Modernisation in Timor Leste: the 'community' at stake
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Abstract

Timor Leste has recently celebrated its 10th anniversary of independence and statehood. During the past decade the country has undergone a significant transition into, what is now, a relatively stable modern, democratic State. In some respects, however, this 'development' has happened at the demise of the social significance of indigenous culture, particularly within urbanised areas and demographics. This paper is a case study of the Aileu district of Timor Leste. The paper analyses the role of indigenous Timorese culture in maintaining a cohesive and functional community. I will reflect on the power of indigenous and religious culture to inspire a sense of community in Aileu, mediated by the *uma lulik* (sacred house) and their respect for humanity's common origin, and then discuss the negative effects of forms of modernisation, such as a competitive multi-party political system and an individualistic economic environment. The paper will conclude by warning against a rush towards modernisation in fledgling nations such as Timor Leste, if the trajectory does not properly preserve, presumably through educational means, the pro-community practices and values that are indigenous to the area.

Introduction

This paper broadly focuses on the ways in which the statebuilding process has affected social functionality and dynamics in a post-conflict context. I have been researching the Aileu district for the since 2010 and have established a theoretical concern with modernisation. Statebuilding and peacebuilding interventions are typically about efficiency and efficacy, getting the country back on its feet as quickly as possible; kick-starting the economy and establishing a stable political system, undergirded by the rule of law and public order. In just thirteen years, there have been five United Nations missions in Timor Leste,[2] all supporting the common interest of bringing about peace through developing the small, new nation. A fundamental concern is with this form of intervention and development, what could otherwise be

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[2] *United Nations Mission in Timor Leste* (UNAMET) – June-October 1999; *United Nations Transitional Administration in Timor Leste* (UNTAET) – October 1999-May 2002; *United Nations Mission of Support in Timor Leste* (UNMISET) - May 2002—May 2005); *United Nations Office in Timor Leste* (UNOTIL) – May 2005-August 2006; and, *United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor Leste* (UNMIT) – August 2006-December 2012.

characterised as rapid modernisation – i.e., rapidly pulling away from, or transforming the traditional social processes of pre-1999.[3]

Peacebuilding theorist, Roland Paris in *At War's End: Building Peace After Civil Conflict* (2004), warns against rapid modernisation in what he calls "Wilsonian peacebuilding"[4]. Paris is concerned, at a state-level, about the social effects of post-conflict reconstruction vis-à-vis the "pathologies of liberalisation", namely democratisation and economic neo-liberalism. He argues that these are inherently competitive, adversarial systems, logically antithetical to post-conflict peacebuilding. With particular respect to statebuilding in Timor Leste, Damien Grenfell's summation seems most accurate: "the whole process of intervention has been both rhetorically *and* materially framed by efforts to entrench the institutional and social infrastructure of a liberal hegemony" (Grenfell, 2012: 210).

The focus of this paper is primarily dedicated to the micro, individual-level of the post-conflict Aileu society. Based on almost three years of qualitative and quantitative research, I consider the transition of a traditional society to more modern one in Aileu and how this has impacted local conceptions of community. I take the notion of community to be a fundamental aspect of nurturing stable, peaceful societies. Based on the notion of "community" promoted by social theorist, Ferdinand Tönnies in his *magnum opus*, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (Community and Society, 1887), an analytical distinction is made between what one may refer to as the *continuities* and the *discontinuities* of the Aileu district community. This two-fold approach will ultimately help to identity the phenomenological influences, pathological and otherwise, on Aileu society.

Aileu is hidden in the mountains about 45 kilometres south of Dili. The comparatively small district population, just 45,000, inhabit the district's four sub-districts (Aileu Vila, Laulara, Liquedoe, and Remexio) and thirty-one towns (*sucos*). For spiritual and historical reasons, many villages are dotted along mountain ridges throughout Aileu. This does not only typify the topography of the district, but also Aileu Mambai culture. With a cool, temperate climate for much of the year, the district's altitude and temperature is ideal for growing coffee – Aileu's principal contribution to the nation's economy. But the climate and high altitude also nurtures a calmness and peacefulness expressed within local culture. The Mambai pride themselves on being some of the most peaceful people in Timor Leste, they claim, because of the coolness of the weather during the dry months over the middle of the year. Moreover, due to the relatively small population and sparsely spread villages, Mambai people rely on close communal networks. This value of familiarity in Mambai culture requires in turn a great deal of trust; a trust from my own experience, that does not come cheap in the district. In many regards, trust is one of few forms of social security for an Aileu person. As such, once trust and familiarity have been established, there is a tremendous sense of community that flourishes in pockets of societies throughout Aileu.

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[3] It could be argued that the modernization of Timor Leste began long before, but 1999 marks a definite point in time of development of the nation.

[4] Named after US president Woodrow Wilson, Paris identifies democratisation and economic liberalisation and marketization, which constitute this type of peacebuilding, the preferred approach by Western nations.

Modernisation Theory

There is a great deal of literature that discusses the concomitant breakdown of traditional social institutions (Beck 1992; Giddens 1990) and the rise of individualisation and individualism (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Slater 1970; MacPherson 1962) with modernisation. The push towards more modern ways, in sociological terms, means the departure from actual, real life social relationships. Giddens (1990) refers to this as the "disembedding of society" to suggest that people's relationships with each other are becoming less 'real' and less direct. Paul James expands on Giddens' thesis, calling this the process of "social abstraction" (James 2006).

In their respective works, Max Weber (1864-1920), Ferdinand Tönnies (1855-1936) and Karl Polanyi (1886-1964) called for the reinstatement of more traditional, concrete ways of sociality; the direct interrelations and interactions of social life. Late 19th and early 20th century was a time of drastically changing economies in the 'modern' world – i.e., almost entirely Western European – due to industrialisation, and its social consequences of stratification and isolation. Polanyi (1944) called this time the "Satanic Mill"; a Marxist concern that industrialization and the advancement of production tools, and its growing materialistic social consequences, were being accompanied by social dislocation of the commoner; what Mooser (1983) referred to as "the dissolution of the proletariat milieu". Broadly speaking, Romantics (e.g., Polanyi, 1944; Tönnies, 2001) conceived traditional society as a social system of strong genealogical ties and of localised communal living, which were the social safety nets within society to mitigate the marginalisation of individuals. Modernity, however, through greater levels of education and competiveness, promotes over-rationalism, self-sufficiency and self-reliance.

In today's age of technology and commercialism, society has evolved into, what Ulrich Beck coined, the "second modernity". Accounting for the period from the mid-twentieth century onwards, modern society is typically becoming a society of personal independence (individuality), and, according to some, of self-centred individualism (MacPherson 1962; Slater 1970). Through greater education, mobility (i.e., the chance to transcend hierarchical social boundaries), and competitiveness, the late modern world is becoming more individualised and individualistic (Beck 1992).

In traditional society, protection and social security comes from one's family and community. Historically, traditional family relationships are sustained, not on emotional grounds of love and affection, but on "work and economics"; for instance, "their activities were closely coordinated with one another and subordinated to the common goal of preserving the farm or workshop" (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 88). Due to this financial dependency, the family members were "exposed to similar experiences and pressures (seasonal rhythms, harvest, bad weather etc.) and bound together by common efforts. It was a tightly knit community, in which little room was left for personal inclinations, feelings and motives" (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 88).

In modern society, however, the family as a social institution has lost its social significance, principally because the scope for personal advancements and freedom is far greater than in pre-modern societies (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). There is

no longer the economic imperative to stay within the confines of one's family. For Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), the process of individualisation begins at the disintegration, or abstraction, of the modern family. The modern, "post-familial family", in other words, we might consider as comprised of a set of "elective relationships" rather than traditionally a "community of need" (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 85-100).

Methodology

Inspired by the works described in the previous section, I am interested in the impacts of modernisation and emerging individualisation on Aileu society. The Aileu district, along with all of Timor Leste, is currently undergoing significant social and cultural shifts as a consequence of post-conflict reconstruction. Based on numerous interviews, field-notes and over 450 survey[5] responses, collected over the past two years, this paper will discuss the notable social impacts of modernisation on local conceptions of "community". To an extent, these lessons can be expanded to the broader development process of Timor Leste.

The framework for analysis in this paper is based on a conception of community adopted by Tönnies, who drew a distinction between *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society) (2001 [1887]). The community, to Tönnies, is the embodiment of familiarity, comfort and security in social exclusivity. Hence, *Gemeinschaft* is the "genuine, enduring life together", a "living organism" (2001: 19), "unity of human wills" even if in separation (2001: 22). While *Gesellschaft* is the newer social phenomenon, *Gemeinschaft* is the older, pre-industrial form of social makeup, based on feudalism and agrarianism.[6] The community, to this extent, is more localised and tight-knit. An "ordinary human society", on the other hand, we may "understand simply as individuals living alongside but independent of one another" (Tönnies, 2001: 19); there are only voluntary relationships between members of a *Gesellschaft*.

Indeed, since 17th century Enlightenment there has been a great deal of literature on the negative aspects of traditional community obligations, namely referring to its oppressive and constrictive nature, usually caused by a culturally powerful elite. In adopting the "continuist" perspective of Giddens (1990), this paper recognises the respective deficiencies of traditional and modern senses of community. As Giddens states, "there are continuities between the traditional and modern, neither is cut of whole cloth; it is well known how misleading it can be to contrast these two in too gross a fashion" (Giddens 1990). Thus, this paper is an analysis of the social consequences of modernisation (and not modernity *per se*)[7] and is concerned with establishing a mixed model of traditional and modern social life, i.e., normatively extracting the positive elements of each. In other words, this analysis should not be considered a romantic view of traditional life in Aileu.

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[5] These surveys (2011 and 2012) were comprised of a five-point Likert scale, "1" representing "Strongly disagree" to "5", "Strongly Agree". I have used SPSS Statistics 20 to analyse the data, including descriptive and one-way ANOVA testing. The data collection tried to be proportional according to gender and sub-district populations.

[6] I define feudalism and agrarianism to be a society, respectively, based on lordships and fiefdoms and agricultural and horticultural farming, as was typical in Medieval Europe.

[7] Modernisation can be conceptualized as the *process* of modernizing. Unlike modernity, it is not an ends, but a means towards social evolution.

An introduction to Mambai culture

The Aileu people belong to the Mambai culture and language system, one of 30-odd in Timor Leste. Cultural values and practices share particular themes throughout Timor Leste, but each has certain nuances. Mambai culture falls in the great Austronesian culture. According to James Fox (2006) Austronesian cultures emphasise humanities common origin through the botanic metaphor of the tree. Although the origin story may differ significantly from one Austronesian culture to another, it is the discourse of origins, what may be called the "founder-focus ideology" (Bellwood 2006), that is distinctly Austronesian (Fox 2006: 5). The tree metaphor indicates the importance of historical precedence in Austronesian societies, specifically regarding the "reverence for ancestral founders, the naming of groups after them, and the ranking of positions in relation to such founders by which rights to land, labour and ritual prerogatives are derived" (Fox, 2006: 9). Due to the principle of historical precedence, the primary stratification of society is based on age and, to a lesser extent, gender.

Furthermore, Austronesian cultures value inter-familial connections through what may be called "marriage alliances" (Fox, 2006: 11). In Timor Leste, specifically, the process of establishing marriage alliances (*fetosa umane*) is a strategic part of building the family "tree". Hence in the long term, the social security of one's family is dependent on the family's capacity to "marry out" its members. Marriage in Timorese cultures is fundamental to the creation of network communities, interwoven across the country (McWilliam 2011). It recognises the two families involved in the marriage process – the "wife-giver" (*umane*, the male house) and the "wife-taker" (*fetosa*, the female house). The formal process of the bride transferring her allegiance to the groom's *uma lulik* (sacred house) recognises, according to reciprocity, the hierarchical relationship of the involved houses – the "wife-taker" *uma lulik* is indebted to the "wife-giver" *uma lulik* for the "suffering" of losing their daughter (Clamagirand 1980).

According to Mambai legend all of the *uma lulik* in Aileu and in parts of neighbouring districts, derive spiritually from Raimansu, located in the southern mountains of Aileu Vila (GM 2012; Traube, 1986). The community of *uma lulik* (plural) can be seen in public at the congregation of Aileu kings (*luirai*) invariably at important public events, such as visits by the prime minister or the bishops of Timor Leste (e.g, at the St. Peter and St. Paul's feast, 29/06/12). Raimansu and its brother house, Hoholu, are the common ground for Mambai *uma lulik*. This community is geographically marked by so-called Mother Earth's navel (*husar*) (field-notes, 30/06/12).

During my visits to Aileu, people reminded me of the peacefulness of their community. "Aileu is not the same as other districts; Aileu is free from fighting. All the people here always work together, and mix around with each other" (interview, AB 18/07/11). I have been to the district three times so far, for varying lengths of time, and people are always eager to raise this with me. I believe the deep-seated respect for peace, cooperation and tolerance in Aileu derives from their traditional Mambai

culture. Even during the civil crisis of 2006, when the nation was effectively[8] divided into two, between *ema lorosa'e* (the eastern people) and *ema loromonu* (the western people), Aileu remained calm (interview MK 21/07/11). In fact, Aileu was a safe-haven for many people fleeing violence in neighbouring districts.

After nearly three years of studying the people of Aileu, their society and their culture, initially intending to look at the effective ways of post-conflict peacebuilding in a grassroots context, I have found myself continually asking why Aileu society functions so relatively well? I do not wish to idealise or romanticise Aileu people and culture; indeed, there have been, and undoubtedly will continue to be, incidental tensions at the district and grassroots-level – notably, land issues and political tensions – but I make the claim that there certain social processes and institutions which mitigate the severity of such tensions. For assistance in analyse, these processes and institutional are what one may term, *the continuities of community*, while the abovementioned social tensions may be, *the discontinuities of community*.

Continuities of Aileu community

Reasons for the relative peacefulness of Aileu society comes from traditional and modern continuities of Aileu community. But the very notion of community, as Tönnies argued (see above), is inherently a traditional phenomenon. As such, the modern positive influences, I argue, are largely traditionally motivated. The traditional continuities of community, which are discussed below, illustrate how Aileu community is currently *conceived* and *preserved.* The assumption here rests on, first of all, the claim that the sense of community in Aileu would not exist without its conception and, in turn, appreciation; while, secondly, the daily volution of community is maintained, conditioned and preserved by the existing culture.

Conceptions of community

> I grew up in my society, and everyone is related to each other, it's hard
> to say that I feel unsafe living in this society. (interview, AA 10/07/11)

Community is conceived of, first and foremost, according to family in Aileu. The institution of the family maintains social cohesion. According to Mambai culture, the family and *uma lulik* (sacred house) share part of the same social significance. Conceptually we might consider, the nuclear family (not the individual) as the smallest social unit while the *uma lulik* is the link between the family and the community. The *uma lulik* is central here. It is the physical embodiment of the extended family and the community. Trust, respect and reciprocity (two-way exchange) dominate social relations because of this institution.

In the tripartite relationship between family, *uma lulik*, and community, it is difficult to determine where one ends and the other starts. As such, we may consider all three as one, comprising the social collective. "The idea of the *uma lulik* is to recognise each other [as brothers and sisters, as family]" (interview, LL 13/07/11). Hence,

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[8] I do not want to over simplify the 2006 crisis, remembering Scambary's (2009) article. Scambary's central point, that the crisis was far more complex than just east-west, is certainly noteworthy, but I reduce it to this dichotomy in order to express, albeit fleetingly, the encompassing scale of the 2006 crisis.

mention of one's family evokes images of his or her *uma lulik* and community, based on feelings of trust and respect (2012 survey)[9].

The cultural norms of traditional community are in line with the religious sentiments in the district. In fact, for this reason, one could claim that religion is embedded in, or a part of, traditional culture. In other words, "religion qualifies tradition" (interview, PD 14/07/11). Aside from the spiritual commonality of the two, religion, more specifically Catholicism, actively integrates with Mambai culture. Their common encouragement is "community" and shared living. For instance, a traditional marriage ceremony, *fetosa umane*, will take place first, and then the families will go to the church to make it official. As one respondent claimed, "92 or 93 percent of the population is Catholic, but this doesn't mean that they have forgotten their culture" (interview, AA 10/07/11).

Religion is deeply embedded in social life in Aileu. Familiarity is a necessary factor of trust and, in turn, a broad sense of community. Sunday Church, for example, is an important instance of how religion plays a role in extending and maintaining one's conception of community. In effect, the church congregation is a modern derivative of the *uma lulik*. The *uma lulik* relies on family connections and the church on religious affiliations. Both are a means towards building community. As much as the *uma lulik*, a traditional institution, is open to inter-family community through *fetosa umane*, the church congregations in Aileu are open to an ecumenical, inter-religion community (interview, RS 11/07/11).

There seems to be growing tolerance and acceptance between the main religions of Aileu, Catholicism and Protestantism. Ten years ago there emerged various disputes between the Protestants and Catholics, involving the desecration of Protestant churches in Liquidoe and in Aileu Vila because they seemingly came uninvited (field-notes, 22/06/12). However many are confident that these issues have now passed (e.g., interview, MK 07/07/2012; interview, PD 14/07/2011).[10] Nowadays religious leaders, representing the various Christian denominations in Aileu, support each other in the community (interview, PD 14/07/11).

Preservations of community

In traditional culture, as mentioned above, the *uma lulik* (sacred house) assumes a central place because it evokes the concept of family, relatedness and collectiveness. In Aileu culture still, it forms the centre of one's identity and of one's belonging in the community. The vitality of the *uma lulik* is maintained through annual rituals, including for birth, death, marriage and agriculture.[11] Although these ceremonies are

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[9] The 2011 survey suggests a strong liking towards traditional Mambai culture because of its promotion of inter-communal and inter-personal respect. In response to the statement, *My traditional culture motivates me to respect all Timorese despite their differences to myself*, almost 90% of respondents (N = 147) answered "agree" (29.9%) or "strongly agree" (59.2%).

[10] One cannot help but wonder, however, what would happen if the Catholic Church no longer predominated social life. Some have claimed that they were behind the 2006 crisis because the Church feared that it was losing its power in society. According to the results of the 2012 survey, there is still some skepticism between the religions. In response to the statement, *I only trust those who follow the same religion as me*, only 45% disagreed or strongly disagreed

[11] Traube (1980, 1986) classifies these as white and black rituals and explains their social performances.

different in their own right, their social purpose is to maintain the appreciation for the sacred house and of their collective community (interview, GS 11/09/11). These ritual are not restricted to kinship, rather some are public events intended to involve members of the society. In the instance of death, one respondent explained:

> when someone dies in the family, all the families gather. I go with some sugar, with some money, with some rice [and] we gather to eat together. And after that we got to the grave for the ceremony (interview, PD 14/07/2011).

Conflicts or disputes are commonplace in any community. As such, there are safeguards in place to overcome these in Mambai culture. Conflict resoluton practices are many and varied according to the severity and duration of the conflict. A usual Mambia proceeding is participatory and reliant on dialogue (2011 survey).[12] According to one respondent, for instance, "I gather them, to listen to them, and after that we can try to have some good solution together" (interview, PD 14/07/2011).

In times of conflicts that are specifically internal to a family or *uma lulik* community, *hadame malu* is practised (field-notes, 28/06/12). As a particular form of *nahe biti* (spreading the mat) (see Babo-Soares, 2004), this ceremony usually involves sitting together, all parties involved in the conflict, to accept either party's *malus* (leaves), lime and *bua* (bettlenut). The significance of *hadame malu* is expressed in one's confidence to eat the goods brought by the other (field-notes, 28/06/12). Thus, as with most traditional cultural activities, it is a symbolic ritual. The practice is usually conducted in the Mambai language to evoke the parties' common heritage and shared understandings of culture; it is a way of bridging the difference (interview, LL 13/07/11).

The marriage celebration of new family alliances is known as *lere dalan*, a figurative expression, best translated as "clearing the road". *Lere dalan* involves the exchange of *barlaque* (tokens), such as jewellery and animals (field-notes, 28/06/12), which are thereafter kept as *sasan lulik* (sacred relics) stored in the *uma lulik*, which denote the everlasting bond of the two families, long after the duration of the marriage. Hence, in effect, we may consider the marriage as a means towards the end of the inter-family/inter-*uma lulik* connection, the *fetosa umane*. Depending on the size of one's family, one may possess any number of wife-givers (*fetosa*) and of wife-takers (*umane*), which command a right or a responsibility, respectively.

On a cosmological level, the *uma lulik* exemplifies the family's ancestors, its spiritual guardians. As mentioned above, the Mambai believe that humanity's origin comes from a spiritual mountains in Aileu, Raimansu and Hoholu. As with all creationist stories, the traditional Mambai believe that we all are *maun-alin sira* (older brothers and younger brothers). This phrase is commonly used in public gatherings to impress a sense of togetherness on the audience, to the point that the literal kinship meaning of "brother" (*maun*) is used far less often (field-notes, 29/06/12).

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[12] According to the results of the 2011 survey, almost 92% of respondents (N = 149) believed (34.9%) or strongly believed (57%) that building trust through dialogue was the most important part of preventing and resolving disputes.

Another common way of celebrating community and togetherness in Aileu is through the simple daily acts of eating, sitting and (importantly) talking together. In dropping around to someone's house, you will always be greeted with a cup of coffee and something. At community gatherings there will always be food and drink. Symbolically, these represent the equal relationship that the involved parties share. This fact is a stark identifier of the traditional living that is still strong in Aileu, though it is also expressed in religious events, such as the *Coraçao de Jesus* (Heart of Jesus) ceremony. Here neighbourhoods are reminded of their proximate, spatial community. A statue of the Virgin Mary is transported around Aileu, being housed at a different village each night during the months of May and June. But uniquely[13] in Aileu, such religious gatherings are not exclusive to the neighbourhood, but, as one interviewee explained, "every Aileu person is invited to the *Coraçao de Jesus* ceremony because we are all related and we know everyone" (interview, GS 03/07/12). It is an opportunity to pray and eat together with your neighbourhood, reinstituting these familial bonds, which seems very important more so for community reasons than religious/spiritual reasons (interview, MK 07/07/12).

A more recent mechanism for preserving the Aileu community at the district level is the inter-institutional cooperation between the Catholic Church (religion), police officers (law and order), and the district administration (state). The combination of these central political powers into what is known as the *tripica*, or sometimes called "the three pillars", seems to be an administrative legacy of the Indonesian times (interview, PD 04/07/12; field-notes, 21/06/12). The continuation of the *tripica* is for the purpose of governing, organising and overseeing political activity against the moral authority of Mambai tradition. Nowadays it has also been incorporated into the social moral authority (interview, PD 04/07/12). Specifically, their mandate consists of, firstly, promoting collaborative community-building, to engage the Aileu people in one community, and secondly to resolve or mitigate any problems from the village (aldeia) to district level. According to one respondent, "when a problem is involving many different groups, I try to pull them together with the police commander, the sub-district administrator" (interview PD 14/07/11).

Organised religion initiates and inspires numerous social welfare activities (2011 survey)[14]. A religious leader explained, "I find it very interesting to be with people, especially poor people, because they need someone for them" (interview, PD 14/07/11). He told a story about helping an elderly couple, whose house was falling down and who had no money for its repairs. Their children had moved to Dili for work and education, and to escape their mother who had become "crazy", leaving the 60-year-old father to take care of the family house himself. Having realised their desperate situation, the local priest bought the necessary material, had it transported to Remexio, and organised a group of young people to "renew the house". They all stayed a week there, fixing the house. According to the priest, this was a real community experience for everyone involved: "we were all there as one family; we ate together, we cooked together, to have lunch and dinner together" (interview, PD 14/07/11). Asked about his motivation for helping poor, the priest explained, "all the people for me are important, but especially the poor people because sometimes when

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13 In other districts of Timor Leste it is not common people outside the neighbourhood to attend a *Coraçao de Jesus*.

14 According to the results of the 2011 survey, 92% of respondents (N = 148) either agreed or strongly agreed to the statement, *My religion inspires me to assist people*.

there is no one to look after them, to have some contact, to meet with them, to discuss about their life, they feel nobody cares" (interview, PD 14/07/11).

Discontinuities of Aileu community

> The new ideology, the new doctrine, sometimes we need more clarification, explanation, socialisation for the simple people, so they don't lose their own culture (interview, PD 14/07/11).

Now let us turn to the discontinuities of Aileu community. By discontinuities I refer to the emerging social phenomena that contravene or challenge the sense of community in Aileu society. We can consider these discontinuist phenomena according to two categories, the monetisation of the social world and democratic individualism.

<u>Monetisation of the social world</u>

What does it mean to be independent on a national level? How has this concept of independence influenced society and social values? One respondent believed that becoming nationally independent has brought about the notion of independence as a person too, in the form of individuality and competitiveness. Traditionally, as we have established above, the Aileu community is what one respondent described as a "group-orientated society" (interview, RS 11/07/11). But political independence and the importance of money has impacted on social life; "if you are not competitive enough, you don't survive in today's society" (interview, RS 11/07/11). Even culture rituals such as the death ceremony (*kore metan*) or *fetosa umane*, have become money-orientated, an expected way of raising money for the family (interview, PD 14/07/11; interview, AA 10/07/11). This represents a real change in understanding of the relationship between the individual and community.

Possibly most culturally affected by the advent of state independence and the ensuing development process have been the younger generations. In contemporary times, youth are less socially confined to their original surroundings. Younger generations have greater mobility than older generations. The 2012 survey (N=289) results suggest that those 29 or younger have a significantly ($p < 0.05$) greater proportion of friends who live outside their town (*suco*) than 30 to 59 year olds. One explanation for this difference could be that many expand their social base, making friends from elsewhere, during their search for employment or, second best, education (interview, PD 14/07/11). Thus they are not as confined to their original surroundings as the older generations.

Mainstream, modern culture through music and television, is a principal driver of this personal need to "succeed" amongst youth. According to modern conceptions, success is determined by money and employment. In a largely impoverished society such as Aileu's, one could speculate whether the cultural urge for money and success is exacerbated, more so than in societies of greater affluence.

Despite commercialism seeming worse in Dili, the mass migration to the capital is leaving behind somewhat of a social and cultural void, undermining communities in Aileu (interview, AA 10/7/11; interview, PD 14/07/11). Youth seem to be detaching

from their Mambai tradition, their *uma lulik* and most of all, their family and community obligations (interview, AA 10/7/11; interview, JV 10/7/11; interview, PD 14/7/11). For example, asked whether they liked to celebrate their *uma lulik* or not, 29 year old or younger (N = 236; mean = 3.98) were slightly less favourable than respondents 30 years or older (N = 51; mean = 4.12) (2012 survey).

To an extent, the hard times of the recent past has inspired a culture of self-righteousness and entitlement, particularly among younger generations (interview, PD 14/7/11).[15] According to one community leader, subculture has emerged since 1999 of "I can go wherever and do whatever I like". There is a strong understanding of one's rights, but not of their responsibilities (interview, PD 14/07/11).[16] Within this emerging entitlement culture there is an attitude of "when I come, just give me some money. So, I do nothing, but I like to receive something from you" (interview, PD 14/07/11). The issue of land disputes in Timor Leste (Fitzpatrick 2008) is a possible instance of this sense of entitlement of families, under pressure to create financial security at all social costs and expense to the community (interview, KA 19/07/11).

Democratic individualism

Possibly the most distinct feature of modernising society in Timor Leste is the multi-party democratic political system. The proportional representation system of Timor Leste has allowed for the generation of multiple parties based on divergent political visions. Since the creation of a democracy in Timor Leste eleven years ago, twenty-four political parties have been established. For the 2012 parliamentary election in July, there was one political party per 20,000 or so people.

Many of the political divisions are based on personal egos, rather than policy platforms (field-notes, 12/06/12; field-notes, 17/06/12), and there is concern, particularly amongst female respondents (2011 survey),[17] of the extent to which this is impacting social cohesion. The emotionally charged political debates that occur in public have the potential to aggravate tensions between party support bases. There seems to be a lack of social reconciliation between party support bases. "Sometimes [the political system] is like this, I am like this: 'So who will come with me? Ok, you'll be my friend.' And 'who is against [political] idea? You are my enemy'" (interview, PD 14/07/11).

Political parties use negative language to slander the opposing side and mobilise support. In first two elections (2001 and 2007), such negative tactics were prevalent during political campaign periods according to some (interview, GS 11/09/11; interview, JV 10/07/11). This is "my party is the best, and that party is the worst" (interview, PD 14/07/11) type of competitive rhetoric has been characteristic of

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[15] For example in the 2012 survey (N = 288), youth (18-29) were slightly more ($p = 0.69$) inclined to respond positively (mean = 2.74) to the statement, *I am more interested in my own security than that of my friends*, than their seniors (30-59).

[16] Individualism as a biproduct of democratisation has been discussed by the likes of Karl Mannheim (1956: 171-249), who explains that democracy may lead to, what he calls, "self-assertion and aggressiveness" in society (Mannheim, 1956: 173).

[17] Female respondents (N = 52; mean = 3.39; standard deviation = 1.235) were significantly ($p < 0.05$) more cynical than men (N = 92; mean = 3.84; standard deviation = 1.122) towards the idea of having many political parties.

Timorese politics. So much so, such politicking – mostly on unsubstantiated and often emotive claims – has frustrated and disaffected many. "I don't want to join with one political party because if you… join with a political party, [then this] maybe creates conflict between us, [me and a non-party person]" (interview, MS 26/07/11). Another explained that he chooses not to support a political party because he is concerned about his "suffering" if he narrows his community according to political boundaries (interview, AB 18/07/11).

While some were quick to downplay the potential for socio-political divisions (interview, RS 11/07/11), there were definite cases where divisions had become apparent. For example, members of one village (*aldeia*) in Aileu Vila voted for the ASDT party, not because they agreed with the policy or historical narrative of the party, but because this political affiliation set them apart from the neighbouring *aldeia* the members of which "can't be trusted", and who support CNRT, Fretilin or PD (interview, LL 13/07/11). Thus, politics in this case was use as a means to distinguish two social groups.

Further, in order to obtain follower, many political parties campaign on the allure of achieving a better life. Again, a prolific part of the election campaign period (field-notes, 09/06/12; field-notes, 22/06/12). Of course, this is not unique of democracy in Timor Leste, however we can see, because of the poor context, that such fanciful pledges have immense capacity to excite and then disillusion the electorate. Political parties come:

> and play music from 5 o'clock in the afternoon, until 8 o'clock in the morning… they come from Dili, they have enough beer with them, they have enough money, they come for a few days, gather the people, eat something with them (interview, PD 14/07/11).

These political gatherings are designed to encourage a sense of hope amongst the electorate for what it is the party can supposedly achieve. However, more times than not, this hope is unrealistic and ultimately leads disillusionment amongst the electorate with not just politics, but with life more generally (interview, PD 14/07/11; interview, AB 18/07/11). The emotional let down of these elusive promises can be devastating to the motivational level of rural people, many of whom are already suffering from financial hardship. After the celebrations of political campaigns "the people go back again to their home" reminded of how poor they are; disillusioned by the liveliness of the campaign, they are reminded, "we have nothing to eat" (interview, PD 14/07/11).

Inevitably this disillusionment with local and national politics has fuelled allegations of nepotism and corruption. There are high levels of cynicism and mistrust in the Aileu electorate towards politicians and political parties (2011 survey;[18] interview, AB 18/07/11). "In one political party", one youth leader explained, "I can see their father is the president, their son is treasurer, and their daughter is secretary. This means that when they lead government, they will be corrupt" (interview, JV 10/07/11). Another argued:

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[18] From a sample population of N = 143, people were inclined to agree (mean = 3.25) that political leader were only interested serving their family members than, than the Timorese nation. Interestingly, women (mean = 3.42) were more cynical than men (mean = 3.16).

> They [politicians at the district-level and nationally] promise everything. It is the same everywhere [in Timor Leste]. But they never deliver on their promises. So that is why I still worry about the political campaign because I believe them 100 percent. When they win [the election], they don't do [what they promised]. The community is the victim. (interview, MS 26/07/11).

But there seems to be conflicting interpretation of such things as nepotism, and more broadly corruption. Whereas under traditional social mores, in supporting one's family, was a vital aspect of belonging to a family. According to tradition, as an adult, the male should not develop by himself without benefiting his or her *uma lulik* relations. As discussed above, this obligation is enshrined in the *fetosa umane* process, where the male has an obligation to take care of his *umane* (male house). But, this leads to common conflict between traditional obligations and the institutionalization of a liberal democracy, which condemns such traditional practices, which is simply *nepotismo* (interview, RS 11/07/11). Nepotism is the modern form of what was once simply a family commitment. But with the hype about corruption and maintaining a transparent political system, such "commitments" are no longer acceptable in modern Timor Leste, at least at the state level.

Conclusion: What are the lessons for development of Timor Leste?

This paper has explored the notions of community in the small district of Timor Leste, Aileu. Notable are the lessons that can be deduced from the underpinning research with regard to the national development process in Timor Leste and, indeed, development programs worldwide. There are three normative assumptions that underlie this paper:

Firstly, an assumption is made here that promoting and maintaining a sense of community – of trust and familiarity in society – is necessary to rebuild a nation of people severely affected by war, displacement and at least a century of foreign rule. While contexts and cultures throughout Timor Leste are nuanced in their own right, all of which must be thoroughly considered in the development process, particular interest ought to be given to indigenous agents within society that encourage community and social cohesion within and between peoples. In the case of Aileu, such agents for continuing community principally derive from traditional Mambai culture and religion, in separate and combined terms. In fact, the information presented in this paper would suggest that these two institutions of Aileu society are popular precisely for their capacity to inspire community. This may be unique to Aileu society; it is beyond the scope of this research. However, the lesson to be taken from recognising their place is that they should continue to be safeguarded, possibly through education and public events.

The second assumption made in this paper is that modernisation and development worldwide is inevitable. The global scope and speed of change is one intrinsic feature of modernity (see Giddens, 1990). Given that today's, 21st century model of modernity consists principally of democratisation and neo-liberal economisation, the development process should be embedded in the country's desires; what they wish to continue and/or discontinue. But with the first assumption in mind, the "community"

must be protected. The data from Aileu presented in this paper suggests that certain cultural changes are challenging the notion of community, principally from modern values of independence and self-reliance.

Third assumption expressed was that the modernisation debate is not as black and white, between modernity and tradition, as one might think. Romanticising either model is unhelpful, considering their respective deficiencies. Thus, in line with the second assumption, development should be a considerate and educational process in finding a hybrid model that best suits and protects the community. We can see from this exposé that Aileu community is maintained through some more-traditional practises (e.g., Mambai culture, sitting and eating together) and some more-recent (e.g., religion, *tripica*) conventions of socialising. Further, the monetisation of traditional rituals, such as death ceremonies, is undermining confidence in Mambai culture and thus in the community.

In conclusion, there is a concern with the rush towards modernisation in fledgling nations such as Timor Leste. In cases where the process does not properly preserve, presumably through educational means, the pro-community practices and values, whichare indigenous to the area, then there is risk of more divisions and instability. The UN is due to withdraw from Timor Leste by the end of 2012, after 13 years of externally-sponsored statebuilding and a century of foreign occupation, leaving Timor Leste to finally stand on its own feet. In order to do so, the nation should be mindful of what does and does not work for their "community".

About the Author

Paddy Tobias is a PhD candidate at the University of New England, Australia. Paddy has been awarded an MPhil (UNE) and BA (International Studies) from Deakin University, and was the country director for Timor Leste for Melbourne-based NGO, the Oaktree Foundation. Founded in social theory and political theory, he has established an interest on the processes of modernisation, democratisation and economic liberalisation in his research on the Aileu district, Timor Leste.

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