Using *kultura* in self-defense: A case study of female empowerment at the household level in a Liquiçá hamlet[1]

Alberto Fidalgo Castro[2]

This chapter considers the use of mechanisms in an extended family in Faulara, a small *aldeia* (hamlet) in Liquiçá, to gain and redistribute power at the household level. I demonstrate the concept through a case study in which I analyze the events that occurred during a family gathering for a Catholic ritual (All Souls' Day) in December, 2010.

After a brief presentation of Faulara's ethnographic context, I examine how a female family member creates an empowerment strategy. She does this by including non-human entities as well as the implicit rights and duties that go along with social relations, in order to reverse the impacts of an emotive situation.

The main objective of the chapter is to demonstrate how particular social actors empower themselves through the use of whichever appropriate cultural and social means they can access. This serves as a partial response to certain observers' knowledge that places the blame for gender inequality on *kultura* − local beliefs or traditions − and that it is unable to manage these types of social problems. Some of those discourses propose that introducing modern institutions, practices and mind-sets into the lives of Timorese people would serve as a better means to solve problems.

The ethnographic setting

Faulara is the name used by the inhabitants of the municipality of Liquiçá to refer to the aldeia of Lepa. It is located on an alluvial

1 DOI: 10.48006/978-65-87289-07-6.199-222.

2. Postdoctoral research fellow (PNPD/CAPES) at the Department of Anthropology of the University of Brasilia. Email: albertofidalgo@unb.br

plain formed by the downstream area of the Laueli River (a tributary of the Loes River), in the only non-mountainous part of the *suku* (village) of Leotelá in Liquiçá, north-west Timor-Leste.

The inhabitants of Faulara are mainly farmers, with only a few formal remunerated jobs, consisting of primary school teachers and agricultural extension workers. The settlement is in an important area for agricultural production. It is one of the few places in the municipality where wet-rice production occurs, due to the permanent source of water from the Laueli River. Corn and cassava are the other two staple foods grown in the village. Fruits are mostly grown as cash crops which, along with some timber production, provide a source of income for the households. Livestock rearing (cattle, poultry, pigs and goats) also takes place. Animals can be used as a source of income when a household faces financial or food supply problems, but they are mainly kept for special occasions and important ritual events during the life cycle of the household (marriages, deaths and other rituals).

Faulara has experienced a number of migration processes under different state regimes. Since independence in 2002, the outflow of people seems to be directed towards Dili, the capital city, as is the case in many other rural areas of the country (GDS and UNFPA 2011). The remaining dwellers are a mixture of native inhabitants and migrants who settled during different times and from various origins, both socially and geographically. Almost all of them were resettled (many by force) as laborers for the agricultural industry. However, some of them, pertaining to families well-positioned in the Portuguese administration, were resettled by the colonial rulers as political administrators.

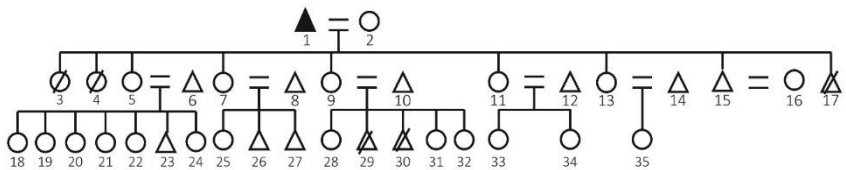
Most of the hamlet's 824 inhabitants, distributed across 128 households (GDS and UNFPA 2011), arrived in Faulara between 1996 and 1997, with the official opening of a transmigration settlement created the final years of the Indonesian regime (CAVR 2005, 116-17). Most were 'local transmigrants' from the Liquiçá municipality.[3] The second most important group are the descendants of the Búnak-speaking people from the Bobonaro

3. *Alokasi Penempatan Penduduk Daerah Transmigrasi* (APPDT, Population Placement Allocation of Transmigration Districts) in Indonesian (Otten 1986).

municipality, who claim to have come to Liquiçá long ago for a different set of reasons: as traders around the Portuguese colonial military post of Boebau, established in 1896, having been forcibly moved by the Japanese during World War II, and to work as laborers in the fields of the Portuguese company SAPT (*Sociedade Agrícola Pátria e Trabalho*, Society of Homeland Agriculture and Labor) in the late 1960s. A small minority of settlers claim to be originally from a handful of the country's other municipalities. Due to this heterogeneous population, the language spoken in Faulara is normally Tetun (one of two national languages), but other local languages, such as Tokodede (the native language of the area), Mambai or even Búnak are used. Indonesian is widely known, and Portuguese is understood by social elites but only fluently spoken by a handful of people.

Salustião's and Losita's household in Faulara

Figure 1: Salustião's and Losita's descendants



1. Salustião da Silva Martins. Ego
2. Losita da Silva (W)
3. Fernanda (D)
4. Filomena (D)
5. Sebastiana da Silva (D)
6. Emilio Pereira (DH)
7. Aida da Silva (D)
8. Angelino dos Santos da Costa (DH)
9. Ricardina da Silva (D)
10. Armindo Freitas (DH)
11. Celsia da Silva (D)
12. Carlito de Deus (DH)
13. Lisonia da Silva (D)
14. Antonio dos Santos Freitas (DH)
15. Sonifansio da Silva (S)
19. Alotu (DD)
20. María (DD)
21. Misi (DD)
22. Koemali (DD)
23. Anó (DS)
24. Nona (DD)
25. Anoi (DD)
26. Nuno (DS)
27. Ameta (DS)
28. Celia da Silva Freitas (DD)
29. Longuinos Freitas (DS)
30. Anó (DS)
31. Leticia da Silva Freitas (DD)
32. Odete (DD)
33. María da Silva de Deus (DD)

16. Elisa de Jesús Ximenes (SW)
17. Loudinos da Silva (S)
18. Ali (DD)
34. Celsia da Silva de Deus (DD)
35. Milena da Silva Freitas (DD)

Salustião (number 1 in Figure 1) is the son of Bunak-speaking people from Bobonaro who established themselves in Liquiçá (*posto* Boebau) to work as laborers for SAPT. Before the 1975 Indonesian invasion, he married and had two children with Losita (number 2 in Figure 1, also the daughter of Bunak people settled in Liquiçá). The first two daughters died (numbers 3 and 4) during the time the couple took refuge in the forest (*ai laran*) of Liquiçá at the beginning of the invasion (they stayed there until 1979). After their capture, they settled in Liquiçá village, where he earned his living in construction from 1979 until 1985. In 1985 Salustião arrived in Faulara with an Indonesian agricultural project funded by USAID,[4] which planned to clear and prepare the land near the Loes River to grow rice (Indonesia. Kantor Statistik Kabupaten Liquica 1997; Martin-Schiller, Hale and Wilson 1987). He was one of the workers who helped clear the land, and construct the road and irrigation channels. After that, he received four water buffalo and one hectare of leased land to use for cultivation, on which he constructed a temporary house (*uma baraka*). During that time, his family kept going back and forth between Faulara and Liquiçá village until they finally settled there in 1999.

None of Salustião's and Losita's sons and daughters was born in Faulara. Daughter numbers 3, 4, 5 and 7 were born when the couple still lived in Boebau. The rest of their children were born in Liquiçá village between 1979 and1992. By the time I moved into their house in September 2010, the people they considered to be permanent residents of the household were 1, 2, 15 and 16. The latter two had married in April that year and were expecting a child.

The residence, although conceptualized as only one household, was composed of three separate structures: two houses and an outside kitchen. The first house was built at the time of their arrival in Faulara and was a typical transmigration house. The second house was still under construction, though already in use,

4. East Timor Agricultural Development Project (ETADEP).

with a dirt floor and, at the time, it was without doors or windows − cloths covered the spaces. Salustião and Losita slept in the old house while 15 and 16 used the new one (where I also lived during my stay). Number 15 was, after the premature death of number 17 at age three, the couple's only son and was considered the heir to the house, as well as most of the land they owned.

The couples formed by numbers 5 and 6, on the one hand, and 9 and 10, on the other, both established their residences outside of Faulara, and both the husbands had formal paid jobs. Number 6 was an extension worker for the Ministry of Agriculture in the nearby suku Gugleur (see Photo 1), and in the Loes River area, where he lived with number 5 and their children. Number 10 worked as a truck driver for a Chinese-Timorese owner of several businesses in Liquiçá village.

Number 8 also had a formal job: he was a teacher at the Faulara primary school. At the beginning of my research, he was living with number 9 and their children in a state-owned house used for government employees. At the time, however, they were constructing a bigger and better house of their own in Faulara, on a piece of land they had purchased from Salustião, located just beside his garden. They wanted to finish building before they moved, but heavy flooding occurred in November of that year, resulting in the destruction of the state house. Thus, they had to hasten their relocation (see Photo 2).

Photo 1: Distribution of Salustião's and Losita's children's residences (Source: Google Earth)

Couple 11 and 12 had an insecure life. They had neither a house nor formal jobs. They helped in agriculture-related tasks both for 12's origin house (see Picture 1), where they settled, and Salustião's and Losita's household in Faulara. Before marrying number 12 drove a mikrolet (a privately owned minibus) along the Liquiçá−Dili route and 11 began her studies to become a nun. After that, they opened a small restaurant (*warung*, Indonesian) in Faulara's marketplace, where they worked on Saturdays. They had to give up the business because their profits dropped drastically from 60 to 70 US dollars each Saturday to less than 10. Their two daughters live with 12's mother. At the time of the events referred to in this case, they were both in Faulara, living with 1 and 2 in the old house.

Numbers 13 and 14 resided virilocally for four years in the suku of Darulete (see Picture 1) and then decided to move to Faulara. Their intention was to build a house on a small piece of land they had bought from 1 and 2.[5] While they waited for their house construction to begin, they settled temporarily in one of the rooms of the new house, where they lived with their daughter. Like 16, 13 was also pregnant at the time of this case study.

5. They paid 100 USD and a cow for it.

Photo 2: Buildings on 1's and 2's land (Source: Google Earth)[6]

The 2010 *loron matebian* celebrations

About *loron matebian*

November 2 is a holy day in Timor-Leste, known as *loron matebian* (All Souls' Day), when people commemorate their dead relatives. It is one of the most important events of the Catholic cycle of annual rituals, for which the members of a particular origin group (*uma-lisan*) gather together to honor their ancestors and the spirits of their dead relatives. Although it is a Catholic ceremony, many practices and beliefs of Timorese cosmology have been integrated into it.[7]

People in Faulara believe that during *loron matebian* the spirits of their ancestors "walk" (*la'o*) "to visit the living" (*mai vizita*). They must be treated appropriately and the same etiquette should be observed as when a living guest arrives. Thus, the visitor should be offered *bua-*

6. Although irrelevant for the purpose of this chapter, there was another building located near the house of 1 and 2. It belonged to Salustião's WZS (see Photo 2), a man called Rafael, who lived there with his wife and children. Rafael had lived with Losita and Salustião when he was young (he was older than most of their children), while they were still living in Boebau. When he got married, he bought land from them in Faulara to settle there with his wife.

7. I have shown elsewhere (Fidalgo Castro 2012) how Timorese have appropriated foreign religious beliefs and practices by incorporating them into the their worldview structures.

malus (betel nut and areca leaves), some kind of drink (wine, beer, liquor, coffee, tea, etc.), a snack (biscuits, cake) and tobacco.

In Faulara, as in other parts of the country, this celebration entails making some offerings to the dead, followed by Catholic prayers, and both of these take place at the burial sites. The *rai-na'in kaer bua-malus*[8] also prays for the *avó jentiu* (pre-Christian 'grandparent'), those ancestors who weren't Catholic at the time of their death, using ritual language (Fox 1988). In the case of Faulara, most of those non-Catholic ancestors are members of the two family groups (*uma lisan*) considered to be the original inhabitants of the place, arriving there before transmigration occurred. Many of the people who live in Faulara participate in the offerings made to those ancestors in recognition of the precedence that those houses have in relation to their own. The prayers to the original ancestors take place first, serving as a general introduction to the prayers and offerings, and then each house moves to their respective burial places to honor their own relatives' spirits and their ancestors.

Photo 3: Offerings made at a grave during *loron matebian*

8. A type of ritual authority: see Alonso Población and Fidalgo Castro (2014) for an account of what *rai-na'in kaer bua-malus* means in the hamlet of Faulara.

People dress in their best clothes and walk in procession to the graves, where they prepare the offerings and ornaments.[9] After placing the ornaments on the graves, normally flowers and candles, they present the offerings to the dead following the Catholic prayer. It is the local catechist who normally conducts the prayers − there are no other religious authorities established in the hamlet − and he conducts the prayers for many different houses in return for a contribution either in money or in kind.[10] Once the offerings and prayers to the dead are finished, people consider that "the ancestors have eaten". It is then time for the people (the living) to eat, smoke, chew betel and areca and chat until the day's events end.

Salustião's and Losita's family celebrate *loron matebian*

Salustião's and Losita's family started the preparations for *loron matebian* in advance, cleaning the graves of their dead. Salustião himself wasn't present that day.[11] The family members who were living there at that time, according to the numbers detailed in Figure 1 (Salustião's and Losita's descendants), were as follows: 2, 7,[12] 25, 26, 27, 11, 12, 13, 14, 35, 15 and 16.

Close to midday on All Souls' Day, the daughters of Salustião and Losita who resided outside Faulara started to arrive at the house, along with their own nuclear family members. They arrived in a truck driven by number 10, borrowed from his patraun (boss) in exchange for bringing it back loaded with wood.[13] The family members who attended the celebration from elsewhere were the

9. Some days before the celebration of *loron matebian*, families start cleaning around the graves, removing the dirt, rubbish and weeds that accumulate during the year. It is normally women, particularly young ones, who do that work.

10. In some families, it is a religious member, or one in religious training, who is responsible for the prayers, if s/he comes to visit on All Souls' Day. In the case of families without economic resources, they normally carry out the prayers themselves.

11. He went to Bobonaro, where he stayed for a month and a half, after receiving a call from a member of his house of origin to help with the construction of a house.

12. Her husband (number 8) went to his origin house in a *suku* elsewhere in Liquiçá, to celebrate *loron matebian*.

13. They loaded the truck with wood from the Laueli river. The river flow drops dramatically during the dry season, exposing the tree trunks and branches swept along by flood waters and deposited there during the rainy season.

following (according to Figure 1): numbers 5,[14] 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24; 9, 10, 28, 31 and 32.

Number 10 left his spouse in the house and, without delay, proceeded to load wood from the dry riverbed. The daughter living in Liquiçá village (9) brought a frozen industrial-raised chicken (*ayam potong*, Indonesian) to cook at lunch time. All of them stayed for lunch and, when finished, numbers 9, 10, 28, 31 and 32 had to return to their house because they had "left the house empty" and "closed the door" (*uma mamuk, odamatan taka*), which was being watched only by a neighbor.[15] Numbers 5, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23 and 24 stayed overnight and attended the ceremony, only returning to their house the next day.

The problem

Loron matebian was a busy day for me. I was trying to take notes about everything that was happening around me. I went back and forth between the kitchen, where the women were chatting and preparing food, and the veranda, where the men talked, smoked and drank coffee. Children ran around everywhere playing. It was difficult for me to follow everything that was going on. Some of the family members didn't know me yet and were curious about my presence there, so they asked many questions about what had brought me to stay in such a distant place. I was asked if I ate the same food as they did or if I had become used to living in the same conditions as they did. Fortunately, the people of the house replied on my behalf, saying things such as, "he eats the same as we do" (*nia han hanesan ita*), and he had "adapted" (*toman*) to the living conditions. Laughter and telling humorous anecdotes about my experience living with them were a constant part of my

14. Her husband, number 6, stayed at home with their daughters (18 and 19) because they didn't want to leave the house empty (*uma mamuk*).

15. It is rare for Timorese families to leave their houses completely empty without a member of the family watching over it. In this fashion, the expression *odamatan taka hela* (the door stays closed) is used, among other things, to point out that nobody leaves the house, that nobody is there at the moment, or to state that the people who live there have an unsocial attitude.

conversations with them. A mood of joyful celebration was constant during the morning.

At lunch time, the men and I were served our food first − and separate from the women − inside the house. Pork, goat and chicken were served as side dishes on a bed of rice with a small plate of chili and salt for seasoning. We ate and talked for a while and, when finished, some of them went back to the veranda and some went to the kitchen. I was with those who went to the kitchen where the women were having lunch, in order to participate in the conversations taking place there.

Shortly after I entered the kitchen, I noticed that number 13 was upset. She was eating and then, suddenly, started to shout at number 15 (one of the men who went to the kitchen after lunch). Both of them then engaged in a verbal fight, shouting things at each other that I didn't understand. After a moment, number 13 abruptly left her plate − she was eating lunch − and went to her room inside the house while shouting and crying. She then started to pack up her clothes and other items, putting them into plastic and cardboard containers, and placing them on the veranda (see Photo 4).

Photo 4: Packed clothes and personal items that 13 placed on the veranda

I didn't understand anything that was going on. The rest of the people in the kitchen kept silent while they finished their lunch, and both 13 and 15 left the kitchen to go to their respective rooms. After a while, I discretely asked number 11 − she was seated beside me − what had just happened, and she told me that number 15 had "chased them" (*duni sira*).[16] With "them," as she told me afterwards, she was referring to 13 and 16. She then added that what number 13 did, meaning placing her clothes on the veranda, was something *lulik*.[17] This added to my confusion even more. But, as I felt that it was not the time to keep asking questions, I let it go at that moment and initiated some small talk to try to reduce the tension.

16. The expression *duni* means "to throw out, to chase somebody or something out of a place". It is used to refer to clashes between people in a figurative way, even if nobody is literally thrown or chased out of a place.
17. The Tetun word *lulik* can work as a verb, a noun or an adjective and has been defined as sacred, taboo or spiritual potency (Bovensiepen 2014).

Shortly after a post-lunch nap, number 2 decided to attend the *loron matebian* prayers at the grave of the *avó rai-na'in* from Laueli's and Asumanu's houses (the ancestor of the original houses in Faulara). She prepared a handful of flowers and small candles, and asked 15 to join her. I also joined them and attended the prayers, conducted by one of the ritual authorities (*rai-na'in kaer bua-malus*). While at the original ancestors' graves, with mostly women and some of their children, I spoke to the wife of one of my interlocutors. She asked me what had happened in the house I was living in, because she had seen the containers placed on the veranda. She told me that she had intended to visit the house and walk together in a group to the graves of the *avó rai-na'in* but, after seeing the containers, she decided to go straight to the graves by herself.

Photo 5: 13 (left) and 11 (right) prepare flower ornaments.

When we got back, I went into the house through the front veranda. The containers 13 had packed were still sitting there and she, with number 11, was preparing flower ornaments for the graves of the family's relatives (see Photo 5). I took some photos of them working and then I sat with them, where we were joined by 16, 15's wife. I started to ask about what had happened earlier at

lunch time, in order to make sense of it, and asked permission to record our conversation. Part of it was as follows.[18]

> **11:** It started this way: 9 brought 13's frozen chicken [into the kitchen] and she gave it to 16.
> **13:** She didn't give it to me at all!
> **11:** She gave it to 16 and then 16 said that she hadn't eaten goat meat. So… she hadn't eaten goat but then she went to get some goat… because 13 asked her to bring her some. As 15 saw that his wife had some goat meat, he also wanted some… He and 14 are *mane-foun* and *umane* [14 being fertility taker and 15 fertility giver]. 15 served himself his wife-taker meat and then 13 got angry with him. At the same time, 15 got angry with his wife and made her cry. Her tears dropped over her plate of rice, just like water…
> **Me:** So… 15 got angry with 16 and 16 with 15? Now I understand it even less. Why did 13 get angry at 15 then? [11 laughs]. This is what I do not understand.
> **11:** Because 15 got angry... [13 interrupts her]
> **13:** Because 15 doesn't like that we [she, her husband and daughter] are living in this house… We are going to wait for our father to get back [from Bobonaro] and then we will leave.
> **Me:** Why wouldn't he like that? …
> **13:** He doesn't like it… We are going to wait for 1 and then we will take off.
> **Me:** Why? …
> **13:** He doesn't like us living here because… more plates have to be filled …
> **11:** It is like this, mister… 15… what he has within… is a hole inside. Both his heart and his liver are like stones. … He is not prepared, he thinks like a child, he doesn't think like a married man…He must see that she [16] eats like everybody else, dresses like everybody else. …
> **Me:** So then… why did 13 place her clothes outside on the veranda? [13 laughs]
> **11:** Because 13 is a very nervous person… she is like a child when you mess with her and gets mad… That's why she took her clothes and suddenly placed them outside.
> **Me:** But you did say that it was *lulik* to do that!
> **11:** That is *lulik*, mister!
> **Me:** So?
> **11:** When the child is born…
> **Me:** Is she not afraid? …
> **11:** She is not… when the child is born… mister… [13 laughs]

18. Only some parts of the conversation's English translation are included. The whole conversation in Tetum is in Fidalgo Castro (2015, 340–44)

13: He [15] would lose his wine and goat … Wouldn't he? … Whenever a funeral inevitably occurs … the wife-takers… should give wine and a goat to somebody [referring to 15]. But when that happens, when 15 may have to attend a funeral, he will not be able to call for us to attend the *lia*[19] … If he wants to call us, he needs to give something first.
15: [Shouting from the veranda] She took her clothes out to wash them! [13 and 11 laughs] …
11: He is the one who loses! This [taking out the clothes] means the death of a male [wife-taker] … but he is the one who loses the bottle of wine and a goat!
13: When 15 takes care of his sister in his house… and gives her to this man… to marry her… That's when he can go and inform them of *lia*; when you have to attend *lia*, then you can go and inform them. … The relationship won't be cut off! When people do not support them, then there's nothing else to do… they would have to stop… He won't be able to continue with the *lia*. …
11: Mister… Taking her clothes out as she did today is *lulik*. Eventually, during childbirth, when the baby starts to provoke labor contractions, she will be suffering. Only when 15 does the *huu* … brings *bua-malus* and does the *huu* and *kuta*… to her, the baby will be able to live. Then the baby will live normally. …
Me: So then… [addressing 13] Your baby will get sick because of what you did today? When you take your clothes out, the baby can get sick?
11: Yes.
Me: And… For him not to get sick, 15 has to do the *huu* to you?
11: He has to do the *huu* to her …
Me: But… then… If they are angry at each other… what if he doesn't want to do the *huu* to her?
11: When you see that your sister is dying… she is dying inside… You have to help her!
Me: And what if he doesn't want to?
11: Ah! Who wouldn't want to? You have to… It is yours [13, being part of the family]! [13 laughs] If she dies, you lose a bottle of wine… a goat… money… You lose plenty! If he [14] then marries another woman… patience… That child of yours who was raised thanks to your efforts (kolen)… it is another person who takes advantage of the child, not you.
Me: Then… I want to ask 13. …

19. The concept of *lia* is extremely polysemic and complex, but in the case discussed in this chapter it could be translated as a ceremony or ritual. I have explored this concept in more depth elsewhere (Fidalgo Castro 2017, 185−87).

Me: So… if 15 treats you badly… you… can also… he also loses… you can complain to the wife-takers over there on the mountain… and they won't come here at all. Is that so?
11: Of course!
Me: You can do that?
11: This means that he has to give a pig… a pig and a tais. … When the woman… when she won't come… 15 has to prepare a pig and a tais…, do the *huu* to him… he has to pay a fine (*fó-sala*) and only then will she prepare the goat and the wine and give them to him.
Me: But it is unlikely that he will do that… Or will he do it indeed?
11: I do not know mister… What happened today was only an outburst of anger. When mister Salustião gets back home he will say: "It's not like that, it is not, it is not… Yes… Drums!" [Meaning, 'he will fix this'] [13 and 16 laugh]
16: Today… was only a joke… it won't affect the *lia*.
Me: So… he won't be paying the fine… Or will he? …
13: He has to! He has to give me a pig and a tais if he wants to ask me when he has to attend *lia*. [She laughs] … If you don't pay… we… the wife-takers… we only take care of our own business … If you pay… we receive them… we will attend the *lia*, we will get involved.

Discussion

The married couples who were living in Faulara at the time of *loron matebian* were as follows: the parents (Salustião and Losita − numbers 1 and 2); their only son and his wife (15 and 16), and two of 1's and 2's daughters and their husbands; numbers 11 and 12 from suku Dato, and 13 and 14 from Darulete. The problem started as a misunderstanding over the share and kind of food allocated to each person at lunch time. Number 15 wanted to have some goat when he saw his wife had some, without knowing that it wasn't for her but for 13.[20]

The conflict arose between 13 and 15, which − according to 13 − had only one solution. He had to solve it by paying a fine and

20. Those ritual exchanges where animals are given and received prescribe that the group of wife-takers offer their wife-givers cows / buffaloes and / or goats and receive pigs from them. Furthermore, they cannot eat the same kind of meat they provide during the ritual. Nonetheless, in this case, 13 ate goat, even though she was 15's wife-taker. I couldn't ascertain why she was eating this meat during this ritual. As a hypothesis, it may have been as *loron matebian* is not a ritual in which meat and animals are exchanged in the same way as for marriages or funerals and, thus, those kinds of food taboos do not apply here.

performing a ritual on 13, after which everything could go on as usual. *Huu* and *kuta* are the names of two processes of a ritual that are performed with the objective of repairing any imbalance occurred when failing to uphold the proper relationship (an orthodox and social sanctioned one) between two entities (human and/or non-human, individual and/or collective ones). In the case study presented, we witness a break in the observance of this balance between two people who shared a fertility-taker/fertility-giver relationship (*fetosaa/umane*), resulting in the endangerment of an unborn child and the mother's life (13). The consequence of this event meant the loss of 15's capacity to mobilize human and material resources from his sister's husband group by virtue of being their wife-giver.

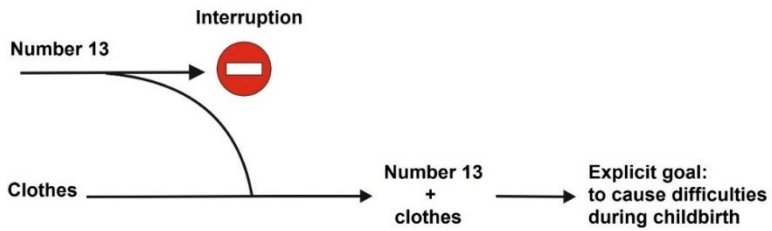
In order to repair this imbalance, 15 must pay a fine (*fó-sala*) in the form of betel and areca (*bua-malus*), money (*osan*), a pig (*fahi)* and one handwoven textile (tais) to 13. He also has to carry out the *huu*: chewing betel and areca, and blowing part of the red mixture over the palms of the person receiving it. After that, he needs to conduct the *kuta*: this is anointing the person's forehead with the same mixture (normally making the sign of the cross). Once this process is over and the fine is paid, the imbalance is considered as repaired and normal relations can resume. The importance of *huu* and *kuta* when taking place between fertility-givers and fertility-takers is significant because it points out the direction in which the flow of life circulates (Fox 1980). Fertility is seen as a gift granted to the *fetosaa* (fertility/wife-takers) by their *umane* (fertility/wife-givers), which is sometimes conceptualized as *fó matak-malirin* (giving the raw/unripe and the cool).

The informal conversation transcribed above is relevant because it helps to exemplify the mutual dependence between fertility /wife-givers and fertility / wife-takers, discussing both their everyday lives and their ritual activities. The anthropology of the eastern archipelago has registered that, ever since Van Wouden's pioneering work ([1935] 1968), these affinal relations (*fetosaa-umane* in this case) create relationships of asymmetry in which the givers are considered to be superior to the takers. In this case study, I have tried to show that the people of Faulara are no different, in relation to the importance of affinal relations, from

many of the other neighboring societies. This structural relation, however, is an abstraction: it is a normative framework that only exists and makes sense when particular social agents put it into practice (Bourdieu 1991). It is precisely when this framework is put into practice in people's day-to-day lives that the analysis of these situations becomes more complex.

In the case presented, I demonstrate how 15 was indeed considered hierarchically superior to 13. So much so that when she had a problem with him, she didn't challenge him directly. Instead, she put herself and her unborn child in danger by mobilizing the actant (Latour 1996, 7) "clothes on the veranda" − a *lulik* act. This was done in such a way that only the ritual (*kuta* and *huu*) intervention of 15 could avoid a possibly fatal ending (see Figure 2). Why did she put herself in danger? What was her potential gain in doing so?

Figure 2: Relation between 13 and clothes as the translation of a goal[21]



Number 13's intention was to deal with what she understood as unfair behavior from 15, her brother. She discursively framed it by saying that he accused her, her husband and daughter of aumenta bikan (more dishes), which implies an accusation of being unproductive members of the domestic unit, consuming more than they contribute. In order to defend herself, she reminded everybody that she was the linking connection with their fertility / wife-takers group, portraying herself as the "obligatory passage point" (Callon 1984, 205–6) without whom one of their wife-taker

21. Figure adapted from Latour (2001: 213).

groups wouldn't exist. The sister−brother relationship, as Weiner (1992) has pointed out, is the key connection that allows for establishing a hierarchical connection between people and groups.

It is through the institution of exogamous marriage, and the exchanges that it entails, that 15 obtains resources from other social groups (Weiner 1992, 16). In mistreating his sister, breaking the necessary intimacy between them, 15 could end up without the support of the key person who allows that situation to happen: his sister. As her brother verbally mistreated her, she warned that he could lose his goat (*bibi*) and wine (*tua*) −literally, some of the goods that the wife-takers provide on ritual occasions to their wife-givers − because the ordinary affinal relationship is put on hold until the damage is repaired. This means that 15 can lose the ability to call upon them when he is in need of support for both ritual and day-to-day activities. By placing her clothes on the veranda, she put herself at risk, but she also withdrew the contingent economic contributions that are mobilized through affinal relationships in favor of her brother.

Nonetheless, she didn't give this warning to her brother directly because that would be inappropriate behavior due to the precedence that he, as a member of her wife-giver's group, has over her. She instead tried to put 15 in a position he could only extract himself from by paying her (and her husband's group) a fine (*fó-sala*). This would be the same as an explicit recognition of having misbehaved and accepting a punishment for that reason. Additionally, 13 reminded 15 that if he used his privileges over her in an abusive manner, he could lose the help that she provided when an important ritual (*lia*) takes place in the future (such as a funeral for 15's wife's parents). Furthermore, the clothes and personal items boxed up and placed on the veranda constituted a symbol meaning "problems within the household," which is widely recognized in Faulara. When people passing the house − located on a busy road − saw those items, visible for all to see, they were instantly aware of some internal problems. This added a public layer to a situation deemed private, creating a shameful event for the household made worse because it happened on All Souls' Day.

Another interesting aspect of this case study lies in the placement of personal items on the veranda as *lulik*. Here, *lulik*

neither implies distance or avoidance (Traube 1986, 142–43) nor is it related to "a potency specifically connected with the ancestral realm" (Bovensiepen 2014, 127). People do not need to avoid their clothes and personal belongings, and these items are not connected in any way to the ancestral realm or believed to have any intrinsic potency (Anderson 1972). What this case seems to imply is that *lulik* is a codification of the appropriate way (by calling on the inappropriate ways) in which the relationship between entities with agency (in this case people and clothes) should take place based on a convention established before by someone else (Rappaport 1999, 124–31). Claiming that a relationship between two entities is *lulik*, in a practical situation, is a rhetorical activation of an orthopraxis (Couceiro Domínguez 2005); that is, a way of calling upon a canonical practice that is used to regulate behavior. Clothes here are *lulik*, in the same way that a house, an heirloom, or a piece of land can be *lulik*. Not because of the participation of a reified essence or substance (Descola 2012, 64), but because the relation of the people with them is oriented by a pre-established cannon or convention.[22]

Closing remarks

The general idea of *kultura* or tradition as an element that keeps Timor-Leste from addressing some of its social issues, such as gender equality (Alves et al. 2009) or national economic development (Brandao et al. 2011),[23] has been mobilized through the discourse and writings of observers both within and outside the country for more than a decade (RDTL 2007).

One suggested cause of women's disempowerment is their perceived role as dependent individuals who see their capacity to make decisions for themselves being undermined. To solve this, some authors have seen the need for women to have access to modern-like mechanisms that may enable their empowerment in contrast to local regimes that do not allow for this. Thus, proposals, such as ensuring

22. We've written about how this *lulik* relationship between entities is activated in day-to-day contexts elsewhere (Fidalgo Castro and Alonso Población 2018).

23. We have shown elsewhere how the notion of *kultura* as a burden can be seen as tensions between principles of power acquisition, both between social groups and regimes (Alonso Población, Fidalgo Castro and Pena Castro 2018).

women have access to state justice (Madden 2013), their taking up roles in the workforce to receive salaries and/or providing financial opportunities for entrepreneurship (Mohideen, Tornieri and Baxter 2005), have been identified as possibly enabling women.

Silva and Simião (2017) have written about some programs that endorse the idea of providing women with financial opportunities through microcredit as a possible path to empowerment. For the authors, these programs suppose that women entrenched in family networks see their decision-making processes and personal or individual development and empowerment undermined as free and autonomous people (2017, 105). They highlight that considering indebtedness to financial institutions as a way of empowering women versus engaging with the exchange regimes as a cause of disempowerment seems like a paradox when conceptualizing both of these as ways of investing.

I have presented a case study in which I explore how several members of a household in Faulara constructed their own ontology through their discourses and practice in their daily lives by defining entities and attributing agency to them. I suggest that exploring the way they did this is a necessary step in analyzing the mechanism of acquisition and distribution of power in Timor-Leste. Contrary to the studies that see *kultura* − local beliefs and practices − as a structural cause of disempowerment, I have shown how a particular woman activated appropriate cultural and social mechanisms, and institutions − ritual and everyday activities, kinship, taboos (*lulik*) − that allowed her to empower herself within the local regimes and networks of relations that she was involved in. By "arranging" (Callon 1984) her clothes in a specific and transgressive way, she created a strategy that reversed, at least temporarily, a situation that was structurally disadvantageous to her: that of the asymmetric affinal relationship. She did so in a unexpected way because a direct clash was out of the question (and was taboo; a *lulik* thing to do) from her disempowered wife-taker position (Scott 1985).

Facing the widespread idea among observers who see *kultura* as a source of gender inequality, I have shown that it is necessary to see how Timorese women mobilize their own resources and strategies − this is, take their agency into account − in order to

establish the causes of the problem. A structuralist-rooted vision of exchange, that deems women to be objects of the exchange instead of active agents of the process (Weiner 1992, 14–15), doesn't allow us to get a more nuanced vision of what the roots of gender inequality are. By simply believing that modern-like institutions and practices offer women an alternative obscures the fact that recognizing the mutual economic dependency of people and groups (houses, fertility / wife-givers and fertility / wife-takers) through *kultura* can also serve as a means to empower women.

References

Alonso Población, Enrique, and Alberto Fidalgo Castro. 2014. "Webs of Legitimacy and Discredit: Narrative Capital and Politics of Ritual in a Timor-Leste Community." *Anthropological Forum* 24, no. 3: 245–66.

Alonso Población, Enrique, Alberto Fidalgo Castro, and María Jesús Pena Castro. 2018. "Tensions between Principles of Power Acquisition in Contemporary Timor-Leste." *Sociologus* 68, no. 2: 107–24.

Alves, Ubalda Maria Felipe et al. 2009. "NGOs Alternative Report: Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in Timor-Leste." Dili.

Anderson, Benedict. 1972. "The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture." In *Culture and Politics in Indonesia*, edited by C. Holt, 1–69. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1991. *El Sentido Práctico* [*The Logic of Practice*]. Madrid: Taurus.

Bovensiepen, Judith M. 2014. "Lulik: Taboo, Animism, or Transgressive Sacred? An Exploration of Identity, Morality and Power in Timor-Leste." *Oceania* 84, no. 2: 121–37.

Brandão, Constantino da C. C. X. 2011. *Culture and Its Impact on Social and Community Life: A Case Study of Timor Leste*. Policy Brief, no. 5. Dili: Belun.

Callon, Michel. 1984. "Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of St Brieuc Bay." *The Sociological Review* 32, (1_suppl): 196–233.

Comissão de Acolhimento, Verdade e Reconciliação (CAVR). 2005. "Chapter 7.3: Forced Displacement and Famine." In *Chega! The Report of the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste*, 1305-07. Jakarta: CAVR.KGP in cooperation with STP-CAVR.

Couceiro Domínguez, Enrique. 2005. "Acción Social Ritualizada, Estructura y Agencia: Procedimientos Pragmáticos y Radicales Procedimentales de las Prácticas Colectivas." [Ritualized Social Action, Structure and Agency: Pragmatic Procedures and Procedural Radicals of Collective Practices]. In *La Conciencia Humana: Perspectiva Cultural* [*The Human Conscience: A Cultural Perspective*], edited by L. Álvarez Munárriz, 257–300. Barcelona: Anthropos.

Descola, Phillippe. 2012. *Más allá de la naturaleza y la cultura* [*Beyond Nature and Culture*]. Buenos Aires: Amorrortu.

Fidalgo Castro, Alberto. 2012. "A Religião em Timor-Leste a partir de uma Perspectiva Histórico-Antropológica." [Religion in Timor-Leste from an Historic-Anthropological Perspective]. In *Léxico Fataluco-Português* [*Fataluku-Portuguese Lexicon*], edited by A. Fidalgo Castro and E. Legaspi Bouza, 79–118. Dili: Salesianos de Dom Bosco Timor-Leste.

Fidalgo Castro, Alberto. 2015. "Dinámicas Políticas y Económicas en el Dominio Ritual y la Vida Cotidiana en Timor Oriental: Estudios de Caso desde la Aldeia de Faulara." [Political and Economic Dynamics in Timor-Leste Ritual Domain and Everyday Life: Case Studies from the Faulara Hamlet]. PhD diss., University of Coruña, Ferrol.

Fidalgo Castro, Alberto, and Enrique Alonso Población. 2018. "Personas y Objetos en Timor Oriental: Relaciones Lulik entre Entidades." [People and Objects in East Timor: Relations between Lulik Entities]. *Ankulegi* 21: 23−37.

Fox, James. 1980. "Introduction." In *The Flow of Life: Essays on Eastern Indonesia*, edited by James Fox, 1–18. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Fox, James. 1988. *To Speak in Pairs: Essays on the Ritual Languages of Eastern Indonesia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

General Directorate of Statistics and UNFPA. 2011. *Population and Housing Census of Timor-Leste*, 2010. Volume 2: Population Distribution by Administrative Areas. Dili.

Kantor Statistik Kabupaten Liquica. 1997. *Statistik Pertanian Tanaman Padi dan Palawija Kabupaten Liquica* [*Statistics of Agriculture on Rice and Secondary Crops in Liquica Regency*]. Indonesia: Kantor Statistik Kabupaten Liquica.

Latour, Bruno. 1996. "On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications Plus More than a Few Complications." *Soziale Welt*, 47: 369–81.

Latour, Bruno. 2001. *La Esperanza de Pandora: Ensayos sobre la Realidad de los Estudios de la Ciencia* [*Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*]. Barcelona: Gedisa.

Madden, Jacqueline. 2013. "Engaging with Customary Law in Timor-Leste: Approaches to Increasing Women's Access to Justice." *International Human Rights Internship Working Papers Series* 1, no. 2.

Martin-Schiller, Barbara, Joanne Hale, and Pauline Wilson. 1987. "Review of the East Timor Agricultural Development Project (ETADEP), September-October 1987."

Mohideen, Reihana, Francesco Tornieri, and Helen Baxter. 2005. *Gender and Nation-Building in Timor-Leste: Country Gender Assessment*. Asia Development Bank, Manila, UNIFEM, Bangkok.

Otten, Mariël. 1986. "Transmigrasi: Myths and Realities, Indonesian Resettlement Policy, 1965−1985." *International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs Document 57*. Copenhagen.

Rappaport, Roy A. 1999. *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

República Democrática de Timor-Leste (RDTL). 2007. "Initial Report: The Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in Timor Leste." Dili.

Scott, James C. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Silva, Kelly, and Daniel S. Simião. 2017. ‘‘Pessoa como Dívida? Controvérsias sobre Dádiva, Dívida e Redes Sociais na Construção da Pessoa em Timor-Leste: uma Aproximação.” [Person as Debt? Controversy over Gift, Debt and Social Networks in the Construction of Personhood in Timor-Leste: An Approach]. In *Dádiva, Cultura e Sociedade* [*Gift, Culture and Society*], edited by Júlio Aurélio Vianna Lopes, Paulo Henrique Martins and Alda Lacerda, 105−17. Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Casa de Rui Barbosa.

Traube, Elizabeth G. 1986. *Cosmology and Social Life: Ritual Exchange among the Mambai of East Timor*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Weiner, Annette B. 1992. *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Wouden, Franciscus Antonius Evert van. 1968. *Types of Social Structure in Eastern Indonesia: Koninklijk lnstituut voor Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde*. Translation Series, Vol. 11. Martinus Nijhoff.