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Lulik encounters and cultural frictions in East Timor: Past and present

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In the East Timorese lingua franca, Tetun, the word *lulik* is often simply translated as 'sacred' or 'forbidden'. But the concept has much wider application as a set of fundamental, philosophical and moral orientations in Timorese social life. In this paper we present six historical and contemporary encounters with *lulik*, by a range of outsiders from beyond the Timorese tradition. Placed in the context of Sahlin's notion of 'the structure of the conjuncture', they illustrate the way *lulik* agency adapts to novel or contingent events in culturally inflected ways, and how ideas of *lulik* may be configured as agents of resistance as well as enabling strategies.

INTRODUCTION

After 24 years of militarised government in East Timor (see Fig. 1), the end of Indonesian occupation brought with it an extraordinary influx of foreigners, each in their own way eager to participate in the remarkable achievement of independence and the new challenges of nation-building. These visitors of diverse cultural backgrounds, who East Timorese refer to collectively as *malae*, included a whole range of security forces and UN staff, development consultants, humanitarian workers, trades-people, entrepreneurs, investors and researchers of one kind or another. From this lively and diverse engagement between the *malae* and their Timorese hosts has emerged a growing appreciation of the central cultural and religious practices that remain so prominent across contemporary East Timorese society.

Among the cultural beliefs that are regularly invoked is the complex of ideas associated with the notion of *lulik*. The word *lulik,* in the *lingua franca* Tetun, is sometimes translated as 'sacred' or 'forbidden' and while this may be a useful shorthand, the influence and reach of the concept extends well beyond any simple glossing of its meaning. Applications of *lulik* are expressed in multiple qualities and forms. *Lulik* exists in all of the constituent local languages of East Timor where it is applied in a consistent and similar manner; for example, Makassae render *lulik* as *falun,* Fataluku as *tei*, Kemak and Naueti as *luli*, and Bunak as *po*. *Lulik* and its equivalents refer to a whole range of objects, places, topographic features, categories of food, types of people, forms of knowledge, behavioural practices, architectural structures and periods of time (see Traube 1986; McWilliam 2001, 2005; Hicks 2004; Palmer and Carvahlo 2008; Shepherd 2013).

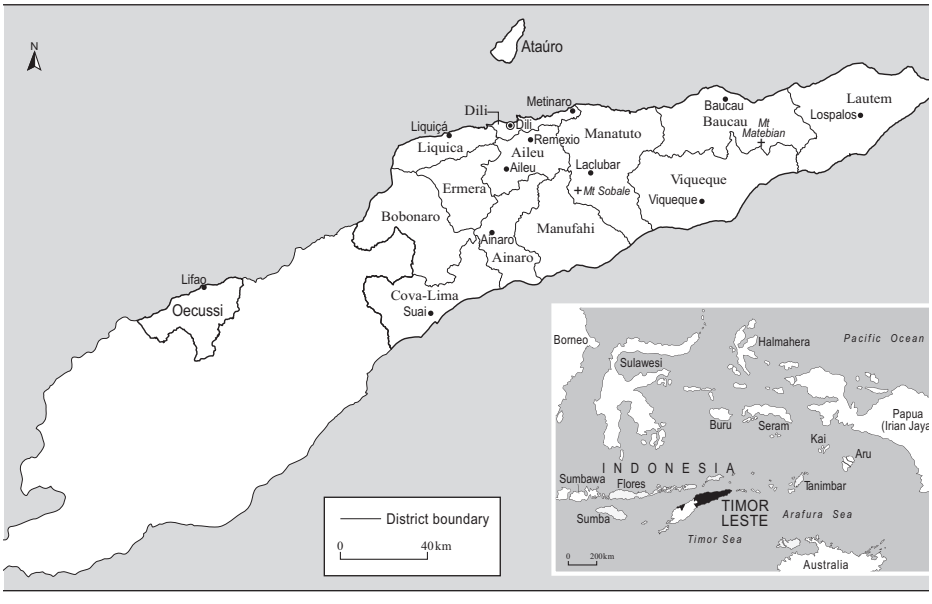

Figure 1 East Timor: Districts and relevant localities.

East Timorese writer, Josh Trindade, describes the *lulik* as a philosophical, religious and moral order that represents the core of Timorese values, and for that reason it remains an important guide to East Timorese intentions and actions across all areas of social life (Trindade 2011). Transgressions of matters *lulik* carry sanctions which, depending on the nature of the infraction, have far-reaching consequences, ranging from fines, rebukes and social ostracism to illness, misfortune and death. This Janus-faced nature of *lulik,* which combines protective blessings with a strong retributive capacity, remains what it has long been: a form of strategic and symbolic action which can assist in accounting for uncertainties in a world where any event might be significant and nothing can be left to chance (Pannell 2006: 15). The power of *lulik* speaks directly to the nature of the uncanny and the indeterminate qualities of social life.

In this paper we are interested in exploring this cultural phenomenon by focusing on outsiders' interpretations, reactions and manipulations to the pervasive forms and expression of *lulik*. We do so by presenting six encounters, drawn from a selection of recorded and ethnographic sources, that offer a variety of perspectives on that most elusive of cultural forms. The encounters illustrate the different ways that foreign visitors, colonial officers, development planners, enquiring anthropologists and Catholic priests have confronted the complications and implications inherent within the *lulik* complex and its attendant moral codes. Our analysis of these encounters is informed by extensive ethnographic field and archival research undertaken variously by each of the authors in Timor-Leste over the last 10 years.

In sequencing these otherwise unrelated accounts, we highlight the persistence of this important enduring cultural motif across at least 140 years of customary practice

and engagement with others. In doing so we demonstrate examples of what Sahlins has called the 'structure of conjuncture', namely, the way people respond in culturally inflected ways to novel or contingent events at the boundary of social worlds—in our case, the Timorese and the *malae*—thus modifying systems of meaning (Sahlins 1985). Another perspective on that cross-cultural engagement is offered by Anna Tsing's metaphorical-analytic concept of 'friction'; those 'awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference' (Tsing 2005: 4). In the six encounters that feature in this paper we show how *lulik* transmutes into a form of cultural friction and even a strategic enabling agent at the very moment it is drawn into the *malae* world. At that point it acquires significance as a form that may be variously protective, obstructive, immoral, superstitious, confounding, instrumental or adversarial. What ensues, in each case, is a drama that hinges on the imperial desire of outsiders to take control of the *lulik* by circumventing it, reasoning with it, befriending it, hijacking it or combating it. We begin with an account from naturalist Henry Forbes on his visit to Portuguese Timor in the 1880s, and end with a contemporary dispute between the Catholic Church and local ritual custodians of *lulik* water sources in Baucau during 2010.

BOTANICAL *LULIK*

Henry Forbes is one of those unlikely characters from the late nineteenth century who followed in the pioneering footsteps of great figures like Charles Darwin and Alfred Wallace, and who was fired with a spirit of scientific adventure in his quest to locate, measure, collect and document the natural world and its rich diversity of living forms. Forbes' own special interests were birds, butterflies and beetles, but his curiosity included an enthusiasm for botanical collections and expositions on the diversity of humanity encountered along the way. His travels in Portuguese Timor from late 1882 to 1883 were part of a long voyage through the East Indies. Forbes offered detailed descriptions of the mountainous interior of the island at a time of endemic rebellions against colonial rule and inter-communal warfare.

Ever the imperial scholar, Forbes had an acute scientific eye for the natural world, but little sympathy for local etiquette and customs, noting that the character of the natives 'did not gain favourably on us' and that '[t]hey are a vindictive people without a vestige of pity' (1885: 464). Having settled his wife, Anna, in newly constructed lodgings on the slopes above Dili, Forbes kept busy with local collecting excursions during the wet season before heading off into the hills, colonial style, with a cavalcade of men and horses.

At points in his account of the interior of Timor, Forbes observes aspects of *luli*, which he describes variously as a sacred institution, a taboo practice, something awesome and protective in times of war, and one that invokes fear of its vengeance if transgressed (1885: 442–446). He often remarks upon the prevalence of *uma luli* (clan cult houses) and the senior authority of the *Dato-luli*, and on the Timorese house interior in which 'a spot is always railed off for the sacred (*luli*) spear, knife and gun,

before which the head of the house makes a propitiatory offering to expedite his particular undertakings' (1885: 431). Forbes adds that 'if a man has an ordinary sickness in his house, he does not consult either of the large *luli* houses, but offers a fowl or a pig at the little railed off section of his own house' (1885: 441).

Forbes himself was generally little affected by *lulik* prohibitions, and his demands for logistical support and lodgings from local Timorese leaders (*Liurai* and *Dato*) were usually accommodated. However, his energetic desire to collect and press all manner of novel botanical specimens eventually clashed with Timorese sensibilities:

> Whenever considerable patches of trees have attained the dignity of wood, one may be sure that the land is *luli*—sacred territory—where, if he is permitted to enter, the botanist may not break or cut a single branch. These spots—often the highest peaks of mountains—having been *lulied* for generations must be the richest store-houses of all rarest plants and trees in their localities. (1885: 454)

'How aggravating to the spirit it was to be prevented from collecting there it is needless to describe', laments a frustrated Forbes (1885: 454). Nevertheless, he was keen to push the boundaries in the interests of science, and managed to persuade the son of the Raja of Samoro to accompany him on horseback to the top of Mount Sobale (7,000 ft) where,

> at 5,000 feet . . . I could freely turn my attention to the thousands of violets, geraniums and labiates that decked the ground and the profusion of ferns that loaded the banks and trees, among which I observed in the forest that covered the upper 2,000 feet of the peak, an abundance of Pandans, Casuarina and other pines. (1885: 475)

But to his 'infinite disgust and disappointment' he adds, 'I overheard the Raja's son tell my interpreter to warn me that all the forest was rigidly *luli*, boding ill for my next day's prospects' (1885: 475).

Undeterred, Forbes arose before light the next morning and slipped away up the mountain in a dense mist accompanied by his 'hindu' corporal assistant. Hoping to avoid being seen, it soon became apparent that 'quite a little crowd, following the *Dato* of the place, was on our trail'. His response was simply to redouble his collecting efforts on the slopes below the summit, 'building up a huge pile on the ground of the most delightful specimens'. Forbes then ignored the murmured reproaches of the crowd now gathered around him, which gradually 'found distinct utterance in complaint and remonstrance', so he moved further up the slope to start on a new clump of plants which he disingenuously hoped 'might not be *luli*':

> There like a drowning man catching at his last opportunity I gathered with a will unhindered for a long time; and it was not until I had another great pile heaped up on the ground that their excitement and superstitious fears became too marked to be longer disregarded. (1885: 476)

At this point, with tensions clearly rising, it began to rain and the whole party returned to camp, with 'five men's load of trophies'. Forbes ruefully acknowledged

that 'it would be useless to force an ascent to the top, for the crest of the mountain was evidently one of their most sacred spots'.

In the end no obvious recriminations arose as a result of his wilful trampling on local cultural sensitivities, and he continued on his way. Soon after, however, the whole expedition was brought to an abrupt halt when Forbes received news from the Government Secretary that his wife Anna was gravely ill with fever in Dili. Abandoning further collections, the group turned for the arduous journey home via mountain tracks across the Laclo River valley and towards Metinaru. Finding his wife Anna much recovered but emaciated from fever and anxiety, they organised a hurried departure, sailing for Batavia in early June 1883, and then for Scotland a month later.

HEADHUNTING *LULIK*

One short decade after the departure of Forbes, and covering the period of the late nineteenth century to the bloody suppression of the Manufahi Rebellion in 1912, the colonial government of Portuguese Timor embarked on a series of punitive campaigns to pacify unruly elements of the interior, and extend the 'civilising mission of imperialism' to all Timorese. Due to limited resources, however, the Portuguese military relied heavily on troop support from elite Timorese warriors known as *arraiais* and reserve troops known as *moradores*. In numerous destructive encounters, one of the characteristic features of these military confrontations was the enthusiasm with which the Timorese fighters sought the decapitation of enemies, the enslavement of women and children and a generalised looting of defeated fortified settlements.

Historian Ricardo Roque, in his detailed depiction of the times, describes this relationship between the Portuguese military and their erstwhile Timorese allies as a symbiotic one of 'mutual parasitism' that allowed colonial rule and indigenous order to co-exist and cooperate for mutual benefit; in this endeavour, ritual violence and the circulation of severed human heads played a key role (2010: 18). Roque's material is drawn from numerous 'eye-witness' accounts of Portuguese military commanders, who write of headhunting and the subsequent ritual treatment of the enemy heads in ceremonies known as 'head-feasts' or *festa das cabeças*. These 'head-feasts' constituted the ritual reception and incorporation of the severed heads into the community (2010: 79).

In the vivid portrayals of these episodes of ceremonial violence, Portuguese chroniclers are plainly aware of ritual elements supporting Timorese warfare and the bloody reprisals against enemies of the colonial government. But the 'liturgy of decapitations', as Roque puts it, rarely extended to a detailed understanding of the cultural and spiritual implications of headhunting. Rather, the empiricist style of the eye-witness accounts was more mechanical than interpretive, and 'there was little interest in sympathetically reconstructing the meaning behind the gestures' (2010: 74).

For these reasons an appreciation of the *lulik* qualities and significance of headhunting as an integral component of Timorese *usos e costumes* (social customs and traditions) is rarely remarked upon in the historical reports. But the connections are

abundantly clear, as Roque makes explicit in his comments on the nature of the 'head-feasts' and the permanent display of severed heads in segregated locations deemed sacred or taboo (*lulik*). Favoured sites included displays of skulls in large fig and tamarind trees, or alternatively wedged into stonewalls and rock piles, described as 'sacred places and contact zones with the spiritual world' (2010: 82).

The murderous success of the pacification campaigns made the contact between the Portuguese empire and Timorese ritual violence dramatically visible (2010: 27). But it also raised certain disquiet over the complicity of the Portuguese army officers and troops in the practices associated with the decapitation of enemies and the evisceration of corpses. Roque cites the *Instructions for Military Commandants* of Governor Celestino da Silva, printed in 1896, which exemplifies these concerns and sought to distance the Portuguese from the distasteful barbarity with which head-hunting was officially viewed, and which the Portuguese civilising efforts were intended to eradicate:

> Do not sanction the horrible and barbaric custom of—head feasts—with your presence, neither authorize any European to attend them, on whatever pretext, nor give permission to the celebration of those feasts in the vicinity of temples, command houses, schools and barracks, instead you shall try to avoid them as much as you possibly can. (2010: 87)

These were noble sentiments in keeping with the moral standards expected of the authorities, but fell short of the command to 'eradicate the horrible and macabre indigenous rite' (2010: 87). In any event, participation was often unavoidable for campaign commanders who, as war leaders, could be invited to inspect the piles of decapitated heads and initiate the first kick that triggered collective head-kicking and the singing and dancing of the ritual. As Roque observes, '[T]imorese ritual violence came to life inside the logic of colonialism' (2010: 24). In their desire to eradicate opposition to colonial rule through the sustained 'pacification' campaigns of the late nineteenth century, colonial authorities became inextricably entangled in the 'polluting' effects of headhunting, and despite efforts to 'purify' their participation, Portuguese military commanders, wittingly or otherwise, found themselves authorising precisely those forms of *lulik* practice which they had personally pledged to disavow.

SUPERSTITIOUS *LULIK*

If Timorese ritual warfare served the ends of the Portuguese pacification plans, other aspects of the *lulik* complex clearly did not. Those who sought to intervene or develop the country adopted an instrumental position on *lulik* phenomena. The animals slain and time spent on ceremonial activities were not regarded favourably by colonial authorities. The Portuguese were not fond of seeing the 'wasteful' slaughter of livestock. A certain Captain Martinho reported:

> In Timor, the animals' worst enemy are the natives themselves. The rituals of 'Ocoi-Mate' [funerals] cause . . . a *hecatombe* of thousands of animals—buffalo, goats and pigs—throughout the year. (Martinho 1936: 6)

Restrictions were placed on the number of livestock that could be ritually killed and the slaying of female animals of reproductive age was banned. Officials kept checks on livestock numbers by enforcing their registration, and licences were required to conduct rituals that involved animal sacrifice. 'The mandatory registration of livestock wealth', Martinho observed, 'has not managed to extinguish this evil, because many animals are slaughtered furtively'. The government tried to modify this situation by increasing license fees for rituals and applying penalties to those who hid their animals, but 'to completely wrest the Timorese from the influence of their traditions', Martinho continued, 'this evil can only be eliminated by Christianizing the population' (1936: 7).

The Timorese preservation of *lulik* land became equally problematic for Portuguese administrators and military commanders around the turn of the century when they set their sights on plantation development as a prospective pathway to economic prosperity. At the height of colonial plantation efforts in 1917, the commander of Manatuto reported that 'Between Feue-Rim and Mane-Hate, we are currently moving further into the forest of Clidne, which from our point of view is *lulic* in as much as it is expansive and will take a long time to fill with coffee (BCAeF 1917: 274). Although they rarely took *lulik* seriously they were, like Forbes, forced to contend with *lulik* injunctions. For the indigenes, adverse outcomes bore witness to the predictive power of *lulik*. There was a story of a poor lieutenant of Bobonaro who had ordered the indigenes to plant coffee and coconut in *lulik* forest, where digging into the earth was forbidden. When the rains came late and the harvests failed, the veracity of local *lulik* precepts was confirmed; the commander was held to account and local people embarked on 'a fury of sacrifices' to make amends (BCAeF 1915: 664). For the commanders, of course, such confirmations were merely coincidental. Yet, as if subliminally haunted by *lulik* spectres, they never missed an opportunity to report divergent outcomes in order to highlight the enlightened view that *lulik* was superstitious nonsense. One commander reported that 'it is proven that the rice in Laclubar yields well despite all the qualities of *lulic* that the indigenous people of that area attribute to the lands' (BCAeF 1917, 3:182).

By the 1960s, on the eve of the green revolution,[1] the *lulik* nature of land once again came to be viewed as a cultural obstruction as administrators planned to resettle large numbers of Timorese from the uplands to the irrigated lowlands. Their rationale for doing so was to reduce the long dominant and destructive maize-centred shifting cultivation and promote cultivation of new varieties of wet rice, particularly along the south coast (Silva 1964). The Timorese, however, were not easily enticed away from their ancestral lands and burial grounds (Metzner 1977; Bovensiepen 2009). For those who did relocate, many fell ill to malaria in the mosquito-infested lowland swamps. Believing that local spirits were resisting their presence there, the settlers quickly returned to the mountains.

It was also in the post-war period that the indigenous notion of *lulik* became the subject of some revision and rehabilitation as a mechanism to improve land management. When the then chief of the Agricultural Services, Ruy Cinatti, and coffee

specialist, Hélder Lains e Silva, examined the sorry state of forests in Portuguese Timor, they laid the blame squarely on the governors, administrators and commanders of the early twentieth century for their disrespect of *lulik* traditions (Silva 1956). German geographer Joachim Metzner echoed their sentiments, insisting that the residue of *lulik* lands had served as 'a break on rampant shifting cultivation', and he extolled the view that these should now become the basis of conservation (1977: 254). What we know of the period, however, is that conservation efforts were in practice very meagre and even if by then the Portuguese had given up their aggressive infringement of *lulik* places, they did nothing to encourage their preservation let alone expansion (Reis 2000).

Under the Indonesian regime (1975–1999), a new system of land and forest management was introduced which completely overrode both the attributions of *lulik* land and customary land tenures. Any overlap between *lulik* land and officially protected bio-diverse zones was coincidental. In the wake of the Indonesian military invasion of East Timor in late 1975, not only was forced mass resettlement away from ancestral lands effected in the context of war and internal security, but Indonesian development companies routinely ignored *lulik* prohibitions, as did the military when it destroyed a majority of clan ancestral houses (*uma lulik*) across the land (Taylor 1999; McWilliam 2003, 2005). At the margins of state political power, however, personal and clan *lulik* forms were nurtured by Falintil guerrillas to endow them with power and endurance, to consecrate and strengthen their alliances and appease the wrath of *lulik* agency (McWilliam 2007). Many Timorese today credit their ultimate victory and attainment of independence against Indonesian occupation to the deployment of *lulik* power (Bovensiepen 2011).

PARTNERING *LULIK*

We now consider the experience of one young American anthropologist, Shepard Forman, who arrived in Portuguese Timor in the early 1970s. The Indonesian invasion was in full swing when Forman penned a revealing personal reflection on the hold that *lulik* had had over his endeavours in the foothills of Matebían (The Mountain of the Dead) during his fieldwork there with Makassae-speaking people. After an initial settling in period, he writes that his anthropological appetite for recording all things *lulik* was significantly boosted on his return to the field following a brief family hiatus in Australia. Greeted like a returning prodigy by his main informant, an old man named Nanai'e Nau Naha who was the 'guardian of myths and traditions', Forman was taken into the *lulik* fold and led down 'the path' like an apprentice. First the old man chose to reveal elements of *lulik* knowledge and restricted clan histories and genealogies. What drove this decision on the part of the old man is not disclosed, if indeed it was known to Forman himself. However, one can be reasonably sure it bore a direct relationship to the intra-community politics playing out among the ritual leaders themselves. Namely, if Nanai'e Nau Naha's aim was to ensure the ongoing harnessing of *lulik* power and his own house's position in the local ritual hierarchy, he had decided

that an anthropologist's presence may well be beneficial to his cause. Meanwhile, for Forman, '[f]ieldwork was suddenly an anthropologist's dream' (Forman 1976: 14).

As it turned out, matters reached a climax and then rapidly deteriorated for the eager apprentice. After a period of complicated revelations, which provided Forman with rich data but ultimately more questions than answers, the fickle winds of opportunity changed: Nanai'e Nau Naha suddenly informed him that the door to 'the path' must once again be closed, and the *lulik* names spoken must again be secreted. Forman's apprenticeship was abruptly brought to a halt.

In a state of resigned disappointment, Forman returned to his more mundane research into local livelihood practices. He duly paid for the sacrificial ram required to placate the ancestral *lulik* spirits in a ceremony that was designed to close the 'door' of ancestral knowledge and to restore the *lulik* names to their secret status. Yet upon entering the most sacred house in the region, the house of the Moon/Sun, the hurried closing of 'the door' for his research became for Forman a situation that went from bad to worse. When invited by the elders to sit, he unwittingly did so atop a stone venerated as the son of the Sun. Forman's poor choice of seating descended into disaster when his house was visited by a cobra. Unwisely, he proceeded to have it killed but as it turned out, considered opinion from the elders was that this reckless act constituted the slaying of a benign messenger of the Moon/Sun deity.

This messenger had been sent, they said, to advise on the need for further sacrifices in order to properly 'close the door' to the *lulik* path. The old men took their leave to confer on appropriate follow-up measures. The next day, anxious and awaiting news on what was required to make amends, Forman spied in the distance an approaching wild fire, a fire that he learned had escaped from a woman's stove and was raging out of control. Unable to be contained on its path of destruction, the wildfire ultimately reduced to ashes the entire Moon/Sun sacred house complex, a place to which Forman had been given unique and unprecedented access, and with which, it seemed, he had much unfinished business.

The disconsolate community of elders then held a divination ceremony, to which Forman was duly summoned. The ceremony was held around a circle of stones. Each stone had been bequeathed a name by Nanai'e Nau Naha, and in the middle of the stone circle was a chicken, which was slowly strangled to death. The stone on which the animal would ultimately fall would indicate who was to blame for the (spiritual) cause of the fire. Strangely to Forman, but to his infinite relief, Nanai'e Nau Naha and Forman's names were not associated with any of the named stones in the chicken's *lulik* circle. When later questioned by Forman about the absence of these associations, the old man simply stated, 'I know how that would have come out . . . and I could not bear the responsibility' (1976: 18).

Neither, it seems, could Shepard Forman. His continued presence in the now ravaged ritual community was a constant reminder of his ill-starred role in the events that transpired. Distressed at once again becoming an outsider, his research dwindled to a standstill. In these bleak circumstances, with 'the smouldering embers of the fire

in the hearth seared forever in our memories', Forman and his family took their leave (1976: 18).

HIJACKED *LULIK*

From Shepard Forman's troubled ethnographic *lulik* encounter, the following perspective explores more recent attempts of various international and national development industry specialists to actively appropriate *lulik* concepts for environmental conservation ends. Initially, independence-era development organisations readily overlooked *lulik* phenomena (Shepherd 2004, 2009, 2013; Palmer 2010). Renewed calls for *lulik* lands to become a substantive part of forest conservation went largely unheeded (McWilliam 2003). What did emerge, however, was a related form of resource management situated between the nascent state and rural communities who retained a high level of respect for traditions closely identified with the *lulik* complex (Meitzner-Yoder 2007; Palmer and Carvalho 2008). In particular, international development agencies and national NGOs enthusiastically revived an apparently long-standing and important tradition of community regulation known as *tara bandu,* which promised to constrain shifting agriculture, forest burnings and deforestation (Shepherd 2013).

But what kind of tradition was *tara bandu*? In the days of Portuguese Timor, *bando* were public announcements delivered by the Portuguese authorities to the indigenous populations. When in the early twentieth century a series of governmental injunctions was levelled against many forms of forest exploitation, a certain *tara* (to 'hang') technique was made a part of the *bando* pronouncement. By and by, the Tetun term *bandu* took the meaning of prohibition, not unlike the term *lulik* (Hicks 2004). Powerful land-owning chiefs subsequently appropriated both the notions of *tara* and the *bandu,* and the communication technique later came into common use to caution people that property was private, or that harvest prohibitions remained in force.

Tara and *bandu*, however, were yet to converge as a unified concept that is now known as *tara bandu*. One of the curious aspects of the phrase *tara bandu* is that it is not directly mentioned in the historical literature. It is entirely absent in the thousands of pages of monthly Agricultural Bulletins, printed in Dili from 1914 to 1921, and in a series of reports that emerged in the 1930s on forestry and the problems associated with swidden agriculture and forest burnings. Pinto Correia's otherwise exhaustive treatment of Timorese rituals contains no mention of *tara bandu* (1935). To our knowledge, there is nothing in Anglo-American or European anthropology on the subject (Friedberg 1980, 1989; Meitzner-Yoder 2007). Only Metzner makes a brief reference to something that we can recognise as *tara* with a prohibition attached to it (i.e. *bandu* in the second meaning of the term): in the Baucau region of the late 1960s he noticed poles from which a given fruit (or component) was hung (*tara*) to signal that fruit may not be picked from the tree or area in question (Metzner 1977). This in fact was, and remains, a quotidian practice known as *tara horok* in Tetun, and similar practices existed on many parts of the island.

Many have noted that Timorese traditions, social forms and structures, suppressed or destroyed under Indonesian occupation, were autonomously revived after 1999. In the early postcolonial period one could observe, for example, hundreds of sacred houses (*uma lulik*) being rebuilt all over the territory (Loch 2007). But no comparable autonomous revival of a ceremony called *tara bandu* occurred, precisely because *tara bandu* had to await its re-invention by a plethora of development actors including the World Bank, the new nation-state and local organisations. *Tara bandu* was created by amalgamating the everyday practice of *tara* with that of *bandu*. Development industry specialists then re-propagated this *tara bandu* by grafting it onto a body of pre-existing ritual phenomena that, in a few of its elements, had some things in common with what *tara bandu* would soon become: restrictions (often temporary) on certain activities (e.g. harvesting, cutting trees and burning). These indigenous regulatory devices had been idiosyncratic across ethnic space and were known through their local names, and entailed the designation of social roles and 'house' responsibilities as both Meitzner-Yoder and Friedberg have demonstrated for Vaiqueno (Oecusse) and Bunak ethnolinguistic groups (Friedberg 1989; Meitzner-Yoder 2007).

The post-independence appropriation of the concept of *tara bandu* effectively hijacked these various traditions and reformed them into a different and more homogenous regulatory practice, in which the state was centrally involved. With this newly confected *tara bandu*, international development organisations as well as the government could press their conservationism and 'rule of law' upon the rural people. National NGOs, beholden to donors, followed suit. All development stakeholders participated in the idea that *tara bandu* was the essence of Timorese law. *Tara bandu* was the simplification that made the pre-existing diverse and ritually complex use and control of landscape legible and usable (Scott 1998). The use and control of landscape was thus recast in the interventionist language of 'resource management', and in the new Tetum dictionaries, *tara bandu* is defined as such.

Tara bandu in its modern guise was simultaneously fashioned as a 'tradition' by village chiefs, who were eager to harness the resources provided by development. Development industry actors provided cash (to cover expenses) and donated slaughter animals; 'masters of the word' or ritual specialists (*lia na'in*) forged the due connection with *lulik*. Local village leaders, in turn, were able to negotiate the terms of *tara bandu*. They found in *tara bandu* a state-sanctioned ritual platform to restage older traditions, many of which had been neglected. They also found new ways to insert their own regulatory preferences and to fashion the process to consolidate local leadership (Palmer and Carvalho 2008). In many cases, they simply ignored the *tara-bandu* styled regulatory apparatus of state and NGOs, while availing themselves of the ritual to reassert village hierarchy and power by endowing them with *lulik* legitimacy (see Ospina and Hohe 2002).

After 2003, tens of *tara bandu* ceremonies were enacted. The World Bank financed them, anthropologists documented them, Timor Television filmed them, NGOs found employment through them and spirits were mobilised through them. More funding for more *tara bandu* made it an institution presented as 'timeless culture'. The practice

of *tara bandu,* however, made one thing clear: *lulik* power is not equally important in all places. In one village of Remexio (district Aileu) where a *tara bandu* ceremony was performed, the locals proclaimed that 'only God is *lulik*'. Indeed, the Catholic appropriation of the *lulik* in *tara bandu* was most striking in this festival: God, not *lulik*, was the creator of the natural resources that stood to be protected against the destructive 'slash and burn'.

MADONNA *LULIK*

Elsewhere, too, the principles underpinning the negotiated relationship between people and the *lulik* spirits of place continue to face new challenges. In the district town of Baucau, the Catholic Church is well entrenched. At some level the town operates like a medieval bishopric—it controls much of the formal economic activity and plays a critical role in maintaining civic functions and infrastructure in the post-independence era. Recent announcements of plans to open a Centre for Bakita (the Black Madonna) near the site of the long since destroyed apical sacred house in the old town are contemporaneous with localised struggles over the relative prioritisation of animism versus Catholicism.

Such struggles are a part of an ongoing contestation around spiritual authority and worship. In 2010, for example, sporadic neighbourhood fighting by youths in the centre of the old town was taking place in the street market near an (in)famous *lulik* spring known as Wai Lia. Along with the frequent fights occurring in its vicinity, the area's neglected appearance was perceived to be the result of the local community's failure to respect the 'sanctity' of this critical water source. This led to a decision by local Catholic priests to erect a statue of the Madonna at the foot of the spring's overhanging cave. This, they believed, would reinforce the sacred qualities of the area and encourage mindful meditation as people came to light candles and pray to Our Lady. The priest, who was leading this particular initiative, supposed that the erection of the statue would have no impact on the *lulik* qualities of the spring. In their reconfiguration of the site, he and his work team had taken care to demarcate places both for animist ceremonies and for Catholic rituals centred on the Madonna. Having both traditions operating in the same grounds would, he surmised, make the area doubly sacred, creating a powerful protective aura.

This syncretic solution, however, was not the view held by the ritual custodians for the spring. For them, the initiative, which began without their knowledge or involvement (although the priest did discuss it with the village head), was a dangerous and risky undertaking. Whilst most were reluctant to speak out against the Catholic Church of which they themselves were members, they were highly anxious about the potential ramifications of the initiative. It was not known, they said, how the ancestral *lulik* spirit of the spring (*bee na'in*) would react to the placement of the statue in its dwelling place. This spirit comprised a mixture of benevolent and malevolent forces, and was known to be unruly, untamed and quick to anger. The ritual custodians were certain of one thing: the two spiritual essences—the Madonna and the *bee na'in*

—could not co-exist, because a saint and a potentially malevolent spirit cannot inhabit the same space; should this be imposed upon them, the almighty power of the Christian God would overcome the *bee na'in*, most likely driving it away (Bovensiepen 2009; Allerton 2009). But they were unsure of the reaction of the *bee na'in*. Where would it go? Would it seek retribution in the form of sickness befalling the ritual custodians, whose task it is to feed its appetites and protect the water source? Even more worrying for the ritual custodians was the possibility that the spirit sanction would lead to the complete drying up of the spring water. Given that Wai Lia is the headspring of the town's water supply, this eventuality would deprive the entire town and dependent agricultural fields of water (Palmer 2011).

The ritual custodians were convinced that the only way forward was for the statue's erection to be halted while all parties came together to discuss a resolution. One of them explained that this must involve a large-scale communal, 'one in seven year' ceremony held at the spring. Bringing all those involved together in such a way would, they insisted, provide the proper forum to ask the *bee na'in* whether it would accept the will of the church. If this was not done, the ritual custodians continued, the benefits of a recently improved flow of water to the spring (an outcome they attributed squarely to their own post-independence ritual renaissance of water increase ceremonies) could all be squandered.

DISCUSSION

What we see in the *lulik* of East Timor resonates with what Marshall Sahlins found when he re-examined the untimely death of Captain Cook in Hawaii. Sahlins (1985) postulated that Cook and his crew's first and second landfall to the island coincided with the fertility rite of the god Lono. Cook's visits and subsequent unpremeditated murder, carried out by his hosts during his second visit, were locally interpreted according to a founding Hawaiian myth. In what Sahlins terms the 'structure of the conjuncture', contingent myth became historical reality.

Timorese cultural logics similarly have reached out to *malae*, furnishing interpretations of their actions and reactions, and forging shifts in the very meaning of *lulik* in the process. Thus, our narrative segments express not only the enigmatic and perplexing character of the *lulik* complex for those who approach it from outside the tradition, but also the way that *lulik* has been shaped and reshaped as a force of resistance and a strategy of enablement. This process is necessary for both internal change and vitality, and as a response to outsider interests and domination. As Sahlins has written of the Hawaiian context 'the symbolic system is highly empirical. It continuously submits the received categories to worldly risks ... and licences the historic subjects to creatively and pragmatically construe the going value' (1985: 155, see also Giddens 1979).[2] It is in this 'situational synthesis' of prescriptive and performative structures that Sahlins (1985: 155) proposes we can understand cultural change and the process of organising current situations in terms of the past.

While outsiders of various kinds have been quick to recognise the quality of *lulik* resistance, less has been understood of its enabling qualities and, indeed, its cultural significance has remained for the most part abstruse to them. Nonetheless, Forbes reveals an intelligent awareness of the implications of *luli* as a traditional set of ideas and practices. But his class position and sense of civilised superiority cannot admit to any acknowledgment of *luli* much beyond something founded on superstition and near savagery. He thus reveals his unwillingness to move beyond his own firmly entrenched cultural sensibilities, particularly so when his botanical collections are at stake. The same can be said of the complicit involvement of Portuguese colonial administrators and military men in the celebratory cult of headhunting that was so enthusiastically pursued by their East Timorese auxiliaries in the brutal 'pacification campaigns' of the late nineteenth century. They were aware that the practices were intimately linked to complex cultural and spiritual associations, but there was little interest in understanding their meaning. Headhunting remained a distasteful, if tolerated, accompaniment to the 'civilising mission' of colonialism, and one that served its purpose to bloody effect.

Other *lulik* manifestations *malae* found less tolerable. The long and shifting history of land development under Portuguese and later Indonesian regimes of governance inevitably became entangled in the inherently conservationist yet unpredictable status of natural landforms deemed *lulik*. Both regimes tended to deny the galvanising effects of *lulik* invocations and declarations accompanying East Timorese approaches to land management, and the Portuguese in particular were adamantly committed to preventing, or at least taxing, the 'profligacy' of ritual slaughter. In the *malae* sensibility, *lulik* was clearly and unequivocally an obstruction when set against colonial desire. Forbes may have seen no connection between his transgression of *lulik* proscriptions and his wife's feverish illness, but there is surely some irony that *lulik* became equally obstructive for anthropologist Shepard Forman, who sought only to befriend it (at another time his fate could easily have turned out to be that of Captain Cook's). Forman's delight in being welcomed into the arcane world of Makassae *lulik* knowledge ended in disaster and misfortune for those involved. This included the local leadership, who had in this case been prepared to submit their 'received categories to worldly risks' by embracing the presence of the anthropologist in their midst. As we have seen, this calculated risk ultimately resulted in great detriment, reminding all of the uncanny and volatile nature of the *lulik* realm, and the way that it can assert itself in ruthless fashion. This volatility also informs similar concerns over the potential consequences of installing a statue of the Madonna at the edge of hyper-sensitised *lulik* waters in Baucau when it remains uncertain where the structure of that particular conjuncture will lead.

Increasingly, as 'cultural difference' and 'tradition' are reconfigured as resources rather than as obstructions, outsiders sense the inferred power of *lulik* invocations or attributions, and seek to tame or manipulate them to suit their own purposes. The modern *tara bandu* project overcomes the *malae* moral recoil that the Portuguese found in headhunting rites, the epistemological scepticism that Forbes and others saw

in *lulik* injunctions, and the resistance and restrictions that successive colonial governments found in *lulik* proscriptions. Instead, *tara bandu* represents an attempt by modern institutions to appropriate, reformulate, rationalise, standardise and, ultimately, harness the *lulik* phenomena in pursuit of environmental resource management. For the Timorese, meanwhile, it suggests a praxis of opportunity, one in which the risks must be continually assessed.

While *lulik* largely remains the preeminent philosophical, religious, moral and epistemic order guiding relations among the Timorese themselves, it is also clear from the encounters glossed in this paper that *lulik* has been, and continues to be, a powerful 'player' shaping ideas, conversations and practices across the intercultural divide (Trindade 2011). Whether they have occurred in the colonial or post-colonial period, the power and agency of *lulik* beliefs is redolent in each encounter, infusing each one with risk, uncertainty and ambiguity, especially in the context of unforeseen mishap or outright failure. For their part, outsiders have been wont to try and control and subvert this ever-intangible *lulik*, whether in the name of collecting botanical specimens, accruing military advantage, pursuing economic development, advancing anthropological knowledge, managing the environment or asserting the pre-eminence of Catholicism.

If outsiders choose, for whatever reason, to engage with *lulik* beliefs and practices, it is clear that they also choose to enter into an enchanted world of power, knowledge, authority, respect and fear. They thus not only assimilate a set of relations guided by another, nominally animist, moral order, and subject to all its attendant risks and opportunities, but their own rationalist moral order—naturalist, militarist, developmentalist, ethnographic, Catholic—becomes infused by the *lulik* complex itself. Through these multiple encounters such as those we have treated in this article, outsiders are seen to grapple with the *lulik.* In the process they variously (mis)understand it, offend it, humour it, desire it, define it, dismiss it, circumvent it, mobilise it, yet all the while still find themselves subject to its worldly opportunism, constraints and capricious nature.

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NOTES

1 The phrase was coined by USAID Administrator, William S. Gaud in 1968, and referred to the dramatic increases in yields of rice and wheat in Asia and Latin America obtained by the breeding

of improved seed varieties combined with fertilisers and other chemical inputs along with irrigation (IFPRI 2002).

2 Giddens makes a similar point in his theory of 'structuration', that'structures need to be conceptualized not only as constraints upon human agency, but also as enablers' (1979: xiii).

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