Embracement and legal support for survivors of domestic violence: the praxis of FOKUPERS in Timor-Leste[1]

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This chapter approaches the practices and discourses (praxis) of an East Timorese non-governmental organization (NGO) that provides support to women who experience intimate-partner violence, FOKUPERS (Forum Komunikasi Untuk Perempuan Lorosa'e, Communication Forum for Eastern Women). It discusses the profile of these women, the pedagogy underlying support practices and the effects they intend to produce. Based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out between 2015 and 2016, I argue that the weakening or rupture of kin relations, manifested in the absence of practices of care, accountability and mutual obligation, has turned these women into the main targets for the efforts of state and civil society. I also bring to light the legal pedagogies such an institution resorts to in order to modify domestic-violence survivors' conceptions and attitudes towards themselves, their rights and even their understanding of what domestic violence is. [3]

The argument is developed in six steps. In the first section, I present the NGO and its main pedagogic practices. I then relate the

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narratives of some of the women who sought shelter while providing brief comments on each case. The fourth section discusses the fundamental role of reciprocal relations in Timor-Leste and how these tend to be lacking in the narratives of sheltered women. In the fifth section, I seek to deepen the analysis of how the organization operates by re-elaborating the women's relations with their kin, partners and communities. The closing remarks articulate the multiple interpretive and empirical elements developed throughout the chapter.

FOKUPERS: practices, discourses and pedagogies

FOKUPERS is an East Timorese NGO founded in 1997, which advances gender equality and fights violence against women.[4] The NGO promotes public awareness campaigns on women's issues and rights, and assists women who suffer sexual or physical abuse by providing them with shelter and legal support. In the present discussion, I focus on the procedures the NGO adopts to support survivors of violence by helping them find their way through the legal system when pursuing domestic-violence cases.

FOKUPERS maintains a specific team for embracing women who experience violence, which helps them report ill-treatment and, later on, coaches them on how to behave during interactions with legal agencies (police, public prosecution, courts, and so forth). This team, linked to the legal support unit, includes lawyers who help mitras navigate the multiplicity of judicial spheres by means of strategies that I describe below. *Mitra* is an Indonesian word meaning 'partner', which FOKUPERS uses instead of the term 'victim' for referring to, and dealing with, the women to whom they provide support.

The organization seeks to ensure that women are able to report the perpetrators to the police and receive health care, and are assessed on a case-by-case basis as to whether or not each mitra needs shelter at the safe house (Portuguese, *casa abrigo*; Tetum, *uma*

4. FOKUPERS works in four areas: advocacy (working to improve women's lives/monitoring the government; victim support) community awareness (women's issues and rights/gender based violence); and childhood learning.

mahon). FOKUPERS provides support during the entire legal process, so women can navigate the state's legal system.

The legal support unit's efforts to ensure that the mitras are able to negotiate legal/institutional spaces consist of material and symbolic forms of mediation. Practically, the NGO provides transportation from the women's houses (or the shelter) to the courts, no matter where they live, as well as food and legal support. The team also monitors the legal process, delivers the court's notifications and makes sure the women respond to subpoena. But the most complex work is probably for the symbolic (or immaterial) mediations for introducing the mitras to technical terms, jargon, legislation and the reproductive logic of legal agencies managing conflict resolution. This kind of mediation is enacted through activities involving drama and socialization.

Drama activities are rehearsals for hearings with magistrates, who arbitrate cases of domestic violence. The legal support team conducts the role-play with each mitra, showing the women how to behave when a magistrate comes into the room, what and how to answer whenever questioned or in response to a prosecutor or public defender. The women learn body language and posture, and voice intonation. The team presents each of the agents involved and their respective roles in the legal process. The practice continues for as long as necessary, so that the women are ready for the court hearing.

Socialization activities consist of meetings held between the mitras and NGO team members. There, the team explains the criminal code, as well as the code of criminal procedure, the Law against Domestic Violence (Number 7/2010), and the functions of public attorneys, judges and defenders. For these events the FOKUPERS team assembles the mitras who live in the shelter and those who have already left but who continue to receive assistance. The purpose is to stress the need to report cases of domestic violence to the police and take them to the courts, rather than to local conflict management arenas. The team promotes the law in these moments and spaces as well as the women's role as complainants in cases of violence affecting themselves or others, so that their communities are encouraged to do the same. It is important to emphasize that FOKUPERS's defense of the legal system stems from the organization's view that it is only in this

sphere that women's rights as individuals can be fully taken into account. In contrast, local agents operating conflict mediation would be more concerned with maintaining relations between the partners and their respective families.

The organization's actions, practices and discourses, embodied in a series of material and symbolic mediations, are fundamental to reorient the experiences of women who receive legal support. The organization does so by making available new resources and instruments for occupying certain spaces in the legal conflict resolution sphere, and by making sure it happens in a qualified and comprehensive manner. Through pedagogic action aimed at specific legal dimensions (related to state justice and norms rather than village sociability), the organization seeks to assist the mitras in adapting to new spheres of action within state institutions. This process ends up also introducing the women to a new moral order.

In the following section, I outline the profiles of the women assisted by the NGO and show how the organization reaches out particularly to women with weaker bonds to their family groups. In other words, these are women onto whom kin-related obligations, such as practices of accountability and care, do not impose themselves as compellingly as in other cases.

The mitras: contemporary ordeals

Júlia[5], 18 years old, left her house in the township of Manatuto, which she shared with her aunts and a few cousins, in order to live with a young police officer she had recently met and started a relationship. During what was ostensibly a visit to his house in a Liquiçá village to meet his family, Júlia ended up moving there but not without tribulations. From that moment on they were living together, sharing a house with his mother, brothers, sister-in-law and sisters, without the due arrangement between their respective families regarding marriage prestations. No goods had been exchanged at that point, not even a promise between Júlia's family and her boyfriend's kin. Their relatives had never met.

[5] All fictional names

During the first weeks of co-habitation conflict began between Júlia and the other women in the house, and between her and her partner. The issues with the other women were mostly practical: Júlia would not perform the same domestic tasks as her boyfriend's sisters and sister-in-law. According to her narrative, tasks, such as cooking food, tending animals and even cleaning the house, seemed too complicated for her. Her claim was that she was too young and inexperienced in household chores and, as the other women had no patience with her, communication between them became difficult and would escalate into quarrels. She said she did not feel welcome in the house and conflicts – especially with the sister-in-law and the mother-in-law – intensified to the point of affecting the relationship with her partner. Fights with him also increased, especially as Júlia found out that he was exchanging regular phone messages with other women. When asked about it as they engaged in heated argument, the man responded by physically and verbally attacking her.

While pregnant, Júlia's partner assaulted her inside the hospital. A person who witnessed the event reported him and from there Júlia went straight to the uma mahon for the first time. Embraced by FOKUPERS, she remained there for a few weeks, until she moved back to her aunt's house in Manatuto. Towards the end of her pregnancy, the boyfriend asked her to live with him again in Liquiçá. Júlia accepted, even in the absence of signs of commitment to marriage prestations, inter-family agreement or a promise of marriage.

When the child was born, Júlia suffered complications during the delivery and had to stay in hospital for a few days. While she was hospitalized the father took the newborn with him to Liquiçá, to be cared for by his mother and other female relatives. During Júlia's time in hospital, no one came to care for her – not her own kin or her boyfriend or his relatives.

After she left hospital and returned on her own to her boyfriend's house, Júlia received even worse treatment. She was abused, humiliated and physically assaulted by her partner and verbally attacked by the mother-in-law and brother-in-law. The latter announced that there was no room for her in the house and sent her away. She was kicked out without her son as they shouted

insults such as dog (*asu*). During the incident, she was not criticized with regards a personal trait − her very status as a human person was challenged. This event, in addition to the forced separation from her child and the ill treatment received from the boyfriend and his kin, led Júlia once again to the police to report her partner for domestic violence.

Júlia's story emphasizes her isolation at that point. With no mention of parents, uncles, brothers or older cousins, her narrative did not include relatives that could have represented her before her boyfriend's family. This was true in relation both to the mediations necessary to establish the parameters of her relationship, and to other spheres of extra-legal conflict management and mediation. From a local perspective, these were possible alternatives. Resorting to the police and to the legal system usually happens only after all procedures at the local level have been exhausted. The latter comprise mechanisms for mediating between local and 'traditional' authorities, and the domestic circle of families, villages, and the suku (village) (Silva and Simião 2013).

During her court hearing Júlia's isolation became even more evident.[6] Besides herself, there was me, a member of FOKUPERS, one of her younger cousins and the NGO employee who drove us there. Her former boyfriend was accompanied by his older brother, sister-in-law, one of his sisters, his mother and some of his colleagues from the police department.

Augusta's case is another telling instance of how dramatic predicaments may emerge or intensify, when there are no relations or persons to whom one could appeal. Augusta, a 32-year-old Indonesian woman, was born in Atambua, close to the land border separating Timor-Leste from Indonesia. She met and started a relationship with an East Timorese man whom I will call Alberto. He used to drive a truck back and forth to the neighboring country and, from their intermittent relationship, a child was born. Time passed, and while Augusta and their daughter lived at her parents' house in Indonesia, Alberto came to visit frequently.

6. I refer to isolation in kinship terms, that is, detachment from members of her own kin – a kind of relationship which is highly valued in Timor-Leste.

On one such visit, Alberto asked to take their daughter to Timor-Leste so she could meet his parents. His commitment was to return the child to Atambua in two weeks, the next time he visited Augusta. But Alberto did not keep his word, and three weeks later he sent a message to Augusta saying that if she wanted the child back she would have to come and get her. So she went to his house in Timor-Leste and, as soon as she arrived, revelations began to emerge. Alberto was in fact poorer than she thought and lived in a two-room house surrounded by his relatives. The man was married and had eight children. Augusta did not know what to do about it so ended up staying for a while. Her relations with the first wife (fe'en or feto boot) were very conflictive, as neither woman desired the other's presence. His relatives did not approve of the idea of a second wife and kept their distance from Augusta. Given such complications, she decided it was best to leave and take her daughter with her. Her plan was however curtailed by Alberto and his aggressive behavior.

Augusta stayed with Alberto in Timor-Leste for over a year. Whenever there were quarrels he assaulted her and his family always stood at arm's length from their fights. Augusta's experience was similar to Júlia's: she had no one to appeal to, no kin networks, no friends or anyone who could go there and help her. When she finally succeeded in contacting the police, Augusta and her daughter were taken to the FOKUPERS shelter, where they stayed until papers were ready for their return to Indonesia.

The story of Fernanda, another young (20-year-old) woman from Timor-Leste, also shows parallels with those of Júlia and Augusta. Fernanda and her siblings were separated during the Indonesian occupation. She and her youngest sister were raised by an Indonesian couple who knew their parents, while their older sister remained in Baucau with another family. She had no idea of her other siblings' whereabouts. Her father did not resist the occupation and her mother was accused of abandoning the children. While growing up, Fernanda and her sister had no contact with their mother.

When Fernanda reached legal majority (17 years old), her foster parents advised her to marry a young man from Ermera. Marriage prestations were exchanged (Tetum, *barlake*) and she married Júlio, who worked in a construction company in Díli. After the wedding, Fernanda went to live with Júlio's family – parents, siblings and

sisters-in-law – in his native township. There, she had to work in the coffee fields, help care for the animals, cook food and take part in other household chores. She found the situation unfair, as her mother-in-law, besides doing nothing, retained all the family earnings – those derived from coffee sales, and even Júlio's and his brothers' wages. Fernanda did not agree with this arrangement and whenever she questioned Júlio about it, his reaction was often violent.

Her pregnancy was a difficult time. As it progressed, it became harder for her to perform household tasks and this became a reason for quarrels with her mother-in-law. After giving birth, Fernanda took the little money she was able to save from her work in the coffee farm, and left for Díli to live with her sister, rather than with Júlio. Stripped of family obligations, Fernanda began earning money doing laundry and cleaning foreigners' homes. That was enough for her to make a living.

Júlio and his mother followed Fernanda to Díli and at one point she was again physically assaulted. This event pushed her even farther away: Fernanda moved to the township of Baucau to live with her older sister and her husband. At this point, Júlio's family contacted Fernanda's foster parents in order to rescind the marriage prestations, something they had threatened to do unless she changed her behavior.

In Baucau, the three sisters lived together, along with the older sister's husband and their children. There, Fernanda took care of the kids and assisted in the construction of the family's new house. Things turned sour when her sister's husband began sexually harassing her and became worse when he tried to rape her younger sister. In the aftermath of this dreadful event, her older sister reported the husband and the three of them were referred to the FOKUPERS shelter.

Fernanda's situation was particularly complicated. She had been married to Júlio but had no interest in resuming that relationship, or returning to his family's house in Ermera. Her foster parents were not pleased with the idea of having her back after returning the *barlake*.[7] This significantly reduced her scope for action and at that moment she had very few options.

7. I understand *barlake* as a set of goods (and/or money) offered by the groom's family to the bride's, according to practices of marriage prestations in Timor-Leste

It was common to hear FOKUPERS members share stories about East Timorese – especially women – living in isolation after separating from their families. One such story was about a woman who worked at an NGO, who had been sexually abused by the father as a teenager. She moved to the uma mahon and the team members reported the crime to the police. Later on, her relatives went there to plead with her to withdraw the accusation against her father, or else he would go to jail. At the hearing, however, she did not change her testimony and the father was sentenced to prison. As a result, the family did not accept her back after she left the shelter. From then on, relations with her kin group were broken and she became a permanent resident at the shelter.

Another time, as we were visiting former mitras – a routine procedure for checking the well-being of former FOKUPERS clients – I heard the story of another woman who was also ostracized after resorting to justice through public institutions. This woman, in her mid-forties, lived in a roadside hut in a village near Díli. With no children, she moved there after being abandoned by her husband, who was indicted for domestic violence based on her complaint. Background information about her was not precise, and those who told me the story knew only that she had no other relatives besides her husband. After he left, her only option was to make a living by selling miscellaneous products from the hut that was both her home and shop. Her isolation was characteristic of those who had been excluded from certain moral obligations (such as assistance in times of need) stemming from kinship relations. She had no one to appeal to, no one to lend her support. As my interlocutors at FOKUPERS put it, she was a lonely woman, a "poor wretch".

A few notes and observations

The cases discussed above make evident the dramatic situation of mitras detached from the wider social networks supporting individuals in Timor-Leste. The constraints they faced were

(Silva 2010, 210). In this chapter, I use the term to refer to not just this set of goods, but to the broader scope of all possibilities involved in marriage prestations in the country.

intensified precisely due to the lack of family to whom they could appeal. Poor relations with kin groups seem to be the chief reason why they ended up in the FOKUPERS shelter in the first place.

Conflicts that emerged between these women, their partners and/or relatives can largely be explained by the latter's expectations about the household tasks that the new wives were to perform (especially in the case of Júlia and Fernanda). The fact that their behavior strayed from such expectations prevented their full incorporation and recognition as part of the family.

Some of the sources of distress in Fernanda's relations with her new family were the labor in the coffee fields and distribution of household chores, in addition to not having access to her own husband's earnings. Júlia and Fernanda constantly questioned age-related hierarchies – or at least showed discomfort about how these were practiced. Júlia and Augusta were not fully recognized as spouses, and sometimes had their very personhood denied, as shown by the abusive comments against Júlia when she was finally banished from her boyfriend's house.

The poor integration of these women into their partners' homes is probably the most remarkable recurrence in these stories. In the cases of Júlia and Augusta, this extends further to the absence of relations between their own families and those of their partners. If, for some of them, there was no concrete commitment formally recognizing them as part of the new families, for others it was difficult to establish relations according to local norms (based on expectations, provision of services to the husband's family, compliance to age-related hierarchies). In such cases, reciprocity relations that would qualify socialities involved as appropriate and acceptable were lacking (Silva and Simião 2017).

Gift and reciprocity: on creating and cultivating relations in Timor-Leste

Debates on sociality in Timor-Leste have underscored the gift as a key mobilizer of relations. Gift relations are built through debt between individuals and groups, and ultimately aim at (re)producing persons and things. Silva and Simião claimed that "coercion through debt is fundamental for constituting gift

partners as such, as well as for constructing the value of the donor through the other's moral capture" (2017, 108). To be captured in such relations, to make such commitment, is regarded as positive from the point of view of those involved.

Marriage prestations, *barlake* in Tetum, are a form of local sociality that displays most clearly the logic of reciprocity and its aggregating effects. It is through gifts exchanged between the bride's and groom's families, which consolidate a woman's transfer from her original house to her husband's, that marriage and alliance between families are established. Through *barlake*, the symbolic commitment and alliance relations between the two groups are consolidated and expressed in the gifts exchanged in recognition of the bride's value. In virilocal communities, for instance, upon the conclusion of *barlake* the couple may begin living with the man's group (Simião 2015, 136).

Unions through *barlake* are deeply meaningful as they produce long-lasting relationships between families and groups, and these remain connected through the circulation of goods and people, thus incorporating value to the latter (Silva and Simião 2017). Although fundamental, the husband and wife are not the only subject positions constructed through marriage and associated exchanges. The spouses' kin groups also acquire roles and names that reverberate across social life at large. The kind of relationship linking families that celebrate marriages between their sons and daughters bears the name *fetosaa-umame* (literally, wife-giving clan−wife-taking clan). These attachments between groups make up a system of relations based on mutual obligations and responsibilities (Brandão et al 2011). Through marriage, families sustain long-lasting relations (Silva 2010, 210) that bind their members to account for their own conduct, to respond socially for their behavior and attitudes.

One perspective is that *barlake* unites families, transforming them into allies while at the same time functioning as a symbol of their mutual agreement about a wedding. Through it, the 'value' of a bride is recognized in the presence of the family and the community at large (FOKUPERS 2012). Unions mediated by *barlake* are publicly acknowledged, and may prevent conflict by bringing families together in a common moral and social code binding both

couples and families (Brandão et al 2011). Finally, it is expected that *barlake* will make families more attentive to the couple, enforcing accountability for their conduct towards others and helping curb violent or arbitrary behavior (Simião 2015). This would promote a sort of behavioral decorum, according to which spouses would respond to their respective families about how they treat each other.

In contrast, in the cases discussed here, obligatory reciprocal ties binding women to their families were, if not completely broken, at least significantly weakened. As a result, they occupied a kind of marginal position. The importance of constantly referring to the family groups to which they belonged (or not) stems from the fact that, in the construction of personhood in Timor-Leste, to be someone is to be able to count on someone. An individual only becomes a person through relations of kinship, debt, or prospects of engaging with them. These are vital for constituting oneself as a subject, as a fully-fledged person (Silva and Simião 2017).

I am not suggesting that all women experiencing domestic violence in Timor-Leste have no relatives to whom they may appeal, or are 'left out' of kin and/or gift relations. But the fact that many mitras are in such marginal positions suggests that modern support networks, such as the ones promoted by the state and civil society organizations, such as FOKUPERS, tend to reach primarily those women who are already somewhat disconnected from local webs of reciprocity and, therefore, in a sensitive position of vulnerability. Thus, in this particular situation, response to domestic violence is more effectively manageable by means of modern organizations' discourse and practices.

Complexities and controversies: further analysis

A case that sparked commotion within the FOKUPERS team in November, 2015 stands out from the multiple dramatic situations taking place during the organization's routine work. A soldier from Timor-Leste's Defense Force (Forças de Defesa de Timor-Leste, F-FDTL) in Díli assaulted his pregnant wife and was reported. The woman was sent to hospital and was receiving primary care when another national NGO called PRADET (Psychosocial Recovery and Development in East Timor) summoned FOKUPERS. In the

meantime, she was transferred to a private clinic. While the FOKUPERS team contacted its network of institutional partners to prepare to assist the woman after she left hospital and checked into the clinic, the husband went to the FOKUPERS headquarters to look for his wife and demand an explanation.

Another officer accompanied him and both sat silently in uniform, while waiting for the shelter's director, J. The conversation was very stern and dry, led by J.'s firm position, who recalled several times during the discussion the severity of the husband's assault on his wife. J. remained unmoved by his attempts to justify his acts: he would have to respond to that in court, to take those explanations to the judge. The officer then demanded to know where his wife was so he could see her. The director's reply was as negative as it was assertive: "your wife is now under our care". As there was nothing else he could do, the husband left knowing only that, after leaving the clinic, his wife would go straight to the uma mahon.

Also significant was the case of two men who arrived at the FOKUPERS office looking for one of the mitra the NGO had embraced. These were her husband and his father, who wished to take the spouse/daughter-in-law back home. Two team members advised the men to return home and wait until they consulted with the woman about the possibility of meeting the men some other time. They tried to explain to the men that they could not see or take the woman back whenever they wished, unless a series of procedures were concluded first. The husband insisted that he had the right to take his wife, and accused FOKUPERS of disrupting his family and causing him problems. Tension rose and one of the team members, L., had to remind them of the violence the husband had committed, and how the trauma had driven his wife to the shelter. She reasserted that he had no option but to wait, as he had assaulted his wife and now the issue would have to be resolved in court, before the judge.

Whenever husbands or relatives wished to visit, it was necessary for them to request a meeting with the team, so staff could first assess the mitras' emotional state and safety, and comply with her wishes. Relatives could not just go to the NGO office and see them immediately. The procedure for booking visits was

mandatory and meetings always took place in the organization's headquarters rather than in the shelter. Moreover, the meeting did not grant the relatives the right to take the woman back home.

One case where such booking protocols had been fully followed may help explain other aspects of the NGO's embracement dynamics. The mother, uncle (father's brother) and two cousins of a girl victim of sexual abuse perpetrated by her father arrived at the FOKUPERS office demanding to see her. Their intention was to convince her to rethink the complaint against her father and withdraw it. The uncle and mother wanted to ask her to stop the father from being incarcerated long term. The man was already awaiting trial in jail, and it is widely known in Timor-Leste that sexual abuse is among the gender-based offenses that most often result in a jail terms. The family's concern was that the girl's father would receive the ultimate conviction.

The uncle and mother believed that she could change this outcome by withdrawing what she had said, by changing her testimony to refute that the father had done what she had accused him of. They were there to plead with her to think especially about her mother, the rest of the family, and the difficulties they would go through if the father was absent for many years. They were not there in any way to support the girl or recognize her individual need for reparations and justice, as FOKUPERS understood it. Rather, it was a demand for recognition of the father's importance, for him to avoid jail. This was however beyond the girl's scope of action as victims of domestic and sexual abuse cannot withdraw their complaints.

The team advised the girl to keep to her testimony, to follow through with the legal process and tell the truth before the judge, because this was the right thing to do. The dilemma at stake was significant: to proceed with the case, the accusation and her own testimony meant having to deal with all sorts of negative reactions from her family upon her return home, if, indeed, she could. From the FOKUPERS perspective, the father, regardless of his position, was an offender who had to face justice. The girl's family however did not share this view. In any case, she could have ended up being exposed as the one who 'caused trouble' and who would have to bear the burden of 'disagreeing' with her family.

This case helps us grasp the complexities involved in the liminal position occupied by the mitras. They found themselves in-between two fields that demand exclusive adherence: one centered on individuality, the other around family (holistic/collective) values; one was based on individual interests and rights, the other on obligations and expectations placed on them by others. Even in the case of women who do have attachments with persons who embrace them as members of a collective group, the NGO positions itself as a mediator or a screen for interactions between them.

The NGO's protective role imposes, from the start, certain limitations on the partners' access to the women in order to defend or safeguard the latter's individual rights, privacy and dignity. The husbands' access to, and contact with, women in the organization's care are reconfigured, screened or constrained. This reinforces the assumption that these women are, above all, individuals who, as such, do not have the obligation to make themselves available to others whenever they wish – no matter which relations and ties are involved.

By negotiating/mediating the mitras' agency towards to their relatives, FOKUPERS seems to reify the individual as a full, exclusive bearer of rights. Whenever necessary, the organization reasserts the importance of summoning and trusting the state's legal apparatus – as was shown in the section on pedagogic practices and the case of the girl advised to keep to her testimony and confirm the abuse committed by her father. FOKUPERS seems therefore to operate by producing new values and providing instruments capable of reshaping some of the mitras' social experiences, especially those marked by gender bias.

Closing remarks

Once embraced by FOKUPERS, the mitras go through a series of cohesive strategic procedures aimed at providing them with legal support, guiding them through the legal process and securing their autonomy for addressing conflicts involving domestic violence. Such autonomy essentially refers to spheres of non-legal mediation (traditional/*kultura*), where women require a network of kin to represent them before the offenders' relatives (Simião 2005; 2007; 2015).

As discussed, the supportive discourses and practices the NGO provides show significant potential for change, both by mediating contacts and relations between the women and their families, and by guiding their conduct regarding the resolution of cases involving domestic violence and the recognition of their rights as individuals. Much of FOKUPERS's work involves reconfiguring relations, even where women are encompassed by consistent networks of belonging. The organization offers an apparatus that produces new forms of agency and consciousness, new ways of being and perceiving the world, based on the struggle for legal rights and guarantees. These new tools take the form of legal knowledge and understanding of the state's norms and legal institutions, which are made available through the kind of education that I have called legal pedagogies[8] (Santos Filho 2017; 2019). The ways in which legal experiences are rationalized and lived are always guided by perspectives and logics that make sense for a given collectivity and its interests. FOKUPERS has promoted a defense of legal institutions and produced "ordered relations" between people (Rosen 2006, 198), and between people and spaces of conflict-resolution, basically through educational procedures.

In this sense, the mitras are exposed to a series of activities aimed at re/orienting them towards how to act in a modern world. This is shown by the efforts of FOKUPERS in resetting mitras' actions and interactions with their partners, communities, local institutions such as 'traditional' or 'customary' justice, and government spheres of activity.

From the NGO's modern point of view, ultimate value lies in individual rights and guarantees, rather than in relationalities and sociabilities constructed through gift−debt kinds of relations and in how well integrated into the houses those women are. Therefore, even though they does not exclusively embrace women detached from extended kinship groups – as we have seen from the

8. My deployment of this category is inspired by the work of Kelly Silva on consumption, circulation, and governance of certain economic resources fundamental for the (re)production of things and people in Timor-Leste. Silva (2016) shows how educational campaigns and public policy have attempted to reorient the assumptions and behavior of local actors in order to stimulate them into channeling resources for the market.

narratives presented throughout this chapter – FOKUPERS care services guarantee the needs of women with that particular profile or those having difficulty reintegrating into their families, for various reasons.

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