

Kabita-Kaburai, de cada dia: Indigenous Hierarchies and the Portuguese in Timor

Janet Gunter

Abstract: Focusing on the area east of Mount Matebian in eastern Timor, this paper looks at the way colonialism was experienced in the hinterlands of Portuguese Timor. Portuguese power was often first experienced indirectly, enabling elites to strengthen indigenous hierarchies before the Portuguese administration was able to consolidate indirect rule in the 1910-20s. In the long run, the Republican administration co-opted these hierarchies, resulting in the paradox that elite power became both absolute and fragile.

In October 1974 a reporter from the *New York Times* arrived in the village of Lausana, near Mt. Matebian in the eastern part of Portuguese Timor. He asked the elders who was the first Portuguese to visit the village. They explained that fifteen years earlier a Portuguese administrator arrived on horseback to open a dirt road from the sub-district post at Quelicai. When asked who was the last Portuguese to visit, they replied, "He was the last. The Portuguese have only been here once." This encounter raises several questions. How did East Timorese in the hinterlands experience the Portuguese presence? When and how was Portuguese rule consolidated in remoter areas?

The conventional national narrative speaks of 450 years of oppressive colonial domination. Yet by 1907, for example, the Portuguese census shows that contact between the indigenous population and outsiders varied greatly. In the

western districts the indigenous population experienced closer contact with colonists and merchants, with the ratio of Timorese to non-Timorese ("mixed," Chinese, African troops) roughly 150 to 1. By contrast, in the districts at the eastern end of the island, the figures suggest a degree of Timorese autonomy: in Baucau and Viqueque districts, the same ratio was over 3,500 to 1.¹

During recent fieldwork in eastern East Timor, one of the most common themes in elite oral accounts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was Timorese agency in their incorporation into new hierarchies, initially based on symbolic tribute and later based on direct dealings with the colonial power. According to elite accounts, the "legitimacy" of these hierarchies appears to be located in a mimetic appropriation of what were believed to be Portuguese symbols. In certain regions of eastern Timor the Portuguese presence on the island was felt first indirectly in the form of missionaries, guns, and symbols of monarchy. By speaking mostly with elites, and engaging their memories about how their predecessors received and negotiated outside influences to their own benefit, I do not mean to minimize the inequalities or long-term consequences of the strengthening of vertical power structures.² To the contrary, I hope to show how elites concede that by strengthening their authority over their subjects in the late nineteenth century through the creation of a wide-reaching tribute structure, they put themselves in a difficult position in subsequent decades. As Republican administrators attempted to consolidate indirect rule in rural Timor, in the 1910s and 1920s, elites were either discarded or reduced to being coerced agents of Portuguese rule.

This paper focuses on the sub-districts of Uatocarbau (in Viqueque) and Baguia (in Baucau) that lie in eastern Timor under the shadow of Mt. Matebian, which rises over 2,300 meters. To this day, these sub-districts remain isolated from the "outside" in that the only available media is short-wave radio, and the state of roads and bridges often make travel impossible or too expensive for locals. There during a short stay in October and November 2006, I spoke both with elites and simple farmers, most self-identified descendents of the old mountain "kingdom" of Afaloicai.

Afaloicai

At the turn of the twentieth century large swaths of the map of the eastern tip of Portuguese Timor, especially around Mt. Matebian, remained blanks on the administrative map. The political entity of Afaloicai was one of these.³ Located on the southern slopes of Mt. Matebian, the traditional center of

Afaloicai appears to have consisted of two villages that still exist today, Buibela and Lená. The origin story of Afaloicai, as documented by Antonio de Almeida and repeated to me a number of times, refers to a shepherd who turned into a rock—*Afa*, meaning rock, and Loicai, the proper name of the shepherd. This rock is located two kilometers from Buibela village. It is not clear if the residents of surrounding villages are also descended from this original shepherd, or whether they later came to identify themselves with Afaloicai and came to view this as a unified “kingdom.” Most likely people across a certain geographical area were united by a system of cross-cousin marriage, known as *fetosaan-umane*,⁴ and harvest-related tribute, with its ritual center at Buibela-Lená.

For some of my informants who claimed descent from the Buibela-Lená area, these villages seem to represent a lost paradise. This is understandable given the majestic location under Matebian, with sweeping 270-degree panoramas, groves of preserved hardwood trees, and dependable mountain springs. However, in describing this earlier time, other informants make it clear that they do not view Afaloicai as an isolated “Eden” but as integrated into a larger region, relying on the elders of the outside villages of Laka-hu (to the north) and Uai-kai (to the south) to resolve conflicts (*tesi lia*).

In today’s Afaloicai⁵ two unrelated languages—Naueti and Makassae—are spoken, often side-by-side. Naueti, an Austronesian language, is mostly spoken in lower-lying and coastal areas. Makassae, a Papuan language, is spoken predominantly in mountainous, more elevated terrain, with pockets of speakers in the eastern Matebian valley. The linguistic literature suggests that these languages arrived at different times on the north coast of the island.⁶ Speakers of these languages share the *fetossan-umane* kinship system, which has allowed for fairly pacific, gradual blending and spreading of both. War occasionally played a part in the diffusion of one language over another. Today in this region, people identify more readily by locality of origin than by “ethno-linguistic group.”⁷

Thomaz summarizes the dominant Portuguese view of pre-colonial Timor, outlining a neat hierarchy that resembled a “feudal system of the medieval Occident” (496). The Portuguese used the word *reino* to describe groupings of villages that were perceived to have a sufficiently centralized and vertical tribute and military system as to resemble “kingdoms.” In Timor, possession of large landholdings by lords varied a great deal by region. Additionally, in the local understanding, it is important to note that in Tetum *reinu* means something quite different from *reino* (Portuguese). Currently, in the Matebian

area, *reinu* literally means the common people or peasants.⁸ As such, both the equivalence between the Tetum *reinu* and Portuguese *reino*, as well as the European feudal comparison should be made with caution.

Many informants argued that in early times the role of a *liurai*, or petty king (from *liu* meaning “beyond” and *rai* meaning “the earth”), was mostly to convene the council of the elders when their judgment was needed, to provide animals for sacrifice, and to call on warrior-heroes (*asua'in*) and ritual leaders at appropriate times. *Liurai* also could command the labor of *reinu* in certain circumstances. However, there are debates about the extent of *liurai* power. As a recent ethnography of the Makassae in Baucau district (Da Costa *et al.* 2006) argues, “[I]t is questionable as to what extent [the *liurais*] had absolute power.” These authors even go so far as to state that *liurais* were “deemed as the agents of foreign rulers.” They ask the reader to “differentiate [between] the feudal system influenced and operated by colonial rulers (and its decline in the Makassae community)” from the values of tradition in the nation-building process.

Clearly there is a danger of romanticizing “traditional” social relations and glossing over the less ideal aspects of indigenous social structure, which included a slave class. In Uatocarbau and Bagaia, I heard more than one report of *liurais* in the region being buried with numerous live slaves in the early twentieth century. The stories of slave sacrifice remind us of the limitations of “ethnographic data” relating to the past. There is still quite a lot at stake today for East Timorese when describing earlier social structures and the process of colonial domination.⁹

The Missionary

When *liurai* Bernardo Pinto of Afaloicai-Uatocarbau recited five generations of his ancestry, my curiosity piqued when I heard the name of his grandfather who was the first family member to be converted to Christianity in 1910. Pinto was one of the most influential Timorese catechists in the region, and his memory of his grandfather’s bungled recitation of the Lord’s Prayer—with its creative use of local words—was still fresh in his mind.

Pinto remembered the name of the visiting missionary, Father Jerónimo, who is described at length by Joaquim Paço d’Arcos, one of Portugal’s celebrated mid-twentieth-century authors.¹⁰ Paço d’Arcos tells with condescension of Manuel Pereira Jerónimo’s origin from the remote mountain area of northern Portugal. He equates the Timorese (“poor negroes of Oceania”) with the mis-

sionary (“a poor, semi-barbarous shepherd from the wilds of the Estrela Mountains”). Jerónimo was plucked from Braga at a young age and transported to Macau to serve the Bishop, with whose “benevolence” he was later confirmed a priest. With little experience, he was sent to Timor to proselytize, where he learned Tetum rapidly and related quite well to the native people. Paço d’Arcos suggests that Jerónimo was both zealous and inept, crisscrossing the island, converting receptive nobility, charming them with his intimate knowledge of local customs and language. According to Teixeira, he served three long stints in Timor between 1896 and 1920. In a particularly supercilious passage, Paço d’Arcos relates an anecdote that he suggests is based on real events¹¹ during the Bishop of the Diocese of Macau’s visit to Timor in the 1910s.

A pretalhada ouvia-o delicada. Somente o bispo, que por ter missionado em Timor também compreendia a língua, não parecia tão maravilhado; e tais barbaridades ouviu sobre pontos de doutrina, tais desacatos ao Dogma, tais sacrilégios, que sem poder poupar o antigo protegido teve de lhe ordenar a suspensão da prédica. (Teixeira 309)

[The bunch of negroes listened to him politely. Only the Bishop, who for having proselytized in Timor also understood the language, did not seem so impressed; and such barbarities did he hear on points of doctrine, such profanation of Dogma, such sacrilege, that not able to save his old protégé, he had to order his suspension from sermon.]

Paço d’Arcos portrays Father Jerónimo as a mediator between the colonial military and local elites. When the natives rose up against white domination, receiving Portuguese troops with bullets and arrows, he writes, the missionary could advance alone and the “rebel indigenous would receive him with respect.” Here Jerónimo fits the part of the heroic adventurer “de Quinhentos, aos quais todo o vasto mundo era familiar e de cuja tẽmpera ainda hoje guardam lembrança, das Índias aos Brasis, os vários povos” [“of the 1500s, to whom all of the vast world was familiar and whose character the various peoples from the East Indies to Brazil still hold in their memories”].¹²

Liurai Pinto suggested I consult his 50-page memoir¹³ to confirm his oral accounts. He wrote that Father Jerónimo visited the military post Dara-Lari, several kilometers from Buibela, and taught his grandparent’s generation how to be Catholic in two days. To his convert’s grandchildren, Father Jerónimo

seemed an intrepid Portuguese whose fleeting appearance on the scene did little more to promise sustained contact with foreigners, a promise which would not be fulfilled for two more generations.¹⁴

The “Pai Nosso” recited by his grandfather came out “Keu-keu nosso, nosso cada dia, cabita-caburai, de cada dia!” instead of “O pão nosso de cada dia nos dai hoje; perdoai-nos as nossas ofensas.” In Pinto’s grandfather’s prayer, the comedic value lies in the words he inserted which do not have anything to do with the Christian world of meaning. The words *kabita* and *kaburai* are local versions of Tetum words for military rank, from the original Portuguese *capitão* and *cabo*. *Keu-keu* makes reference to botanical terms (*keu* being a suffix in *ka-keu*, a kind of pine tree). All of these words appear more closely tied to Tetum than the local Makassae language.

The greatest legacy of missionary activity in remote areas of Timor seems to have been to highlight the growing importance of Tetum, which was the *lingua franca* of Timor. Tetum was used by military and civil administrators to communicate with people in the hinterlands before there were enough schools and teachers to teach Portuguese. Missionaries had been perfecting the catechism in Tetum for much of the nineteenth century. Tetum’s similarities to Nauri, which is also an Austronesian language, made it easier to learn for those with meaningful contact with missionaries. In the early twentieth century, in the Uatocarbau-Baguaia area, a new generation of village heads, especially in areas of lesser importance with no pre-existing, compelling leadership, would be favored by Portuguese administrators on the basis of their ability to speak Tetum.

The Musket

Before discussing the history of warfare in East Timor, it is first necessary to provide some background about the Matebian region. By the late seventeenth century the kingdom of Luca had become a major power.¹⁵ The under-staffed Portuguese administration saw Luca as one of the three most important kingdoms in the east¹⁶—the land of the “Belos”—and conferred privileges and titles on them. Luca appears on many early maps of Timor. Both conversion by Dominican missionaries and subsequent, if at times inconsistent, military alliance with the kingdom of Luca generated a lasting connection between the Portuguese administration and this region. Luca’s elite remained Christian. The Portuguese language and the written word were very important to Luca, as was recording their interactions with the distant colonial power.

In a letter written to a vassal kingdom in 1795, D. Tomás de Amaral of Luca referred to himself as “Tenente Gn.al Supr.y Intendente e Conservador-mor desta Prov.ça dos Bellos Espector geral das Cobranças das fintas reais do Sul, Rey e Coronel do Reyno de Luca e das suas jurisdiçoens.”¹⁷ This letter paints a portrait of Portuguese indirect rule via the self-important kings of Luca. Yet already by this time, and especially in the century to follow, Luca was no longer trusted entirely by the Portuguese. A letter from the Queen of Luca to the Portuguese Governor dated July 1892 provides an unexpectedly frank picture of the region around Mt. Matebian, to the north and east of Luca. According to Queen Rozados Reis e Cunha, the area was mired in internecine feuding over land rights and buffalo. Implicit in these battles was the struggle for influence and the issue of tribute and vassalage. The Queen attempts to explain the complex chain of events that led to armed conflicts between a number of villages ostensibly under her domain. Two of these villages, she writes, “do not follow my orders, nor do they submit.”¹⁸

Afaloicai is listed as one of the trouble-spots involved in the conflict. This letter indicates that villages near Mt. Matebian were able to resist domination by powerful coastal kingdoms in direct contact with the Portuguese well into the 1890s. Whether a conscious strategy to evade taxes and tribute, or genuine conflicts over resources or personal matters, the result of these recurrent conflicts was to play the major coastal kingdoms off of each other, and to delay indirect foreign domination in the interior and mountain communities.

The Portuguese conducted periodic military campaigns in the east to “teach a lesson” and to collect taxes, which often did little to permanently subordinate peoples in remoter areas. A month after the Queen of Luca wrote this letter, the Portuguese began a military campaign called the “War of Matebian,” ending in the rock escarpments near Quelicai on the northeast side of the mountain. It is not clear if Luca participated in this war. But it appears that Ossuroa, one of Luca’s vassals, fought in its place. In one of the only Portuguese accounts, from the *Boletim Oficial de Timor*, the campaign is portrayed as a major victory against vaguely identified adversaries (“Officio do respectivo governador [...]). The Portuguese relied “almost exclusively” on native troops called “auxiliaries,” with only 28 non-Timorese individuals involved. The report admits that even with overwhelming advantages in firepower,¹⁹ it was only by siege and “by hunger” that Quelicai fell. There is little reason to believe, based on what information is available, that this campaign brought all of the rebel or autonomous communities in the area into submis-

sion. Afaloicai is not mentioned in this report even though it is only a four hour march from Quelicai.

In 1894 Celestino da Silva was appointed governor of Portuguese Timor and initiated "pacification" campaigns based on methods, first developed in African colonies, that were intended to ensure "effective occupation." A number of oral accounts allude to a major war in Uatocarbau soon after da Silva arrived. Drawing on oral sources, Antonio Vicente provides some information dating this war, referred to by elders as the Burabo'o War, to 1895. Vicente suggests linkages with the conflicts west of Matebian three years prior. Instead of a Portuguese campaign like the "War of Mattebian," he claims that the Portuguese sponsored an intra-Timorese conflict provoked by Vessoro's refusal to pay tribute to powerful Luca. A decree signed by Celestino da Silva ("Portaria 18") suggests that Viqueque decimated the entire eastern coastal region near Vessoro on Luca's request, destroying villages up into the jungle areas above. There is no mention of the use of Portuguese forces or munitions in this decree.²⁰

It is important to note that warfare and its effects are embedded in historical and genealogical narratives in the Uatocarbau-Baguaia region. Bernardo Pinto claims that the first of his ancestors to win a noble title, Muli-Hú, gained it for heroics in a war on behalf of the king of Afaloicai. Pinto categorically denied the war that occurred five generations ago as having anything to do with the Portuguese presence.

Muli-Hú used a flint musket (*espingarda de pederneira*) named *o na' wai*, which in Makassae means "never misses the target." The source of the musket named *o na' wai* is not clear. It could have been obtained from the Portuguese or through indigenous trade of buffaloes.²¹ In any case, was the musket itself decisive in this war? As an Afaloicai elder told me, "Before, you got on a horse with a bow and arrow and a machete. That was war" (de Menezes). Even if war parties possessed muskets, one or two muskets, they relied heavily on arrows and swords, as apparently marksmen like Muli-Hú were rare enough to warrant honors from the king of Afaloicai. Due to the importance of individuals, notably certain warriors, in these societies, "one good shot, then, it was all over," Marshall Sahlins observed. He wrote, "Hence it was not the European muskets that historically made Fijian chiefs powerful so much as the chiefs that made the muskets historically powerful."

While armed conflicts were widespread during the late nineteenth century, some documented by the Portuguese and the kingdom of Luca, in the Afaloicai

area, the conflicts that informants tended to highlight did not involve the Portuguese directly and firepower was not presented as a determining factor. Instead of guns, another object associated with the European presence—the scepter—was likely the culprit for sweeping change and contestation in the hinterlands.

The Scepter

At the beginning of the eighteenth century the Portuguese began to grant official military ranks to indigenous allies in and around Oecussi. In the Sarzedas document, a letter addressed to the incoming Governor of Timor in 1811, the Viceroy of Goa explains that since 1701 Portuguese governors had given out *patentes militares* (“military ranks”) of “tenente geraes, brigadeiros, e coroneis” to kings, and “tenente coroneis e sargento-mores” to nobles. He warned that the Portuguese crown should not alter these titles, which were “mais uma especie de investidura que elles procuram d’esse governo, para poderem exercitar a sua jurisdicção e poder” (De Castro 219).²² In central Timor, Portuguese military coats with epaulettes represented these ranks, while in other parts, especially the east, scepters were issued to Portuguese allies. According to Forman, the first kingdoms to receive these ranks in the eastern part of the island were Vemasse and Luca.²³ Over the following decades, Forman explains, a system of “telescoping authority” and expanding tribute relations developed in the Matebian region, represented symbolically by the possession of a baton or scepter.

In 2004, elders in the Uatolari/Vessoro area described a great battle between a place called Ossuca’ua and a kingdom that owed tribute to Luca and the Portuguese called Ossuroa.²⁴ Elders explained that Ossuca’ua refused to pay tribute to Luca, which was in a period of expansion. Instead of accepting a scepter as a symbol of this tributary relationship, Ossuca’ua openly declared its allegiance to the magical stones (*lita*) that embodied the guardian spirits of the land. Luca and the Portuguese accused Ossuca’ua of practicing witchcraft and used this as a pretext to destroy the small kingdom.

One elderly informant from Loe-Ulu, a minor *suco* near Afaloicai-Uato-carbau, also remembered changes to the tribute system experienced near the turn of the century. She was told that their “nearby *liurai*” of Ossuca’ua suddenly informed representatives from Loe-Ulu that they would have to pay tribute to the “far *liurai*” in Ossuroa, which would grant a *rota* (“scepter”) to Loe-Ulu in recognition of this relationship.²⁵ Tribute was no longer to be paid in *belak* (circular bronze or gold ornaments) but instead in buffaloes, horses, and swords (Domingas). This change marked their incorporation into a more

vertical tribute system at the top of which was the Portuguese administration. And yet there is not one report of a European involved in the battle or political subordination of Ossucaï'ua.

Interviews on the eastern side of Mt. Matebian reveal a complex and creative appropriation of these gold or silver-tipped scepters originally intended to be symbols of a binding alliance to Portuguese rule.²⁶ In Afaloicai-Baguaia, a self-styled guardian of tradition of the hamlet of Oekilari, Martinho de Menezes, described how his village received the scepter. Luca gave the "mother" scepter (*rota inan*) to Buibela, the ritual center of Afaloicai, and copies of this scepter were then given to all the hamlets in Afaloicai-Baguaia. His hamlet received its scepter from one of these. De Menezes implied that the more populous hamlets received the *rota* first. Then, in the same way, each hamlet distributed scepters to the *uma kain*, or the clan houses, in order of influence. The *rotas* are "the same" in that the clans that received the first *rotas* are not seen to "rule" over those which received them later, but, according to Martinho de Menezes, there is more "respect" for the first *rotas*. At the hamlet level each clan's scepter had a specific name, most commonly iterations of Portuguese military ranks (*Kapitan, Ajudanti, Tenente, Cabo, Rea-ulun, Cabo-reinu*). In Loe-Ulu, roughly five kilometers from Afaloicai-Baguaia, there existed a similar list of *rota* names (*mandati, kabita, kaburai, bobosã*), each held by a hamlet (Domingas).

The bungled prayer recited by Bernardo Pinto's grandfather included the *rota* names "kabita" and "kaburai." Pinto's grandfather's conflation of the sacred and what seems profane—the politico-military—is actually quite understandable. All across Timor, the scepters are included among the sacred objects kept in ritual houses, and their maintenance and occasional display continues to this day. The *rota* represented the interdependence of political and ritual power.

In spite of the ritual and sacred significance assigned to the *rota*, many of today's *liurais* continue to see them as political symbols, as a sort of "compact" between *liurais* and their subjects.²⁷ De Menezes told me that in the past the *rota* did not obligate either side to serve the other, but instead created "respect" and a "family feeling." Bernardo Pinto recited the oath that representatives of the *reinu* ("subjects") and the *liurai* reciprocally swore to each other during the *rota* reception ceremonies. Pinto explained that these oaths were not given in Portuguese but rather in his mother tongue, Naueti. He emphasized that other symbols of colonial power such as the flag were usually present at these ceremonies.

According to *liurais* today, the "original" scepters were typically 50-80 centimeter long wooden staffs tipped with gold or silver that was sometimes

engraved with dates or botanical motifs. There appears to have been no controlled or centralized manufacture of the scepters.²⁸ In the Uatocarbau sub-district, remoteness and relative political “insignificance” allowed some communities to obtain scepters from multiple superior kingdoms (Vemasse, Luca, Viqueque), sometimes in curious combinations.

Informants’ descriptions of the origins and distribution of these scepters suggest that local populations created an organic order from the chaos of colonial domination. These “indigenous” scepters raise fascinating questions about the “mimesis” occurring in this context. In particular, we might ask: which came first, the scepter or the Portuguese? Writing on the Atoni in West Timor, Schulte Nordholt refers to the use of rattan staffs (called *uel*) as a traditional symbol of authority held by the ruler’s envoys.²⁹ In Flores, Pinto da França (146) provides evidence of the distribution of scepters to Portuguese vassal kingdoms: the last “king” of Sica, Alesu Sentis da Silva, was photographed in the 1960s displaying his scepter, which he claimed dated from 1607. More than one church he visited there also possessed these items. He described one as a “bastão de madeira com castão de oiro igualmente decorada em filigrana” (67) [“a wooden baton with a golden cap equally decorated with fine metal tooling”]. Was the rattan staff or scepter already in use in eastern Indonesia when the Portuguese began giving them as symbols of vassalage and military rank? Or did the staffs described by Schulte Nordholdt arrive in west-central Timor in the seventeenth century via the “Black Portuguese”—the largely mestizo, Catholicized community that arose in Flores?

The conventional wisdom in Buibela is that the “mother” scepter dates from 1703 (Luis Pinto). This is highly unlikely, but may be a reference to the date on which the Portuguese conferred the first military ranks in Oecussi. These were later “passed” to Luca, which in turn gave scepters to Afaloicai-Uatolari. One middle-aged informant claimed that this process occurred in his grandfather’s time and that the stories about the ceremony and celebration surrounding the *rota* have been handed down from one generation to the next (Ximenes). Other informants suggested that in the 1890s-1900s there was a secondary proliferation of *rota* to these outlying areas. In “taking stock of the magical usage by the colonized of the mystique” of the colonizing apparatus, as Taussig puts it, why was there a “second wave” of *rotas* in the late nineteenth century? Was this the initiative of the Portuguese or powerful Timorese kingdoms? Or, as suggested by the proliferation of the scepters down to the clan-level, was this process initiated from below by small communities?

Much has been written about “cargo cults” and other forms of commodity fetishism in eastern Indonesia and the Pacific. But the *rotas* were not “commodities” per se. In the Matebian area, these objects often preceded the incorporation into external markets. Instead, these scepters both reflected and promoted a consolidation of political authority over an increasingly dispersed population free of the threat of warfare. In his work on the Viqueque-Baucau region, Metzner (16) suggests that the early 1900s was a time of great demographic change. The end of the era of “tribal warfare” corresponded to the end of a settlement pattern in “fortified villages” to one more characterized by increased population dispersion. Was the distribution of scepters, which seemed to have occurred over the same period as the drawing of borders, an attempt by elites to consolidate hierarchy over and the collection of tribute from an increasingly dispersed population? Based on informants in the Bagaia and Uatocarbau area, it appears that villages and small kingdoms sought the most beneficial form of incorporation into the expanding system of tribute and taxation. Representatives of these small kingdoms and villages were either traditional rulers, *liurai*, or village headmen, but sometimes just the most enterprising, “smartest” individuals in formerly unimportant or recently reconstituted settlements. But these scepters came at a price: with recognition came the obligation to collect and pay tribute. These individuals were to become a new generation of *liurais* and interlocutors with the expanding Portuguese military apparatus.

Round Feet and Indirect Rule

In remote parts of eastern Timor elites used scepters to create a hierarchical order that mimicked the Portuguese expansion, but often with little direct connection to the mechanics of Portuguese rule except for the arcane taxation system. For these elites, the threat of “punishment” by the Portuguese and their coastal allies undoubtedly served as an incentive to seek a place in these hierarchies. In the short-run, the Portuguese administration benefited from the slow expansion of the taxation-tribute that went hand-in-hand with this proliferation of *rota*. But in order to benefit over the long-run from these hierarchies, the Portuguese needed to divide the landscape and dominate elites within that landscape. Borders and military outposts were key to this formula.

During Celestino da Silva’s governorship (1894-1908), areas that had not previously appeared on administrative maps were divided into manageable-sized *sucos*, to be monitored and governed by new military outposts. According to oral sources, the *liurai* of dominant kingdoms such as Vessoro and Ossuroa,

known as “Dom,” were in charge of creating these divisions. It appears that these *liurai* remained the definitive source on *suco* and even sub-district borders up until World War II.³⁰

There are two narratives about the division of Afaloicai into *sucos*. The first account, which is not set in historical time, tells of the separation of four brothers, one of whom becomes the ruler of Afaloicai, while the other three each rule over new lands adjacent to the original Afaloicai. (The fourth Afaloicai, which was located in Viqueque district, no longer exists.³¹) The departure of the three brothers from Buibela-Lená is not represented as a loss but as the strategic expansion of territory and influence. In this version, the four brother kingdoms are recognized separately by their reception of *rota* from different sources (Guterres). In other words, the “mythical” origin sees the *rotas* as arriving after the split, and somehow confirming the simultaneously unified and divided legitimacy of the Afaloicais.

Martinho de Menezes shared with me a second, more colorful narrative that is located in “historical time” and makes reference to Portuguese officials. In his grandfather’s time, he said, a party of Portuguese military and allies from Ossuroa arrived at a place below Afaloicai. To avoid the strenuous hike up to the mountain kingdom, a messenger was sent to Afaloicai (Buibela/Lená) to ask for horses to transport the party. The rulers of Afaloicai viewed this request as an affront, and even a thinly veiled demand for submission to Ossuroa. According to de Menezes, the *liurai* of Afaloicai asked, “Who will pay me back for the horses?” (*Sei mak selu fali ba hau?*). Snubbing the party waiting in the valley below, he refused to send horses.³² Seeing this refusal to provide horses as disobedience, when the Portuguese reached the kingdom they drew the new borders under the four tree-trunk pillars of Buibela’s sacred houses, dividing the kingdom into a number of separate *sucos*.³³ The way that de Menezes told the story, the division of Afaloicai was inevitable, with the Portuguese merely playing their part in moving the plot forward. In both narratives the Timorese are the principal characters and the separation of Afaloicai is seen paradoxically as a founding-moment.

Curiously, many *liurais* see the proclamation of the Republic as such a major change, interpreted as a tightening of colonial authority and a weakening of indigenous power. The new Portuguese administration did not seem to understand the significance of the symbols of monarchical Portugal—the flags, the scepters, and military ranks. These symbols represented and reinforced the relationship between *liurais* and their subjects. Armando Pinto Corrêa reported viewing a monarchical flag in Uatolari as late as 1929 (59).

Nearly thirty years later, Portuguese anthropologist António de Almeida photographed a tattered monarchical flag that had been kept by Afaloicai for over 60 years. Many monarchists, including Celestino da Silva, claimed to respect the *usos e costumes* of the Timorese. For *liurais*, however, the new bureaucratic order dismissed the symbols of indigenous political and ritual authority.

Liurai informants often allude to a shift in how the colonial government viewed indigenous leaders. Starting in the 1910s there was a marked change in the posture of the colonial government in relation to the *liurais*, who became extensions of the under-manned Republican administrations desperate to promote a market economy across the territory. When *liurais* stepped out of line or when they obstructed the market economy, they were removed (“*exonerados*”), like errant civil servants. In the coastal kingdom of Vessoro, for example, an Australian company began oil exploration in 1910, the same year that the *liurai* D. Simão was removed for “incompetence.” Similarly, in Afaloicai-Baguaia, a *liurai* named D. José (Zé Loi Rubi) was removed from office in the late 1920s. According to Martinho de Menezes, Administrator Calçona justified this decision by asking, “If you cannot plant trees, how are you supposed to control your subjects?” (*Se ó la bele kuda ai entaun nusá ó bele ukun ema?*).³⁴ This highlights another important change: the increasing demands made by military commanders and later administrators for *liurai* to provide labor and to cultivate hardwood and coconut trees for the market economy.

The use of *asulear*,³⁵ or corvée labor, had long been a feature of vassalage in the western kingdoms, but in remote parts of the east this was a new development. While some *liurais* found that requests for the provision of forced labor were a way of reinforcing their authority, the practice was extremely unpopular and limited the amount of labor that *liurai* could call on for their own purposes. The impressive remains of Tualo, a military post near Vessoro, indicate that the construction of these posts would have required prolonged efforts of work crews, including the hauling of stones to elevated locations. It is not coincidental that these administrators came to change the way people defined the recent past. As Pinto Corrêa noted in the Baucau area in the 1930s, the figure of the administrator came to be a measure of time. Even today, people refer to different periods according to the administrators who ruled over their area. For example, “*iba Bras nia tempu*” means “during Bras’ time.”

The tightening of the bureaucratic order from Baguaia to Uatocarbau is also remembered as creating fear among people up and down the social spectrum. According to their descendants, under the Republic and early Estado Novo,

liurais were beaten by the Portuguese for not providing sufficient quantities of eggs, fruit, vegetables, and meat (Bernardo Pinto; Martinho de Menezes). Bernardo Pinto recounted how his great uncle, Domingos, who was the *liurai* of Afaloicai-Uatocarbau, was kicked, beaten and humiliated in public for disagreeing with the administrator and deciding to leave a census exercise (*arolamento*) early. Pinto says his father was arrested and beaten to death in the late 1920s at the orders of a rival nobleman named Antonio “Keleboku” Kaisala and the Viqueque district administrator, Oscar Ruas.

Kaisala’s nickname, “Keleboku,” was first mentioned in Uatocarbau in relation to the military post Tualo. Informants suggested that it was he who presided over this outpost alone (Quintão, Sousa). I imagined him as a Portuguese man, until they explained the joke surrounding his name *keleboku*—which in Nauti means “round feet.” He was the first person in the region to wear shoes, probably army-issue boots.³⁶ I later found there was some debate among other informants from Kaisala’s village as to whether he ever “presided” over anything, but they did not deny he was an extremely influential person, not only in his *suco* but also in his relationship with the colonial administration all the way to Viqueque (Domingas). The unusual scale and size of the ruins of Kaisala’s house in Loe-ulu indicate that as the brother of the *chefe de suco* he commanded a significant amount of peasant labor for his own private purposes. Kaisala was from a hamlet in his *suco* that “received” the *rota* last, probably indicating either that it had a small population or was of little ritual significance in the ritual order. When asked why a man from the least important hamlet of a rather unimportant *suco* could gain such influence, I was told it was because he was “clever”—he spoke good Tetum and knew how to convince people.³⁷ Some suggested the key to Kaisala’s success was his ability to terrorize his subjects, including women, and anybody who would cross him.³⁸

Kaisala stands out as a particularly notorious figure, but other *liurais* of the twentieth century were also repeatedly described to me as *siak*, or short-tempered. If *reinu* forgot the greeting *Bon dia amu* (“good day, lord”) they could expect to be beaten (Anonymous). Portuguese residing at administrative or military *postos* required *liurais* to provide food for them, and the *liurais* would in turn demand food, under threat of violence, from their *reinu*. José Simões Martinho describes the role of *liurai* as enforcer of the census. Because they received a “gratificação” for the total tax levied on their subjects, the greediest *liurai* would even force infirm and disabled people to the count.

Conclusion

By the 1920s, the power of *liurai* in the eastern parts of Portuguese Timor was paradoxically both absolute and fragile. According to military commander António Metello, who served in southern Lautem (east of Uatocarbau), Republican ideals about the market economy and indigenous “democracy” resulted in inconsistent attitudes towards local elites. While treating weaker figures as errant civil servants, such as was the case in Afaloicai-Uatocarbau and Afaloicai-Baguaia, commanders occasionally promoted minor figures like Kaisala to fill the vacuum. The onus was on individual nobles or *liurais* to prove their loyalty and strengthen their ties to the administration by performing in terms of taxation, labor provision, expansion of market activity, and consensual behavior. Fernando Florêncio describes a similar process in Mozambique as the “administrative and political encapsulation” of traditional authorities (137).

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, through a “telescoping” and mimetic process of the distribution of *rotas*, as well as the strategic reception of catechism and Tetum, elites in the hinterlands attempted to position themselves in new hierarchies. These vertical power relations are remembered by elites positively up to a certain point. Even the drawing of borders can be framed in power-enhancing terms by elites. But the subsequent Republican cooptation of these hierarchies eventually allowed the colonial administration to exercise indirect rule with much greater ease, and over the long-term the weakened legitimacy of hierarchies would expose *liurais* to resentment and contestation by their peers and from below.

Acknowledgements

This paper is the product of a grant from FLAD for fieldwork and support from Fundação Oriente. I'm grateful to my informants in Baguia and Uatocarbau, as well as to Pedro Lebre and family, who provided critical support in the field. Antero Benedito da Silva kindly provided me with a draft paper that aided my thinking. Comments and support from Douglas Kammen and Judith Bovensiepen were crucial.

Notes

¹ Only in the district of Manufahi was it greater: no non-Timorese for 4,882 counted Timorese. This gaping “zero” in the statistics seems to foreshadow the great rebellion of Dom Boaventura four years later.

² I do not want to minimize the shock and violence inherent in the “encounter.” As Luís

Felipe de Thomaz comments, "The consensual and symbiotic character of the consolidation of the Portuguese presence in Timor does not imply that relations between the various powers were a bed of roses."

³ It is not included in the list of *reinos* compiled by the *commando militar* ("Decreto de 17 de Junho").

⁴ Documented by Shepard Forman ("Descent, Alliance and Exchange") and Justino Guterres.

⁵ Defined by the *sucos* of Afaloicai-Uatolari, Afaloicai-Baguaia and Afaloicai-Uatocarbau. A *suco* is the administrative unit below the sub-district.

⁶ See Hull on these questions.

⁷ While the recent conflict between "firaku" and "kaladi" within the armed forces, police, and Dili neighborhoods has ignited a debate over essentialized identities, most residents of the valley still strongly identify most with their village and clan. The concept of being a "Makassae" is quite complicated because there are at least four varieties of the language, and speakers of the southern variety are often mocked by those from the north coast.

⁸ It is in fact a social category, a self-identifier, as in the much-repeated phrase, "I am *reinu*." Thomaz writes that the term *kuda-reinu* or horse-*reinu* was widely used, which he believes mean the beasts of burden of the *reino*.

⁹ At the time this ethnography was published, one of the principal authors, Cristiano da Costa, founded a new political party called UNDERTIM, which calls for a re-creation of social relations in rural communities based on a pre-colonial ideal. For discussion of archetypes of slave and king in Timorese politics, see Kammen.

¹⁰ Paço d'Arcos met Jerónimo on a trip to Macau as a young man, crossing the Pacific with the then 60-something missionary. I quote Paço d'Arcos from Teixeira.

¹¹ Paço d'Arcos explains that the passage that appeared in the *Amores e Viagens de Pedro Manuel* is taken directly from his encounters with Jerónimo (184).

¹² Paço d'Arcos later calls him the "heir" of Fernão Mendes Pinto, the sometimes clumsy, always picaresque chronicler of Portuguese expansion in the East.

¹³ Father Felgueiras, a Jesuit priest now based in Dili asked Bernardo Pinto to write this memoir. Father Felgueiras, who has been in Timor since 1971, recently published a memoir of his own. He kindly allowed me access to the growing archive of *liurai* memoirs at the Jesuit Mission in Taibesse, Dili.

¹⁴ Bernardo Pinto's father was educated in Baucau, a world away from his village. The nearest mission to Uatocarbau only opened in Ossu in 1937. A catechist began teaching a handful of students in Uatocarbau in 1938 (Pascoal).

¹⁵ It already appeared on Manuel de Erédia's map of Timor (Plate 418).

¹⁶ The others were Vemassee on the north coast, and Viqueque, not far from Luca in the south. For more on the early colonial geography of Timor, see Hägerdal.

¹⁷ According to Portuguese sources, the Portuguese chose Tomás de Amaral to rule Luca after a series of intrigues and strange conflicts during his uncle's reign known as "Guerra dos Doidos." The Guerra dos Doidos appears to have been a messianic, anti-colonial movement. See Luna de Oliveira (Vol. 1-2) and Pelissier. D. Tomás' title, in translation: "Lieutenant Gen.l Superintendent and Controller of this Province of the Bellos and General tax inspector of the royal fincas of the South, King and Colonel of the Kingdom of Luca and its jurisdictions."

¹⁸ The villages were Cassleque and Waibobo.

¹⁹ 13,444 Remington cartridges, 7,220 Albini cartridges, 846 pounds of gunpowder, 12 Howitzer, 12 munitions, 6 bombs 1 of which was an incendiary bomb, 7 percussion bombs, 8 *espoletas graduados*, 1 composition candle, roughly 200 kilograms of lead bullets. Furthermore,

the report claims that 163 hamlets were burnt and 17 chiefs or nobles taken prisoner.

²⁰ In the final analysis, the Governor seemed most preoccupied with the creation of a workable, lasting taxation scheme. Vicente suggests that Da Silva enslaved prisoners and put them to work on his plantations on the north coast. Additionally, in casual conversations across the Matebian valley it was repeated to me that slaves were taken in the conflict from Burabo'o Mountain to near Soibada in Manatuto district.

²¹ Thomaz believes that the Malay origin of the word for gun in Tetum, *kilat*, proves that the Timorese had been exposed to firearms before contact with the Portuguese.

²² "More a kind of investiture that they seek from this government, in order to exercise their jurisdiction and power."

²³ Luca received one of the first military ranks in the East, most likely earlier than Vemasse.

²⁴ Here I am indebted to the fieldwork and draft paper of Antero Benedito da Silva, professor of Development Studies at University of East Timor and native of the Uatocarbau-Uatolari area.

²⁵ It is important to note that *cai'ua* in Naueti means scepter. The fact that the place was named "Ossu-scepter" suggests the name came after the cited war.

²⁶ Ospina and Hohe mention Afaloicai's complex system of "telescoping authority" in passing in their analysis of traditional power structures. Their "pyramid" diagram does not do justice to the complexity of the situation.

²⁷ My use of this Hobbesian term is intentional. The same informants spoke of their "institutions" as though they were western parliamentary democracies, with divided judicial, legislative, and executive branches. Their speech was soaked with European political models.

²⁸ Forman ("East Timor") attempts to document the path of the scepters from the kingdom of Vemasse to the areas on the north and west slopes of Mt. Matebian. Additionally, the word *rota* is used to describe other objects. Informants report that during the early years of the Indonesian occupation other items, such as porcelain from the Dutch East Indies Company (VOC), were referred to as *rota* (Hermenegildo Pinto). Some indigenous objects like gold or silver *belak* were also referred to as *rota*.

²⁹ Recently such objects have appeared for auction on the internet.

³⁰ A 1927 map of Portuguese Timor prepared by the Ministry of the Colonies indicates that the Portuguese were unable to map the definitive administrative division in most of the territory, including the Baguia-Uatocarbau region. In the first narrative, official delineation of the *subdistricts* was assembled only in 1959.

³¹ The number four is very significant in the region, signaling balance and stability, as Nordholt and Andaya note. Luis de Menezes told me the Viqueque Afalocai was called "Makaliku." He said all of the other Afaloicais are "photocopies" of the *original*.

³² The second time De Menezes told this story, laughing, he added that the ruler of Afaloicai was probably a little drunk from palm wine (*tua mutin*).

³³ In Buibela, caretakers of the sacred houses confirmed that the borders of the *sucos* Afaloicai-Uatolari and Afaloicai Baguia invisibly "bisect" the *uma lulik* under the *ai-rin* or feet of the houses, literally an east-west line right under the houses.

³⁴ In Tetum the second person familiar form "O" is reserved for children and subordinates, which increases the insult behind this declaration.

³⁵ Commonly thought to be from the Portuguese *auxiliar*.

³⁶ The Timorese fascination with Kaisala's shoes seems to have been echoed by the Portuguese. Metello describes a Governor of the 1910s. Quoting the Governor: "É preciso civilisar o preto [...] para o ano na nova Festa que aqui se ha de relisar, os pretos venham todos de sapatos!" ["The negro must be civilized (...) next year for the new Party that we must have here, the negroes

will come in shoes!"]).

³⁷ He was also a loyal Portuguese subject. Luna de Oliveira (vol. IV) cites his efforts to help the Portuguese during the Japanese occupation in World War II.

³⁸ These abuses had violent consequences during times of “pay back,” like World War II, when Kaisala was handed over to the Japanese by Timorese enemies. He was executed.

Works Cited

- Almeida, António de. *Expressão Portuguesa no Oriente*. Lisbon: Fundação Oriente, 1994.
- Andaya, Leonard. *The World of Maluku: Eastern Indonesia in the Early Modern Period*. Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 1992.
- Anonymous. Personal interview. 15 November 2006.
- “Ao Ilmo. E Exmo. Sr. Commandante: A jurisdição de Vaille por nome Luliban [...]” Letter dated 27 July 1892. DGU 1R 002, Caixa 7. Lisbon, Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino.
- “Carta da Província de Timor (esboço).” [1927]. Arquivo Militar: No. 18335/A. Paris, L’Institut Geographique de Paris.
- Castro, Affonso de. *As Possessões Portuguezas na Oceânia*. Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1867.
- Corrêa, Armando Pinto. *Gentio de Timor*. Lisbon: Lucas & C.a, 1934.
- Costa, Cristiano da, Aureo da Costa Guterres, and Justino Lopes, eds. *Exploring Makassae Culture*. Baucau: Instituto Católico para Formação de Professores, 2006.
- d’Arcos, Joaquim Paço. *Memórias da minha Vida e do meu Tempo*. Lisbon: Guimarães e C.a, 1973.
- “Decreto de 17 de junho.” *Boletim Oficial de Timor* 132 (7 Aug. 1909): 136. Accessed 23 April 2007. <<http://siarq.iict.pt/ahudigital/ahutim/pagtim/vtim001.asp?menuAno=1909&menuMes=08&menuDia=07&imageField2.x=14&imageField2.y=17&offset=5>>.
- “Dom Thomas de Amaral Tenente Gn.al Supr.y Intendente e Conservador mor desta Prov.ça.” Letter dated 29 April 1795, in folder “[4] ‘Documentos relativos à Ilha de Timor 1705 – 1888,’” Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa.
- Domingas. Personal interview. 27 October 2006.
- Florêncio, Fernando. *Ao Encontro dos Mambos—Autoridades tradicionais vaNdau e Estado em Moçambique*. Lisbon: ICS, 1995.
- Forman, Shepard. “Descent, Alliance and Exchange among the Makassae of East Timor.” *The Flow of Life: Essays on Eastern Indonesia*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1980.
- . “East Timor: Exchange and Political Hierarchy at the Timor of the European Discoveries.” *Economic Exchange and Social Interaction in Southeast Asia: Perspectives from Prehistory, History and Ethnography*. Ed. Karl Hutterer. Ann Arbor: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, 1977.
- França, António Pinto da. *A Influência Portuguesa na Indonésia*. Lisbon: Prefácio, 1993.
- Guterres, Caetano. Personal interview. May 2003.
- Guterres, Justino. “Para uma antropologia do sistema de alianças em Timor: O caso dos Makassae.” *Lusotopie* (2001): 173–81.
- Hägerdal, Hans. “Servião and Belu: Colonial conceptions and the geographical partition of Timor.” *Studies on Asia*. Series III, 2006, Vol. 3, No. 1. Accessed 22 April 2007. <http://www.isp.msu.edu/studiesonasia/s3_v3_n1/3_3_1Hagerdal.pdf>.
- Hull, Geoffrey. “The Basic Lexical Affinities of Timor’s Austronesian Languages: A Preliminary Investigation.” *Studies in Languages and Cultures of East Timor*. Vol. 1. Sydney: Academy of

- East Timor Studies, University of W. Sydney, 1998. 182.
- Kammen, Douglas. "Master-slave, traitor-nationalist, opportunist-oppressed: political metaphors in East Timor." *Indonesia* 76 (Oct 2003).
- Lelyveld, Joseph. "Time catching up with neglected Timor." *New York Times* 26 October 1974.
- Martinho, José Simões. *Problemas Administrativos da Província de Timor*. Porto: Livraria Progredor, 1944.
- Menezes, Martinho de. Personal interviews. October-November, 2006.
- Menezes, Luis de. Personal interview. 22 November 2006.
- Metello, António. *Timor Fantasma do Oriente*. Lisbon: Lusitania, 1923.
- Metzner, Joachim. "Man and the Environment in Eastern Timor." Diss. Australian National University, 1977.
- Schulte Nordholt, H. G. *The Political System of the Atoni of Timor*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971.
- "Offício do respectivo governador dando conta do resultado da última guerra de Mate-bian e Quele-cai." *Boletim Oficial de Timor* 52 (29 Dec. 1892).
- Oliveira, Luna de. *Timor na História de Portugal*. Vols. 1, 2, and 4. Lisbon: Fundação Oriente, 2004.
- Ospina, Sophie, and Tanja Hohe. *Traditional Power Structures and the Community Empowerment and Local Governance Project: Final Report*. CEP/PMU, ETTA/UNTAET, and the World Bank, 2001.
- Pascoal, Ezequiel. "Dezoito anos de intensa actividade, 1924–1942." *Seará* 1.4 (April 1949): 29-31.
- Pelissier, René. *Timor en Guerre: Le Crocodile et les Portugais (1847-1913)*. Orgeval, France: self-published, 1996.
- Pinto, Bernardo. "História de Liu-raís de Timor: Tradições Familiares." Taibesse, Dili: unpublished manuscript.
- . Personal interviews. 11 and 21 November, 2006.
- Pinto, Hermenegildo. Personal communication. 11 November 2006.
- Pinto, Luis. Personal communication. 26 November 2006.
- Plate 418 (map by Manuel Godinho de Erédia). *Portugaliae Monumenta Cartografica*. Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional Casa de Moeda, 1960.
- Portaria 18. *Boletim Oficial de Timor* 6 (1903): 27-28.
- Quintão, Tomás. Personal interview. 16 October 2006.
- Sahlins, Marshall. "Goodbye *Tristes Tropes*." *Journal of Modern History* 65 (Mar. 1993): 1-25.
- Silva, Antero Benedito da. "Humanity and Ecology: Potential of Education for Conflict Transformation and Identity Reconstruction in the Cultural Context of Uato-Lari and Uato-Carbau." Paper presented to the Instituto Católico Para Formação de Professores. Baucau. 20 September 2004.
- Soares, António Vicente Marques. *Pulau Timor: Sebuah sumbangan untuk sejarahnya*. Baucau: self-published, 2003.
- Sousa, Armando da Costa Ximenes. Personal interview. 16 October 2006.
- Teixeira, Manuel. *Macau e a sua Diocese: Missões de Timor*. Macau: Tipografia da Missão do Padroado, 1974.
- Taussig, Michael. *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Thomaz, Luís Felipe. "Timor: O Protectorado Português." *História dos Portugueses no Extremo Oriente, Segundo Volume, Macau e Timor, O Declínio do Império*. Ed. Oliveira Marques. Lisbon: Fundação Oriente, 2001.

Traube, Elizabeth. *Cosmology and Social Life: Ritual Exchange among the Mambai of East Timor*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986.

Ximenes, Salvador. Personal interview. 22 September 2006.

Janet Gunter, MA Anthropology (ISCTE), lived and worked in East Timor for two years. Her recent MA thesis focused on memories of late colonial rebellion in Portuguese Timor. E-mail: janet.gunter@alumni.brown.edu