Introduction
Performing modernities[1]

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> "The civilizing mission was above all a pedagogic crusade."
> (Camaroff and Camaroff 1997, 412)

This book is a collection of essays derived from research attempting to cast light on how projects of modern cosmologies, social arrangements and persons have been transposed, produced, enacted and subverted in Timor-Leste. The research began in 2002 when Daniel Simião and I first arrived in Dili to carry out fieldwork for our PhD theses, published approximately a decade later − Silva (2012) and Simião (2015). The research benefitted from a series of Brazilian government grants from 2007, including a program funded by the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES, Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel), which supported academic exchanges between Universidade de Brasília and Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e (UNTL) between 2014 and 2018.[3] Through this program, eleven Brazilian graduate and undergraduate students undertook fieldwork in Timor-Leste and five undergraduate East Timorese students received training in social sciences research techniques at the University of Brasilia. This book brings some of the results of such efforts to a global audience.

The way we devised the research agenda was not a priori in the sanitised spaces of laboratories: negotiation took place in multiple arenas between diverse agents. In these processes my training as an anthropologist in Brazil, where classic monographies sit alongside a major interest in the Brazilian national society,[4] and our East Timorese interlocutors' concerns and anxieties for improving the lives of their fellow people (whatever it may mean) have played an important role. How our interlocutors managed and made sense of the multiple, complex and composited institutional settings in which they live – a characteristic of good ethnographies – is a generative fact in the resulting analyses.

The introduction shares the main categories, assumptions and methodologies framing our team's work, as well as some of our findings. By making explicit our understandings of categories, such as modernity, *kultura*, technologies and pedagogies, I also explore what the idea of performing modernities entails. The mutual feedback between methodology, research practices and theory – what we might say is a dialectical perspective – has inspired all our efforts. In short, we acknowledge that our and our interlocutors' categories, narratives and ways of acting in the world (their agency) are historical products of multiple conversations. In light of these considerations, I introduce the contents of the chapters that follow.

The Janus faces of modernity

Two ways of understanding modernity frame the research agenda developed in this book. The first is modernity as an analytical and ethical category, and the second, modernity as an emic and empirical idea. Regarding the first, Charles Taylor's definition of modernity aptly synthetizes the historical and moral references evoked by such a concept, which is immanent in the following chapters. He said modernity entails:

> A historically unprecedented amalgam of new practices and institutional forms (science, technology, industrial production, urbanization), of new ways of living (individualism, secularization, instrumental rationality), and

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4. For a discussion, see Silva and Simião 2012.

of new forms of malaise (alienation, meaninglessness, a sense of impending social dissolution) (2002).

Since Max Weber's work, literature of diverse origins and from different disciplines has highlighted the elective affinities between the development of the moral and functional configurations we now recognize as modernity, capitalism and market society. Despite my own criticism of making history by analogy (Mamdani 1998) or retrospective determinism (Bendix 1977), it seems to me undeniable that the quest for development in Timor-Leste today is, by and large, the quest for building a market society.[5] Notable is that only a few authors have adopted the same perspective (for instance, Bovensiepen and Yoder [2018] and Bovensiepen 2019).

To consider the mechanisms by which market societies have been built in different places and times may help us better understand what is happening in Timor-Leste today. Of course, this is a long-running process that dates from at least the end of the 19th century, when de facto colonial governance expanded across Portuguese Timor. Bearing this in mind, the various phenomena discussed in this book are but brief moments in continuing processes of longue durée development.

The replacement of interdependency networks via multiple governance procedures and the separation of labor from other activities of moral and material reproduction (utmost in importance was the commodification of land, human labor and money) are at the core of the rationale Polanyi (2000) described in relation to the making of a market economy in 17th- and 18th-century England. Framing such a replacement was a process of separation (Dumont 1977; 2000) and purification (Latour 2009), attempting to make the economy an autonomous and dominant realm of social action prioritized over politics, justice and religion, etc. In that context, the economy was cultivated as an alternate version of nature, with an

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5. The idea of modernity functions in this book more as an ideal type or a floating signifier than an empirical experience. Often modernity makes itself apparent in particular and unforeseen ways. For instance, for some time now in Timor-Leste there are attempts at modernization without industrialization or secularization. The following chapters discuss some of the configurations that emerge from these facts.

exclusive and independent set of rules, from which making profit for a few was to become the main aim of society.

As time went by, an illusion of independence and separation between economy and politics, public and domestic realms, nature and culture, individual and society, object and subject, fact and representation, tradition and modernity, for instance, came to be enforced and advertised as moral values which marked the supposedly superior position of western societies before others, be they glossed as non-civilized, eastern, indigenous, etc. The disenchantment of the world and the monopolization of the capacity to act over it (that is, the idea of agency only for humans) were also central in this project (Keane 2007).

In summary, the construction of dissociations has been the bedrock of market-society projects and economies, and underpins the phenomena we call modernity (Latour 2009). Unveiling the pedagogies and technologies by which such a worldview has been produced in Timor-Leste is fundamental to the chapters comprising this book. I return to that issue later.

Similar to other historical experiences, many institutions and agents have participated in making a modern and market society in Timor-Leste. The Catholic Church, the Portuguese State, the Indonesian State, the Timor-Leste State, the United Nations, as well as international and local non-governmental organizations, Protestant missionaries and *kultura* (see below) are but a few of them. Through these institutions and organizations a number of new non-human agents were introduced to or enforced on the people of Timor-Leste: a Christian god, scientific epistemology, languages of western origin, writing, media, new technologies of production, new administrative techniques, etc. So, the building of modern institutions and subjectivities in Timor-Leste has been a multi-institutional and multi-ontological endeavor or, using Lattas' and Rio's (2011) terminology, an assemblage of powers and entities. In this book we try to make explicit some of these powers and entities as well as the way they have become entangled in certain dynamics particular to Timor-Leste.[6]

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6. An alternative way to make sense of the actions and effects of that assemblage of powers and entities in Timor-Leste is to present them as agents of globalization.

The search for the how, where and why involved in the transpositions of modernity in Timor-Leste leads us to discover its distinctive characteristic − *modernity* as a political mover to which people resort to produce difference, social stratification or even moral exclusion.[7] In this context, Webb Keane's work has been extremely useful in deepening the understanding of the social life of modernity. In particular, his proposition that we look at modernity as a moral narrative:

> 'an ideological formation in terms of which societies valorise their own practices by the contrast to the spectre of barbarism and other marks of negation.' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997, 32) Modernity is as much a story people tell about their own past as about others … the narrative often has a normative, even moralist, thrust to it. … (I)t includes a moral narrative about human liberation (Keane 2007, 48, 51).

On the basis of such a perspective, discourses about and performances of modernity and modernization are the means by which people voice and build what they consider desirable and abject, good and bad, happy and sad, fair and unfair, reasonable and unreasonable, rational or irrational, etc. In these uses, modernity is a floating signifier whose meaning is negotiated in each particular context.

Attention to the social life of concepts related to and derived from modernity has been essential for us as anthropologists. Such a procedure allows us a glimpse of the main means by which people make comparisons and interpret changes in their lives, and produce themselves in dialogue with those they consider others. As in various scenarios belatedly colonized by European countries, we see in Timor-Leste an association of modernity with urban spaces standing against the idea of *kultura* and its perceived typical location, the *foho* (rural areas) (Silva 2011).

However, I consciously chose to frame the debate with reference to the idea of modernization or modernity, as it is a more precise analytical tool. We can think about globalization as an effect of modernization.

7. The fact that modernity (and modern/modernization) is also an empirical and political category points to how important scientific imaginaries and vocabularies have become in the construction of the world we live in.

Kultura and modernity in a post-abyssal moment?

In previous work I discussed the genealogy and social life of *kultura* and its synonyms – *adat* (Indonesian), tradition, *lisan* (Tetum) and *usos e costumes* (Portuguese) – in urban Timor-Leste today and in its colonial past (Silva 2012; 2018; Silva and Simião 2012; 2017). I highlight not only that *kultura* has a colonial origin, but that the related phenomena have been continuously reshaped in response to diverse interests. We are thus obliged to hold in suspension any ahistorical assumption we may have regarding the divide between *kultura* and modernity. In fact the way that *kultura* has been used for colonial and postcolonial governance is a recent invention. Keeping this in mind is useful to understand some developments in contemporary Timor-Leste's public spaces.

Using *kultura* for administrative purposes and its further internalization in common parlance have made it a tool to describe and govern heterogeneous people and their particular ways of life, vis-à-vis an idealized image of a Western or European world – one that is considered modern. In this process, a moral hierarchy between the forms of life predicated on each of these two categories was established to associate *kultura* and tradition with negative and inferior connotations, and modernity and civilization with positive and superior values. Additionally, *kultura* was associated with rural and highland (foho) landscapes whereas modernity was linked with urban places (Silva 2011), as referred to earlier.[8] As the following chapters suggest, the opposition between *kultura* and *modernity* is still central to the way different governance agents make sense of various social-change projects and of the efforts to turn projects into individual and collective realities. For instance, in terms of public policy, the issues of domestic violence and gender inequality are often taken as manifestations of *kultura*, as well as what is interpreted

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8. In Silva (2012a, 92) I proposed that such a divide is reinforced by the development industry and that it generates a misrecognition effect, that is, "sentiments of moral exclusion that emerge among populations targeted for development projects, as a result of the systematic assertion that one or several elements of their ways of life are inadequate when compared to narratives of good living conveyed by development agents and agencies" (and by many town dwellers).

as unfair methods of local conflict resolution. In many contexts, whatever is termed *kultura* is taken as a subject of governance to be domesticated in order to free people from poverty, injustice, backwardness and ignorance (Silva and Simião 2017a).

However, by changing the scale and context of analysis – moving out of modernity-driven governance institutions − another pattern of the *kultura*-and-modernity relationship emerges. For most East Timorese people, there are few ways to succeed in life today without paying respect to *kultura* institutions and obligations. Broadly speaking, *kultura* institutions entail responding to gift-giving obligations, taking part in a number of life-cycle rituals where ancestors and other mystical entities are honored, respecting precedence relations in terms of house membership, age, gender, among other phenomena. This trend is hardly a novelty in Timor-Leste studies. Works by Fidalgo Castro (2015), Bovensiepen (2015), Palmer (2015), Scambary (2019) and others have explored such facts in different contexts. In this book, a mutual cooperation between *kultura* and modern institutions is also present across the chapters.

What seems relatively new in Timor-Leste today is that some institutions promoting modernity as the target of social change are themselves explicitly resorting to *kultura* to reach their objectives, be it promoting the State judicial system, gender equality, economic empowerment, land registration, education or even the formation of the State. We are perhaps at a post-abyssal moment in Timor-Leste in which the divergence between what has been labelled, on one hand, as local, traditional, *kultura* or rural dwellers' practices and, on the another hand, as global, modern, urban and civilized, are no longer in strict opposition (Sousa Santos 2007). Many State- and Dili-based institutions now rely on the reduced duality to extend their modernity-driven governance projects.[9]

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9. My hypothesis that we may be at a post-abyssal moment regarding the relationship between *kultura* and modern institutions is inspired by Sousa Santos (2007). His writing analyzed the abyssal character of Western hegemonic epistemology, which claims for itself the monopoly on truth and disregards other systems of knowledge, and Bruno Latour's (2009) critique on modern scientific endeavors framed by anxieties of rupture and separation between what is considered nature and culture, justice and politics, knowledge and power, etc.

Most chapters in this book follow this newer understanding and give it ethnographic density. For instance, Rocha's chapter demonstrates how attempts to take the State justice system closer to the foho people by using mobile courts recognized local conflict-resolution moralities, technologies and agreements. In most of the cases Rocha documented the mobile court's decisions consisted of replicating outcomes already settled in traditional conflict-resolution institutions or the withdrawal of complaints closed the process, including in cases of public offenses (public crimes) when processes should not be suspended, according to the law.

Oviedo's work describes how the National Directorate of Land and Property office in Ermera also used local conflict-resolution institutions and moralities. In postcolonial Timor-Leste, the registration of land has mainly been conducted in cases free of dispute. Where conflict about land rights occurs, the State promotes mediation based on local moralities and authorities. In these procedures, gift-giving obligations between wife-takers and wife-givers are often mobilized, both as the reason triggering the conflict as well as a way to resolve it. Oviedo suggests that *kultura* somehow pacifies the land-registration process. In other words, it seems that the delivery of land title − a fundamental step in any State formation – has been marked by *kultura* institutions.

Efforts to diversify the Timor-Leste economy and enhance rural people's access to cash have led various governance institutions to explore certain dimensions of *kultura* as an asset for producing particular commodities. Such phenomena are the focus of two chapters which consider the ramifications of artifact production, circulation and consumption for the tourism market. Both analyses address the commodification of *kultura*. Whereas Silva and Oliveira focus on the pedagogical practices structuring NGO Empreza Di'ak's management of artifacts in Atauro, the chapter by Silva, Ferreira and Gosaves draws attention to the strategies and scenarios of fair-trade dynamics in Timor-Leste.

Most importantly, both chapters explore the impacts of Christianization on the way different people and institutions have rescued, managed or reshaped local knowledge. As such, the relations between *kultura* and Christianity are a focus. From fieldwork undertaken in different Atauro villages Silva and

Oliveira argue that the different governance practices applied to turn certain artifacts into commodities in Makili, on one hand, and Arlo, on the other, may be due to diverse trajectories of people's adherence to Christian churches. One hypothesis is that Makili people's adherence to Catholicism has somehow made it easier to involve people in market production. This is because Catholic Christianity in Makili did not insist on the relinquishing of local knowledge involved in carving statues and other objects, a practice which is accorded mystical value. The vitality of local knowledge facilitates the production of carvings as cultural commodities for tourist consumption. Conversely, the Arlo residents' stronger adherence to Pentecostal Christianity (Assemblies of God) brought about the loss of much local knowledge related to local institutions. This is because Protestant denominations used to be much less tolerant of the reproduction and co-existence of local intuitions and Christianity. As a consequence, reviving local knowledge for the production of cultural commodities in Arlo required much more investment from Empreza Di'ak.

Protestant intolerance towards local knowledge and supernatural entities seems to condition the profile of some commodities produced with their support. By observing differences in the way Timorese *kultura* was managed to help forge a fair-trade niche in Dili, the Silva, Ferreira and Gosaves' chapter points to the fact that, occasionally, cultural commodities produced under the governance of some Protestant projects gave a negative portrait of local ways of life and chose to make goods that had little connection with what was perceived as *kultura*. However, most of the tactics used by governance agents to increase the participation of East Timorese people in the monetized and market economy have turned *kultura* in an asset.

Kultura is also an asset to reproduce leadership in both local and state institutional and moral orders. Fernandes' chapter conducts a complex analysis of the mutual parasitism (Roque 2010) between *kultura* and State institutions in postcolonial Oecusse. By means of an ethnography of a school's activities in the Usitasae hamlet of Puni, Fernandes describes how elite houses – glossed as *estrutura kultura Usitasae* – took advantage of the school apparatus – high-ranking civil servant positions, waged labor, school festivities, the exam

calendar – to reproduce their leadership in the village and the classificatory system which granted them superior positions. At the same time, the author suggests that the State was dependent on local elites to reinforce its position. State ideologies and institutions reached local people by the mediations of local and regional elites who maintained their privileged position because they acted as mediators. The capacity to act as a mediator derived from the fact that the elites were well trained and empowered in dealing with both the State and the *kultura* institutions: to translate between these two moral orders was a fundamental part of their role as mediators. In Ingold's (2000) words, such people are elite because they master and combine assorted skills and social capital from different sources. However, if the mutual parasitism between *kultura* and the State institutions continues, Fernandes is skeptical about how long the relationship will last. The search for higher levels of schooling forces the young to leave their villages of origin, moving to larger towns with high schools where they are compelled to develop new relationships with distant kin or non-kin. Thus, they engage in new networks of solidarity which, sooner or later, may affect their commitments to their people and places of origin.

Santos Filho's chapter also offers thoughts on the dynamics of replacing solidarity networks and interdependency. His ethnography about the profile of services FOKUPERS (*Forum Komunikasaun ba Feto Timor Lorosa'e*) provided for domestic-violence survivors, especially those admitted to its shelters, points to the fact that these women accessed the services because they had become detached from the wider kinship networks supporting individuals in Timor-Leste. In other words, the women's kin relationships and the obligations they entail had broken before or at the very moment they asked for help in modernity-driven institutions. Such findings resonate with those proposed by Sardan (2005) and Ferguson (1994), and others about the profile of people who first become entangled in development projects and discourses. These are people who are in vulnerable positions in local prestige hierarchies.

It is clear that different kinds of co-habitation between *kultura* and modernity institutional and moral orders occur across Timor-Leste today (Viegas and Feijó 2017). But how the co-existence is

structured in particular contexts and how such categories are reshaped in this interplay require deeper discussions. It seems to me that what may be, in some cases, a mutual parasitism between *kultura* and modernity will be – or has already – turned into a predatory relationship at the expense of *kultura*. In Silva (2014) I indicated how colonial and postcolonial states use *kultura*, synonymous with local power institutions, to promote integration and monopolization of power by the State. Also, various agents have imposed and expanded modern practices and projects of social organization and subjectivation via *kultura* or in dialogue with it, mobilizing different technologies and pedagogies to that end.

Technologies and pedagogies of governance in the making of contemporary Timor-Leste

By searching for a new way to make sense of cultural differences, Ingold suggested that we think about it in terms of a difference of skills. His perspective of skills is wide and inclusive:

> the capabilities of action and perception of the whole organic being (indissolubly mind and body) situated in a richly structured environment. As properties of human organisms, skills are thus as much biological as cultural. Secondly, and stemming from the above, becoming skilled in the practice of a certain form of life is not a matter of furnishing a set of generalised capacities, given from the start as compartments of a universal human nature, with specific cultural content. Skills are not transmitted from generation to generation but are regrown in each, incorporated into the modus operandi of the developing human organism through training and experience in the performance of particular tasks. Hence, thirdly, the study of skills demands a perspective which situates the practitioner, right from the start, in the context of an active engagement with the constituents of his or her surroundings. I call this the 'dwelling perspective' (Ingold 2000, 4).

Capacity-building projects have been one of the hallmarks of development actions in postcolonial Timor-Leste. In various scenarios skills development is just another way to talk about modernization. Capacity-building initiatives have transferred enormous amounts of human, technological and financial resources to the country, generating endless controversies and effects (Silva 2012). As such, Ingold's epistemological framing

seems potent for anyone interested in understanding an array of diverse phenomena in the country.

Following Ingold's proposal, I assume that performing modernities is how global and local modernities have been made in Timor-Leste. In Silva (2012) I anticipated a similar rationale when demonstrating that, since 2002, State building in Timor-Leste has involved enacting tasks considered typical of contemporary States, such as data production, maps, planning and indicators on a national scale. All of these procedures have allowed people to imagine and manage the new nation, as similar past procedures allowed colonial empires to come into existence (Mitchell 2002) As researchers we are also included in this process. We are performing modernities by embracing epistemological projects whereby we search for how individual agency and structural frames act together in shaping the world we live in.

All of this entails bringing to life and making use of institutions, technologies and ways of acting and perceiving the self and the world classified as modern, as well as the moral narratives which valued them over those considered local. In such processes, in Timor-Leste and elsewhere, although in diverse intensities, proposals of rationalization overlap growing individualism, urbanization, which, in turn, intersect prospects of secularization, aspiration of material improvement, etc. Many of the chapters in this book cast light on the technologies and pedagogies whereby such modernities have been enacted, taught, learned, spread, in sum, performed in Timor-Leste.

Laws, public policies, systems of knowledge, moral orders, disciplinary mechanisms, security devices (Foucault 2008), roads (Elias 1972), writing (Goody 1986), linguistic homogenization, media (Anderson 1989), fantasies of development and the very category of *kultura* (Silva and Simião 2012) are some instances of governance technologies, the performance of which have played fundamental roles in shaping modernity, and Timor-Leste is no exception. As Sautchuk (2018) stated, "technologies are means which mold and allow interaction between humans with something that, to some extent, differs from themselves". In other words, technologies allow particular kinds of relationships which accord (or not) with certain political and cosmological ends.

Importantly, certain technologies produce the very subjects they pose in relation, a topic included in the chapters of the book.

In industrial societies some of these technologies are so prosaic that they risk going unnoticed by the analyst. However, the micro-analysis that characterizes ethnography prevents us from ignoring their effects in transforming collective life in Timor-Leste. As an example, Fernandes's chapter considers how a school-event calendar and the changes people make to daily life in order to allow children to go to school end up affecting the way students see and act in the world. Fernandes approaches rituals as technologies of communication which produce multiple effects, reflecting the teachings of Leach (1966) and Tambiah (1985).

Silva and Oliveira's chapter, in turn, explores the techniques Empreza Di'ak applies to transform artifacts into commodities in Atauro production groups. Selecting, classifying and codifying artefacts as well as the guaranteed purchase of local products are thus fundamental to turning certain objects into commodities. In conjunction with the Silva, Ferreira and Gosaves chapter, the analysis of fair trade labels, folders and stores shows they are technologies of mediation essential in the fabrication of fair-trade commodities by connecting the spheres of exchange and production, by predicating the purchase of commodities on the supply of gifts, by connecting global markets to local production, by inscribing the act of purchasing as a way of doing justice and politics. In fact, these chapters call attention to the role of material and immaterial mediations in performing modernities in Timor-Leste.

Santos Filho's and Rocha's respective chapters describe performance, in the sense of acting, as a technology used to create modernities in the country. Both of these chapters discuss strategies used by governmental and non-governmental institutions to familiarize people with the State justice apparatus. Santos Filho argues that drama is a key pedagogical procedure. By drama, he means individual rehearsals prior to magistrate hearings in which FOKUPERS staff instructed domestic-violence survivors they were supporting on how to behave in court and who is who in the process (prosecutor, public defender, etc.). In addition, the provision of transport, food, shelter, and other basic needs for domestic-violence survivors – all of them technologies – are

essential in the NGO's care and justice work. Inspired by the idea of economic pedagogy (Silva 2017), Santos Filho proposes the category of legal pedagogies to make sense of FOKUPERS's procedures for teaching basic legal knowledge and state justice modus operandi.

In his chapter analysing mobile courts, Rocha demonstrates that the performance of trials in villages is also a pedagogy and technology by which national and international institutions attempted to expand the State justice apparatus in the hinterlands, teaching people what a court is and how to behave when there, and who is who in it. During the hearings and trials, the presence of people not involved in the cases was not only welcome but encouraged. This is because presenting the trials is itself a pedagogical device to make people more familiar with State institutions

Nogueira da Silva's and Fidalgo Castro's chapters demonstrate how individuals mobilized the institutions of *kultura* as technologies to generate phenomena associated with modernity. Fidalgo Castro indicates how one of his female interlocutors in Faulara, Liquiça, applied a practice considered *lulik*[10] – placing packed clothes and personal things on the family veranda – to force one of her siblings to treat her properly. By doing so she communicated to her brother and other family members that her relationship with him was at risk and, as a consequence, her brother may have stopped receiving the obligatory gifts from her husband, as a wife/fertility taker. In other words, she mobilized *kultura* to empower herself within her family of origin.

Finally, Nogueira da Silva's analysis of visits university teachers made to their hamlets of origin, and the enactment of sacrifices which followed, indicates that these were acts to *open the way* as much as to allow them to succeed in life. They believed there was no other way of attaining a good life than to maintain communication with the ancestors. It entailed reporting their major life achievements as well as asking for their ancestors' help to be successful in other endeavors. It is important to note that Nogueira da Silva's discussion reminds us of the complementary roles

10. In the chapter's context, *lulik* refers to an extraordinary order of action which cannot be easily controlled by humans.

performed by institutions associated with *foho*, on one hand, and town, on the other, in contemporary Timor-Leste, from the point of view of Dili dwellers. For them a social division between *foho* and town appears to exist. Whereas foho provides mystical services, Dili provides material resources through which the flow of life continues.

Development and change

So much has been said about development in Timor-Leste and elsewhere that the word is becoming devoid of meaning. But, in one way or another, development stimulates change, for better or for worse. It goes without saying that any kind of change implies continuity, as Sahlins (1990) taught some decades ago. Given that, I conclude this introduction by summarizing some changes and accommodations in Timor-Leste's social dynamics suggested in the following chapters.

A number of chapters reveal changes in people's lives caused by modern (state-centered or otherwise) governance apparatus. For instance, Fernandes uncovers his interlocutors' resentment about *povo* houses – some members of which were merchants – winning positions in local Usitassai elections, as it implied the weakening of certain houses' power in the *suku*. The merchants' success was the result of their business enterprises, owning trucks and other means of transport, and the shops on which people grew dependent for everyday reproduction.

Santos Filho's and Rocha's chapters present transformations in negotiating life in Timor-Leste. The backlog of judicial cases in the courts – a reason to legitimate the need for mobile courts – and FOKUPERS' procedures to help domestic-violence survivors point to the fact that people were appealing to new modes of negotiation, new mediators for solving conflicts and defending their interests. As another research has identified, awareness surrounding the large numbers of domestic-violence cases in the country is also an indicator of change: it reveals a rising morality which considers domestic violence unacceptable (Simião 2015). Importantly, the weakening or rupture of kin relations and of the mutual-care obligations they entail are trends towards modernization in various places in the world, and Timor-Leste is no exception (Comaroff and

Comaroff 1997). Santos Filho shows us how such a fact marks the trajectory of women in FOKUPERS's shelters.

Nogueira da Silva's chapter approaches transformations in the social life of *kultura* by discussing the reasons why elite people resort to their ancestors and houses to succeed in modern life. The chapter depicts an enlargement in the nature of the house's functions, and its supernatural entities are summoned to help in academic labors. Here is an instance of accommodation and interaction between local and modernity-driven institutions, between supernatural and secular investments.

Last, but not least, I am not supporting any meta-narrative, either of change or continuity. Instead, I suggest that change and continuity exist in a dialectical interplay, as Sahlins proposed in 1990. If the role of social scientists researching in and about Timor-Leste is to unveil the complex ways diverse forms of life and agency are being conceived, reproduced and reinvented, we still have much to learn from resilient people in an amazing country.

Disclaimer

Although published in English, the articles comprising this book were written by professionals trained in Latin countries. Such a fact entails a particular way of conceiving an article which cannot be translated, or better, reduced to an Anglo-Saxon model without incurring epistemic violence.

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