



**MISSIONARY ENDEAVOURS AND COLONIAL ETHNOGRAPHIES  
IN EAST TIMOR (1910-1926)**



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## PROLOGUE: MISSIONARY COCK FIGHTING

This is the story of a man who's almost an anonymous figure, a man who hasn't even fallen into oblivion, since he never was - and never will be - a well-known name. *Padre* João José de Andrade was a Portuguese missionary who lived in East Timor between 1917 and 1931. The young priest wrote, in 1920, eight small articles for the *Ecclesiastic Bulletin* of the diocese which were the first specifically ethnographical texts to be produced by a Portuguese missionary in Timor, as attested by their general common title, «Em Timor. Usos e costumes»: «In Timor. Uses and Customs». Each article had in plus a more suggestive subtitle, namely: «The Major», «The Funeral», «Homage to the Hammering of Poetete», «The Corn Harvest», «The Adulterous Woman», «A Case of Justice», «Kick Fighting» and finally «Cock Fighting».

Let's begin with «O Jogo do pé», «Kick Fighting». This snapshot may have only four pages, but it contains a full path of mental transformation, that makes Father João José transcend the savage/civilized dichotomy and reveal almost unwittingly his own degree of personal involvement with that native cultural reality. In the beginning of the text he appears like a totally external figure, a distant, non-participant observer who could therefore take better notice of the reactions of all those involved in the fight. The physical expression of emotional outbursts is underlayed in the way of a correspondence between the combatants and the public. «The audience», wrote Father João José, «is the faithful repercussion, the bright mirror of the players. They follow all their movements with the eyes, with their mouth, with their feet, with all their body. They are truly mesmerized by the players.» (Andrade 1920g: 189)

There is though an uncompleted sentence in his short article. He was beginning to conclude, and I quote, that «this is indeed a stupid game and...». He then stopped. He couldn't go that way. A new paragraph was started instead with the following words of *mea culpa* for having thought to denigrate kick fighting: «*Perdão, povos de Timor. Ofendi-vos sem razão.*» «Forgive me, peoples of Timor, for I have offended thee without reason.» How could he arrogantly pretend that his own society was without games just as crude? «How come that a son of the venerable Europe, who prides herself on being the cradle and the herald of modern civilization, deems your amusements as stupid and barbaric? The same Europe so fond of games not far short of barbarity...! Bull fighting... boxing... cock fighting...» (Andrade 1920g: 188) As a Portuguese, Father John Joseph was in a delicate situation and couldn't just condemn these European amusements from an external catholic standpoint. He tried to suggest from

the beginning that the Spanish people, in contrast with the Portuguese, had «outbursts of barbarity» that justified their «true passion and enthusiasm» for *los toros*. Alas!, he knew perfectly well that this game was an Iberian reality, and not just Spanish. Even though in a slightly lighter version, that precluded the killing of the animal in the arena, bullfighting was indeed a deep-rooted Portuguese tradition. He knew quite as well that bull fighting permeated catholic feasts in both Iberian countries without their respective Churches' disapproval.

This isn't just a case of acceptance through self-criticism, but of acceptance through participation, through a shared experience. So the real question is: did Father João José remain an alien personage in the Timorese kick fighting scene? Did he stay untouched by the excitement and effervescence of the natives? By the way he describes the euphoria of the winning party, one should think that he did so remain - untouched. «After the victory of one of the contenders», and I quote, «the people of the winning kingdom are almost grotesque in their joy. They shout, they bellow, they jump, they wallow, they throw their kechiefs or cloths up in the air, they run about like crazy. But all this happens in such a crude way, that it is undescrivable, one has to see it.» Surprisingly enough, the Portuguese missionary finished his text with a confession. Notwithstanding the «natural aversion that such a savage play inspires», he wrote, the whole spectacle «thrills and even excites us in such a way that turn us into a true player (...).» (Andrade 1920g: 189)

That this confession wasn't a mere literary device is attested by Father John Joseph's article on cock fighting, «O Jogo do galo». For our purposes, the historical importance of such ethnographical description lies in the missionary's own personal relation with that native experience. He said it was a «greatly barbaric» game, «much more than *touradas*», the Portuguese word for bull fighting. But at the same time he made once again a confession, in a most straightforward phrasing. «It is extraordinary», he wrote. «I confess that when I witnessed this fact» - meaning the victory of a cock - «a quivering of enthusiasm, of admiration, almost a cult thing, ran in my veins. Brave bird! (...) Cock-a-doodle-do! Cock-a-doodle-do!» (Andrade 1920h: 257)

The value of such emotional participation in Timorese cock fighting may be better asserted when contrasted with the strict positions on the matter by other Portuguese missionaries living in East Timor on the 1920s and 1930s. Father Abílio José Fernandes, by then Superior of the Missions of Timor, reported in a laudatory way the following story. The chief of the village of Sabago wanted to be baptized but had already been twice rejected by the missionary of nearby Suro, for the only reason that the man was an inveterate cock fighting bettor. «It is obvious that a Christian cannot voluntarily watch those shows», wrote Father Abílio. «Cock fighting (...) is an occasion of disturbance and one is prone to hear the most

indecent words around the players (...). That was, therefore, the obstacle to Mau Lou's baptism.» The inflexibility of the missionary of Suro was such that the catholic-to-be decided to kill all the cocks of Sabago. And even «without approving such a rigorous resolve», the priest draw the following conclusion from it. «Mau Lou was a man of good will, he deserved baptism and received it - why shouldn't we say it? - in reward for the *death of the innocent...* cocks, which will stand before his subjects and neighbors as an example of good will (...). Mau Lou is now called João (John) and can hardly imagine that the slaughtered cocks are singing his faith in the pages of our *Ecclesiastic Bulletin* and trotting around the five corners of the globe.» (Fernandes 1937: 118-123)

Father John Joseph's writings may be rather meagre ethnographically, but his avowed emotional excitement over kick fighting and cock fighting stand for a more accepting attitude toward cultural difference. It therefore represents, in the missionary scene, a less reformatory policy of conversion in comparison with Father Abílio's and other missionaries' goal of eliminating cock fighting, at least from the native Christians' lives. And then again, if Clifford Geertz sublimated the cocks into symbols, we may as well regard that Timorese culture is here at stake apart from the games, including obviously ritual traditions, that were all the more susceptible of deliberate destruction. The search for harmony between catholic mores and local customs was definitely not a prevailing trait among Portuguese missionaries in East Timor in the first decades of the 20th century. Let's see a paradigmatic illustration of this.

### 1. SACRED HOUSES OF SOIBADA: FATHER SEBASTIÃO AND THE FLAMES OF HELL

It was in September of 1899 that four priests lead by father Sebastião Maria Aparício da Silva came to Soibada to stay and transform a decadent, practically abandoned old mission into the main center of catholic irradiation in the South coast of Timor. The consolidation of the military administration of the colony at the turn of the 20th century helped the recruitment of aristocratic students and others for the school missions, but Father Sebastian had many years of experience of Timor when he settled there, and mastered the Tetum language with great ease, which permitted him to strongly intervene in the local dynamics. Mothers, fathers and other relatives established dialogue with the priests and were involved in the first communion of their boys and girls. Not being Christian themselves, the adults were curious about the mysterious idea, already assimilated by the children, that these were about to eat the body of the god of the white people. These contacts of proximity were responsible for the creation of four classes of catechumens of the surrounding regions, willing to dedicate their Sundays to the elementary learning of the Christian doctrine. Women were taught at the

house-school of the Canossian mothers who had come to stay in Soibada, while the men were taught at the masculine college. Father Sebastian noted that these adults showed real "fear of God", thus indicating that Christian representations were being effectively incorporated in the imaginary of the surrounding communities.

This process of reaching the adults through the children extended regularly to other more distant villages, some of them high up in the mountains where no Christians existed. By means of their intervention with the local women, the Canossian mothers were responsible for quite a feat, that of bringing a young girl to the boarding school, when on visit to the mountains. So she became officially the first Christian of the highlands of Soibada and it was through this little girl and her links with relatives who lived nearer Soibada that other contacts were made, at first timidly, but with growing curiosity from more distant natives, either geographically or religiously. Four boys, "sons of chiefs" of the mountains were admitted at the college in the middle term of 1900. Father Sebastian himself described the mechanism of furthering proximity with these communities: "First came the fathers to our house, and seeing their sons with European clothing and well treated, they lost their fear. The boys became Christian. Later the mothers came, brought by other women who lived closer to us. They visited the Canossian mothers, and being welcomed they lost the fear they felt to appear before the *malai*, a word that amongst themselves means foreigners. Nowadays in these highlands there exists quite a number of Christians who give me much consolation." (Silva 1908: 193)

This enthusiasm doesn't mean that Catholicism had eradicated the indigenous beliefs and rituals. The missionary himself was conscious of this. Although some of the leaders came down to Soibada on Sundays to go to mass and to be catechized by father Sebastian himself, they did not conceal that the power of tradition was very strong in their villages and amongst their people, and it was very doubtful that these aristocrats could distance themselves from the native representations and practices. One of the more profound and recurrent features among the different ethno-linguistic groups of East Timor, and foremost the Tetum, was the religious importance of relics belonging to noble families, and kept in sacred houses - *uma lulik* in Tetum - under the protection of ritual experts. Although in Tetum and other languages it had a generic meaning of sacred and forbidden, the word *lulik* was currently restricted by the missionaries to these material expressions of the native cults, and therefore its extension to the catholic universe became impossible. The sermons of father Sebastian during mass or at the catechism against such objects and such places were therefore a real challenge for the new Christians of the highlands. The missionary tried to point out the distance between, on one side, the religious progress obtained by the local chiefs, and on the other the backwardness of

the common people, in such a way that the latter were induced to promote the detachment of tradition. This tendency reached a breaking point when the priest urged them to prove by deeds and not just words that they despised their witch doctors and the "gentile and devilish ceremonies" carried out by these in the aforesaid sacred houses. Father Sebastian was quite aware of the delicacy of the situation, going so far as to declare that he did not act «carelessly or without prudence». On the contrary, he knew very well «how very attached the Timorese are to these gentilities». Even so he went as far as to propose to his faithful «a most heroic act», that is, «to set fire to certain huts that are like pagodas or temples full of gentile superstitions». (Silva 1908: 194)

The result was quite astonishing. The highlands neophytes accepted to do it «if I went there», wrote Father Sebastian, «for they would not do it on their own». (Silva 1908: 194) The missionary accepted the challenge thus sent back, but on condition that the noblemen should talk first with the gentile of their villages and above all with the witch doctors. «Only after this did I climb the mountains.» It was on the 21st of May 1908 that this preannounced and dangerous visit took place, in the company of another missionary of Soibada and thirty four students of the masculine college. The hostesses were prepared for an amicable reception, having killed and cooked a buffalo for the occasion. The «head chief» introduced some of the so-called "witch doctors" of the region to the missionaries, and father Sebastian took advantage of the moment to speak about the new religion. According to the missionary's narrative, the ritual experts answered in a most extraordinary way, saying that «he could burn everything, they would not be angry». (Silva 1908: 194)

The unknown missionary of the Timorese Belle Époque was undoubtedly the protagonist of this «Island of History». But the destruction of native sacred houses was a social drama with inevitable tensions between the natives themselves. Unfortunately, the available sources at the present stage of research do not allow me to reconstruct them with the necessary historical rigor. It is probable that in the network of relations of the missionaries of Soibada there existed many fragilities, but that does not invalidate the fact that their influence tightened as they used more and more the neophytes who represented traditional authority. There might have been a certain indigenous play acting in benefit of the colonizers, as was well proved to exist in other occasions. Whatever the case may be, the destruction of *luliks* in 1908 is by itself proof of the existence of intense relations between the mission of Soibada and some local communities. We have reasons to believe that, in this context, father Sebastian had an effective charismatic power over the natives. In this sense he may have momentarily liberated himself from the military aid and from the authority and prestige that went along with it.



It may even be imprudent to reduce the impact of Christian ideology on the peoples of Samoro in the turn of the 20th century to purely sociological considerations. The Jesuit's charisma was based on the strong conviction with which he spoke in the native Tetum about his God. The chapter about the salvation of the souls was quite impressive, and even more so the one about the pains of hell, to which everybody was damned if they did not embrace the Christian religion and at the same time reject the old *luliks*. The high hierarchy of the Catholic Church kept insisting on the eternity of the flames of hell. In that day, 21 of May 1908, the burning of a total of nine sacred houses in the highlands was used by the missionary to discourse on the theme. The flames directly seen somehow reinforced the power of the words and vice versa, and so we find some verisimilitude in the narrative about what the indigenous people said at that moment: that «all they wanted was to have God by their side and go to heaven, and they promised that they would come down from the mountains to be with us». (Silva 1908: 195) Amongst several men who were near one of the burnt sacred houses, one in particular spoke with «intense spirit» and even «cried out loud», in the name of all, that «they all wanted to be Christians, for they all wanted to go to heaven». The others who were there «answered that it was so and that everyone thought the same». (Silva 1908: 195) A photograph of the group was then taken, including the "witch doctors", but it is impossible to know, for the time being, if this precious iconographic object survived in the Portuguese colonial archive.

## 2. PORTUGUESE *LULIKS* OR INDIGENOUS RELICS?

The Jesuits and the Canossians in Soibada reached a high degree of interference on the native religious' realm, but as a matter of fact Father Sebastian didn't know entirely what he was doing and just how far he was going. The burning of *uma lulik* meant that the objects inside the houses were not considered one by one, but as an undistinguished mass of devilish things. For him, the *lulik* objects were a purely native reality that had nothing to do with Christianity, neither spiritually nor historically. But the island of Timor, and namely its Portuguese half, was a surprise box. With nothing less than four centuries of missionary experiences in different kingdoms, the vestiges of abandoned trails could be found in the most unexpected places. They could be found, namely, in places that the missionaries of the 20th century, ignorant as they were of their forebears' full history, considered to be totally virgin, without any Christian past whatsoever.

For instance, there were many doubts if there ever existed a mission in the kingdom of Bobonaro before 1908 and it was currently said that its people were possibly the most savage

in all Timor. But in the beginning of the 1920s, only after several years of hard work, the new priest there, Father Germano Cardoso, finally heard a native tradition according to which there had been two missions in the area a long time ago, one in the Tetum-speaking plain of Rai-Méa and the other further west in Suai. He made further inquiries in these two spots and the results were quite astonishing. Among the native *lulik* objects, one could find images and other Catholic items, the most spectacular being a mutilated wooden statue of Our Lady of the Rosary. «This does not mean», he wrote in a letter to his Bishop, «that the peoples who have for so long kept these objects of cult have also kept the religious faith of their ancestors. They possess religious objects of the missions of yore simply because of the custom that all natives have of keeping everything that belonged to their ancestors, even if it's just a letter without any importance.» (Cardoso 1923: 50)

There was, for instance, a letter of 1790 that allowed Father Germano to conclude that the missions of Rai-Méa and Suai were already extinguished by the end of the 18th century. It is quite amazing that such documents and objects, possibly of enormous importance to the reconstruction of the catholic presence in East Timor in past centuries, were being more cherished by the non-Christian Timorese than by the Portuguese missionaries, who devaluated not only their historical value but their religious one as well, which was considered to be practically nil. From the Church's point of view, it was simply gone. In the case of saintly images, to start with, catholic doctrine didn't consider them to have an intrinsic and perennial sacred status. Unlike an idolatrous cult properly speaking, the significance of catholic images was strictly and explicitly symbolic and therefore inseparable from the worshiper's faith. If the Christian faith vanished, as it did among those strayed descendants of ancient faithful, the objects became deprived of their original worth. So we can say that the statue of Our Lady of the Rosary, for example, had indeed become a native *lulik* from a doctrinary point of view.

What's ironical in this story is that for the Timorese themselves such objects of Portuguese origin were still sacred - precisely they were *lulik*. As an integral part of a cult of the ancestors, they had remained inside an *uma lulik* for an indefinite but certainly very long period of time, or otherwise the paper items, to take the most fragile material, would have totally disintegrated. This is clearly a case for an "Archaeology of Colonialism", but while it isn't done in East Timor, one is tempted to suspect or imagine that those communities hadn't historically interrupted their religious awe towards their own catholic heritage. Even if they didn't know its Christian significance, they were probably aware of its Portuguese connection, since the objects in question were presented to Father Germano when he started his investigations *in loco*.



This could have been an original process of selective syncretism due to native, non-Christian ritual experts, who may have appropriated what they wanted or what they could from the foreign religion and culture. At least in discourse, the missionaries had nothing to do with such *bricolage*. But in other cases, indigenized objects of Catholic origin could indeed be the unpredicted historical outcome of a stronger missionary influence of yore. In other words, the present day keepers of such Portuguese *luliks* could have actual Christians as ancestors, all the more so that aristocratic branches - the main possessors of sacred houses - had always been the preferred target of catholic missions. One wonders if, in the 20th century, the deep respect of the Timorese peoples towards the ancestors and their heirlooms could have been otherwise explored by the missionaries. Knowing there was the possibility of finding catholic vestiges inside *uma luliks*, may be there was an opportunity for "evoking" and "recovering" a "lost" religion, Catholicism, presenting it as the true faith of the native's very own ancestors. But the missionaries definitely chose the opposite path, cutting the historical as well as the spiritual bridge between the two realms.

This option was a form of violence not only to the Timorese, but unconsciously to the missionaries themselves. Let us clarify that the rational explanations about the symbolic significance of catholic images didn't obviously exhaust their power over the believers, be they rustic peasants in a Portuguese village or more or less cultivated priests. Even if it was transformed into a "heathen" object, the statue of Our Lady of the Rosary was still susceptible of catholic worshipping. It would be unthinkable, for sure, to burn it as just any other native *lulik*. After all, the missionaries would be prone to project in the wooden figure their own faith in the Mother of God and therefore to restore its "legitimate" and original religious value. As a consequence, the indiscriminate burning of sacred houses was a terrible thing to do. One could never be sure what was really being thrown to the flames, from a very old crucifix to a mutilated Virgin Mary or what not, including, by the way, ancient Portuguese flags, later and rather often found among Timorese heirlooms in different parts of the island.

Curiously enough, there are testimonies that Father Sebastian visited Rai-Méa in 1900, being certainly unaware of the perils of his own action. (Fernandes 1931: 21) An unintentional self-destruction was at stake. Catholic methods such as his, aggressive to traditional sacred objects, places and persons in Timorese societies, had a hidden dimension. When he burned to the ground nine *uma luliks* in the surroundings of Soibada in 1908, he could be destroying, without knowing it, a material and spiritual heritage related to the Christian converts or at least to the Portuguese missionaries of past centuries. Who can be sure of what was actually being annihilated?

### 3. COLONIAL QUO VADIS: A NEVER ENDING RETURN

The sacred houses affair, with its historical filigree of relics that could be of Portuguese extraction, demonstrates that sparse elements of Christianity had sometimes been integrated in the native's own ritual sphere. Old Timorese appropriations and transformations of the catholic imagery could remain invisible, as if they were purely native; but when acknowledged by the Church, they were seen as a more or less disgraceful adulteration. Even when it concerned the descendants of bygone *cristandades*, this kind of situation was always negatively portrayed. Such an attitude had to do with the very essence of Catholicism as universal orthodoxy exclusively through the priests' sanction. Whenever and as long a *cristandade* had to be abandoned to itself, it was necessarily doomed from the missionaries' point of view, because of the lost sacraments and because their members and descendants wouldn't be able to reproduce the Gospel in a proper way.

Besides, without the priest's guidance and control, the "psychological fickleness" of the Timorese would prevail. Such was the phrasing of many Portuguese missionaries in the first decades of the 20th century. By their own experience, so they said, only the continuous presence and perseverance of the missionary could eventually eradicate the parallel influence of "superstition" alongside catechism. Surrounded as they were by "heathens", Christian natives would otherwise and inevitably relapse into "paganism". «Without the priest», one missionary wrote, «the Timorese abandons right away the God of Abraham.» (Fernandes 1931: ) One of the most salient aspects of this worldview is precisely the denial of any empirical blending between the two religious worlds, which were kept separate in discourse. Even though they could be perfectly aware of the weight of native tradition in the converts' lives, the missionaries always pictured the case as a juxtaposition of two parallel forces and didn't admit that the Christians were possibly experiencing a religious syncretic reality. Let's see an example: «Feeble as they are, they accept the doctrine we teach them as easily as they stop following it. Suspicious by nature, they believe what one tells them, but only in small portions, always reserving space in their minds to believe the opposite, if that's necessary or convenient. They believe the missionary, but they keep on giving credit to what they hear from their *mata lulic* and *lulic na'in*, the gentile priests and soothsayers.» (Mendes 1924: 480)

The only place the Catholic Church had for syncretism or variance - classified as adulteration - was the historical terrain of defeat and departure, be it in the past or in the future, but never in the present efforts of eradication. The rejection of any strictly indigenous endurance of Christian traits, forcibly seen as spurious, was indeed connected to the missionaries' vision of their own History as a cycle of retreats and coming backs. After four

hundred years of colonial contact and a present day statistic of less than 5% of native Christians, East Timor was a good illustration of the idea promoted by the Church itself that the fall of past achievements was God's way of putting His shepherds to the test since the time of the apostles. The installation of Father Sebastian's Jesuit mission in Soibada had been one of such symbolic returns after a long period of abandonment and decadence, caused by the extinction of religious orders in Portugal in the 1830s after the Liberals' victory in the Civil War. Let's keep in mind that Portuguese history, despite its profound connection with Catholicism, was punctuated by several cycles of anticlericalism and political measures against the clergy, in particular against religious orders. To complete the picture, the days of rapid and relative "zenith" of Father Sebastian and his team were counted once again. The Jesuits and all the regular clergy in East Timor would have to leave the island much sooner than they themselves could have imagined. As in all the churches of the empire, a mass was held in Soibada for the souls of King Charles I and of his first-born, both murdered in February of that year of 1908 - the year of *uma lulik* destruction. And it was from the hands of the superior of the mission that each pupil received a small medal with the effigy of the new monarch, young Manuel II, who would stay only for two years and a few months on the throne to which he had been catapulted.

The 8th October 1910, only three days after the instauration of the Republic, the expulsion of religious orders from Portugal and its colonies was once again enacted. The six Jesuit priests and the five Canossian mothers that were then at Soibada were forced to leave Timor. The mission was officially expropriated by the colony's government, even though two secular priests were sent to the main house, residence of the missionaries and masculine school, with the incumbency of not letting die Father Sebastian's work. They reopened the school year with some of the old students who had remained there and with others from Barique and Alas. But the Canossians' provisional building made of *palapa* collapsed and the new one that was being finished for the feminine school stood in the militaries' hands. Its provisional zinc roof was pulled out, but the demolition wasn't completed and the whole had now the aspect of a ruin. «To make things worse», wrote the new superior of Soibada, Father João Lopes, «we have to take into account the moral impression, the fear and the suspicion induced in the natives' mind by the departure of the priests and the plunder of the mission's property.» According to the same priest, «there wasn't any mission in a more precarious condition as this». (Lopes 1924: 671, 673) In 1917, an earthquake damaged the main house and put the church to the ground. Soibada was by then a ruin of ruins.

In Timor, the anticlerical climate associated with the Republic put the missionaries in a more fragile position indeed. Considering there were even churches transformed into

barracks, it's no wonder that several priests complained about the lack of support from the authorities or even about the boycott on their activities. There were military commanders who put abruptly an end on the recruitment of the sons of aristocratic natives to the missions' schools. Besides, the missionaries were the first to acknowledge that the change in their political status was well understood by the Timorese. By realizing the missions' flagrant loss of prestige and authority, many Christians reacted accordingly, that is, they stopped practicing the catholic religion in its many opportunities of showing off.

Following the lucid explanation of several missionaries in Timor, that happened because many or even most of the native Christians maneuvered their foreign religious identity for self-interest and not by genuine faith. «The first times we have to deal with them, we get the impression that they are sincere, humble and simple», wrote Father Manuel Patrício Mendes. «But if we find ourselves in such a position that they won't fear us anymore or that we don't have any authority over them, we soon realize that Friar Cristóvão Rangel was right, when in the middle of the 17th century he wrote that: «All their life and employment are made of wars and guns, vanities and nobilities...» (Mendes 1924: 479) With this quotation from another age, the missionary wanted to say that, in Timorese traditional societies, obedience to higher ranked figures was managed by each man for his own profit. Besides, those hierarchical mechanisms and values had been fully articulated with the present time colonial situation, so that the missionaries couldn't ignore the web in which they found themselves caught. The Timorese, concluded Father Manuel Patrício, «always commands to the pleasure of those in command». (Mendes 1924: 480)

The imbalance of the missionaries' political status was therefore deemed responsible for the estrangement of Christian natives (not to mention the non-Christian). The momentary instability of the first accentuated the chronic religious instability or "psychological fickleness" of the second. *Cristandades* had seldom or never suffered a structural change by way of which the relinquishment of native religious forces was internally reproduced by the Timorese themselves in a more permanent way. But what's more, such a transformation was impossible or at least it was necessarily unsuccessful from the Church's point of view. After all, there was a kind of vicious circle between the indispensability of the catholic priest and the frailty of Christian communities. No wonder that only many years later, in the 1930s, would there be new reports of *lulik* destruction in the missionary archive. For sure, those episodes couldn't happen by the sole efforts of the missionaries; they had to imply Timorese collaborators, be they true followers or political opportunists. But the natives' will to participate was a changing factor, even when the priests stayed in place. Religious destruction wasn't continuous in Timorese colonial history because a third element was necessary to surpass the purely

transitory nature of such climactic moments and therefore to prevent the vanishing of past or present endeavors. I mean precisely the explicit reinforcement or support of missionary action by the Portuguese military and civil administration.

#### 4. «THEY WANT TO DIE WITH THEIR PRIESTS»: A RELIGIOUS WAR IN REPUBLICAN TIMOR

The so called war of Manufai, in 1912, created a certain number of revealing episodes as to the decline of the missions' political favor. By the same token, it illustrates in surprising ways the deep interdependence between the missionaries and the military. True that since the last years of the century that kingdom was very resilient to the effective occupation by the Portuguese, but now the conflict spread the anti-colonial rebellion to places thought to be peaceful, where men and boys from the popular classes worked in Portuguese plantations as *auxiliares* indicated by the native chiefs under pressure of the authorities. The rebellion was thus transversal to a certain degree, in regions with different pasts concerning the Portuguese presence and therefore Catholicism itself. In this complex moment of the History of Timor we are interested in what happened in the missions. Certain reports describe situations where Christians rebelled against the colonial presence but not against the missionaries, including the kingdom of Manufai where a commanding Portuguese officer was assassinated. (*BEDM* 1912a: 170; 1912c: 70) Some of the chiefs may have discriminated positively the religious personnel, thus not including the missions in the conflict. Did the converted population or at least some part of it really consider the priests as special? This cannot be generalized, but only admitted as a historical hypothesis in some parts of the territory, leading to further research. In any case the missionaries did not all keep their posts, there were some strategic retreats.

The dissuasive influence they had in regard to certain communities who wanted to fight with arms is sometimes pointed out. It must be said that the war of 1912, like all others that came before in the period of effective occupation, was also between Timorese and not just against the Portuguese who had in their troops a majority of *arraiais* of faithful kinglets. It is quite clear that the pacifist appeals of the missionaries were made in behalf of fidelity towards Portugal and not of the obedience to God's commandments. In the small Republican milieu of Dili, a strong discussion was nonetheless held regarding the leaders of the revolt, ancient students of the mission schools, being implicit the accusation that the missionaries were enemies of the Republic. «Only utter stupidity can thus think», they answered. «It surely was not the mission that preaches obedience to the constitutional powers, the love of thy neighbor and the respect of others' lives and properties, the mission that educated them, the one that should also teach them to adopt the principles of rebellion and inhuman and cruel

feelings.» (BGEDM 1912c: 72) For the Catholic Church, the anticlericalism of the actual administration of Timor had a circumstantial significance and the missions maintained a solid link with the colonial order and the Portuguese sovereignty.

The missionaries' collaboration in the restraint of the uprising was not merely diplomatic, nor did they exclusively give information to the general staff. The death of Father Alves Ferreira from the mission of Maubara entered the annals of the empire's mythology, as he fought side by side with the hybrid soldiery. There is a version that says he himself went off recruiting *arraiais*. «We dare not say that our missionaries did right or wrong by taking sides in these battles», wrote a commentator in the pages of the diocese's bulletin. «Ministers of a religion of peace and love, it seems that the role of fighters does not look good on them (...). Nevertheless we are convinced that the sad condition of having to defend the most legitimate interests - the lives, the belongings of their Christians, the houses and the churches of the mission (...) and, who knows? the integrity of our domain - that and only that led them to risk their lives and the prestige of their noble mission.» (BGEDM 1912b: 202) It is evident that we stand before a sweetened portrait leading to an artificial division between the gentiles who profaned churches and the faithful who defended their missionaries. The religious identity issue cannot be put in these terms, not during, not before, not after the Manufai war, for the simple reason that the local experiences of being a Christian were varied and mingled with other identities and interests.

The understanding of this complex reality shouldn't lead us to an aprioristic rejection nor to an uncritical acceptance of the reports that tell the story of communities congregated around the missions during the 1912 uprising. The case of Soibada represents an interesting challenge from this point of view, because of the description of the local Christians' behavior: «They are ready to fight to the last, but if they cannot resist, they will seek refuge in the church, for they want, they say, to die there with their priests». (BGEDM 1912a: 170) The truth is that in a second version, signed by Father João Lopes, the superior of Soibada at the time, informs that the missionaries were obliged to appeal to the confidence of the natives in the military action of the government, or else «these people would probably, because of fear, take sides with the rebels». They were very close geographically, given the proximity of the kingdoms of Samoro and Manufai. The local chiefs then decided to stay with the mission. «They were devoted to us», wrote the same priest, «and they updated us with the proposals the enemy made to them, information that I passed on to the authorities so that they could act accordingly.» (Lopes 1924: 672) The mission did ask Dili for military help, and reinforcements did come.



As so happens, the commander was not only a republican, but «a Jacobin who always hated the missionaries.» In one of the reports we read: «his sectarianism lead him to the point of despising the data that the good missionaries, who knew the place and the people, promptly gave him.» (BGEDM 1912b: 200) More than that, he ordered his men to march on at a critical moment leaving the mission literally alone to deal with the rebels of Manufai at its door. The two secular missionaries that were there at the time decided to close the mission and leave to Manatuto with some of the students advising the other Christian to disperse. «Having no means of defense», wrote Father João Lopes, «I did not have the right to expose the lives of those who trusted me». (Lopes 1924: 672) It was «the last and decisive destructive blow» in the path that had led to the expulsion of the Jesuits and the Canossian mothers and to the intentional demolition of the unfinished girls school. The Manufai rebels, it was said, went inside the church like an open house, even stealing the images. The truth is that the Christians of Soibada had hidden them in the bush, alongside with other objects of cult. The mental exercise needed to read the missionary archive is quite explicit in the following idealized description of the encounter, published in the diocese's bulletin from the rare letters of the very same missionaries of 1912, today lost or not available:

"The missionaries recall some pathetic scenes that are really moving. After the danger passed, they went to look for those poor Christians who had hidden here and there in the bush. When they saw the priests, they looked at them as if they were angels sent by God. They cried of holy emotion, they prostrated themselves before them, they kissed their feet (...) and tried to find a hut where the missionary could celebrate the holy mysteries and give them Holy Communion!» (BGEDM 1912c: 72)

##### 5. THE MAJOR OF POETETE: SURVIVAL CATECHISM AND POLITICAL PAGANISM

The scarcity of missionaries in Timor became more and more dramatic during the first decade of the century, as the consequences of the closing up of the seminary of Sernache do Bonjardim began to be felt. Those that went away on a temporary or definitive basis, often because of sickness, were never substituted, so life became more and more desolate for those few who stayed behind. The effort to keep alive the memory of catechism and of the sacraments in the Christian communities of monarchical times was often pathetic, for those communities had no missionary of proximity, they were far from the missions geographically speaking and sometimes completely on their own, with no support whatsoever from the Church. The visits to these alleged *crisandades*, including abandoned missions for lack of personnel, became fewer and fewer, as each priest had to travel very far and with little resources. «These Christians are naturally good people but they have forgotten the religious

practice and overall the doctrine» - these sad words are exemplary of the spirit of a missionary visiting a mission that had been closed for eight years. (*BEDM* 1918: 154) In this context, it is only natural that the priests would increase their pleas for divine help and make nostalgic references to the "ancient splendour" of the missions.

The absence of the Canossian Mothers made the matters even worse. The references to the role of the Mothers as genuine missionaries and not only religious auxiliaries are frequent and emphatic. Their influence, in effect, was exercised well beyond the walls of the schools, not only in regard to the direct links of proselytism established with the mothers and other relatives of the students, but also because they followed a concrete strategy of involvement of all these Christianized women in the propagation and confirmation of faith, making them a kind of improvised catechists or custodians. These essentially feminine catholic universe did not disappear with the Republic, but they became more native and more isolated from the missions. The visit of a priest from time to time, to administer sacraments or for the special occasion of a liturgical celebration, contributed in a certain way to dignify them and to give them a certain feeling of belonging, but one can say that many of the small Christian communities would have disappeared from the map of Timor had it not been for the native feminine initiative.

Let's take a look at the example of Vé-Mácin, where two ex-students from the Canossian Mothers' School of Manatuto had reached an innovative social (and religious) status. Every Sunday they promoted litanies to Our Lady and other collective prayers. «I believe that only they maintain piety and religion amongst those crudes», wrote Father Manuel Patrício to his Bishop. As a matter of fact, the young women forcibly worked as catechists without being so officially, since the priest in one of his visits examined several children and adults for baptisms and even for first communions. He was «most surprised» with the results: «The girls in particular knew not only the formulas of catechism but also their meaning. As far as possible to childish intelligences, they had learned the sublimity of the act they were about to perform by receiving for the very first time the Most Holy Body of Jesus Christ.» (*BEDM*, 1918: 153) Be as it may, the missionary considered all this to be mere «vestiges». The pseudo-catechisms of indigenous endeavor implicated grave risks of abasement of the formulas. It was clear, by the way, that some of these Christian communities had the feeling of being left to themselves - and such a situation reinforced the eminently catholic doctrine of the superiority of the priests and the impossibility of their replacement. The notion that in many places the teaching of the doctrine survived thanks to the effort of certain Christian families, with frequent predominance of the feminine element, was at the same time a victory and a defeat.

Apart from that, the lack of a missionary superintendence of those communities led to the imperfection of the annual statistics. Leaving aside the qualitative aspects, the numbers related to the sacraments were by nature pretty rigorous, since they depended directly from the presence of a priest; but the overall accountancy of the faithful became more and more doubtful. «It is not easy to give an exact number of the Christians that exist nowadays in our *crisandades*», said the superior of the central mission of Lahane, «because the lack of staff doesn't allow us to make proper statistics.» (Neves 1923b: 42) The imperfection of the figures relating to extreme unctions was perhaps the most poignant, because of the symbolism of the *crisandades* dying through the passing away of Christians. As a consequence of the physical incapability of the priests to administer that sacrament, which required indeed a high degree of mobility, a religious doubt remained about the faith of the deceased. The extreme unctions not only disparaged the total sum but accentuated the nostalgia of the conversions made in the past: «Many Christians who were members of the old *crisandades* are dying without our knowledge... It is heartbreaking that so many efforts got lost.» (NEVES 1923b: 42, 48)

In the same letter to his Bishop, the Father of Lahane confronted the statistics of the present with those from five, ten or fifteen years ago, only to realize there was «a truly terrifying difference». The religious movement, instead of growing had been diminishing all along. Special attention was given to the number of communions, associated with the number of confessions, for it meant the «thermometer of religious life» (following a metaphor in fashion at the time). It was not only an exterior manifestation of faith by the converted, but the continued redemption of sins. The decline of communions could be attributed to the feebleness of the circumstances of the Portuguese Church in Portugal, and more so in Timor, but not to the behavior of the Christian Timorese left to themselves, with no priests to give them communion even if they wanted to.

Nevertheless, the number of conversions was the most important issue for it connected directly to the essence of the missionary activity. «The missionary is above all a preacher of the Gospel», said the Bishop of Macao, as he attested with grief that, in the beginning of the 1920s, the conversions were «few or none». (Nunes 1923: 705) The main duty of his men should be day and night «to attract the gentiles», and that wasn't happening. Such state of things, he added, could not be attributed to the lack of zeal, but to the equivocal legal situation of the missionaries, dependent as they were of the School Inspection that forced them to give four to five hours daily as primary school teachers, with no difference from metropolitan teachers so as to comply with the legislation of the Republic. (Silva 1924: 553; Nunes 1924: ) Complaining themselves about the «Byzantine» curricula conceived to European children, the missionaries felt stuck to their teaching activities, when by nature they should

lead an errant life, «all the more errant as the island of Timor was mountainous and the natives were more often than not completely scattered (...)» (Nunes 1924: xx, xxi) In a word, by absorbing almost completely the few missionaries in the colony, the schools had lost their efficacy as conversion poles. The kinship ties of the pupils (exclusively male since the departure of the Canossian Mothers) couldn't be explored in the same way. «In Timor there are really no missionaries» - said the Bishop - «there are teachers who happen to be priests». (Nunes 1923: 705)

In this picture of desolation from the catholic point of view, Father João José de Andrade made his entrance with the purpose of reopening and directing the school of Ermera, closed for several years. His first article, «O Major», reflects well enough the difficulties of the missionary activity in the republican era. The missionary dedicated it to one of the figures whose conversion to Christianity was of the most strategic interest but had not yet been obtained. It was none other than the chief of the *suco* of Poitete, one of the most important of the Ermera kingdom. «Before presenting him to the reader, let's talk a bit as someone who wants to make... history." (1920a: 16) This sentence was more profound than surely the Author thought. He started by describing in the present tense «the indigenous administrative regime» divided in kingdoms and subdivided in *sucos* that were composed by villages. «The kingdom is governed by a king or kinglet and the *suco* by a chief, under the orders of the latter, being a kind of locum tenens for he receives his orders from him, or as they say in their midst "the route" - sign of power and authority.» (Andrade 1920a: 16) He then went back to the immediate past, although «quite near to us», and to «the great authority» that the kings had «and with them the *suco* chiefs». (Father John Joseph meant the period before the military occupation, when the allied kingdoms of Portugal (and also their enemies) had effectively large autonomy). The past freedom of the kings and the *suco* chiefs to exercise internal power wasn't seen by the priest as a purely native reality: «They were honored by our government who bestowed on them titles of ranks of our Army». Translating this to an anthropological phrasing, the colonial power expressed itself specially in the spheres of ceremony and symbolism, following the vassalage logic of the *ancien régime*. Since the formal extinction of indigenous monarchies by the colonial power after the Manufai war, things had changed, evidently, in the sense that the *suco* chiefs were sanctioned or even selected directly by the colonial administration among the most loyal.

Father John Joseph had such a case to publicize, that of the chief of the *suco* of Poitete. Showing himself as sensitive to the aspects of continuity in change, he started out by explaining the title of "major". The chief of this *suco* had for a long time the Portuguese rank of colonel, but since he was the «most powerful man, the greatest» - "maior" in Portuguese - «in

land and in people (...), he began being called by the people "maior" and with time the word became "major", which is now how the chief of this *suco* is known». (Andrade 1920a: 17) In a footnote, and to reinforce this idea, the missionary wrote that some people around the chief still called him "major". Difficulties in the pronouncing of the Portuguese diphthong was perhaps at the origin of this error. His name was Loi-Lelo. He had worked his way to the top with hardships. Being «of a belicose nature and adventurous», he started a conflict with his *suco* neighbor of Fatu-Bôlo on an issue of frontiers. Defeated, he tried to take vengeance by burning a house of the enemy, but the case was brought to the attention of the colonial administrators, who ordered his prison and had him work in a farm. During the war of Manufai, «our hero» was called to Dili by the Portuguese authorities to try to alter the way the rebels of his *suco* were behaving. «These services hoisted Loi-Lelo, as they say, to the highest hierarchy of the *suco*, whose chief died at that occasion. However, there are those who say that Loi-Lelo at the time of the revolt was already in freedom and that his becoming the chief is due to his being the first of the principals of the *suco* who presented himself at the Post (military post of Ermera) leading a group of people to occupy peacefully their lands and to recognize the Portuguese dominion." (Andrade 1920a: 18)

Loi-Lelo usually wore the traditional clothes of the chiefs of the region, but on occasion he would wear a bowler hat, being followed by an assistant in a top hat. «The first time I saw the "major" with such a bizarre adornment, was when his Excellency the Governor came for his first official visit and we waited for him.» (Andrade 1920a: 20) This is certainly more than simple ethnography of "uses and customs". As much as the missionary disdained of the bowler hat as a combination of «imposing and ridiculous», it was surely a symbol in construction destined for the moments of solemn relations with the secular Portuguese power, but not with the ecclesiastic authorities. Perhaps not at a conscious level, Father John Joseph ended his snapshot with «two words about the major's character». He considered him, with his «very small intense eyes», as «smart, malicious, suspicious and self-seeking» - and that was precisely the «largest obstacle to his conversion». (Andrade 1920a: 21) In other words, Loi-Lelo was quite representative of the strategic attachment of the native leaders to the civil and military authorities to the detriment of the missionaries fallen in disfavor in the republican context.

In a most significant way, the priest tried to reach this important adult through his children. «I wanted to get inside of his house by means of the baptism of one of his sons - the one that goes to school.» But the boy, called La-Crisa, «did not go to school on the days his father was at home». His absences were then intentionally used as means of pressure towards the boy. He finally became assiduous and was baptized with the name Manuel de Jesus. «And the father? Indifferent... nothing...» The missionary saw himself as incapable of winning the

old man without divine help, so he ended with a plea to his readers to pray for the major's soul. (Andrade 1920a: 21)

## 6. MAROMAK AS GOD AND THE DEATH OF FATHER JOÃO JOSÉ

Father João José de Andrade was twenty years old when he first arrived in East Timor in 1917. He had just been ordained presbyter and then nominated as missionary to succor the colony's penury of staff. He stayed on the island for fourteen years, which were the last of his short life. In 1931, he died from typhus while working in the mission of Soibada. In the beginning of this paper, I contrasted Father John Joseph's emotional empathy towards cock fighting and Father Abílio Fernandes' eulogy of a cocks massacre by a tormented Christian-to-be who had been struggling against the temptation of cock fighting. As I approach the end of this paper, I now retake the comparison between the two men. Writing as the Superior of the Missions of Timor, Father Abílio viewed native religion through very negative lenses. To be more precise, he denied the Timorese had a religion «properly speaking». From his point of view, the fear of the dead was practically all there was to it, and from that terror was born «the respect with which they retain and keep up any object used by their ancestors, specially the spathe, the spear, the pot where they grinded the betel, the little bamboo where they kept the areca and the lime, the mat where they rested, etc., etc. All these objects are stored in a special house, *uma lúlic* (sacred house), that the Portuguese currently call *pomal*.» (Fernandes 1931: 22) Such a depiction identified an emotion - fear - in order to affirm an insurmountable gap between the indigenous ghost religion and the Christian experience of love - hiding or ignoring the fact that fear was also a component of Catholicism. All this justified the annihilation of the Timorese sacred world, supposedly centered around the *uma luliks* and their guardians, as a purely native aberration that had nothing to do with God, that is, with the Christian God. In spite of the historical crossings between the two spheres, in missionary ideology there was an absolute dichotomy between them, in particular between Catholic churches and *uma luliks*, or between Catholic priests and *dato lulik* priests. Father Abílio is therefore a foremost representative of such an attitude, which is undoubtedly connected to a broader reformatory logic of cultural destruction - as his position on cock fighting well illustrates.

Let's now consider the case of Father John Joseph. We've seen that he somehow constructed an emotional bridge between himself and some Timorese customs, notably kick fighting and cockfighting. The reader of his ethnographical snapshots is allowed to imagine the missionary's own excitement over an animal victory, when he got lost in the shouting crowd.



As a matter of fact, there was something about games in general that touched Father John Joseph's psychology. He liked to play and used games abundantly in the mission school of Soibada. He taught his Timorese children many different kinds, from the most physical ones to be played outdoors to the calmer board games, very useful in the hotter hours of the day or in rainy weather. He wrote that the «*pretinhos*», a Portuguese paternalistic word for dark-colored people and in particular for children, played them «just with the same enthusiasm as the white!». (Andrade 1925: 215) If we scratch under the surface of this apparent racism in language, we verify that Father John Joseph was once again exploring the cross-cultural power of emotions and namely the thrill of a game, whether of Portuguese creation or Timorese.

When this obscure missionary died at the age of 34, maybe something else died with him. Comparatively, he was a man with a more open attitude towards the Timorese and their culture. He never engaged himself in the destruction of *luliks* and we cannot know for sure what he thought about this problem, including the presence of very old catholic objects inside native sacred houses. But one thing we know. Just like human nature could be found anywhere through the innocent joy of a game, Father John Joseph considered that the Timorese had religious feelings as any other people. «Always and everywhere», he wrote, «man cannot and does not know how to give up the idea of his own littleness and dependence of a higher being (...).» As a creation of the human mind, such an entity could assume many different forms, more or less strange or aberrant. But also as a creation of the human mind and, more than that, as an intrinsic tendency or necessity of mankind, it was always a movement towards God, even when the resulting images were very far from His true face. «All else», he wrote, «is anti-scientific, anti-historical and even anti-human». (Andrade 1920c: 346)

In the case of the Timorese native, even though he was «half-savage and ultra-barbaric, with a *modus vivendi* that leads us to compassion, he does not forget the Supreme Being.» Father João José was thinking of a Tetum godly figure, Maromak, which was identified by later professional anthropologists as «a passive, masculine divinity that dwells in the sky» and who «intervened in human affairs on one occasion only», namely by impregnating the earth mother and thereby bringing the first men into existence. «Since that primeval moment», writes David Hicks in *Tetum Ghosts and Kin*, «the male deity has shown scant concern for his human progeny, and they reciprocate with disinterest.» (Hicks 1976: 33) Other ethnographers have reported a greater involvement with Maromak in other parts of the island, but that wasn't the case of Father John Joseph, who wrote instead that the (Tetum-speaking) Timorese were indeed rather aloof towards their own God. In spite of this indifference, almost to the point of Maromak being not much more than a word to most people, he identified him as a good divinity and testified that the natives sometimes called him

*Na'in Maromak*, Lord Maromak - or Lord God in the missionary's translation. (Andrade 1920c: 346)

All in all, Father John Joseph had no doubts there was an imbalance in Timorese religion between the distant status of Maromak and the more obsessive concern with Buan. He identified this term as representing an evil spirit, but was aware that it applied mainly to people accused of witchcraft by the «*maté dooc*», a ritual expert who read the viscera of pigs and other animals. One could be tempted to think that Father John Joseph looked at Maromak as a decadent divinity that in the long run had been forgotten or abandoned by its followers. Let's recall that there were biblical degenerationists, namely in the 19th century, who saw "savage" peoples as utterly decadent descendants of Noah's children whose religions were pathetic and spurious remains of God's primeval revelation to mankind. The starting point of Maromak, from this point of view, could have been Jehovah. But the Portuguese clergy had never been much inclined to participate in the cosmopolitan debates over anthropogenesis. At least tacitly, all indicates that Father John Joseph didn't think that biblical degenerationism was the proper explanation for the Timorese god dwelling in the sky. For him, the natives had always been on the religious track through a psychological short-circuit of their own. «Man is naturally religious», wrote the missionary. (Andrade 1920c: 344) This means that he didn't consider there was an absolute gap between Timorese own religious creations, as purely human, and Christianity as a revealed religion emanating from the manifestation of God.

I believe he was also unaware of the international turmoil, in the first decades of the 20th century, over the concept of "high god". This neo-degenerationist formula, promoted by the Scottish anthropologist Andrew Lang from 1898 onwards, was used to identify "savage" divinities that shared some characteristics of monotheistic gods, amidst an overall animistic tendency to privilege minor and "immoral" spirits. Primitive humanity, he stated, had produced independent "high gods" in different parts of the world, but in most cases their importance had decayed in favor of beings that were closer to petty human affairs. Maromak's case could be read in such light. Under the influence of the Austrian catholic priest Wilhelm Schmidt, who adapted and promoted Andrew Lang's ideas, there were indeed plenty of catholic missionaries all over the world who were influenced by the "high god" concept. But this wasn't the case of Father João José de Andrade. Forged outside the neo-degenerationist paradigm, his ideas were actually more dangerous; and it is probable that the theological and anthropological implications of his phrasing weren't fully apprehended by the readers of the ecclesiastical bulletin. What he really wanted to say was that Timorese religion, as a natural outcome of the human mind, was a perception of God, even if it was a defective perception. To speak of religion, it was therefore unnecessary to imagine a better positioned Maromak in

bygone ages. The native sacred world simply was what it was - and the Timorese «obeys and acts according to a religious idea, even if it is difficult for us to define it». (346)

Portrayed in his brief obituary as a «powerful intelligence», Father John Joseph hereby stands as a symbol of an alternative order of things. His precocious death doesn't fit into the cycle of ruins of the Portuguese catholic missions in Timor. It is not comparable, for instance, with the departure of Father Sebastian in 1910. On the contrary, what died with him was the possibility of viewing - and constructing - in a different way Timorese history, let alone missionary history in general. Instead of a succession of failed attempts to replace a "half-savage" or "barbaric" world by a "civilized" one, until the "glorious" moment where the second would finally prevail over the first, he was willing to admit the shared humanity of both and by the same token the shared transcendence of "gentile" and "Christian" religious experiences. He could have been the only missionary capable of properly translating the word *lulik* as *sacred* or *holy* in more general terms and not only in reference to indigenous items. He never did so, but he went far enough in his ethnographical writings to let us imagine a different picture of the world. A world of cultural and spiritual bridges, not of self-imposed ruptures, between what was inside an *uma lulik* and inside a church. No need to say this is all about people making places and ways of feeling the world.

## EPILOGUE

With the advent of dictatorship in Portugal in 1926, with its irreversible reinforcement of the missions' political status till the end of the colonial presence on the island, the policy of destroying *uma luliks* was to be pursued more strenuously, from the 1930s onwards, with a concomitant decay of their ritual guardians, the *makair lulik* or *dato lulik* priests. In *Tetum Ghosts and Kin*, allegedly «the first ethnography to have been published by a professional social anthropologist on East Timor», David Hicks states that by the time of his field research in the 1960s «missionary activity had brought about the abandonment or destruction of most of these sacred houses.» (Hicks (1976): ix, 43). Through an obvious attitude of rivalry between the Timorese sacred houses and the catholic churches, the missionaries indeed tended to target the *makair lulik* or *dato lulik* as their main enemies, portraying them very negatively. «The very title of *macai-lúlic*», wrote Father Abílio Fernandes under the new regime, «should be enough for them to be pursued and punished by the authorities as vultures and extremely dangerous creatures. They are confident that the natives, afraid of the terrifying revenges of the *lulik*, will never dare to denounce them. So they commit all sorts of crimes.» (Fernandes 1931: 23) These words were published in 1931, the year of the death of Father João José de

Andrade. His memory faded, his ethnographical snapshots accumulated dust for almost a century. But let the joyful sound of his «cock-a-doodle-do» echo in our ears for a brief moment.

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