

“FROM THE CITY TO THE MOUNTAINS”: DISPLACEMENT EXPERIENCES, REUNIONS DURING THE CELEBRATION OF DIA DOS MORTOS IN BOBONARO, TIMOR-LESTE

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DOSSIER RELIGIONS: THEIR IMAGES,
PERFORMANCES AND RITUALS

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This essay handles the importance of the ancestors' cult, the way it is configured during the celebration of Dia dos Mortos at Casa Sagrada Dom Cailito, in the municipality of Bobonaro, in November 2016. Timor-Leste is a small island located in the intersection of Asian Southeast and Oceania. The independence of East Timor was unilaterally proclaimed in 1975 and restored only in 2002 after several conflicts, cultural encounters and disagreements: 430 years of Portuguese colonization, 24 years of Indonesian occupation and 30 months of transitory administration by United Nations.

In East Timor, Dia dos Mortos is a national holiday; it is an event in which many residents of Díli, the capital city, get together in order to return to their *uma lulik*, the sacred houses of the municipalities. To many East Timorese populations, *uma lulik* is the center of



collective celebrations; it is the material and immaterial memory repository which allows their origin narratives reproduction. *Uma lulik* is the term used to treat a construction, both physical and symbolic, on which a descent group identifies with (FOX, 2006) and people are placed, not only in precedence relations, but also in mutual mandatory net.

The Houses are summoned to engage themselves in a continuous reproduction by means of an active participation in reinauguration ceremonies of the sacred houses' edifications, harvest, weddings and mournful rituals which are broadly denominated *kultura* ceremonies (SILVA, 2014). The sacred house embodies the ancestors' presence and that's why the celebration of Dia dos Mortos mobilizes investments of multiple orders. This implies an intense traffic of people and circulation of food, beverages, cigarettes, candles and flowers from Díli to the municipalities or, as it is commonly said, "from the city to the mountains". This celebration evolves many activities that precede and surpass November 2nd: the trip preparation, the welcome in the municipalities and the cemetery visit which ends up with the return to Díli on November 2nd or 3rd (SILVA, 2019).

In 2016, we were invited to participate in on the November 2nd celebration with Mira's family – Mira was an interlocutor of the research – at Uma Lulik Dom Cailito in Bobonaro village. Mira, as most East Timorese, lives and works in Díli, but dislocates to her hometown – in this case Bobonaro – to pay honor to her ancestors, pushed by this felling of belonging to her origin community. The celebration of Dia dos Mortos to Mira and her family that year would count with the introduction of Alejandro, Mira's son, to her sacred house. The images that follow are, therefore, the register of encounters, ancestors' cult and arrival celebration, besides the presentation of a new son to the house. During this period, there is an intensification **on the neat of the graves and on the cult of the deceased.**





Mira left East Timor as a child to live in Portugal with her mother and siblings. Even far away, she followed up the situation of her country participating actively in the fight for its independence. In 2005, Mira returned to East Timor and begins to participate in ritual events at her sacred house, as in the celebration of Dia dos Mortos.



Sacred House guardian, the one who takes care of the House, feeds the ancestors and cultivates the relations between the humans and not humans.





At the celebration of 2016 Dia dos Mortos, Alejandro, Mira's son, visited his mother's hometown for the first time. At that occasion, he was initiated to different ways of thinking, conceiving and living the world than the ones he was socialized in Europe. Although the usage of traditional garment is not required at the celebration of Dia dos Mortos, for being presented to his House, Alejandro performed wearing clothes and objects that are generally used during other events.



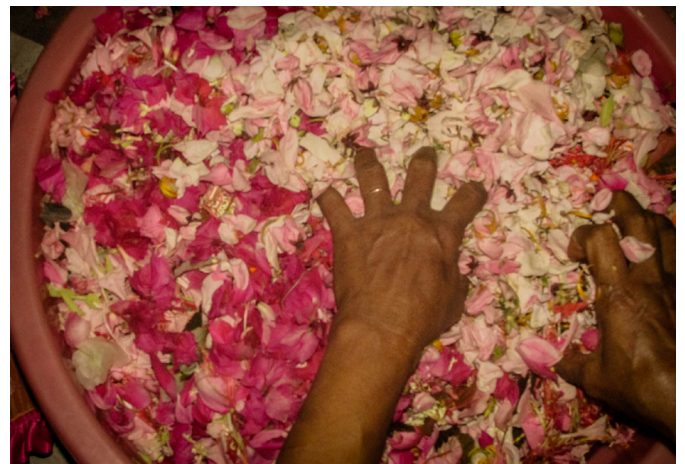


On November 1st evening, a feast is prepared to the ancestors with diverse dishes: beef, *katupas* (cooked rice wrapped in vegetal fiber), biscuits and wine displayed inside the Sacred House. This feast is offered to the ancestors and shared with the present people.





November 2nd is day to embellish the loved ones' graves. Flowers are transformed into adorns that, along with the candles, are offered to the ancestors at the cemetery.





The House guardian proceeds with the rituals and authorizes the departure to the cemetery. The women leave the Sacred House to the cemetery carrying offers in baskets covered with mantles.





At the village cemetery, people meet their neighbors and friends who also honor their deceased. Many people pray and cry while embellishing the graves with flowers and candles and also take pictures, many of which are posted at social networks during the day.





The flowers and candles left over the graves demonstrate the neat and affection that the alive ones have for the ones who occupy another dimension of existence.



At the cemetery, the members of different Houses get together. At this occasion, Mira and Alejandro connected themselves to a net of people from suchlike Sacred Houses. At the celebration of the deceased, Alejandro begins to be part of a ritual community in East Timor.

TRANSLATION
Leonardo da Cunha
Mesquita Café.

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ABSTRACT

In East Timor, Dia dos Mortos is a national holiday; it is an event in which many residents of Díli, the capital city, get together in order to return to their *uma lulik*, the sacred houses of the municipalities. This essay handles the importance of the ancestors’ cult, the way it is configured during the celebration of Dia dos Mortos at Casa Sagrada Dom Cailito, in the municipality of Bobonaro, in November 2016. This event mobilizes investments of multiple orders, implies an intense traffic of people and circulation of food, beverages, cigarettes, candles and flowers from Díli to the municipalities or, as it is commonly said, “from the city to the mountains”.

KEYWORDS
Dia dos Mortos.
Sacred House.
House. Ancestors.
East-Timor.



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