POWER, CULTURE AND SOCIAL ORDER: PERSPECTIVES AND MANIFESTATIONS IN TIMORESE SOCIETY

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Abstract: This study was conducted between 2015 and 2016 with 310 university students who attended undergraduate courses of the Faculty of Philosophy and Human Sciences and the Faculty of Education, Arts and Humanities at the Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e. The study aimed to understand some perceptions around concepts such as *social order*, *culture* and *power* that are present in Timorese society. To achieve this, a group dynamics exercise was carried out, followed by a discussion and subsequent individual interviews with 78 randomly chosen students. The results elucidated the conception of order as the absence of conflict, with culture and the exercise of power as means to ensure social stability.
Keywords: culture; power; social order; conflict; moderator system; East Timor.

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Resumo: Com o objetivo de compreender algumas das percepções sobre *ordem social*, *cultura* e *poder* presentes na sociedade timorense, este estudo foi desenvolvido entre os anos de 2015 e 2016 com 310 universitários que frequentavam os cursos de Licenciatura da Faculdade de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas e da Faculdade de Educação, Artes e Humanidades da Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e. Para tal foi realizada uma dinâmica de grupo, seguida de um debate e posterior entrevista individual com 78 alunos escolhidos de forma aleatória. Entre os resultados obtidos está a percepção de ordem enquanto ausência de conflito, sendo a cultura e o exercício do poder um meio para garantir a estabilidade social.
Palavras-chave: cultura; poder; ordem social; conflito; sistema moderador; Timor-Leste.

This study analysed concepts relating to *power*, *culture* and *social order* in present-day Timorese society. The group selected for the analysis consisted of 310 undergraduate students from the Faculty of Philosophy and Human Sciences and the Faculty of Education, Arts and Humanities of the Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e. Among the participants – divided into nine classes with approximately 34 students each – 156 were about to complete the course, 84 were in their third year and 70 were

in their first semester. Of these, 162 were females between the ages of 19 and 35 and 148 were males between the ages of 19 and 32[2]. In this study, a group dynamics exercise called 'underground shelter' was used, followed by a group discussion and subsequent individual interviews with 78 randomly chosen students (42 women and 36 men)[3].

The group activities took place during classes in sociology and psychology of learning and development that I taught during 2015 and 2016. Each class was divided into small groups with an average of six participants each. e exercise con- sisted of asking each group to imagine that a meteor was about to hit East Timor and kill all life and destroy the houses, crops and roads of the country. People would not have time to escape. However, there was an underground shelter with food, electricity and enough space for six people to live comfortably for a year.

After explaining the objectives of the activity, a list with descriptions of 13 characters was distributed to each group and they were asked to choose who could enter the shelter. e characters were as follows: a 35-year-old musician who is addicted to drugs; a 25-year-old architect and his wife of 24 years of age who cannot have children (they only agree to enter the shelter together); a priest aged 75; a prostitute aged 34; an atheist aged 20; a female university student who made a vow of chastity; a 26-year-old biologist who only agrees to enter the shelter if he can bring his weapon with him; an 11-year-old girl who is deaf and dumb; a homosexual of 49 years of age; a 34-year-old woman with mental problems who suffers from epileptic seizures; a politician who has been accused of corruption; and a very rich businessman[4].

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[2] These numbers correspond to the students who participated in the activity, not the total number of students per class. In total, 51 groups were created via a simple counting method: students, from where they were sitting, counted loudly from 1 to 6, returning again to number 1 and restarting the count. Due to differences in the number of students per class, 4 groups had 7 participants and 5 groups had 5 participants each. The students came from several municipalities of East Timor, namely 79 from Dili; 72 from the eastern region (Baucau, Manatuto, Lospalos); 66 from the western region (Liquiçá, Gleno, Maliana); 43 from the south coast (Suai, Same, Viqueque); 29 from the central-west region (Ainaro, Aileu); and 21 from Oecusse special administrative zone.

[3] The draw was first made among the members of each of the groups, ensuring that each group had a student selected for the individual interviews. After this, a new draw was made with the other students in each class.

[4] I did not include in the list traditional leaders like *Liurai*, *Lia Na' in* and *Matan-dook*, because I wanted to observe how participants would react to different hierarchical references and values.

The characters who received the most nominations to enter the shelter were the priest, the businessman and the politician, who appeared together in 38 groups; the businessman and the priest, who were chosen by nine groups; and the businessman and the politician, who were chosen by two groups. In general terms, the politician was chosen 40 times, the priest 47 times and the businessman 49 times. Among the least selected characters to enter the shelter were the atheist and the homosexual, who were chosen by only one group, and the woman with mental problems, who was chosen by two groups.

The main arguments put forward to justify the priest's selection were that he was needed to teach the 'Word of God', to celebrate mass and to minister the sacraments to the people who stayed in the shelter, as well as to mediate any disagreements between people. During the discussions, I questioned the need for a 75-year-old priest to teach the gospels when the Bible would be accessible to all. The participants answered that it would be necessary for a priest to teach the 'Word of God' and that most people would not be able to interpret the teachings contained in the Bible. Priests are people who have studied at good schools, kept in touch with people from other countries and learned how to interpret the Bible. The other people would not know how to read or would not have adequate knowledge to comprehend what is contained in the holy book. In addition, they thought the priest deserved respect for being older and would have a lot of experience in advising people and thus would be able to mediate conflicts in the group.

The businessman was chosen on the grounds that he had a lot of money and could financially help the people who survived. In addition, he would be someone who had studied, who knew other businessmen, understood business and management, and could organise the development of the city after they left the shelter. In an attempt to stir up debate, I said that everything would be destroyed by the meteor, which included the businessman's properties and money. In this case, the businessman would have as much money as any other person inside the shelter. After my comment, some answers added new elements to the story by suggesting that the businessman could bring money with him or even that he would have buried money that he could collect after leaving the shelter. However, the main replies to my comment were that after leaving the

shelter, the businessman would know how to help the poorest people, create jobs, hire workers and negotiate with businessmen from other countries. Also, by understanding business, the businessman could organise the distribution of food and could thus maintain the balance and harmony of the group.

The other most chosen character was the politician, because he was an important person in society for having studied at good schools, for knowing how to write laws, for having the diplomatic skills to talk to other people, and for having experience in organisation and leadership. I remembered that the politician had been accused of corruption. I also suggested that it is not necessary to study to become a politician, as you can simply join a political party, just as the people in the shelter could organise themselves and write new laws and social rules. The counter arguments were that the politician had not yet been convicted; there would be conflicts between people without a leader; leadership must be exercised by a single person; the politician would have repented and made up for his mistake; the politician was already a leader and would have the respect of the others, thus avoiding fragmentation of the group; and he could be a mediator during contact with other survivors and help write new laws for society.

On the other extreme, the atheist, homosexual, and woman with mental problems were chosen because they were excluded from society and because they had personal problems and deserved a chance to redeem themselves. All three were seen as sick people in need of help to change their lives. As we will see below, these choices were criticised by the other groups.

All groups, without exception, elected a 'chief' to organise their presentation. This 'chief' was responsible for introducing each of the group members, clarifying what they would say, controlling the timing of the presentation and answering questions[5]. When I inquired about the need for introducing the members of the group, since everyone in the room had studied together and already knew each other, as well as the need for one person to be in charge

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[5] Choosing a 'chief' – *xefi*, in Tetun, was the expression used by the participants – was a decision made by the students during the organization of the groups, and there was no previous classroom arrangement on this subject. The word 'leader' is also used interchangeably, with the same meaning. The meaning of 'chief' is discussed further on.

of controlling the speaking time of the others, the answers emphasised the importance of one person to organise the group; that the leadership figure was part of Timorese culture; and that without leadership, people could do whatever they wanted and would not respect each other's speaking time.

In general terms, the presentations and discussions went by in an apparently cordial manner. The 'chief' of the group, when starting the presentation, expressed thanks for the time they received to explain their ideas and their respect for their colleagues. After that, they explained the activity and what they would do and introduced the group members, giving the floor to each of them to present their arguments. Each member of the group explained the reasons for choosing a particular character and then gave the floor back to the 'chief'.

The questions raised during the discussions were mostly asking for further explanation on the reason for the choices presented, and were preceded by apologies and the statement that they did not want to disrespect the choice of their colleagues, but they just wanted to clarify a few points. After each question, the 'chiefs' of the groups took control of the debate or indicated a person to answer the questions. The defence of the group's point of view was made in an emphatic way, in an attempt to reaffirm their choices without leaving room for contradictions or considerations about the relevance of their arguments.

SOCIAL ORDER AND THE (NON) ABSENCE OF CONFLICT

The emphasis on centralised leadership, determining roles that individuals should play in organising life in a group, and on using culture as a way to legitimise or delegitimise a particular rule or behaviour would be – according to the participants – some of the bases for ensuring social order. This order would be associated with the absence of conflict, where everyone 'thinks alike', 'obeys rules', 'follows culture', 'promotes national stability' and 'respects the authorities'[6]. In this case, contradiction and direct confrontation between people on asymmetrical hierarchical levels would not be welcome. Dissident thinking or behaviour that threatens the previously established order would be disapproved,

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[6] In Tetun: *ema hanoin hanesan, la'o tuir regras ne'ebé mak iha, la'o tuir kultura, hala'o estabilidade nasaun nian, respeita ema boot sira.*

for it would represent a lack of respect for one another and could trigger personal disagreements, punishments and disorganisation within the group.

This could be observed in how the debates went during the group dynamics. The students who questioned the others were usually the 'chiefs' of their respective groups or persons authorised by them. The participants addressed each other with the *ita boot*[7] expression, asked for permission before making questions, stated that they respected the opinion of their colleagues before asking for explanations about the reasons that led to the choice of characters to enter the shelter and, in most cases, did not contest the arguments received.

This posture does not necessarily mean that the students agreed with each other's opinions. During the individual interviews, I asked what they thought about the choices of their colleagues and, individually, the students demonstrated disagreement with some of the choices made by the other groups and even by their own group. For instance, they mentioned that some groups had separated the architect and his wife, not respecting their desire to be together; others pointed out that choosing the young university girl because she could have children disrespected her vow of chastity; they criticised the criteria of utilitarian choice based on the function that each person could play in the shelter, not looking at people as human beings; they stated that several groups had not made the 'right' choices, putting the survival of the others at risk.

When they were asked why they did not speak up during the debates, the answers were basically as follows: the group had a representative to ask the questions; colleagues could be offended; and it is no use talking when people do not want to listen. According to the students, people in general would be more concerned with asserting and imposing their point of view than reflecting on it. These responses led us to think that there is a certain fear that insistence on a particular opinion that is different from another's may lead to interpersonal conflicts and disunity in a group.

About their own choices, the students stated that each member of the group chose a character. This method would have been used – without the groups planning it with each other – so that all could participate in the activity.

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[7] *Ita boot* (you + great) is a formal personal pronoun in Tetun that can mean sir/madam and is used to denote respect.

However, 19 participants said they had their choices changed by the group 'chief', who did not agree with their opinions. The main claim was that the characters chosen could cause problems with others. Among the examples given were the atheist challenging the priest; the prostitute seducing the men in the shelter; the homosexual setting a bad example; the musician selling drugs to people; and the deaf girl needing constant care. All 19 students were unanimous in stating that they did not agree to having their choices changed, but preferred to accept the change so no disagreements and internal division in their respective groups would be caused.

The presentation of ideas in groups is made through a set of rules and mandatory demonstrations of respect that limit the spontaneity of the conversation and condition the linguistic repertoire. This causes people to maintain constant vigilance and control over how they communicate with one another. However, if the behaviour indicates submission to social codes, people individually continue to maintain a certain level of criticism and even disapproval of these same codes[8].

Conflict was present, despite the efforts to disguise it. It happened more explicitly in two classes. In one, three students from different groups questioned all other groups – the three being the 'chiefs' of their respective groups. These students were not content with the answers and tried to point out what they understood as gaps in logic to justify the presence of the characters in the shelter. They stated themselves during the interviews and conversations outside the classroom that the reason for this attitude was to stimulate debate and critical thinking among students. The 'chiefs' of the groups being questioned responded with the usual formality, but when faced with insistent questions, they adopted two main strategies: some tried to maintain the cordiality of the conversation by saying that they respected the opinions of their colleagues, but

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[8] Although I was careful during the interviews to create a friendly environment where students could reflect without any external pressure, such as feeling that they were being evaluated, one could argue that the criticism was made not necessarily because they were protected from the gaze and pressure of the group, but rather to correspond to a possible expectation of the teacher. If this is the case, the idea of avoiding direct conflict is confirmed, as well as the respect for authority and adequacy of speech to context. However, I think here all factors coexist and do not conflict with each other.

they could not interfere in their choices; others, however, began to respond more sharply by altering the volume of their voice, accusing colleagues of trying to create discord in the class and claiming that they could not intervene because they belonged to another group.

In this particular case, the tension had older roots. During the first semester of the course, these three students had challenged the voting system and the legitimacy of their class leadership and suggested new elections. These three students came from families with prominence in the leadership of their respective *Lisan* and *Suku*[9] – they were descendants of *Lia Na'in* and *Liurai* from their communities. As for the elected class 'chief', he was not descended from traditional leaders, but was the son of a businessman from Dili. After many discussions, the 'chiefs' of the four classes of that school year decided that they would meet with the student council to discuss the situation. However, the three students would have argued that the student council lacked the authority to decide on that matter and thus the subject needed to be taken to the school board. After some meetings between the students, the conflict continued without mutual understanding. Ultimately, the protests stopped, but the resentments remained and tension could be noticed in the classroom.

The other situation happened within a group that chose characters that had been rejected by most groups. is group, consisting of five men and one woman, was formed of students who had been late to class, arriving after the other groups were already organised. The group's choices were the atheist, the homosexual, the woman with mental problems, the deaf girl, the prostitute and the young woman who vowed chastity. The justification for their choices was that they prioritised 'poor people' or people who had 'problems' as a way of protecting those most in need. This group – formed by students considered by the others to be uncommitted as they missed many classes or had low grades – was strongly questioned by the others and not only by the leaders involved in the debate, but by almost all of the students. At every attempt to explain their choices, the other students smiled and shook their heads in disapproval. e main arguments used to challenge their choices were that they did not care about the

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[9] From Tetun: Suku – village, Lisan – tradition, custom; also used to identify family groups connected through a supposed common ancestor.

continuity of society; their chosen characters were sick and weak and could not take care of themselves and the others; the characters were people who caused conflicts and problems. Besides that, the other students began to look down on the members of this group by impugning their analysis and comprehension skills. During the individual conversations, even faced with the argument that they wanted to protect people with special needs, these students were called irresponsible or considered as having poor intellectual abilities.

As can be noticed, there was concern over maintaining social order, associated with stability in relationships and individual fulfilment of previously established social functions and expectations. This is an attempt to maintain the feelings of social balance and of the absence of conflicts[10]. During the group dynamics, when the participants were confronted with contradictions or possible threats to the established order, it was common for arguments to shift away from the subject of the debate and focus on personal devaluation by attacking the intellectual, moral and suspected hidden motivations of the participants. As this occurred on many occasions but did not reach the point of creating an explicit conflict – the disagreements stopped upon the first sign of resistance and those arguments were disregarded – we can at least notice signs of a behavioural pattern. The opponent becomes an enemy, the exchange of ideas becomes a conflict, and the contradictory becomes disrespectful. Under the argument of preserving the social order, the *status quo* is maintained and sometimes passed on as 'culture'.

However, the conflict remains. According to Leach (1995), social balance with a total absence of conflict is unattainable, since imbalance and conflict are two constant variables in social relations. In the case studied here, the whole process – the presentation and the debate – followed a set of codes and procedures that revealed the performative nature of the event[11]. From this

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[10] There is an extensive body of literature that associates social balance with the absence of conflict that can be checked, such as Durkheim (2007); Evans-Prichard (2007); Comte (1978) and Parsons (1952), among others. Other authors, like Gluckman (1987) and Turner (1974), tried to relate conflict as a social process that would lead to balance in relationships.

[11] For an analysis of the performative and contextual nature of conflict resolution, see Tambiah (1979) and Peirano (2001).

point of view, the conflict established in the groups itself would be a way to communicate among the participants in a particular, intelligible language – to a lesser or greater degree.

This does not mean that the conflict was legitimised or that everyone shared the same interpretations of the content of the message. Making a generalisation – which is subject to deviations and contradictions –, when facing a conflict, the students reacted primarily in two ways: the conflict was seen as a transgression when triggered by people who did not officially hold power or who broke the rules of conduct for that moment; on the other hand, when leaders initiated the conflict by evoking common logic, it was accepted as a way of maintaining harmony in the relationships. At the point when the discussions became more heated, as well as in the individual interviews, where students could express themselves with a greater degree of freedom, the understanding of the conflict presented other angles, which may seem contradictory: it threatened the stability of the group; it confirmed unity and social order; it was something expected and part of the context; it was an unwanted anomaly; it is people's right to express their opinions; and it disrespected 'culture'/ 'tradition'.

All of these differing perceptions coexisted and had more or less relevance according to the people on the scene. However, the conflict was not necessarily a part of the social structure and may not have had a specific function, which, through certain social performances, would lead to the restoration of a suppo- sed balance in the relationships. The fact that we perceive certain practices and rituals as strategies for conflict resolution and search for a balance does not mean that these same practices and rituals are automatically legitimised by all involved, or that they are effective in restoring order, or that they end disputes. Conflicts have different levels, intensities and extents that can only be measured within the context in which they occur.

What I realised is that seeing conflicts between people as a threat to the social order is as arbitrary as denying this possibility. Conflicts have a relational nature and need to be understood in terms of time, space, and within a specific logical-symbolic set. The rituals and rules for conflict resolution are not effective in and of themselves, as they must happen in a receptive logical-symbolic context, and they have to be legitimised by the people involved in the event.

LEGITIMISING BEHAVIOUR THROUGH CULTURE

During the debates and individual conversations, the students evoked the notion of culture whenever the arguments to justify their point of view were not enough to overcome the impasses and differences in ideas. Resorting to the concept of culture was a logical-discursive resource to attest the need, veracity or superiority of a particular argument or practice. Using culture to set boundaries or even to mediate discussions does not necessarily require one to understand the arguments, but implies their acceptance.

According to the participants, culture in general can be understood as a set of practices, rules, beliefs and stories that would be identified as ancestral, native to their communities and passed down from one generation to another.[12] Disrespecting the culture would be an affront to the memory of the ancestors, an instability in interpersonal relations and a threat to the social order. The most common expressions for defining culture were 'the things we do on our land', 'it is the tradition of Timor that was passed down by our ancestors', 'something that comes from the past and we cannot change because it is already part of the nature of the people', and 'the stories and customs of *Lisan*.'[13] Examples of cultural practices included the manufacture of the *Tais*, wedding ceremonies and funerals, hosting and celebrating visits by important people in the community, respecting the elders, preserving local stories, language variants and belonging to a *Lisan*. The perception is that sharing the same set of practices and beliefs, immutable with time and passed down from one generation to another, favours a sense of unity.

During the classroom activity, 20 groups chose the celibate university student to enter the shelter. Among the justifications were that she could have children to guarantee the continuity of the group, she could clean the shelter

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[12] This understanding of the meaning of culture seems to widespread in Timorese society. In a previous study on a community on the island of Ataúro, I found similar arguments to characterize what the participants understood as culture (Boarccaech, 2013). Often, the word 'tradition' is also used interchangeably, with the same meaning.

[13] In Tetun: *Buat sira nebe ita hala'o iha ita rai laran; hanesan tradisaun Timor nia ne'ebe uluk ita nia beiala sira husik hela mai ita; hanesan buat ruma mak mai husi uluk no mos la bele muda tamba sai ema nia karakteristika; istoria no kustume lisan nian.*

and cook for other people, and she could teach people to read and write. When confronted with the argument that the university student had made a vow of chastity, the participants immediately began to resort to the logic that represented their culture. They said that in Timorese culture, 'women have to have children', and they must 'be obedient'. According to the students, 'obeying the orders of the leaders', 'having children' and caring for 'home and family' are basic attributes of all women.

The same thing happened with the architect. Although one of the conditions was that the architect would enter the shelter only if accompanied by his wife, 17 groups chose him to enter alone. The justification was that the architect could help in rebuilding the country by building homes and roads. Since his wife could not have children, she would hinder the survival of the group. e students thought that the architect should respect the decision of the group and think about the community. Besides, as a man, he should have children, for this is one of the functions of men in society.

The whole process of choosing the 'chiefs' of the groups and the formality in the presentations was also justified by the students as being a cultural practice. From the nine classes, only two 'chiefs' were women, a nun and the 28-year-old daughter of a *Liurai* and sister of a businessman in her home village. In the 51 groups, seven women were chosen as 'chiefs': two were the already mentioned class leaders; four came from four groups that contained only women; and the seventh was from a group that had only one man among its members – who had been included in the group after being late to class. When confronted with the fact that there were few female class or group 'chiefs', the participants resorted to certain practices and rules identified in their culture. According to the students that voiced their opinion during the presentation and debate, it is a 'tradition of Timor' to have male leaders. They argued that 'it is part of the culture', 'it has always been like that' and that they learned from their 'ancestors'. As examples, they affirmed that in the hierarchy of the communities, the *Liurai, Lia Na'in* and *Matan-dook* are all men. The transposition of the logic and customs considered traditional, in this case, happened almost automatically to justify their point of view. Another example was when I questioned the students about their reasons for

choosing only six people to enter the shelter. The standard response was that they were following my directions. I clarified that I did not define the number of people at any time; I just informed them that there was enough food and space for six people to live for a year. In choosing six people, they had just condemned another seven to death. After a few smiles and jokes, the 'chiefs' of the groups sustained their choices with the following arguments: it would guarantee longer life for the people in the shelter; it would prevent 'bad' people from harming 'good' people; it would help avoid conflicts between people; it would help create a new society made up of only people who did not have problems/diseases; they thought about choosing more people but also thought it was forbidden; the teacher was to blame for not determining the exact number of people to enter the shelter; and it was only a classroom activity and no one really died. The students did not use the word 'culture' to justify their choices, but they used the cultural logics of obedience to leaders, maintenance of the social order, balance, respect for rules, and notions of good and bad, right and wrong. Cultural and personal values were reorganised into new narratives to ease the tension caused by the choice dilemma.

Resorting to culture as a primary source for resolving any disputes, contradictions or promoting meaning to certain practices and thoughts is a recurring strategy in disputes between people. This way, when faced with a strange or contradictory fact, the students searched for logical and symbolic references that favoured the semantic reorganisation and confirmation of their point of view. The basis for this reflection was the idea that a certain practice or rule was legitimate only if it was based on customs inherited from their ancestors.

However, although this can be seen as an apparent consensus in social interactions, on the individual level, the contradictions, doubts and dissatisfactions continued. Examples include the formalities in the presentations being recognised by all as a cultural aspect, but during the 78 individual interviews, 33 students stated that they were unnecessary; the choices of the 'chiefs' were not openly challenged, but 12 students said they did not agree with it, because people should decide for themselves; about the dominance of male leadership, 19 male participants said that it did not make sense and/or was an ancestral practice that needed to be changed; as to the definition of

women's roles being those of caring for the house and having children, among the 42 female students interviewed, 15 affirmed that they agreed, three said that this should be a personal choice and 24 disagreed completely.

Cultural aspects influence people, making that often our thoughts, feelings and behaviours become standardized reactions to certain stimulations. Culture has a normative aspect in clarifying, indicating and determining the rules of conduct and what may or may not be done. To some extent, culture can limit – or cause a sense of imprisonment – when its rules deny and punish any attempt at opposition. In general terms – therefore, in a heuristic model without complexity and deviations – we can identify in the studied group some underlying ideas in the way cultural elements are passed on and impact relationships between people: there is a stimulus to submit and even depend on the control of authority figures; this relationship is not devoid of discomfort and aggression that must be disguised; education, obedience and order can only be achieved through rigid, severe control and the threat of punishment; suspicion about supposed hidden motivations of 'others' favours a self-defensive and individualistic posture; the constant feeling of being watched and evaluated limits the expression of feelings and the spontaneity of relations; and there is a certain level of determinism and immobility in social relations that contributes to a fatalistic view of the world.

However, the way we relate to cultural content differs from one individual to another. This is in part because the logics on which we base our notion of culture go through a range of influences, power disputes, and signs and narratives that are sometimes contradictory, besides the constant dialectic between unforeseen and conventional/familiar elements. Cultural phenomena are not monolithic and universal, but rather diffuse, complex and involve multiple factors[20].

Timorese society is multifaceted and has numerous habitus that interfere with the relations between individuals and social groups[21]. In Timor, there are matrilineal and patrilineal communities; dozens of linguistic variants; social groups with their own histories and myths about the origin of the world and

[20] For discussions on the concept of culture in the social sciences, see Wagner (1981); Geertz (1989); Sahlins (2003); Bhabha (2013).

[21] The *habitus* is a system of socially constituted dispositions that, as structured and structuring structures, constitute the generative and unifying principle of the set of practices and ideologies characteristic of a group of agents (Bourdieu, 1987, p. 191, our translation).

the human kind; and differences in gender, generations, geography, economy, level of school education, and religious beliefs and denominations. There are also Timorese who returned after independence, Timorese who remained in the national territory during the Indonesian period and those born after independence. There are pro-Indonesian or pro-independence families; nationals who married foreigners; Timorese of Chinese, Indonesian and Portuguese origin; and many others.

Just as society is not homogeneous, these groups and sets of *habitus* are also contextual. Using a Weberian expression, the *habitus* is an *ideal-type* form. These *ideal-types* are elaborated through generic conceptions about the characteristics of a particular group. However, this selection of common elements to delimit and differentiate groups does not consume the plurality of relations within these same groups. I think that the concept of *value* proposed by Weber (1995) can help us to understand this diversity. According to the author, values are a set of ideas, concepts and certainties that exist in a certain social group. These *values*, when put into practice, influence people's actions. Because they are not universal and are related to historical-social contexts and individual experiences, these *values* can change over time according to the place and people involved.

These *values* do not diminish the diversity of meanings; on the contrary, they make the relation between signifier and signified even more complex. In order to organise the dichotomies and incongruities, we put into action what I call the *moderator system*. This system is not autonomous and corresponds to the movement of forces – values, laws, signs, logics, environments, morals, ethics, religious beliefs, politics and other systems – that influence the individual. Some of the functions of the moderator system are as follows: adjusting the individual logics to match the logics shared by the group; organising the tension of the contradictions; coding the plurality of semiosis into an intelligible binary logic; and providing individuals with a set of ideas – within the available repertoire – that directly interferes with the formation and maintenance of their self-image and worldview[16].

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[16] For a more detailed presentation of the moderator system, see Boarccaech (2013).

Although the notion of culture is evoked to cause a sense of unity, it does not exclude the presence of tensions, power struggles, and the constant semantisation of its elements. The way people relate to beliefs and customs associated with the notion of culture is not identical. The ideas, signs and practices identified as cultural influence and condition people's performances, although they can assume values and meanings with distinct levels of relevance, support, acceptance and respect on the part of individuals of the same society.

THE PLACE AND OWNERS OF POWER

As mentioned earlier, all nine classes had their leadership[17]; likewise, the 51 groups formed for the dynamics exercise chose their own 'chiefs'. These 'chiefs' were given responsibility for ensuring order, obedience to the rules, and organising and representing the group. There was a kind of code among the students that said that leadership could not be openly challenged and 'chiefs' of different groups could not explicitly interfere with one another. This can be noticed in the arguments used to interrupt the questions they received. The participants, when facing an impasse, stated that the other students and 'chiefs' could not evaluate their choices because they belonged to other groups.

The need for a person who centralises power in the group was justified as being a cultural practice inherited from their ancestors. According to the students, without leadership, harmony in the relations would be threatened because people would compete with each other and would not respect each other. There was fear of division through possible confrontation and disrespecting of the rules. It would be up to the 'chief' to keep the rules working and even punish those who disrespected them. One expression that some students used to justify the need of a 'chief' was that 'the body without the head cannot walk'; the 'chief' was the head and the body was the rest of the people.

The family and personal characteristics of the class 'chiefs' are interesting when thinking about the process involved in their election. Among the class 'chiefs', three were children of local leaders - *Lia Na' in* or *Liurai* of their

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[17] Officially, these representatives are called 'class delegates'. However, this name is little known or used. The students identify class representatives as 'chief' (xefi) or 'leader' (líder).

communities; one was a nun; another belonged to the family of a nationally prominent politician; two belonged to families of businessmen; and a young woman descended from a family of traditional leaders and businessmen. In the groups formed during the dynamics exercise, these same elements were found. However, other factors were added when choosing the 'chiefs', such as being considered the most intelligent person in the group; having better grades than their colleagues; knowing socially important people; being friends with the class 'chiefs'; being extroverted and communicative; and having a personality that was dominant over others.

Another important factor that reinforces the figure of the class 'chiefs' is that they are formal interlocutors of the teachers and the courses' school boards with the other students. The 'chiefs' participate in meetings and decisions and have their authority, a priori, delimited in time and space by a set of rules previously established by the statutes of the students and the university. Thus, these 'chiefs' were chosen because they had personal attributes valued by the other students, because they represented the culture in some way, and because there were rules that legitimised and controlled their actions[18].

Leadership needs to be emphatically exercised and the 'chief' needs to be 'strong', 'courageous' and 'protect people'. During the debates, the 'chiefs' sometimes raised their voices, put a serious expression on their faces, pointed their index finger and authoritatively closed the discussions, stating that others could not intervene. Leaders who are opened to dialogue, express doubts, acknowledge their mistakes and change their minds are considered weak and 'failing to defend' their group. Thus, the authoritarian attitude of the 'chiefs' is also related to the fulfilment of social expectations about the role they play. The better you represent the character, the more legitimised you are in the role of someone who has power.

In a panoramic view, this may lead us to think of a kind of Hobbesian *style social pact*, where people consensually choose a leader to protect them and ensure social stability (Hobbes, 2003). However, the classroom debates

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[18] The dynamics surrounding the authority of the 'chiefs' show similarities to what Weber (2009) called systems of charismatic, traditional and rational-legal authority.

and individual interviews demonstrated that this supposed consensus around the figure of the 'chiefs' was not free from quarrels and dissatisfaction.

Students compared themselves with each other and said that certain people had been chosen solely because of 'tradition'. Among the 78 interviewed, 41 complained about the 'chiefs' in their respective classes, stating that they 'do nothing' and 'are not prepared'. Another 27 students said they preferred 'someone else'. Regarding the groups, 14 participants stated that they would have liked to have been chosen to be the 'chief' of their group, and 53 stated that they were able to be the 'chief' of their group. Of these, 46 said they would never be the 'chief' because they did not belong to 'families of important people' or were people of 'humble' origin.

According to the students, power is acquired through access to certain positions in the social hierarchy and not necessarily through personal characteristics. There would be specific people that, more than occupying a position, are their rightful owners. When asked directly about the meaning of power, the participants replied 'something that belongs to leaders', 'a right of leaders', 'handed down by tradition', 'the government has the power', and 'power is the position' that the person has[19]. Therefore, we can understand a little more about the almost unanimous choices of the priest, politician and businessman. In the view of the students, these characters – in comparison with the others – have important positions in the organisation of society.

Although each 'chief' can only act formally within their own group, there are spaces for mutual interference. The 'chiefs' do not exercise power in the same way and are not legitimised in the same way. There are levels and ranks of power that vary according to each 'chief' individual posture and prestige. An example of this was the young female class 'chief'. According to the students, she had been elected through family credentials and had the right to occupy the position. However, despite having good relations with all of her classmates, this young woman showed 'weakness' in her convictions, was shy, spoke little, could not impose herself on others and had low grades.

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[19] In Tetun: *Buat ne'ebé líder sira mak iha; direitu líder nian; husik husi tradisaun; governu mak iha poder; poder hanesan pozisaun ne'ebé ema okupa.*

Her colleagues, despite maintaining the formalities, did not respect her as a leader and two other students unofficially took over her role.

Let us return to the example of the three students who challenged the choices of their colleagues and the group that selected people considered as 'sick'. The students who questioned the other groups did not have to assert their authority in front of the class. These students, being children of local leaders, possessing excellent grades, and having knowledge of rhetoric and cultural symbols and a good ability to express their ideas, were recognised by all of the others as legitimate leaders. Thus, they possessed – within the logical-symbolic codes shared by the group – the power to behave that way. The counterpoint made to them was that insisting on questioning could trigger disunity in the class, and also that they could not make some decisions because they belonged to another group. Some of the group 'chiefs' – who supported the class 'chief' – came together and responded in a louder voice. However, despite the exalted performance, they remained within the limits of respect and the division of powers dictated by the protocol. Something different happened with the group that chose people considered 'too sick' to enter the shelter. These students did not have the same legitimacy and saw their intellectual capacities and authority challenged. They did not confront the arguments of the others because they were not considered holders of power, and they did not consider themselves to be in the position of those who held power.

There is another example that is not directly related to this study but can contribute to our understanding of leadership. There is an agreement among students that during semester exams and other classroom activities, they will turn their papers in only after the class 'chief' has turned in his own paper or has authorised them to do so. However, the three students who contested their colleagues during the group dynamics exercise would not wait for the class 'chief' to complete his exam or wait passively for permission to turn in their paper. These students, after completing the exams, would get up and pass by the class 'chief', who in return nodded authorising them to leave. This way, these three students did not disrespect the rules, which could cause them trouble and reprisals, but fulfilled them with the particularity that the power they possessed allowed them to do. They were not trying to assert their power; they were exercising it.

Direct confrontations happen when a person understands himself to be hierarchically on the same level as his interlocutor or above. This levelling of forces is not always recognised by either party or even by most of the people involved in the situation. The struggle would not necessarily be to legitimise one's power, but it could be a struggle to see who holds more power. Direct conflicts, as uneven as they may appear, happen when both sides think of themselves as legitimate holders of power[20]. Someone who judges himself to be at a disadvan- tage or hierarchically inferior would not normally contest his opponent directly.

The way in which power is obtained and the different degrees of le-gitimacy that individuals or groups possess influence the establishment and outcome of a conflict. It is not enough to hold power and be recognised as someone who has the right to exercise it. It is necessary for the legitimacy logic of power 'A' to be more valued than that of powers 'B', 'C' and so on. Thus, we can have different forms of legitimisation of power. These forms do not necessarily void each other, but may favour certain social characters who assert their power over others. Those who have the ability to manipulate the elements that integrate and define the notion of culture acquire a certain ad-vantage because they can reorganise and overturn ideas in debates and other social interactions. But only those who already hold the power to manifest themselves can do this, otherwise their intervention would be delegitimised and even punished. Respect for formality sometimes becomes more important and meaningful than the relevance of the argument.

Through preconceptions based on practices and customs they consider cultural, the students understand that certain people and social functions hold the right to exercise power. This way of relating to power does not prevent contestations, inconsideration or leadership – although formalised – from being delegitimised at the individual level. In part, this is because power is a concession that people made to each other. Power, as proposed by Foucault (2004), does not have a place or specific person that controls it, for it can be

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[20] The idea of hierarchy proposed by Dumont (1997) is interesting as it reflects these dynamics of power. According to Dumont, hierarchy is a relation of contextual force and cannot be thought of as a monolithic taxonomic tree or a game among beings of decreasing dignity.

found everywhere at all levels of relationship; it circulates and is always in motion, being passed down from one individual to another.

The participants in this study were constantly confronted with logics, symbols and arguments that differed from their points of view. When facing a contradiction, they activated the *moderator system* in an attempt to reorganise their certainties by resorting to authority, culture, rules and even intimidation of one another. If, on the more general level, the students demonstrated a certain consensus, we can realise that individually there were innumerable narratives and worldviews. It is interesting to observe that the formal elements used were similar, but the content had different interpretations according to individual experiences. We cannot escape the fact that our worldview, the way we think, relate and communicate, is restricted to the information we have throughout our development process. We live immersed in our conscious and unconscious references, where language is the link between the concrete and the abstract.

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