australia is relatively straightforward. Getting copies to Timor of materials already in Australian repositories may prove more complex.

Australian archival institutions are legally bound by very strict and restrictive copyright laws, making wholesale copying of collections problematic. In future years, it may be possible for Timorese institutions to seek copies of collections from Australian repositories under certain conditions.

In the meantime, it may be possible to negotiate copying of materials created by individual copyright owners. CHART envisages assisting Timorese repositories in any future negotiations with Australian repositories on this issue.

Conclusion

Time will tell whether the emerging CHART model proves successful in its aim to provide access in Timor-Leste to important historical materials. The early indications are promising.

There is also a very strong case for pursuing similar aims in other countries holding significant Timor records – especially in Portugal and Indonesia but many other places as well. Such work is beyond the resources and capabilities of CHART, but hopefully will be taken up by Timorese and committed individuals and institutions in those countries.

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