

## Compatibility, resilience and adaptation: the *barlake* of Timor-Leste<sup>1</sup>

David Hicks<sup>2</sup>

That institution<sup>3</sup> known in Timor-Leste as the *barlake* is the recipient of considerable criticism from educated East Timorese and from *malae*.<sup>4</sup> There are a number of reasons they cite for this negative attitude, including the economic demands it makes on impoverished villagers and the delay it frequently causes for young people desiring to marry. The most plangent source of criticism, however, lies in its defiance of what some choose to call ‘international values’, the most prominent being the *barlake*’s implications for gender. In the present article, I argue that this claim is unfounded: insofar as they involve gender rights, there need be no incompatibility between the values of this most iconic of Timor-Leste’s institutions and international values, and that even as shifting social, economic and political forces re-align certain elements of its properties, the *barlake* will continue as an integral part of Timor-Leste’s culture.

### The semantics of the ‘*barlake*’

Since a description of the basic features of the *barlake* may be found in a previous article<sup>5</sup> I shall not dwell at any length on the nature of the institution itself here, but given the misunderstandings that those who write about it appear to have, a few remarks by way of clarification may be useful. Some of the misunderstanding results from the ambiguous nature of the word ‘*barlake*’ itself, which denotes several different, though overlapping, forms of marriage arrangement. Even its etymology encourages confusion. Although a stock criticism of the *barlake* is that involves ‘buying a wife’, in its root form – the Malay word ‘*berlaki*’ – the term glosses as ‘to take a *husband*’! Etymological confusion is sustained by a semantic complexity that incorporates religion. Definitions of the *barlake* by authoritative sources diverge almost as much as they converge. Father Jorge Duarte, quotes Cândido Figueiredo who defines it as ‘to buy a woman according to pagan rituals’<sup>6</sup> and Manuel Patrício Mendes who defines it as ‘marriage among pagans’, ‘to marry in pagan fashion’, and notes that it is ‘a word of foreign origin and little used among Timorese’.<sup>7</sup> Artur Basílio de Sá glosses the word as ‘a pagan marriage, celebrated by non-christians’<sup>8</sup>; Luís Costa’s dictionary has it as ‘marriage; a matrimonial contract (according to traditional usages and customs) which involves an exchange of goods of equivalent value between the families of the affianced couple’.<sup>9</sup> Geoffrey Hull’s dictionary renders *barlake* as a ‘traditional marriage contract involving the payment of brideprice’.<sup>10</sup> As a scholar and

son of a Mambai mother and European father, the late Father Jorge Duarte is probably the foremost authority on the term, and he remarks that when used as a substantive '*barlake*' has two referents: *marriage celebrated between pagans* and the *prestations* given to the fiancée's parents. In the latter sense, he notes, the term *barlake* is synonymous with *folin* ('brideprice' or 'bridewealth'<sup>11</sup>). He adds:

[A] great number of Christians, of one or other kind, also celebrate the ceremonies of the *berlaki* in respect of the compensation owing the bride's father, a sort of civil pagan marriage taking place before the religious marriage. Others, less instructed, remain in the state of pagan marriage [i.e., dispense with the Catholic ceremony] ... Because of this, in the Portuguese spoken in Timor, *barlaque* and *barlaquerar-se* have come to designate simple marital unions among the indigenous population or among Europeans.<sup>12</sup>

By his account, we see that Christians who marry under the auspices of the Church are also, therefore, permitted by the ecclesiastical authorities to marry according to their local *lisan* or *adat*<sup>13</sup> which typically would involve giving the *folin*<sup>14</sup>, a pragmatic syncretism of which the government and United Nations might well take note. In August 2005 in Viqueque town my wife and I were guests at a wedding in which both wife-givers and wife-takers were devout Catholics yet who followed many of the conventions of the *lisan*, including prestations and ritual embellishments that made of it a very grand and splendid event.



*Lisan*: The pig arrives (Viqueque wedding, August 2005)  
Photograph: Maxine Hicks

The sociology of the word '*barlake*', too, is instructive. Given the term's widespread use in Timor-Leste, Mendes' statement that the *ema foho* (people from rural areas) themselves have little use for it and Father Duarte's confirmatory remark that the East Timorese employ it only when conversing

with *malae*<sup>15</sup>, might come as something of a surprise to *malae* unacquainted at first hand with village life. My own field observations among Tetun and Makassai *suku* (villages) in the sub-districts of Viqueque and Baucau substantiate their comments. To the best of my recollection, not once in all my nineteen months' residence did I hear a single person utter the word. Among the *Tetun Terik* speakers of Viqueque there is no single word corresponding to the English word for 'marriage'. What there is, as I describe in *Tetun Ghosts and Kin: Fertility and Gender in East Timor*<sup>16</sup>, are three terms, each of which denotes a distinctive form, or mode, of marital union<sup>17</sup>: *fetosa-umane*<sup>18</sup>, *hafoli*, and *habani*.<sup>19</sup>

The first two categories prescribe that the bridegroom's descent group (be it clan, lineage, or sub-lineage) gives the *folin* to that of the bride. However, while the *fetosa-umane* entails a larger *folin*, is more demanding in the duties required of the affinal partners, and involves a number of descent groups that may form extensive networks, the *hafoli* is a simpler institution prescribing fewer obligations for affinal partners, requires a more modest *folin*, may involve no group larger than the nuclear family, and is not sustained by networks. Giving the *folin* in either institution acquires for the wife-taking group certain rights, two of which are of considerable importance. The bride moves from her parent's home to reside in her husband's, which is usually close to his father; and the couple's children belong to the husband's descent group. Ritual similarities they also have in common. Wife-givers and wife-takers regularly assemble to celebrate rites of passage – birth, marriage, death – among their kin and affines, and these are formal occasions accompanied by material symbols and verbal metaphors packed with a wealth of meaning, much of it having fertility and mutual interdependency as their theme. The *fetosa-umane* is especially endowed with such elaborations. No *folin* is given in the *habani*. After marriage the husband lives with his father-in-law, his children belong to their mother's descent group, and the symbolism accompanying the wedding is meagre compared with that of the other two modes.

The permutations in the manifold variants of the *barlake* are not exhausted even with these variants of marriage. In Viqueque I encountered an arrangement in which no *folin* was given nor was the son-in-law required to reside matrilocally. I am not sure whether this was considered to be another form of marriage or not, but people disapproved of it. The term by which it was known was *hafe(n)* (*halo* = 'to make' + *fen* = 'wife'), which Duarte mentions as being a synonym of *habani* in Dili and in other places where *Tetun Praça* is spoken.<sup>20</sup> He provides as its gloss, 'contracting pagan marriage without the obligation of giving the *folin*; or simply for a woman to enter into a condition of concubinage'. Where *Tetun Terik* is spoken, that is among the Tetun, Father Duarte notes there is a form of marriage called the *ha-etu*, in which the husband incurs the obligation of supporting his bride and giving to her parents and relatives a simple pre-nuptial gift of more modest dimensions than the *folin*<sup>21</sup>, scarcely seemingly to count as bridewealth at all. He regards

*hafe(n)* as a synonym of *habani*, though he does not mention the husband having to reside matrilocally. Still another form of marriage is that practised by some families in Dili and described by Dr. Kelly Silva<sup>22</sup>, the *aitukan-be-manas*, in which a prestation of between five hundred and three thousand dollars is given by the wife-takers. Some who practise this custom deny, however, that they are practising the *barlake*, on the grounds that the *aitukan-be-manas* is given only to the biological parents of the woman, not to other kin in the bride's descent group. Silva remarks, however, that in two instances she witnessed the gifts were distributed to the bride's uncles and cousins. From the above it will be apparent that plenty of scope exists for confusion by critics and others.

Another inducement to misunderstanding what the *barlake* is all about is that in some *suku* in Viqueque, as also among the Bunak, the Tetun in Suai and Manatuto, and the Galoli in Manatuto, matrilineal descent and matrilocal residence for the husband occur instead of patrilineal descent and patrilocal residence. Under this regime it would seem that little or no *folin* is necessary for marriage, and children belong to their mother's descent group. The question arises, therefore, as to whether this system merits the designation '*barlake*'. Since, however, among the referents of the word '*barlake*' that of 'pagan' marriage is included, thereby subsuming *all* forms of non-Christian marriage under the term, this would appear so. In which case, what comes of the 'buying a wife' tag?

### **The *barlake* as an institution**

There is, however, at least one source of confusion that can be resolved easily enough. Those writing about the *barlake* commonly label it a 'dowry'.<sup>23</sup> As the *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines the term, a dowry is 'The money or property the wife brings her husband; the portion given with the wife'<sup>24</sup>; a gloss confirmed by *The American Heritage Dictionary*: 'Marriage or property brought by a bride to her husband at marriage'<sup>25</sup>. The *folin* is more properly termed the 'brideprice' or 'bridewealth', that is, the set of prestations given by the wife-takers to the wife-givers. Its economic dimensions depend upon a number of factors, principally the social status and wealth of the two affinal groups and local *lisan* protocols. The *folin* can be so high as to discourage marriage<sup>26</sup>, – another aspect of the bridewealth that has attracted adverse attention – and it expends resources that critics would prefer directed elsewhere, among them providing for children's education.

The *fetosa-umane* is an East Timorese instance of an institution found in many parts of the world that uses marriage as a means of bringing kinship groups into alliance systems, and it has been subject to considerable scholarly analysis by social anthropologists, who, among several alternative designations, refer to it as 'generalised exchange' or 'asymmetric alliance'. These verbal ascriptions emphasise the importance of *alliances* between *descent groups and/or between nuclear families*. Marriage establishes or – if alliances already exist (as they often do) – maintains relationships between these social groups and marriage is but one component of this complex

institution that is defined by a host of mutual rights and obligations of many kinds. The nuclear family, which critics focus upon, is but one social unit within a hierarchy of segmentary units that anthropologists variously identify as sub-lineages, lineages, and clans. Generically, these may be referred to as 'descent groups' or 'houses' (*uma*), members of which are related through patrilineal or (as the case might be) matrilineal links. The rights and obligations marriage establishes, or maintains, binds, therefore, not only the respective parents-in-law, but uncles, brothers, cousins, and other relatives in a web of inter-connections. To take one example, while writers about the *barlake* limit the *folin* to a gift coming from the groom's father, the latter's brothers and cousins are almost invariably major contributors to the prestation. The same applies to the wife's father, who must redistribute the *folin* among his kinsmen. From a sociological point of view, the groom's father and the bride's father may thus be looked upon as conduits, as it were, for recycling wealth, sometimes for generations, among the two alliance parties. The networks thus created or maintained by marriage may be thought of as 'the horizontal ramifications' of the *fetosa-umane*, and they once provided the means by which the alliance partners could help one another in such activities as engaging in inter-*suku* wars. Today, they remain as templates for co-operation and mutual support, inspiring a loyalty defying the more remote concept of nationalism.

But the *fetosa-umane*'s – and this applies in the case of the *hafoli* as well – networks are not just horizontal. They extend generationally as 'vertical ramifications'. Not uncommonly, a *folin* will not be completely discharged by the day of the wedding, and when this occurs, several scenarios are possible, of which two are that the *folin* may never get discharged in full for years or those who originally contracted the marriage may die before it can be. The contractual relationship, nevertheless, retains its force in perpetuity which means that even as they contract new marriages, men of subsequent generations inherit the obligation to discharge old debts. Although a condition of perpetual indebtedness that threatens a family's economic advancement, these vertical ramifications also ensure families maintain their system of mutual support inter-generationally. This practice of keeping a debt active to help maintain social bonds finds a parallel in pre-World War II rural Ireland, where farmers would purchase goods from local shopkeepers on credit and pay off a portion of their debts as they sold their agricultural produce. Although in good times they would have been able to discharge the entire amount, they never did so – unless they decided to terminate their relationship with the shopkeeper.<sup>27</sup>

### **Gender and the *barlake***

So now to the question of whether the *barlake* diminishes the female gender, as the expression 'buying the bride', might seem to imply, since it could suggest demoting her to the status of a chattel. Does it also, as some anti-*barlake* proponents claim, promote violence against the wife? The following passage from a report composed for the USAID/Timor-Leste Country

Strategy Plan FY 2004-2009, makes precisely that claim:

Although it varies in practice from place to place, a traditional bride-price custom, called 'barlaque' is maintained in which the prospective husband's extended family pays a negotiated combination of cattle, animals, money, traditional woven cloth (tais) and gifts to the family of the prospective bride and her family reciprocates with much more minor gifts. While this system builds relationships between families, it also can provide a supporting context for domestic violence because men and their families then expect obedience from the wife since she has now become the *property* [italics supplied] of the husband and his family.<sup>28</sup>

A similar assertion appears in a report about women in the context of rural development:

In many cases, the *barlaque* and the patrilocal residence associated with it contribute to gender-based violence (VBG), as well as promoting the idea of women being like property, establishes relations of unequal power in the core of the family and installs the idea that wives be subservient.<sup>29</sup>

It is easy to understand why the *folin* can be indexed as a payment. Its referents, after all, do include 'price', and the public display of wealth might appear to offer tangible acknowledgement of this characterisation. Yet I think a stronger case can be made for the contrary interpretation. I have argued in another place<sup>30</sup> that the *barlake*, far from demeaning the female sex, actually enhances the concept of womanhood (*feto*) in East Timorese thinking<sup>31</sup>, and made the point that women are no more 'bought' with the *folin* than men are bought with a dowry. Several reasons incline me to this position. In the first place, there is the construction put on it by *ema foho* themselves. These, after all, are the people who actually practice the *barlake* and therefore understand its meaning better than anyone: they clearly affirm that wives are not bought.<sup>32</sup>

Secondly, the bride is not – in the manner of a fungible commodity – something whose worth can be substituted by a set of material objects. She is implicated in a relationship between two social groups, and the gifts exchanged, besides herself, constitute a conventional set of prestations necessary for marriage. Certainly, bargaining is involved and the total quantity of the gifts is subject to negotiation, but there are specific categories of prestation which must be given and these are rich in symbolic intent. Wife-takers give horses, buffaloes, goats, chickens, golden pectoral plates worn by men, war swords, money, and gold. Their wife-givers reciprocate with cloth, pigs, rice, coral necklaces worn by women, and, of course, the bride herself. In the *barlake's* 'classic' modality, the *fetosa-umane*, the symbolic character of these prestations not only mark out the contrasting status of wife-giver and wife-taker, but are infused with images that convey the significance of the alliance and the high esteem in which the bride is held. The claim that 'her

[the bride's] family reciprocates with much more minor gifts' could hardly be more misleading, because it dismisses the most important gift in the mutual exchange, namely, the person of the bride herself without whom her husband's descent group could not survive into the next generation.<sup>33</sup> East Timorese express this value in calling the bride the 'source of life'<sup>34</sup>, thereby elevating her to the status of a creator of life, an attribute more fittingly ascribed a goddess than to a commodity bought in a Dili store. Or, one might say, a male soccer player that Benfica might buy from Manchester United for a few million pounds. In this context, it might be recalled that in Europe, until recent times, giving a dowry for the husband was customary, as it is today in countries like India. Indeed, in parts of the Western World the bride's father is expected to foot the bill for his daughter's wedding, which amounts to an expensive dowry. Would critics who represent the *barlake* as 'buying a wife' denounce this gift as 'buying a husband'?

Thirdly, as we have seen, the *barlake* does not always involve the *folin*. Living with his bride's father and having his children become members of his wife's group under the terms of the *habani* is a glum fact of life for a married man. He lives away from his agnates, is at the disposal of his father-in-law, and lacks the respect he would have commanded were he residing patrilocally. Must one infer therefore that the *habani* demeans the male gender?

Critics of the *barlake* too readily reduce this complex institution to one of marriage between two individuals and obtaining the *folin* by the bride's father as its prime social purpose. Yet, as we now see, just as the *barlake* amounts to considerably more than the economic materiality of gifts, so too does it encompass much more than marriage, especially in the *fetosa-umane* which requires that maintaining the co-operative relationship be regularly reified after the nuptials by successive gift-exchanges for as long as the alliance exists. Thus, when children are born to either alliance party, or when affines die, gifts have to be given, and these, moreover, must be of the same character as prescribed on the occasion of the marriage itself: wife-takers, for instance, giving buffalo meat and wife-takers reciprocating with pork. Then again, if the *barlake* is simply purchasing a woman, why would the institution be so ritualised and rich in symbols? Each stage of the marriage negotiations has its own metaphoric appellation and finds verbal expression in verse, often with the fecundity of the bride a recurrent motif. For the Tetun of Samoro, in Manatutu, Father Duarte has given a detailed account of the florescent language enriching the wedding ritual when a *liurai* (hereditary ruler, sometimes translated as 'king') takes a bride.<sup>35</sup> A prenuptial prestation, consisting of two parts, is given. The first part, the *osan-cain rua*, entitles the prospective groom and his family to commence marriage negotiations, a stage called the *lati odan* or 'to lean against the steps' (of the future bride's house). The second part, the *osan-ulun rua*, entitles the petitioner's party to enter the house to initiate the bridewealth discussions, and bears the appellation *core lesu-matan* or 'unfastening the cord or string of the door' (of the girl's house). These are but two illustrations from a plethora

of verbal images that enrich the concept of marriage, and without which the *fetosa-umane* would lose much of its meaning. Ritual gestures accompany the words, with the result that the impression conveyed in its totality is of an institution transcending materiality, spirituality, and the aesthetic. Regarded from this perspective the *folin*, essential though it may be, is at root only the physical means by which two social groups – and by extension any number of similar groups – are brought into a relationship with one another. Space prevents me from doing more than register the fact that this relationship also has religious dimensions, since marriages, and the other rites of passage, are occasions when the ancestral ghosts (*mate bein*) of the descent groups are invited into the social world to share in the company of their living kin.

In 2011 the East Timorese NGO, Belun, issued a policy briefing with ‘Culture and its Impact on Community Life’ as its theme and it contained data from many sub-districts.<sup>36</sup> This document provides a useful source of data, and certain of its recommendations are sound, including its acknowledgement of the *fetosa-umane*’s contribution to community cohesion and its properly drawing attention to the financial strain the *folin* can place on some families in certain circumstances. Nevertheless, as Mr. Josh Trindade has acutely pointed out, among its shortcomings are its ‘Dili based, economic, western and individualistic’ perspective and its failure to acknowledge the reality of the institution’s ritual aspects.<sup>37</sup>

What of the contention the *barlake* fosters domestic violence? There has been so little detailed research on a hypothetical connection it is not possible to be certain either way, and research comparing violence in marriages in which the *folin* is given with marriages in which it is not is obviously needed for this connection to be confirmed or refuted. But one might pose the question: are husbands in a non-*folin* marriage less likely to assail wives?<sup>38</sup> And, if it comes to that, is domestic violence absent from *malae* marriages?

Ambitions by national and international agencies to instill greater respect for the female gender among the populace is to some extent, therefore, redundant since respect already exists under *lisan* codes. The difference, of course, is that these organisations are pushing for their own version of gender equality, an equality only legitimated according to their codes by the *malae imprimatur*. As Timor-Leste advances towards a greater sense of national identity, so the government must find a way of reconciling its version of gender equality with the more traditional respect accorded femininity in such institutions as the *barlake*, and thereby encourage the *ema lisan* to incorporate national institutions more thoroughly into their social lives. There is nothing in the least unfeasible about this. Traditional notions of gender are *already* demonstrating a capacity to change, as are ideas concerning social hierarchy in general and authority; but for *ema lisan*, kin and affines remain, in the first instance, those to whom they owe loyalty and from whom they expect help. This is not to say that villagers’ universe is exclusively confined to locality, but as things are at present, the extension of their universe is accomplished



through the agency of the *fetosa-umane* networks extending throughout Timor-Leste rather than through any grand conceptualisation of government institutions. Alliances interconnect families in a way government does not and traditionally-established obligations make people more independent of the State than they might otherwise be, a circumstance not only militating against the development of national consciousness but reinforcing the disconnect between the metropolis and the domain of the *ema foho*.

### Resilience and adaptation

The *barlake's* commanding status as an emblem of Timor-Leste's culture underscores the fact that it is too engrained in East Timorese values for criticism by East Timorese and *malae* alike to make it go away. Yet, like all institutions, the *barlake* is subject to change and will either decline into irrelevance or adapt to new circumstances, a capacity it has already demonstrated. The introduction of a cash economy into Portuguese Timor in the twentieth century, for instance, brought money into the *folin*, and later further tokens of material wealth from the *malae* world in the form of bridal beds, mattresses, cutlery and the like (see photograph below). Protocols such as those specifying which categories of relative are marriageable and which relatives are not have also been adjusted to accommodate new ideas, and the elaborate imagery accompanying wedding ceremonies is no longer deemed *sine qua non*. Without doubt these changes are harbingers of further changes the future will bring.<sup>39</sup>



The modern: the wardrobe for the bridal suite arrives (Viqueque wedding, August 2005)  
Photograph: Maxine Hicks

What might some of these be?<sup>40</sup> Firstly, as the *ema lisan* become increasingly aware of alternative ways of looking at social relationships, people may become more aware of their status as individual citizens and rather less circumscribed by their roles as members of descent groups. With this

change in attitude, both lateral dimensions and vertical dimensions of the *fetosa-umane* may contract, and as they shrink the kinship and affinal duties individuals are presently subject to are likely to become less constraining. As descent groups gradually ease the compulsive hold they now exercise over men and women's lives so may the nuclear family replace the descent group as the dominant social unit in marriages, as in life in general. People will be less inclined to define themselves as exclusively in terms of descent, and while the ancestors will retain an influence over collective thought, their grip will slowly be replaced by 'international attitudes', among which the notion that education for girls is every much as desirable as education for boys, will be especially important.<sup>41</sup>

Secondly, and in part as a consequence of these adjustments, I suspect that, although the *folin* will continue to maintain its position as the contractual centerpiece of most forms of the *barlake*, its size will diminish to more modest dimensions. Not necessarily in all marriages – wealthy families will continue to take pleasure in the public display of the resources they command – but social expectations that the 'generic' bridewealth should amount to a substantial proportion of a family's wealth will be supplanted by a desire to invest resources in the individual's own family rather than redistribute it to affines with whom, in any case, reciprocal ties will have become increasingly tenuous.

Thirdly, these social and economic modifications to the *barlake* will find their counterpart aesthetically and in the spiritual realm as its symbolic elaborations become more impoverished and no longer constitute ritual statements of a life-giving fertility that derives from the domain of the ancestors, but remain only as evocative vestiges of a past in which the East Timorese were once in thrall to them.

In analysing criticisms of the *barlake* one is struck by the fact that writers give the impression of assuming it is *sui generis* in the context of Timor-Leste and that the East Timorese are singular in employing it. Comparative ethnography shows that the custom of giving bridewealth is far from being unique to Timor-Leste, occurring in societies as diverse as Indian tribes in South America, pastoral populations in Africa, Dravidian peoples in South Asia, and all over South-East Asia, where it is a marked feature of eastern Indonesia, not least in West Timor. The East Timorese have, as it were, plenty of company as users of an institution that is virtually universal. Would those who find fault with the East Timorese *barlake* extend their criticism to these other populations? Perhaps they might, but before casting aspersions on the *barlake*, as practised by the people of Timor-Leste, they might pay some attention to understanding how other nation-states have come to terms with the institution and its relationship to gender.

Since, as I have argued, the value accorded womanhood in the *barlake* in its current form is consistent with international values, and assuming the adaptations described above come to pass, as I believe they probably will, there is no reason why this iconic institution will not continue to play a

prominent role in Timor-Leste society. Nor need it prove an obstacle to the *ema lisan* becoming as conscious of themselves as citizens of a modern nation-state as they are of being kin and affines.<sup>42</sup> On 20 May 2012, the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste celebrated the anniversary of its birth. Amidst all the celebratory excitement, in light of the above considerations, those hostile to the *barlake*—educated East Timorese and *malae* alike—might take a moment to reflect upon the fact that while the nation-state has been in existence for a mere ten years, the *barlake* has been around for centuries.

## Endnotes

- 1 The orthographic usage '*barlake*' followed here conforms to the orthography used in this journal. In prior publications I have favoured the alternative '*barlaque*', as my references in the text indicate, and any searches for these need to use this latter form.
- 2 I wish to thank the following organisations for their help in funding my research at various times in Timor-Leste since 1966: the London Committee of the London-Cornell Project for East and South East Asian Studies which was supported jointly by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Nuffield Foundation; the American Philosophical Society; and the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board. I also register my thanks to Stony Brook University for providing me with a sabbatical leave in which to write this article. Among my friends who have given me assistance in Timor-Leste I thank Maria Rosa Biddlecombe, José Henriques Pereira, Rosa Maria Pereira, Luís Francisco de Gonzaga Soares, Teresa da Luz Simões Soares, Fernando da Costa Soares, José Caetano Guterres, José Texeira, Geoffrey Etches, Marion Corbett, Benjamim de Araújo e Corte-Real, Lurdes Bessa, Kym Miller, Dan Groshong, and Max Stahl.
- 3 I use the term 'institution' in the sense proposed by Marcel Mauss, that is, as 'public rules of action and thought' [my translation]. See M. Mauss, 'Oeuvres: 1. les fonctions sociales du sacré', in V. Karady, ed., *Les éditions de Minuit*, Paris, 1968, p. 25.
- 4 The term '*malae*' translates to foreign, in this instance 'outsiders'.
- 5 D. Hicks, 'The *barlaque* of Timor-Leste', in P. Castro Seixas, ed., *Translation, Society and Politics in Timor-Leste*, Universidade Fernando Pessoa, Porto, 2010, pp. 115–22.
- 6 J.B. Duarte, 'Barlaque: casamento gentílico Timorense', *Seara*, vol. 11, no. 3–4, 1964, pp. 92–93.
- 7 P.M. Mendes, *Dicionário Tetum-Português*, Fernandes e Filhos Ltas., Dili, 1935.
- 8 A.B. de Sá, *Textos em Teto Literatura Oral Timorense*, Junta de Investigações, Lisbon, 1961, pp. 151–2.
- 9 L. Costa, *Dicionário de Tétum-Português*, Colaboração Técnica Margarita Correia, Faculdade de Letras, Universidade de Lisboa, Edições Colibri, Lisbon, 2000, p. 50.
- 10 G. Hull, *Standard Tetum-English Dictionary*, Allen & Unwin in association with the University of Western Sydney, Macarthur, St. Leonards, New South Wales, 1999.
- 11 The comparative advantages and drawbacks of the terms 'bridewealth' and 'bride-price' were carefully considered by E. E. Evans-Pritchard in the early 1930s as one of a number of contributions made by social anthropologists on the topic. He remarked that the latter is too restrictive in its meaning and misleading in its implication, namely that the bride is an object of commerce. He considered the former, on the other hand, while properly including the economic implications of the prestations, nevertheless to have wider connotations that more accurately render service to their total meaning for society. It might also be noted, as he did, that, even so, neither of

the English words 'bridewealth' and 'bride-price' may precisely correspond to the full range of meaning of the indigenous term. His ethnographic context was African societies, but his insight applies universally, and certainly in the case of Timor-Leste. See E.E. Evans-Pritchard, 'An alternative term for "bride-price"', *Man*, vol. 31, 1931, pp. 36-9, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2789533>>.

- 12 My translations from the Portuguese original.
- 13 The term *lisan* appears to be indigenous to Timor. Since the Indonesian invasion, the term *adat* has gained widespread currency in the country as an alternative. Both terms refer to values, beliefs, ideas, concepts, customary law and protocols relating to kinship and marriage, rituals, and cosmological notions; indeed, virtually every facet of society and culture. Hence, *ema lisan* = 'people who follow the *lisan*'.
- 14 Clergy, for the most part, continue associating the *barlake* with the *gentio* ('pagan'), regardless of whether or not the *folin* is given. The unappreciative attitudes of Catholic missionaries is discussed by Ricardo Roque in an excellent historical analysis of marriages in the context of colonial Timor that is essential reading for anyone interested in these matters. See R. Roque, 'Marriage traps: colonial interactions with indigenous marriage ties in East Timor', online version of 30 December 2010, available at <<http://colonialmimesis.wordpress.com>>, accessed 2 January 2012. This is a version of the paper to be published as: R. Roque, 'Marriage traps: colonial interactions with indigenous marriage ties in East Timor', in F. Bettencourt and A. Pearce, eds, *Racism and Ethnic Relations in the Portuguese-Speaking Countries*, British Academy, London, forthcoming.
- 15 J.B. Duarte, 'Barlaque', p. 93.
- 16 D. Hicks, *Tetum Ghosts and Kin: Fertility and Gender in East Timor*, Waveland Press, Prospect Heights, Illinois, second edition, 2004, pp. 98-9.
- 17 These categories, by the way, are common all over Timor-Leste.
- 18 Some ethnic groups employ alternative designations.
- 19 For a detailed description of these categories of marriage see *Tetum Ghosts and Kin: Fertility and Gender in East Timor*, Waveland Press, Prospect Heights, Illinois, second edition, 2004, pp. 94-101.
- 20 J.B. Duarte, 'Barlaque', p. 93.
- 21 *ibid.*
- 22 K. Silva, 'Foho versus Dili: the political role of place in East Timor' in P. Castro Seixas, ed., *Translation, Society and Politics in Timor-Leste*, Universidade Fernando Pessoa, Porto, 2010, pp. 129-30.
- 23 See, for example, I.C. Sousa, 'The Portuguese colonization and the problem of East Timorese nationalism', *Lusotopie*, 2001, p. 188.
- 24 *The Oxford University Dictionary*, second edition, Volume IV: Creel-Duzepere, prepared by J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner, 2000, p. 1003.
- 25 *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, third edition, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, New York, London, 1992, p. 558. While the former dictionary also gives the gloss: 'A present or gift given by a man to or for his bride', the dictionary notes that this use is obsolete.
- 26 Of the ethnic groups, the Fataluku, so I am informed by East Timorese with whom I have discussed the matter, are reputed to require the largest *folin*. On the other hand, I have heard it said that this is more in the way of cultural self-regard by persons of that ethnic group rather than what typically happens when most marriages take place.

- 27 C.M. Arensburg and S.T. Kimball, *Family and Community in Ireland*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass, 1940.
- 28 DevTech Systems, Inc., *Gender Assessment for USAID/Timor-Leste Country Strategy Plan FY 2004-2009*, August 2004, p. 4.
- 29 V. Narcisco and P.D. de Sousa Henriques, 'O papel das mulheres no desenvolvimento rural: uma leitura para Timor-Leste', CEFAGE-UE Working Paper 2008/04, CEFAGE-UE, Universidade de Évora, Largo dos Colegiais 2, 7000-803 Évora, Portugal, 2008, p. 10, available at <http://www.cefage.uevora.pt>.
- 30 D. Hicks, 'The barlaque of Timor-Leste', p. 122.
- 31 Rather than repeat what I said in the aforementioned article, readers interested in the details of the *barlake* are invited to consult it.
- 32 D. Hicks, 'The barlaque of Timor-Leste', pp. 121–2.
- 33 Since in this affinal relational relationship the wife-giving group does indeed give prestations to their wife-takers, i.e., to the husband's group, it might be argued that the *barlake* does, after all, involve the giving of a dowry. To put this construction on this set of gifts, however, ignores the fact that there appears to be no term comparable to that of *folin* (bridewealth) by which these gifts are denoted. Furthermore, writers who refer to the *barlake* as a dowry are clearly not referring to what the bride's group gives but rather to the gifts given by the groom's social group.
- 34 B. Clamagirand, 'The social organization of the *ema* of Timor', in J.J. Fox, ed., *The Flow of Life: Essays on Eastern Indonesia*, Harvard University Press, 1980, p. 145; B.A.G. Vroklage, *Ethnographie der Belu in Zentral-Timor*, 3 volumes, E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1952–1953, p. 137.
- 35 J.B. Duarte, 'Barlaque', p. 94.
- 36 EWER (Early Warning Early Response), Policy Briefing No. 5, *Culture and Its Impact on Social and Community Life: A Case Study Of Timor Leste*, author: C. da C. C.X. Escollano Brandao, E. Choi, M.O. da Costa, S. Dewhurst, L. Ximenes, eds, Center for International Conflict Resolution, Columbia University, New York, 2011.
- 37 J. Trindade, email correspondence, 13 October 2011, [jtrindade76@hotmail.com](mailto:jtrindade76@hotmail.com). He also takes issue with the brief's recommendation (page 8) that the government regulate the *barlake* with formal law. A discussion of this proposal would take me beyond my terms of discussion, but I can at least register again my concurrence with Trindade's arguments against it.
- 38 Josh Trindade cogently argues against the claim that it incites violence in the same terms. *Ibid*.
- 39 The question of whether the *ema foho* should change their traditional values to bring them into harmony with *malae* values, is, of course, a separate issue.
- 40 The following remarks should not be taken as prescriptive or even preferential suggestions. The future of Timor-Leste is the business of the East Timorese domiciled in the capital and in the interior, not the *malae*, and no reader should read my anticipations about what might happen to this institution as reflecting any preference I might have about what should happen. The republic is already graced by an abundance of foreigners only too willing to instruct East Timorese in how they should live their lives.
- 41 In an interview, Mr. Agustinho Caet, Languages Advisor of the Ministry of Education, made some instructive remarks that deserve attention. He noted that many women never complete their education but marry early because they are an economic asset to their parents. While noting, that 'This does not happen in

all the districts', he said that in some districts 'parents get very happy when they have many female daughters because they reflect the money they will get for them through the *Barlaki* (dowry) system'. He went on to say that 'according to some traditions, women do not need to get a high level education. When a man wants to marry someone's daughter, the parents will remove their daughter from school'. Mr. Caet added that 'some parents give more importance to the *Barlaki* and how much money they will get for their daughters than with their level of education'. A. Caet, 'Gender: women represent an economic asset for the parents', interview by Isabella Ermelita, conducted on 11 October 2011, *The Dili Weekly*, 3 January 2012.

- 42 In the case of some families that identify with Dili, the future, as it were, appears to have arrived, or perhaps almost arrived. In her excellent account of how marriages are contracted in the capital, Dr. Kelly Silva shows the multiple variations in the meaning attributed to the *barlake* and draws attention to the institutional and moral confusions attending social change, which, predictably, are presently affecting the metropolis more than the *Foho*. See K. Silva, '*Foho* versus Dili', pp. 126–8. One might anticipate that these same uncertainties will surely attend the extension of what one might label 'Dili values' into the hinterland.