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## Nationalism at Scale in Timor-Leste : Between Rai na' in and Rai Timor<Special Theme : Nationalism in Timor-Leste>

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## Nationalism at Scale in Timor-Leste: Between Rai na'in and Rai Timor

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ティモール・レステの伸縮するナショナリズム  
——ライ・ナインとライ・ティモールの間で——

アンドリュー・マクウィリアム

Historically, the diverse ethno-linguistic communities of Timor-Leste have defined themselves through local ancestral resource jurisdictions and mythic histories of exchange, alliance, and settlement. Central to this conception of place and belonging is the idea of the *rai na'in*, a Tetun language term with local language variants that refers to 'custodians of the land'. However, the brutal, generation-long struggle for independence promoted new forms of imaginative connection and belonging encapsulated in the concept of *Rai Timor*, or 'homeland'. The notion of *Rai Timor* is not merely a more encompassing 'homeland' than the landed inheritance of locally embedded communities; it is imagined as a territory shaped from below and collectively by the ordeals of 'the people', who become the active originators of the nation. If the constitutive act of a subject in the traditional ideology of rule is to recognise and defer to authority vested in ritual and political leaders (the *rai na'in*), the constitutive act of belonging to the nation is to suffer and sacrifice for it (the *Rai Timor*) (McWilliam and Traube 2011). This presentation considers the contemporary force of this expansive sense of the imagined community in Timor-Leste, a notion that Anderson described as 'aggregated nativeness' (2003), in the light of the well-documented resurgence of custom and traditional authority. How do these different scales of allegiance and belonging contribute to the shaping of contemporary society in post-independence Timor-Leste? In this chapter, I discuss these and other questions with reference to the Fataluku ethnography.

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**Key Words** : Fataluku, nationalism, homeland, customary, belonging

キーワード : ファタルク, ナショナリズム, 祖国, 慣習的, 所属

歴史的にティモール・レステのさまざまな民族はローカルな伝統（先祖からの取り決めによる資源の裁定、交換・縁組・居住に関する神話的歴史）を通して自らを定義してきた。土地と所属に関するこの考え方に中心的な位置を占めているのがライ・ナインである。「ライ・ナイン」はテトゥン語で「土地の守護者」を指す。しかしながら、暴力的で一世代にわたる独立への闘争は、想像上の連帯と所属の新しい形、「ライ・ティモール」あるいは「祖国」の概念を産みだした。ライ・ティモールの考え方は、単にローカルな共同体の土地にむすびつきながら継承されたものをより包括的にしただけではない。それは全く違った仕方では想像されているのだ。それは下から、集団によって、「民衆」（彼らこそが国家の作り手となるのだが）の試練から作られた領土なのである。伝統的な統治のイデオロギーの中での主体の重要な行為が儀礼的・政治的リーダー（ライ・ナイン）の権威を認め・それに従うことだとすれば、国家に属するという中で重要な行為は国家（ライ・ティモール）のために殉教し犠牲になることである（McWilliam and Trauve 2011）。この論文はティモール・レステにおける想像された共同体（「ネイティブの集合体」（Anderson 2003））の、このような意味での拡張された意味の力を、慣習や伝統的権威の復活というよく知られた動きと対照させながら、考察する。いかにしてこれらの様々なスケールをもった忠誠と所属の意識が、今日の独立以降のティモール・レステの社会を形作っているのだろうか？わたしはこれらの問題をファタルクの民族誌に基いて議論する。

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## 1 Introduction

Over the last 50 years, the people of Timor-Leste have been embroiled in a protracted struggle for national independence against occupying Indonesia, which sought to integrate the half-island territory and former colony of Portugal into its archipelagic state. In the end, the Timorese prevailed and independence was ultimately founded (formally in May 2002) on the capacity of the resistance leadership and the many thousands of loyal supporters to transcend their local and historical differences and collaborate for a common national objective.

Historically, the diverse ethno-linguistic communities of Timor-Leste (comprising over twenty distinct ethno-linguistic groups) have defined themselves

through local, ancestral resource jurisdictions and mythic histories of settlement, exchange, and alliance. Many also have long and abiding memories of internecine warfare and mutual enmities that continue to inform contemporary intergroup relationships. These long-standing rivalries often derive from the Portuguese wars of pacification during the late nineteenth century, which culminated in the murderous campaigns of the Timorese auxiliary militias (Arraiais/Moradores) against the ‘Great Rebellion’ of Boaventura and his allies in Manufahi in 1912 (Pelissier 1996).

Central to the conceptions of place and belonging for Timorese communities is the idea of the *rai na'in*, a Tetun language term with many local language variants that refers to ‘custodians or guardians of the land’. The concept is widely conceived of as a binary expression of land ownership that combines the *rai na'in* as a more-than-human spirit owner of a particular place, and the living ‘traditional’ Timorese groups who over generations of sacrificial invocation and commensality with their spirit counterpart assert pre-eminent rights and authority over the country in question (McWilliam 2011a; Palmer 2015). In this conception of landed connection, customary rights and entitlements to local land and resource domains are grounded in a spiritual authority with weighty sanctions against transgression.

However, the brutal, generation-long struggle for independence arguably promoted new forms of imaginative connection and belonging encapsulated in the concept of *Rai Timor*; or ‘homeland’. As Elizabeth Traube has commented, the notion of *Rai Timor* is not merely a more encompassing homeland than the landed inheritance of locally embedded communities; it is imagined as a territory shaped from below and collectively by the ordeals of ‘the people’, who become the active originators of the nation. If the constitutive act of a subject in the traditional ideology of rule is to recognise and defer to authority vested in ritual and political leaders (the *rai na'in*), the constitutive act of belonging to the nation is to suffer and sacrifice for it (the *Rai Timor*) (McWilliam and Traube 2011: 17, see also Clifford 2007).

In this chapter, I explore the implications of and tensions between these two vital conceptions of identity and imagined community in contemporary Timor-Leste, one highly localised and group specific, the other national and broadly inclusive in its reach and aspiration. The distinction raises questions around the shape of Timorese patriotic nationalism into the future. How do these different scales of allegiance and belonging contribute to the development of contemporary society in post-independence Timor-Leste? How strong is the contemporary force of the *Rai Timor* as an expansive sense of an imagined community in Timor-Leste, especially in light of the well-documented resurgence of custom and traditional authority (*rai na'in*)? Is there any contradiction between these different scales of belonging, in any case? Ben Anderson considered the contemporary force of this expansive sense of belonging in Timor-Leste to be an expression of ‘aggregated

nativeness’ (2003), but he cautioned that ‘for the culture of nationalism [...] survival cannot be enough’ (2003: 184). As with all other nationalisms, Timor-Leste’s nation-making agenda is now fully engaged in the search for inclusive futures for its citizens. At the same time and drawing on an alternative version of ‘nativeness’ articulated by Emily Yeh (2007), the notion of inclusion here can also refer to a scale that is smaller or more limited than universal and collective claims about political or cultural rights. An alternative reading of nationalism operating at a regional scale, a ‘sub-state nationalism’ (Kaplan 1999), could reference pre-colonial and pre-state legitimating authorities and traditions that may co-exist in tension with nationalist imaginaries on a different scale. In this chapter, I discuss these and related matters with particular reference to the Fataluku ethnography in contemporary Timor-Leste.

## 2 Fataluku Nationalism and the Resistance Struggle

The Fataluku-speaking population of Timor-Leste currently numbers over 35,000, forming the largest linguistic community of the Lautem district, which is the most easterly district (now *Municipiu*) of Timor-Leste<sup>1</sup>). Lautem itself is composed of five subdistricts (*Posto*), and Fataluku speakers form the dominant population group in the three most easterly subdistricts (Tutuala, Fuiloro, and Lautem)<sup>2</sup>). In 1975, the great majority of Fataluku households pursued livelihoods sustained by a diverse mix of seasonal cropping and small-scale animal husbandry along with a rich range of foraged seasonal foods and other resources drawn from the nearby forests, extensive coastal reefs, and inshore waters of the district (McWilliam 2017; Pannell 2011). Although they were resolutely local in their livelihood pre-occupations, they were also highly responsive to the political vision of a post-colonial future disseminated by the then-radical FRETILIN political party and its vocal leadership that called for revolution and political independence.

There is little doubt that Fataluku communities were generally committed to a vision of Timor-Leste as an independent nation. They were certainly well represented in their support for the armed struggle under FRETILIN and their subsequent commitment to the student-led clandestine resistance movement after 1983. Indeed, one demonstrable measure of their capacity for sustained struggle against the strength of the Indonesian military – with up to 20,000 troops in the country at its peak – is the fact that Fataluku residents across the district helped sustain the operations of the armed Falintil guerrillas throughout the 24 years of occupation. This entrenched resistance (in the regional command known as Ponta Leste) gave rise to the area being referred to as the ‘land of continuous war’ (*fumu sei nafatin*). Young men in the region in particular risked torture and death over many years, both as active Falintil fighters living in the bush camps or operating as civilian messengers (*estafetas*) and as suppliers of food and medicine to their armed

comrades. This implacable resistance, however, and the large numbers who refused to accept integration into Indonesia, prompted sustained military reprisals and long periods of repressive action and surveillance against those sympathetic to the independence cause. Military repression and punitive violence was the price of resistance but one that people were willing to bear. The fact that former revered resistance leader, and later Prime Minister, Xanana Gusmão was afforded shelter and protection for years in Lautem and led the resurgence of the resistance after the near-complete destruction of Falintil forces on the mountains of Matebian in 1979 is testimony to the widespread, if high-risk, support he received. In a similar way, the emergence of former Fataluku School teacher, Nino Konis Santana, as leader of the Timor-Leste Falintil command in 1993 evoked another persuasive and powerful symbol of support for the nationalist struggle, even as his untimely death in 1998 was a painful reminder of the scale of the sacrifice endured to achieve that elusive prize<sup>3</sup>. The acknowledgement of that cost is today expressed poignantly in the many graves of fallen comrades and loved ones scattered around community cemeteries in Lautem and commemorated with the phrase *Herois de Patria* (National Heroes) imprinted on their headstones.

The point here is that, like many other networks of resistance against occupation across the country, the Fataluku contribution was driven by a commitment to an independent nationalist vision in its imaginative reach. Describing his community to me in the early 2000s, a Fataluku colleague of mine stated that they were all ‘*Maubere Asuwain*’ (warriors of Maubere) in the struggle for independence; he referenced the once-derogatory Mambai term *maubere* (equivalent to hillbilly) that subsequently became a rallying cry for the FRETILIN national movement. Like their Mambai counterparts, Fataluku supporters of the cause perceived the nation as one ‘brought into being through their personal sacrifices and purchased with their own lives’ (Traube 2007). Nearly two decades after liberation, this sense of the wider struggle for independence is a tangible legacy of their commitment to the cause.

### 3 Revising Fataluku Sociality and Cultural Identity

The end of occupation, following the destructive withdrawal of the Indonesian military forces, left most of Timor-Leste a smoking ruin. Among the most pressing concerns for Fataluku households was the widespread destruction of residential housing and livestock; the withdrawal of formal government, and with it all essential services; and the collapse of the trade markets along with much of the cash economy. Victory in the struggle for independence was achieved, but the cost had been heavy and meant that most households faced the slow and difficult process of rebuilding their lives and communities (Hicks 2004; McWilliam 2011b).

In this post-conflict landscape of Timor-Leste, the limited visibility of the

government presence during the early years opened the way for a resurgence in both the exchange economy and a reinstatement of the older forms of relationships to land and resources (see McWilliam 2011b). Under Indonesian occupation, many performative aspects of tradition had been suppressed or ignored to varying degrees over the years. Subsequently, in the comparative absence of direction from the Timorese national government<sup>4)</sup> on matters of land use and formal titling, these older, deeply embedded understandings of access, resource rights, and customary permissions came to the fore.

To illustrate Fataluku conventions of customary relationships to land, I draw on the general regimes of recognition that apply across Timor-Leste. In this view, Timorese claims to localised political and cultural rights are mobilised through the Tetun lingua-franca concept of *rai na'in* ('people', or custodians of the land/soil). The Fataluku equivalent is *mua ho cawaru* – land and lord). In both versions, the phrase approximates many meanings, including living custodians or owners of the land, land spirits, and spirit custodians, all originating from the subterranean world. While it is arguable that these spirits are most often ontologically ancestral and autochthonous in form (Palmer 2015), David Hicks also refers to them as free nature spirits and agents of Mother Earth, often appearing other-than-human with an unpredictable and sometimes malevolent agency (2004: 33). As noted earlier, in Timor-Leste, the conventional understanding of the category, *rai na'in*, finds tangible expression in a distinctive consubstantiated form. There is a human and visible expression embodied in the living senior representatives of the clan community of owners, and a second, mostly invisible realm that comprises emplaced 'spirit' entities of the land itself, including the collective ancestral shades of the living owners. In this foundational cultural construct, the living community of landowners (*rai na'in*) maintains a continuing relationship of sacrificial commensality with their spirit domain (*rai na'in*). In exchange for placating and feeding the 'spirit owners' of the land, the affiliated living community ensures access to abundant blessings and protection as well as political primacy over their jurisdictional resources.

Under these traditionalist schemas, historical claims and entitlements to land and its constituent resources are nested within residents' relations to the *rai na'in* households and ritual authorities (*lia na'in*) of a particular customary domain. Over time, new settlers and young men who marry into the community establish continuing exchange relationships and acquire rights to utilise and cultivate the resources of the *rai na'in* territory with the permission of the land-owners and their inspired emplaced counterparts. Local tenures are therefore expressed as much within the sacred geographies and spiritual connections that people retain with specific localities as they are in the personal histories of engagement and exploitation of the forest environment and coastal foreshores. This is a widely documented ethnographic feature of Timor-Leste and is a particularly strong aspect of Fataluku relations to ancestral domains across Lautem, despite efforts under Indonesian and

former Portuguese colonial regimes to implement degrees of regulatory land tenure systems (see Fitzpatrick et al. 2012; Fitzpatrick and McWilliam 2013).

The difference between different areas of contemporary Timor-Leste generally lies in the degree to which these spirit owners are actively engaged through forms of sacrificial invocation and symbolic commensality as an ongoing feature of human-land relations. Where they are neglected or limited in effect, this is usually related to the shift towards the individuation and commodification of land parcels, particularly in urban and peri-urban environments. Certainly, among rural Fataluku communities, these issues remain a core feature of accepted vested authority over portions of forested land and coastal foreshore, including their manifold resources. Furthermore, as my Fataluku colleagues have often observed, the land (*mua cao vele*) has long been fully divided among the resident founding clan groups (*ratu*) and may not be sold according to custom and ancestral sanction. In their view, there is no provision for state land (*rai estado*) other than those small, and conceptually temporary, portions allocated for community benefits (such as schools, health clinics, and government buildings).

In this context, where loyalties and acknowledged authorities over people's livelihoods and well-being derive to a significant degree from the protocols and the customary authority of leading households, it is perhaps inevitable that an unwavering commitment to everyday nationalism, and to the national government, may weaken or be diverted to other more pressing local concerns.

#### **4 Asserting Ancestral Entitlements: Mua Pusu and the Nino Konis Santana National Park**

An event that readily illustrates the tension between national objectives and local concerns is the establishment of the Nino Konis National Park (*Parque Nacional Nino Konis Santana*), which covers extensive areas of eastern Lautem. Legislated in 2007 during the dying days of the FRETILIN government, the conservation park was formally proclaimed in 2008 in a public ceremony attended by dignitaries, politicians, officials, and many local Fataluku villages invited to participate in the celebrations with traditional dancing and public commensality (McWilliam 2013). Its boundaries encompass a terrestrial area of some 1,236 km<sup>2</sup> in eastern Lautem with a corresponding extensive area of coastal waters and fringing coral reefs (556 km<sup>2</sup>) that forms a designated protected marine zone. The park includes Lake Ira lalaru, the largest freshwater lake on the island of Timor, as well as the densely forested Paichao mountain range (up to 900m) with its extensive and largely unpopulated stretches of monsoon and evergreen canopy rainforest.

The creation of the park was informed by two principal objectives, both framed in terms of nationalism and nation-building (McClellan 2014). The first of these was recognition of the rich, albeit poorly documented, bio-diversity and envi-

ronmental values of the region (McWilliam 2007; 2013). The second goal was to create a lasting living memorial to the national struggle for independence, symbolised in the name of the former national Falintil leader Konis Santana, whose recognition resonated with Fataluku contributions to the resistance while speaking symbolically to the suffering of the nation as a whole. Combining these twin objectives, the Park was categorised as an IUCN<sup>5)</sup> Category 5 mixed use conservation zone. This category of conservation recognises the role of human interaction in the reproduction of environmental values while aiming to balance environmental protection with continuing livelihood development objectives. It is specifically described as follows:

An area of land, with coast and sea as appropriate, where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant aesthetic, ecological and/or cultural value, and often with high biological diversity.<sup>6)</sup>

The arrangement reflects the fact that six Fataluku-speaking village communities were fully incorporated within the boundaries of the park and derived the bulk of their livelihoods from extensive foraging and cultivation of its resources<sup>7)</sup>.

While the symbolic properties and intent of the Park were well appreciated by the general Fataluku community in the region, their good will has been tested in subsequent years by a disappointing lack of action on the part of the national government in the critical process of zoning to reflect the intended mix of environmental protection and development areas. Lack of funding and unavoidable delays are cited as the cause, but this lack of action has not stopped government efforts from significantly restricting hunting practices (McWilliam 2017) and cur-tailing plans for the re-settlement of formerly dislocated communities to their ancestral places of residence (*lata irinu, lata paru*) deeper within the Park (McWilliam 2007)<sup>8)</sup>. The political inertia inevitably creates degrees of disaffection, resentment, and opposition to restrictive conditions placed on Park residents.

To provide an example of the kinds of impacts currently underway, I focus here on recent developments in the seaside village of Com, located in the north-western portion of the Park. During the dry season of 2017, a number of households from the constituent hamlets of Mua Pusu and Lohomatu decided to relocate their residences further inside the national park at a distance of some two kilometres to the east but well beyond a small creek that had formed a notional boundary of settlement for a decade. Many more people were openly canvassing the possibility of moving *en masse*; in doing so, they made definitive statements of claim or more precisely, ‘reclamation’ of their ancestral lands despite the absence of official approval and the risk of future eviction for ignoring government procedures. Having held off moves of this kind for many years following the proclamation of the Park, the community had already been cultivating fields within the area for some years, and they continued to bury deceased members at the site

of the former Mua Pusu settlement cemetery. However, the new strategic decision to relocate housing was a more definitive signal of their commitment to customary claims in the face of the wider public interest and conservation objectives of the national government. Conversely, the residents of Mua Pusu and Lohomatu see their action as repairing the dislocation in their lives since they were forced by the occupying Indonesian military to resettle in Com in the late 1970s<sup>9</sup>.

The immediate precursor of the residents' decision to move was a development initiative undertaken by the national government itself: namely, to fund the construction of an unsealed access road some four kilometres into the park from Com to a beachside area known as Salara. The new roadworks were built on the foundation of a former Portuguese colonial road built in the early twentieth century that had long since fallen into disuse. A luxury guesthouse was being developed at the end of the newly constructed road. Reportedly a part of a 'tourism initiative', it features high-quality, decorative stone masonry sourced at considerable cost from Iliomar on the other side of the island, connections to the national power grid, and a series of bedrooms and bathrooms. The whole edifice is nestled in a dense thicket of forest overlooking a tranquil beach and recognised sea turtle nesting ground. People in Com have taken to referring to the 'mini-Poussada' as 'Xanana's place' based on various unsubstantiated rumours concerning the involvement of the charismatic former resistance hero and key figure in national government, Xanana Gusmão<sup>10</sup>.

The development of the guesthouse and its associated infrastructure sent a clear message that, in this area of the park at least, strategic developments were permitted and the area was not intended to be a protected zone with minimal disturbances. The former residents from Mua Pusu and Lohomatu took this as a sign that they could return to their former garden lands with attendant ancestral rights over their historical claims to this natural resource domain. This view was reinforced by the role of senior ritual practitioners from Mua Pusu, who were invited to effect a ritual release of land for the guesthouse through a ceremony known as *mua masule*, to ensure the success and protection of the endeavour. It was also precipitated by the decision of the traditional leader of the Mua Pusu and Lohomatu communities, from the former ruling house of Macapainara Ratu<sup>11</sup>, to establish a new residence in the area.

Another factor that has guided decision-making is encouragement from Com village itself. As in many other areas of Timor-Leste where displaced groups were involuntarily resettled by the Indonesian government, long-term entitlements to land in the resettlement areas have rarely been accepted by host communities, who had little choice in the matter of their placement and would generally be happy to see them return to their former lands. This is probably a majoritarian view among long-term resident groups in Com, who regard the decision by their neighbours from Mua Pusu and Lohomatu to relocate their settlements in the park as well overdue.

At this stage, it would be premature to predict the outcome of the current momentum among Mua Pusu and Lohomatu residents to resettle their ancestral lands. In the absence of a clear and prompt regulatory response by the government, it is likely that this piecemeal re-occupation will continue unabated. House construction, new garden fences, livestock pens, and associated structures will once again shape the landscape and reinforce through practical action the abiding customary basis upon which territorial claims are made and remade. The salient point here is the inherent tension revealed in this case between customary claims to resource domains over and against the broader public interest defined by the state in the establishment of the National Park. Drawing on Emily Yeh's concept of 'nativeness', the tension directs our attention to the persistence of mythically constituted ancestral entitlements, forms of belonging that are founded on both an assertion of enduring rights in land and a religiously based association of sacrificial connection to ancestral country. These kinds of regional and local forms of allegiance, a patriotism directed towards the local homeland that are by no means uncommon across Timor-Leste, need not undermine the broader consensus towards an inclusive nationalism, but they do demand attention and degrees of accommodation in the context of a pluralistic and responsive governance<sup>12)</sup>.

## 5 Identity, Belonging, and Nation

Across the social landscape of Timor-Leste, there is a prominent theme that victory in the struggle for independence was secured with the intervention of powerful spiritual forces of the land and the sacrifice of the people (see Pannell and O'Connor 2013; Bovensiepen 2011). It is understandable that the unity of purpose required to achieve independence might have weakened and diverged to varying degree in the aftermath of victory. The practical realities of securing livelihoods, building governance, and the inevitable compromises of democratic politics make this perhaps inevitable (Babo Soares 2003), but it is also the case that the citizens of Timor-Leste looked to the nation state to distribute the fruits of victory in ways that recognise and reward their collective sacrifice (Traube 2007). For most rural Timorese, that implied social contract with the state remained unfulfilled during the early years of post-occupation independence. This period leading up to the political crisis (*crisé*) and outbreak of inter-communal violence in 2006 (see Independent Special Commission of Inquiry for Timor-Leste 2006) was also marked by highly constrained public expenditure and the absence of government services, leaving most of the population mired in poverty and, for the most part, abandoned to their own devices in the grinding task of social and economic recovery.

However, the years since then have seen significant improvements in economic development across the country, funded in large degree by bounteous oil revenues from the Timor Sea. This largess has included a range of targeted payments and

honoraria to those who sacrificed their lives for the independence struggle. The ballooning pension and other state payments directed to registered veterans (*veteranus*) of the armed struggle are a prominent and controversial case in point (Roll 2014). Despite these efforts to reinforce a sense of national unity and cohesion, there remain substantial and growing economic disparities between people of the city and the majority population in the hinterlands and mountains of Timor-Leste (Scheiner 2015).

These differences in the experiences of post-independence nation-building and the kinds of tensions that have emerged between competing allegiances over localised conceptions of authority (*rai na'in*) and an expanded sense of the homeland of *Rai Timor* are potentially divisive developments. However, in my view, to date they do not reflect the emergence of a disruptive identity politics that might seriously challenge the legitimacy of the nation state. They are rather a social fact, a way of being in the world and an approach to life that underpins the dispositions of rural communities and that has long provided the foundations of local governance across Timor-Leste. In this respect, the 'mini-nationalism' (Snyder 1982) of the *rai na'in* complex, indexes a kind of semi-sovereignty that falls short of complete self-determination.

A further reason for Fataluku semi-sovereignty is the generalised emotional bond and acclamation felt towards Xanana Gusmão, the former guerrilla leader and hero of the struggle for national independence. Fataluku collective sacrifices for the nation, the 'patria' of Timor-Leste, signified so poignantly in the elaborately decorated graves and public memorials of fallen Fataluku kin brothers and sisters, constitute an enduring commitment to the nation and the *Rai Timor*. Xanana is viewed as a living embodiment of that commitment<sup>13</sup>) to whom Fataluku have afforded abiding protection and support during his years as a fighter in the forests and as the living symbol of Timor-Leste resistance. Even the primordial spirit power of the Fataluku *rai na'in* (F: *mua cawaru*) is said to have been ritually mobilised to shield Xanana from enemy assault. According to one story recorded by O'Connor and Pannell (O'Connor et al. 2013), at a critical time in 1999, a desperate Xanana Gusmão is reported to have conveyed a message seeking assistance from the present (living) 'lord of the land' (*mua ocawa*) in Tutuala (Lautem) to dispel the (Indonesian) foreigners. Upon receiving this request, and with a photograph of the guerrilla leader in hand, the Fataluku ritual leader sacrificed a pig at Titiru (the so-called President *te'i*) in the lead-up to the referendum in 1999 and requested that the *te'i* (spirit guardian) emerge from the earth and take action against the Indonesians and their supporters. As it emerged from its hole, the *mua ocawa téi* began to 'eat' the enemy, and resistance leader Xanana was imbued with the thoughts and power of the *téi* itself, the two creating an unbeatable front against the Indonesian forces. When the Indonesians succumbed and left, the living 'lord of the land' (*mua ocawa*) in Tutuala returned to Titiru and sacrificed another pig to

‘calm’ the *téi* and entice it to enter its hole once again, having been satiated with food and drink and the ‘blood and flesh’ of the enemy. The narrative here expresses several instructive points. First, it reinforces the status of the *rai na'in* complex as a source of foundational authority and power that was deployed in the interests of the wider national struggle. Second, it conveys an understanding that the authority and embodiment of Xanana as a symbol of the nation is anchored in the continuing support of the collective authority of the multiple *rai na'in* that constitute its customary base.

The country’s national political classes would do well to heed these connections, even if for many the persistence of custom (*lisan*) and ritual exchanges that mark these forms of sociality are regarded as ‘backward looking’ practices mired in ignorance and superstition, and, in their view, ill-suited to the challenges and opportunities of the modern nation of Timor-Leste. In Timor-Leste, the imperative to sustain a unity of national purpose requires a greater willingness on the part of policy makers and politicians to actively acknowledge and support the role of customary governance from which the resilience of the nation derives. Such an accommodation need not invite or exacerbate expressions of resistance against a perceived coercive state, or the rise of more assertive politics around self-determination, but it does need to acknowledge the significance of older forms of authority and attachment to vital ancestral homelands as a dynamic platform for inclusion and cooperation.

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## Notes

- 1) A significant portion of the Fataluku-speaking community (20%) lives outside of Lautem in the national capital Dili and overseas as labour migrants, principally in the United Kingdom (see McWilliam 2012; McWilliam and Monteiro in press).
- 2) In the remaining sub-districts of Iliomar in the south and Luro in the western highlands, the languages of Macalero and Sa’ane predominate, respectively, the latter being a dialect of Makasae.
- 3) Santana’s death from illness in distant Ermera was cause for consternation and suspicion among his Fataluku supporters in Lautem for many years after the event.
- 4) Other than a limited engagement by the interim Land and Property Agency (*Terras e Propiedade*) in informal dispute resolution over contested land claims in urban and peri-urban areas (see Fitzpatrick et al. 2012) and the unregulated logging of forests.
- 5) International Union for the Conservation of Nature.
- 6) <https://www.iucn.org/theme/protected-areas/about/protected-areas-categories/category-v-protected-landscapescape> (accessed 12 January 2018).

- 7) These are the villages of Tutuala, Mehara, Bauro, Muapitine, Lorehe, and Com.
- 8) Forcible removal and displacement of populations from forested areas was a feature of colonial Portuguese policies and later Indonesian military strategies to limit the locals' proximity to the armed resistance.
- 9) Com became a 'concentrated' settlement in the late 1970s, as the Indonesian military sought to limit interaction between local villages and the armed resistance groups in the forests along the coast. The populations of Mua Pusu and Lohomatu were among the groups targeted for removal into Com.
- 10) Eco-tourism investment in one of the stated sectors identified by successive Timor-Leste governments; this initiative is likely to have been sanctioned under this policy, although I have not viewed any public documentation relating to the development in question.
- 11) Formerly, the fortified settlement known as *Macapainara Serevairara* was an important political and trading centre during the pre-twentieth-century Portuguese colonial era when the ruling house was granted the title of Koronel.
- 12) This observation speaks to the inherent underlying tensions that persist in many multilingual national states where identity politics can arise and seek enhanced autonomy or special status, a recent example being the nominal declaration of 'national' independence by Catalonia against Spain in 2017.
- 13) Even as his subsequent political career may have tarnished that heroic image.

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