

Abstract (Englisch)

The research on 'Psycho-social Reconstruction in East Timor' took its starting point in the year 1999, when after 450 years of Portuguese rule and 24 years of Indonesian occupation, the small peninsula on the edge of Melanesia finally gained its independence through a referendum arranged by the United Nations. As a consequence of the East Timor conflict throughout the years of 1975 to 1999, between 102.800 and 183.000 people died. After a further wave of violence in 1999 a quarter of the population (currently 942.642 people) became refugees or were internally displaced; later, 34% of the population suffered from symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder. Nevertheless, what had been systematically 'deconstructed' over decades, was reconstructed '*Out of the Ashes*' in the following years.

During an extended fieldwork period in East Timor between 2002 and 2005, processes of psychosocial reconstruction were analysed, which are understandable only with regard to concepts of 'person' and 'intervention'.

It emerged that three dimensions are most important in determining everyday life, as well as the reconstruction of its social networks and systems of meaning: first, tradition (similar to *kastom* in PNG), second, modern influences (e.g. impacts of globalisation, even on local communities) and third, Catholicism (which dates back as early as early as 16th century, when Portuguese missionaries arrived in East Timor).

An emic account of the still highly relevant traditional concepts, for example *lia moris* (life affairs) and *lia mate* (death affairs), are presented in detail. Based on this world-view one can understand how East Timorese succeed in regaining a sense of primal condition and healing, particularly through the reconstruction of their *uma lulik* (sacred houses) and via the translocation of bones from their ancestors to their places of origin. The research documents the reconstruction of sacred houses in the central regions, which constitute a form of indigenous group therapy that re-establishes harmony between the living and the dead (ancestors).

A second effect on the lives of East Timorese is marked by the influences of modern education, media, communication and information technologies, as well as the presence of *malae* (foreigners – especially the employees of the United Nations Transitional Administration and foreign aid agencies). The transformation of the capital Dili is shaped by various interventions of international organisations. Workshops on psychotrauma are discussed as an example for identity reconstruction. On the basis of a survey of all existing psycho-social programs, their underlying principles for reconstruction (as well as their side-effects) are identified and described with regard to their psycho-traumatological implications. In this context the integration of traditional, economical and religious aspects proved to be contextually appropriate and necessary.

A third factor of reconstruction included the impact of the influential Catholic Church. Over 400 sisters and priests are involved in socio-pastoral and quasi-political work in East Timor. They contribute particularly to the reconstruction of the educational sector. However, these psychosocial processes do not take place without disruptions and resistances. Old, as well as new experiences with violence, fears, self-concepts and stereotypes (for example regarding the *firaku* – inhabitants of the east – and the *kaladi* – inhabitants of the west) need to be renegotiated within the strained relationship between tradition, modernity and Catholicism.

In order to explore the identity construction, a new action-research-method was developed in collaboration with a team of young East-Timorese researchers. In these *Stoneman*-experiments even illiterate subjects could build self-representations with specifically coloured stones. With the simple method it was possible to investigate the traditional, modern and Catholic (and later on Portuguese, Indonesian and Australian) self-images of 283 subjects. It turned out that East-Timorese perceive themselves as much more modern than expected and less Portuguese than postulated by their social elites.

In addition to these field experiments, participant observation and discussions with various *lia-na'in* (ritual specialists), modern politicians, bishops and most of all *just plain folks* (jpf) have been carried out. 105 case studies, ethno-psychological field experiments and narratives on their reconstruction efforts of more than hundred informants have formed the basis of this ethnography.