

CHAPTER 11

Rethinking Governance and Security in Timor-Leste

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Introduction

The social and political turmoil across 2006 to 2008, commonly known as the ‘crisis’, reverberated through Dili and Timor-Leste, resulting in many deaths and injury, widespread material destruction, and massive internal displacement. With the first fractures emerging from within the newly formed state, an initial split in the military led in turn to a splintering across the security sector, resulting in a massacre of police by the military, attacks on the homes of military leaders and bases, and the arming by ministers of para-militaries and the involvement of parliamentarians in fuelling violence. Rather than being a site of mediation for social conflict, the new state had become a major source of insecurity and societal violence.

Among all the peace-building efforts throughout the crisis, it was striking that one state-led response was a customary-like ceremony held in front of the *Palácio do Governo* (The Government Palace) in December 2006. A generic *uma lulik* (sacred house) was built,¹ and *lia na’in* (‘the owners of the word’ as interpreters of regulation) from different districts were called upon to enact a *sorumutu* (a ceremonial discussion) to create a binding resolution. Most of the senior political leadership of the country—including those in bitter conflict with one

¹ The building constructed for the *sorumutu* did not represent any one style; styles vary markedly over the territory.

another—sat together. A *nahe biti*² was enacted and there was a sprinkling of coconut juice on a flagpole as a symbol of life.³ Despite all these elements (or because of them), the event itself had a bizarre quality to it. While attended by the political elite, there appeared very little public engagement and no sense of an outcome, let alone any kind of binding compact between parties. Despite being an event for peace, there was a need for heavily armed security to be present. Moreover, practices important to custom, such as the killing of pigs, needed to be undertaken off-site or substituted for acts that did not offend foreign sensibilities (Braithwaite et al. 2012: 225–28).

The value of reflecting on the event here, then, is not so much directly in terms of what it contributed to peace in and of itself. Rather, the interest here is much more in terms of how this *sorumutu* demonstrated recognition by those at the centre of modern governance that customary social life provided one avenue to shore up the legitimacy of the state. That the event could be seen as ‘elite capture’ of customary practices still in effect showed a recognition for how important such aspects of social life are to East Timorese society, and, in this sense, serves in this essay as a kind of metaphorical framing for thinking on the challenges of governance and security in a post-conflict and postcolonial state.

On the question of stability, then, this article puts forward two propositions.

The first argument is, perhaps, the more subtle of the two and is made across the chapter as a whole: Timor-Leste security and stability tends to be reproduced or fractured across distinctive patterns of social life, and that modern systems of governance (which are typically seen as central to the reproduction of security) do not exist in some kind of ‘perfect isolation’ from other forms of social regulation and power.

The second argument is one of analytical frameworks: hybridity has some value when helping adjust analysis for societies who encompass distinctly different sets of social practices (for instance, the customary). However, the constituent parts of the hybrid need to be theorised in order to ensure sound analysis. In doing so, we start to see, for instance, how a hybrid order might become multi-layered rather than implicitly based around two distinct binaries, as is often the case.

In making these two general arguments, there are three sections to this chapter. The first briefly considers the ways in which politics in Timor-Leste is frequently represented as if it is essentially modern in form, rather than taking into consideration a broader definition of politics that encompasses customary

2 ‘The stretching or laying down of the mat as a means to facilitate consensus, or reconciliation’ (Babo-Soares 2004: 21).

3 Interview with one of the organisers of the Sorumutu, Dili, 2006.

and traditional systems of power. While there has been increased recognition of the importance of the customary, too often modernity is seen as the exclusive domain for what constitutes politics.

The second section in this chapter argues the value of a term such as ‘hybrid political order’ as a way of recognising social practices; it means what might otherwise be regarded as ‘ungoverned spaces’ and drawn into political analysis. These spaces involve different patterns of social regulation, power and authority, as well as playing a vitally important role in terms of the overall sustainability of the polity *per se* (a polity being taken as the broader political community comprised of different social practices). Here, I argue how the constituent parts of the hybrid political order can be theorised; one way of doing so is through the use of ontological categories including the customary, traditional, modern and postmodern.⁴ Briefly, what is meant by ontology here is the ‘nature of being’, of how we understand the world around us in ways that are often based on such deeply grounded assumptions that it can be very challenging to think reflexively about them (time and space for instance). For the moment, though, it is important to note that ontologies are treated as textual devices for analysis—and a product of my own modernity—which, nevertheless, help to understand the relationship between different kinds of practice and meaning-generation.

Building on the prior two sections, the final section of this chapter details what is meant by different ontological categories within my suggested hybrid order model order, and brings the chapter back to why these are important to how we understand questions of governance and security. Such considerations are important, not least because 12 years after formal independence and in the wake of massive efforts to modernise Timor-Leste via local and international efforts, the customary and the traditional remain vital to the social fabric of daily life for many East Timorese. This is not just as a point for academic understanding,

⁴ This schema is referred to as ‘constitutive abstraction’ and has been developed particularly by Paul James. See both James, P. 1996. *Nation Formation: Towards a Theory of Abstract Community*. London: Sage; and James 2006. *Globalism, Nationalism, Tribalism: Bringing Theory Back In*, London: Sage. In relation to Timor-Leste, this schema has been applied to understanding the post-independence period in Timor-Leste by Damian Grenfell, see Grenfell, D. and P. James (eds) 2008. *Rethinking Insecurity, War and Violence: Beyond Savage Globalization?* Abingdon: Routledge. One of the challenges of this schema comes with the actual names of its categories. I have used ‘customary’ here rather than ‘tribal’ for instance—the problem being that while the ‘customary’ perhaps suggests a narrower domain, the term ‘tribal’ has been used in such a pejorative fashion that to employ it here risks distracting from what is actually being argued. Equally, the term ‘traditional’ can add a layer of confusion, as it is certainly not referring to ‘traditional culture’ as it might often be used elsewhere. The problem, though, in naming these categories is that the ‘modern’ is the most accurate, as the term is a product of itself, whereas modernist attempts (such as this one) to name non-modern categories of social being will seem to inevitably jar.

but has relevance to the formation and implementation of modern legal services, democratic forms of governance, as well as administrative systems across various levels of society, resource management, policing, gender programs, and so forth.



Figure 11.1 *Sorumutu*, Dili, 2006.

Source: Damian Grenfell.

‘Seeing the modern’ in Timor-Leste

From afar, it is easy to conflate the appearance of a country as it is represented on a map with thinking about what life must be like on the ground. As is the norm, Timor-Leste is given a distinct territorial form, a capital, and population. Districts are presented as sub-territories of the national whole, with roads, mountains and place names playing to the same sense of territorial integrity. In CIA Fact Books, Wikipedia and elsewhere, Timor-Leste is categorised in all kinds of ways, including as a democratic country with a constitution, parliament, periodic elections, and a citizenship. For all intents and purposes, Timor-Leste is portrayed only as a modern nation and polity.

This 'seeing the modern' is, to an extent, understandable from a distance. It continues to occur often within Timor-Leste, however, as analysis is made in many different guises (academics, non-government organisations (NGOs), industry and business, government, aid agencies, and so on). In doing so, it is as if an idealised vision of what people think the country should be is presented as if it is already the reality—an imaginary that is brought to life by rendering large parts of social life either negatively, or, almost more powerfully, simply beyond consideration.

To take one example from the most recent elections, the International Republican Institute's (IRI) report *Timor-Leste Parliamentary Elections—July 7, 2012*, covers all the points that one may immediately expect of an election analysis: the objectives of the mission, background, summary of electoral systems, political parties, brief histories, and so forth. On the surface, it all appears fairly innocuous. However, implicitly, the report not only treats politics as narrowly confined to a particular version of modern political systems (constitutional democracy), but there is no sense of how politics outside that system has any significance, even in terms of how they impact on the elections. We are told that 'Timor-Leste is a representative democracy with both the president and parliament directly elected by Timorese citizens' as if that is the full extent of political life (IRI 2013: 13). Measuring the elections against a preconceived form of what democracy should look like, the stated purpose of the study was 'to identify problems, potential issues and areas where efficiency gains could be made to strengthen Timor-Leste's elections framework' (IRI 2013: 7).

Approaches such as this do not recognise the fuller context in which state-building occurs, with one key concern being the potential consequences of measuring democracy via one idealised framework that fails to take into account the diversity of how politics is actually enacted locally. One example from another report by the European Union on the same elections demonstrates such potential limitations:

The voter register appears to be over-inclusive, especially after the latest updating conducted just before the parliamentary election, and is only sporadically cleansed of deceased people. However, the electoral administration, as well as the political parties and other stakeholders, were comfortable with the inclusiveness of the registration process and did not seem to view the surprisingly large increase in the voting population with concern (EUEOM 2012: 4).

In the first instance, such reports give little sense of the social context for how such decisions might be made. In the report there is a concern that a list does not match reality, and while the 'surprise' might suggest a veiled criticism that a voter registration list had not been 'cleansed of deceased people', it actually shows little sense of why this might be the case. Studies from back in 2002 have shown the importance of ancestors in shaping both leadership in local

communities and the potential flow-on effects of engagement with national politics (Hohe 2002: 74), as well as on the voting patterns of the living (Toome et al. 2012: 32–33). It is possible that, in some instances at least, the deceased are expunged only reluctantly, and, in time, from such bureaucratic lists out of respect for how *matebian sira* (souls of the dead) remain central to the lives of the living, and also out of fear of reprisal should the ancestors not be given suitable recognition (Grenfell 2012: 95). Perhaps if there were these kinds of considerations, the nature of the implied critiques may well change.

This chapter does not argue against such a portrayal as found in the above reports *per se*, as there were, of course, elections, and it could be seen as important to measure their success or otherwise within the frameworks from which such systems of governance are conceived. What is being argued, however, is against the way politics is presented as if it is *essentially* modern, and that practices that do not fit the domain of political contestation by political parties are somehow beyond consideration, even where they reverberate upon the broader ability to influence state-building or the political process.

As has been increasingly noted across a range of literature, customary practices remain vitally important when considering the broader condition of Timor-Leste as a 'polity', even with more than a decade of state-building in the territory. For example, the intersection between state and local governance (Cummins 2010; Gusmão 2012; dos Santos and da Silva 2012; Tilman 2012), conflict resolution (McWilliam 2007), the practices of memorialisation (Kent 2011) and reconciliation (Larke 2009), management of natural resources (Palmer 2012), and development practices (Carroll-Bell 2015) all demonstrate the traction that customary life-worlds have.⁵

An important next step then is to develop an analytical framework that ensures that not only is the customary not written out of political consideration, but helps us to understand how these different ontological formations intersect and interweave in ways that rebound on how something such as how systems of modern governance or security can be sustained or undermined.

5 This term is originally inspired by Habermas in the sense of shared cultural domains and sets of basic assumptions about the world around us. Pointing to the underpinning dimensions of social life that are in a lived sense taken for granted as 'reality', the concept here is similar to Bourdieu's concept of Habitus, the notion of enduring schema within which practice is situated and socially made sense of.

A hybrid political order

The term 'hybridity' is regularly used in research on conflict and peace, especially in discussions on state-building and security in postcolonial and post-conflict societies (MacGinty 2011; Richmond 2011; Wallis 2012). The term has often been used to identify situations where patterns of governance coexist, inform, contest and intersect with attempts to build a new state, typically with a strong external-international dimension, as discussed below:

These processes of mutual diffusion lead to a situation of a contradictory and dialectic co-existence of forms of socio-political organization that have their roots in both non-state indigenous societal structures and introduced state structures—hybrid political orders. In hybrid political orders, diverse and competing authority structures, sets of rules, logics of order, and claims to power co-exist, overlap, interact, and intertwine, combining elements of introduced Western models of governance and elements stemming from local indigenous traditions of governance and politics ... In this environment, the 'state' has no privileged monopolistic position as the only agency providing security, welfare, and representation; it has to share authority, legitimacy, and capacity with other institutions (Boege et al. 2009: 17).

In the case of Timor-Leste, I will use the term 'customary' rather than indigenous, and 'modern' in place of 'introduced state-structures', so as to begin categorising such social relations in ontological terms. Nevertheless, this quote captures well the key aspects of what is meant here by a 'hybrid political order', particularly that the relationship between ontologies can be marked by sustainable unison, adaptation, as well as contestation. As such, a 'hybrid political order' is a way of speaking on particular polities that comprise differentiated patterns of governance where no one form is clearly in dominance, and assists in correcting the analytical blindness that can occur when sites of conflict are, for instance, rendered 'ungoverned'. As Mallet argues:

an appreciation of hybrid political orders provides us with a way of: transcending the reductive failed states and ungoverned spaces discourses which so frame much of international politics; locating the often multiple and sometimes invisible governance mechanisms present in post-conflict or 'ungoverned' areas; and understanding their place and role within the broader political community (Mallett 2010: 74).

As discussed, various pieces of research have shown, firstly, the importance of the customary to sociality in Timor-Leste, and, secondly, how different life-worlds sit in relation to each other. This capturing of difference is perhaps less common in policymaking, though can still surface in debates on law as outlined in the following quote referring to the utility of the Law Against Domestic Violence passed by parliament in 2010.

The current law prohibits customary justice processes from supplanting state justice in resolving domestic violence cases; however, given its prominence in Timorese society, it is a necessary component of a strategy to combat domestic violence. Thus, it is crucial to establish and regulate links between state justice and customary justice systems. While customary justice has weaknesses in the area of domestic violence, it has a role to play if appropriate mechanisms are put into place. A clear and legally established link between the customary justice and formal justice systems would serve to reduce confusion and increase the legitimacy of formal decisions while respecting and reflecting important elements of the Timorese cultural identity (UNDPJSP 2013: viii).

Here, policymakers are being urged to find ways in which two different life-worlds can be brought together to negotiate a complex and pressing social problem. The customary and the modern ('state-law') are being called on to intersect in a way that sustains a process larger than either part, and, in doing so, represents what we are referring to here as a 'hybrid political order'. Some people use 'multiple realities' as a way of acknowledging a simultaneous co-presence of different ways of being (Cummins 2012: 110). Others refer to 'entanglement' so as to speak to 'the co-existence of fundamentally different socio-political cultures and logics of governance' (Brown 2012: 54). Here, the concept of hybridity—and more particularly a 'hybrid political order'—will be drawn upon not dissimilarly, but in a way that allows for a consideration of the condition of the broader polity rather than the more subjective views of people whose lives sit at the intersection of different life-worlds.

To do so, there needs to be considerable care, as terms such as 'hybridity' can be used as labels that result in either concealing more than what they reveal, or worse, in subtle ways inadvertently diminishing the importance and relevance of certain sets of social practices (Grenfell 2014). The use of 'hybridity' here is not necessarily suggesting a syncretic relationship—as in where something new is formed through the amalgamation of two or more existing practices—but rather the holding together of multiple life-worlds or ontological formations in ways that in their sum inform the character of a political community. While it is acknowledged that any society is hybrid in the sense of something generated over time from multiple sources of knowledge and practice, in Timor-Leste it is difficult to identify a dominant life-world within that polity. What remains, however, is a need to be explicit in terms of how we approach the composite parts of such a hybrid order, how they sit in relation to one another, and how such an approach can help us to think about the broader polity.

Social differences and political change

In thinking about what comprises a hybrid order, it is possible that the composite parts could be framed at different levels of analytical abstraction. For instance, at a less abstract level it is possible to draw the practice of *tara bandu* (lit. hanging the law) and NGO peace-building efforts into a form of hybrid relationship (Belun 2013), or the way that different marriage practices are drawn together as part of ceremonial acts (da Silva 2010; Hicks 2012). The emphasis in this article, however, is on establishing a broader model for analysis; it is argued that it is also possible to work at a more abstract level of ontology to frame how we speak of what it is being hybridised.

Briefly, to again give a sense of what I mean by ontology, the term refers to the more basic foundations for how we live. Articles on Timor-Leste are often filled with terms such as ‘customary’, ‘modern’, ‘traditional’ and the like, but if any definitional work is done on them, it tends to only be at the level of practice and often only through empirical explanation. In the process of theorising these ontologies, the customary or the modern are elements of the human condition present in any society, and there are at least four different broad ontological formations that provide a starting place for thinking here: the customary, traditional, modern and postmodern. When treated as analytical categories, each has a distinctive way of comprehending time, space, knowledge and embodiment, and are manifest in practices that are different across exchange, production, communication and organisation. These are analytical categories that help re-engagement with the subject—intellectual devices rather than reified categories.

A key point of difference between each of these categories—customary, traditional, modern and postmodern—is the level of abstraction in terms of social integration. No society comprises any one of these social formations, but it is possible to speak about some societies where one ontological formation is dominant. Timor-Leste is far more ontologically uneven, in that it is more difficult to identify a clearly dominant life-world, hence the relevance of approaching it as a ‘hybrid political order’.

To briefly outline the various ontological formations, the modern is taken to be a pattern of social integration demarcated by levels of social abstraction where people are integrated in ways that are highly disembodied (the opposite being face-to-face/embodied extended forms of social integration). All forms of sociality have elements of abstraction to them, as noted by Benedict Anderson at the start of his celebrated treatise on nations. Thus, the argument here is that the modern is distinguished by the way people are held in relation to each other across time and space (to use Anderson’s language, the creation of ‘imagined

communities'). In this regard, the modern is pivotal to the nation, as it is these abstracted means that allow for a commonality to be felt, and for a citizenry to emerge with some sense of connection to one another.

Attempts to modernise Timor-Leste did not only begin in 1999, but it is the extraordinary efforts since that time that are of interest here. As I have said elsewhere (Grenfell 2012), these efforts can be characterised as a lifting of sociality into a modern pattern of social integration in order to sustain the formation of Timor-Leste as a nation. So many of the development projects, infrastructure programs (roads, energy, telecommunications), governance systems, capacity building, and literacy efforts, have been named as part of nation-building and economic advancement, and are driven by the quest for re-calibrating social relations in order to achieve a sustainable modernity.

If we take one mode of practice within a modern ontology, such as organisation, then it is possible, for example, to reflect on state-building practices in the East Timorese context. Under this category, authority is based in constitutions and laws. A prime minister can be removed and a president overthrown. Authority is claimed via the secular and the scientific (rather than the mythological or cosmological) and, in turn, authority tends *increasingly* to be located via those who can claim a particular expertise; bureaucrats, politicians, NGO directors, and even academics become part of a knowledge elite who claim authority based on logic and competency, rather than familial connections or relationship to faith. Again, this is an analytical category, and does not mean, for instance, that the authority of a politician or an NGO director is informed purely at the level of the modern.

The desire for modernity is not just the assumed ontological basis for the acts of many aid agencies and NGOs that have occupied Timor-Leste since independence. For many East Timorese, modernity can be seen as the tangible expression of sovereignty following a war for independence. As such, it is important not to think in terms of the modern as 'outside', and the customary as 'inside', but rather of a far more complex and staggered set of ontological relations that sit in hybrid relation with one another.⁶

The customary is taken as an ontological formation where both subjectively and objectively, social life is framed far more by what we refer to as the face-to-face or 'embodied extended' relations. Social organisation is primarily based in genealogical or affinal ties, where 'kin' is a foundational point for identity and determines one's place in society (McWilliam 2005). Modes of

6 In fact, if a modernity was not a significant layer of social life at the time of the Portuguese withdrawal in the early 1970s, it is hard to imagine how a nationalist movement may have succeeded against such extraordinary odds.

communication emphasise the oral (the traditional and the modern moves to print for example), and authority is significantly determined by genealogical relations. Epistemologically, the customary tends to be underpinned by a mythological sense of origin or destiny specific to a grouping of people (destiny shifts in the modern, for instance, to that of the citizenry and the 'birth' and fate of the nation), and the spirit and the human world are often taken to be in coterminous relation.

In terms of Timor-Leste, *lulik* (sacred) and *lisan* or *adat* (custom including the laws that govern the spiritual), or leaders such as *lia na'in* are typical manifestations within a customary ontology, especially in their exclusive application to specific groups and in the connections between the world of the spirits and the living (Marriot 2009: 160). One reason why we can talk about the unevenness of social formations in Timor-Leste is that while some aspects of daily life only hold residually to customary modes of exchange and production (for instance wage labour in urban centres), in a political and ethical sense, the role of *lulik* and *lisan* remains strong. As recognised in the quote on domestic violence above, in many instances customary authority has far greater traction over regulating society than modern forms of authority.

In terms of a hybrid political order, we can then return to the *sorumutu* discussed at the outset. The conference at which this essay was presented acts as a reminder for how the emergent modern state in Timor-Leste remains dependent on alternative ontological formations. It was telling how, at a point of crisis, there was a perceived need to draw on customary forms of leadership (such as the *lia na'in*), *lulik* practices (the spilling of coconut juice), and through the symbols such as the symbolic use of the chicken, rooster and horns on the roof top of the constructed house). There are many things that could be discussed here, including whether these acts remain customary in such a context. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this essay, what is important is how the state—at a point of crisis—sought to undertake such an act, at least in part as a process of re-legitimising the modern systems of governance. The cultural authority of the *sorumutu* was not only used as part of a way to resolve the intense political competition at the elite level, but also had a nationalising effect at a moment where there was enough concern for the nation's future that the slogan '*Timor ida deit*' (there is just one Timor) became a state-sanctioned mantra.

However, sitting in the background of the *uma lulik*, and on top of the *Palácio do Governo*, were a Christmas tree and star, marking the forthcoming December festivities. The *sorumutu* ceremony itself included priests as the Catholic authority. Albeit briefly articulated here, this suggests a third ontological formation of relevance when thinking on a 'hybrid political order', referred to here as the 'traditional'. In terms of the abstraction of social relations, the 'traditional' speaks to patterns of social integration that are at once more abstracted than

the customary, binding people into broader communities via a cosmological order (rather than a secular one as per modernity, or a mythological one as tends to occur in customary society). For instance, authority structures within a traditional ontology tend to be removed from genealogy; the authority of the priest is underpinned by a relationship with a God rather than to ancestors. Hence, and unlike a *lia na'in*, he can be placed into a community from which he has no familial connection (though, and importantly, he is still called 'father'). Epistemologically, and keeping to the relevant example of Catholicism, there is a move from the customary specificity of mythological origin and destiny to a cosmologically based universality of humanity. There is a common fate, and origin and destiny are universalised, even for those who are yet to realise it. In this context, the figure of Christ on a globe reaching out to all of humanity, as it does in front of the Motael Church in Dili, is an impossible claim within customary society, and equally appears an anachronism within modernity (though the universalism remains *sans* faith).⁷

While the point can be made that the Catholic Church is imbued with modernity, and many of the ways in which it has come to organise reflects that, as manifest in aspects of its institutional formation, interventions into community, economic structures and so on. And obviously, even the practices of the most devout Catholics move across different life-worlds. However, at the core of Catholic practice is a belief in God, which is neither customary nor modern in form, and, in turn, is the way in which authority is ultimately prescribed within the Church. The Catholic Church is a tangible example of what is classified here as part of a broader traditional ontology, and as a more abstracted mode of organisation than is typical in customary society.

The argument here, then, is that in Timor-Leste, the hybrid political order is not one based in and around a dichotomised or binary relationship between the customary and the modern, but can actually be analysed around at least three social formations (with the possibility of a postmodern ontology emerging in the consumer-citizenry of Dili and migrants to the capital). Moreover, not only are these not pristine and unchanging categories in and of themselves, but there is a tendency towards the ontological forms drawing each other into a process of reinterpretation and layering (Bovensiepen 2014; Traube 2007). This leads

7 And thus hybridity spans different ontologies, something that we can see in a range of writings including that by McGregor et al. (2012: 1134) when they write that 'Catholic symbols that were placed in sacred spaces, or *lulik*, in an attempt to dispel local beliefs, have been reappropriated to signify the strength of the *lulik*. Similarly, open-air masses and prayer meetings came to be held on sites of importance to animist belief, such as the 1993 mass on Mount Matebian.' However, given the shortness of space, the concern I have here is that I am creating the sense too strongly that the Catholicism and 'the traditional' are the same thing. Rather, Catholicism is a very relevant example for thinking on Timor-Leste, but in ontological terms is one possible manifestation that occurs with a particular form of abstraction across modes of production, exchange, communication, organisation, and so on.

to constant contradiction and a sense of multiple truths, and the unevenness of social integration can be seen in the multiple meanings found in the most common items of day-to-day life.



Figure 11.2 *Sorumutu* venue, Dili, 2006.

Source: Damian Grenfell.

The concept of a hybrid political order should help us think about locating sustainable practices amidst the intense pressure of social change in Timor-Leste, and to identify why points of tension can emerge in society. Conflict can be caused, for instance, as an attempt to change the social order in Timor-Leste that fails to account for how meaning is reproduced for many people. To return to the crisis discussed at the beginning of this essay (and questions of stability more generally), one way of explaining why some aspects of the violence of that time occurred is that as customary and traditional forms of authority were being supplanted through the institutional formation of a modern state, the societal traction of newer forms of authority was not extensive enough to contain different points of tension. One form of organisation and authority was being displaced while another was yet to form to the extent necessary to replace it. Hence, from this view, the crisis was, in many respects, underpinned by how state-building in the territory had been approached; the process had created fissures for contestation in between the systems of governance that were being constructed, and those that already existed (Grenfell 2008).

In a different way, though, the concept of a hybrid order should also work to alert us to the need to broaden modernist assumptions, both at an ideological level and in daily practice, and it is possible to see how limited the reports on elections discussed earlier are. By way of example, if one thinks of the lack of state integration in many of the rural communities in Timor-Leste,⁸ the limited access to policing and government services does not mean that these communities are unsustainable. *Adat* and the Catholic faith remain the normative and regulatory basis for social life—in many respects providing for the resolution of conflict, distribution of resources, as well as the basis for shared identity. In doing so, articulations of customary and traditional social life have, in effect, underpinned the development of the modern state. If such forms of social regulation were not as pronounced or strong, one can imagine that attempts at forging a new state would have been an even more riven affair than it has been to date. The simple resources required to govern at that level and in a uniform way in the post-independence period would have likely been too significant a strain on a state still in formation.⁹ The irony of this is that while the state has been reliant on particularly customary systems of governance in order to ensure its development, the modernist prophecy is one where the state becomes the dominant system, with other forms either subjugated or made peripheral.

Conclusion

In order to conclude, I will provide a brief précis of the essay. The main argument has comprised two parts: the first linking stability to governance and security, and arguing that in a polity such as Timor-Leste, both sustainability and conflict are imbricated in the uneven ontological layering of that society. The second argument, as a consequence of the first, has been more a question of approach—one that argues for taking the different ontologies of Timor-Leste into analytical consideration when speaking about major political processes (such as state-building or elections, and to other domains such as security provision, development practices, gender, and so on). The concept of a ‘hybrid political order’ is helpful, not just in terms of describing the character of polity as it has emerged in an independent Timor-Leste, but also as a way for researchers

8 While it can be argued that the state penetrates into all communities via authority structures such as the village chiefs, such positions very often remain primarily connected to the *suku* itself (and informed by alternative authority structures) and in a formal sense remain ambiguous in terms of being formally part of the state. While schools and health clinics can be other manifestations of state penetration, in many rural communities such services remain extremely limited and overall the sense of the state is minimal.

9 Joanne Wallis and others write how the hybrid political order in Timor-Leste is demonstrated by the Government’s attempt to govern the state by engaging with and utilising local socio-political practices. This is largely based on a pragmatic recognition of not having the reach or resources to provide for much of the Timorese population (Wallis 2012: 758).

to be thinking and aware of how complex patterns of sociality sit in relation to one another. Moreover, this hybrid order allows for a proper recognition of how the modern features as part of East Timorese society *as one layer of social life*, avoiding any implication or assumption that the outsider (essentially the foreign intervener) represents the modern while the local Timorese somehow represents the customary. Moreover, I have argued that in Timor-Leste the composite parts of the hybrid political order should be expanded so as to include an intermediary category of the traditional, and that this, along with the customary, remain of great social importance in Timor-Leste, not only in rural villages and locations far from the centre, but also for the ways they effect the character and sustainability of modern systems of governance in the territory.

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