

CO-HABITATIONS AND POWER DYNAMICS: LAND, EXCHANGE, GOVERNANCE. TIMOR-LESTE IN CONTEXT



International Conference

Museu do Oriente & Instituto de Ciências Sociais
Lisboa, Portugal

January 19-24, 2015

Conveners

Rui Graça Feijó (CES-UC) Susana de Matos Viegas (ICS-UL)

Research Project Co-habitations: dynamics of power in Lautém (Timor-Leste)

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In Timor-Leste, as Elizabeth Traube acutely remarked, time is everywhere, and time is not homogeneous. From the *Longue durée* (Fernand Braudel) to the cyclical time of harvests, encompassing different rhythms of change and modes of persistence, time has its own grammar. The arrow of time does not imply that new elements fully replace older ones, but rather that the complexity of social life increases as several layers of time co-exist at one given moment. Timor-Leste has been appointed in many different ways as an example of cultural resilience, political resistance, and clash of paradigms, but also of violent domination by global dynamics of power.

This international conference aims at looking at the accumulation of complexity resulting from dynamics of power in co-habitations. Each section will debate classical themes in the study of Timor-Leste and its regional context - Land and Territory; Exchange and Asymmetry; Governance and Democracy from the analytical viewpoint of evolving power dynamics of co-habitations.

The photo used in this leaflet showing a tomb which combines a Fataluku funerary post that pertains to the long established practices

associated with ancestor related practices, the Christian symbol of the cross inherited from the colonial period, and the flag of the resistance movement FRETILIN epitomizes the co-existence of different temporalities and offers a starting point to consider the complexity of the social process. By no means is the notion of “syncretism” the only possible reading of this image, as the emergence of tensions and even conflict recall the need to look deeply into the ways people experience power relations. The idea of “co-habitations” aims at inscribing in the core of a research project on Timor-Leste and its context the mutual influences arising from the existence of distinct social processes not only side by side but in their mutual influences, sometimes resulting from effective clashes. Historicity is therefore a critical element in the comprehension of contemporary social life, as the past still lives in the present, but time itself does not exhaust the sources of competing social phenomena.

Stable, structured relationships between individuals and the constitutive matrix of any society form what Norbert Elias labeled a “configuration”, which is permeated by tensions, and prone to suffer the effects of dynamic forces and undergo significant transformations. An historical sociology emerges then, and the term “reconfiguration” may be recalled to signify the process by virtue of which social relations are reshaped into new structures. Again, the example of the photo used in this leaflet (revealing a situation that is considerably different from the one prevailing a quarter of a century ago) epitomizes a profound restructuration of social elements (tradition, religion, politics) in the course of the specific process of national resistance.

The purpose of this international

conference is to test the validity of the approach defined by the combination of the notions of “co-habitations” and “reconfigurations” in a dynamic model of evolving power relations in the case of Timor-Leste and its regional context.

Our inaugural session on January 19 will be held at ICS.

Key-note address by **Elizabeth Traube** (Wesleyan University), entitled “Origin Discourses, Gift-Giving and National Belonging”.

Three different aspects of our general theme will be specifically addressed in the following sessions, to be held at the *Museu do Oriente* on alternate days starting January 20, each one beginning with a general presentation, and comprising several other contributions.

First (January 20) the broad issue of land and territory will be discussed. The relationships between people and the land from which they derive their livelihood exemplify the co-habitation of different layers of temporality: customary uses are challenged by “legal titles” originating both in the Portuguese colonial period and the recent Indonesian occupation of the territory. Different articulations of the “right to be included” versus the “right to exclude” are present on the ground. The result of this superimposition of “rights” is the emergence of social tensions. The current government is keen to implement new legislation which is supposed to address the complexity of this problem, but earlier attempts to legislate have raised more questions than those they could answer. This remains a major issue to be tackled by the new democratic state that requires a flexible approach. The purpose of this panel is to contribute to an understanding of the constellation of social forces that shape the human landscape of Timor-Leste and the avenues that are open for an inclusive future. Land is to be understood as territoriality, including not only histories of settlements and displacements but also what the regional literature of the oceanic and southeast Asian context identifies as a kind of a land-view of the world.

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January 20

2

January 22

Key-note address by **Dionísio Babo Soares**, anthropologist and currently Minister of Justice in the Fifth Government of Timor-Leste, charged with the momentous file of the Land Bill. Dionísio Babo Soares also has political responsibilities to find a balance between different sorts of justice and juridical ethos, including the survival of “Tara Bandu” and the principles of a modern state.

Participants in this session are:

Andrew McWilliam (Australian National University)

“Hunting and harvesting the Commons in Timor-Leste: on the political culture of custom”

Laura S. Meitzner Yoder (Wheaton University)

“The city came to us: Rural land and livelihood transformations on the urban periphery”

Susana Barnes (Monash University)

“Land, identity and sacralized power”

Susana de Matos Viegas (University of Lisboa)

“Paths to Infinity. Territorial belongings among the Fataluku in Lautem”

The second session (January 22) will address the issue of Exchange: historical social relations in Timor-Leste have relied on widespread systems of exchange sustained on what has been coined asymmetrical exchange whose normative value is preserved in many present day communities. The winds of “modernity” with their emphasis on individualism and individual rights challenge the persistence of customs and collective, corporate rights, and develop alternative narratives. A case in point is that concerning “barlake”, with a long history of controversy in the Timorese imagination - but is far from being the only one. The aim of this section is to enlarge the focus of attention to other key moments of the social life cycle and include funerary rituals that seem to be positively articulated to those of marriage. In fact, the living and the dead (ancestors) seem to be part of the exchange system and mutually dependent. A direct focus on the specific contribution of funerals and the constitution of ancestors to the general debate on exchange and asymmetry is also expected.

Key-note address by **David Hicks** (SUNY Stony Brook), a leading authority in the field with extensive work covering half a century, under the title: “Exchange and Hierarchy in Timor-Leste”

This will be followed by presentations from the following contributors:

Judith Bovensiepen (University of Kent at Canterbury)

“Paying for the dead. On the politics of death in independent Timor-Leste”.

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January 24

Kelly C. Silva (University of Brazilia)

“Managing persons, things and rituals. Nation building as purification in Timor-Leste”

Susana de Matos Viegas (University of Lisboa) & **Rui Graça Feijó** (University of Coimbra)

“Acaleu Sorotu. A methodological inquiry into fataluku exchange registers”

Susanna Rodemeier (University of Heidelberg)

“Cycles of emergence and decay: social order under pressure in modern as well as mythical times”.

The third panel will discuss governance (January 24). The two previous social processes entail the necessity to deal with the emerging tensions between distinct and often conflicting models of social organization. The modern state, based on democratic principles, has acknowledged on different occasions the value of “traditional” authorities, either in political matters (such as the “community leaders” in suku and aldeias) or judicial (referring part of the conflicts to customary law and practitioners). The construction of the modern state administration requires that principles of legitimacy pertaining to different social strata be made compatible through persistent negotiations, enabling a common language to emerge. This group will be devoted to furthering our comprehension of the articulations between the different discourses and sources of political legitimacy that permeate the current situation.

Key-note address by **Michael Leach** (Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne), a political scientist who is very active in the analysis of current trends of governance, as well as in the Timor-Leste Studies Association. His contribution (co-authored with Deborah Cummins) is entitled “Democracy Old and New. The interaction of Modern and Traditional Authority in East Timorese Local Government”

Further contributions are expected from

Anne Brown (University of Queensland)

“Deepening dialogue and exploring and enriching the state in Timor-Leste.”

Damian Grenfell (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology)

“Power and the construction of analytical categories: Governance and Co-habitation across Timor-Leste”

Daniel Simião (University of Brazilia)

“Justice and Politics of Recognition: the role of conflict resolution in the making of personhood in an East-Timorese village.”

Douglas Kammen (University of Singapore)

“Timor-Leste's petroleum: elite identification and political competition”

Rui Graça Feijó (University of Coimbra)

“At home we wear cawat, outside we wear a tie. Co-habitations and political legitimacy in grassroots democracy”.

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David Hicks and Michael Leach are consultants of the Project FCT (PTDC/CS-ANT/118150/2010) since 2012; Elizabeth Traube is consultant for this conference.

Registration for the Conference is advised (free of charge)

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