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Fragments of utopia: Popular yearnings in East Timor

Douglas Kammen

Six months after the historic August 1999 referendum in which the people of East Timor voted to reject Indonesia's offer of broad autonomy, the newly appointed chief of the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor, Sérgio Vieira de Mello, commented to CNN on the enormous challenge of setting the territory on the road to independence: 'It is a test case, therefore it is even a laboratory case where we can transform utopia into reality. But I think we can try and get it right in the case of Timor.'[1] After 24 years of brutal military occupation, the suggestion that East Timor was to be a laboratory case for the United Nations might have seemed insulting, the notion of utopia absurd. Hundreds of thousands of people were without housing. Basic infrastructure lay in ruins. Commodities were scarce and those goods available were sold at grossly inflated prices. Eleven thousand foreign troops had arrived to restore security. Tens of thousands of refugees were still living in squalid camps across the border in Indonesian West Timor, many against their will. Nevertheless, Vieira de Mello's statement neatly captured the twin aspirations of the time — the independence long-dreamed of by East Timorese and the opportunity for the United Nations literally to build a state from the ground up. In the same CNN report, East Timorese Nobel Laureate José Ramos-Horta emphasised precisely this point: 'This is the first instance in the history of the UN that the UN has managed completely an entire country; and they have a [Timorese pro-independence] movement that is very cooperative, they have an exceptional people that's cooperating with them, so they cannot fail. They are condemned to succeed because failure would be disastrous for the credibility of the UN, so they simply cannot afford to fail.'[2] Utopia, it seems, had become a necessity.

The classical utopias – often set on islands at the edge of the known world – were imagined as social orders where material want has been overcome and the inhabitants are free to pursue personal expression and mental pleasures. The most famous of all utopias is the work of Sir Thomas More, published in 1516, which is narrated by a fictional Portuguese traveller named Rafael Hythloday. Five years earlier, of course, Portuguese ships had reached the great emporium of Malacca on the Malay peninsula, from where ships were sent to learn the routes to the fabled spices of the Molucca

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1 'Rebuilding East Timor is a challenge for returning refugees and citizens', CNN report aired 15 March 2000, posted on http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0003/15/i_ins.oo.html (last accessed on 4 Apr. 2007). The punctuation has been altered slightly.

2 Ibid.

islands and the sandalwood of Timor. Hythloday describes an island divided into 54 cities; the earliest accounts of Timor tell of 16 kingdoms in the western part of the island and 46 in the east. Hythloday spent several years in the capital called Amaurot, the first two syllables of which eerily mirror the names of kingdoms on Timor (Amarasi, Amabi, Amanuban, Amanatun).[3] But that is as far as the parallels go. Hythloday recounts the political and social organisation of the capital: clusters of 30 households, each represented by one syphogrant, groupings of 300 families represented by an archphilarch, the division of cities into four wards, the senate and the elected prince. 'The prince is for life', Hythloday explains, 'unless he is removed upon suspicion of some design to enslave the people.'[4]

Utopian thought, of course, is not limited to literary or political tracts. Peasant stories of a golden age can be found in many cultures, most commonly set in a distant past, but at times too in an awaited future. Christian beliefs in the coming of the millennium depict the arrival of a prophet, judgement and a time of peace, plenty and pleasure, as too do millenarian beliefs and messianism, including 'cargo cults' found in parts of the Pacific and Southeast Asia. Although several authors have mentioned millenarianism and messianism in the context of colonial rebellions and religious movements in Timor,[5] since the 1999 referendum, discussions of East Timorese politics have treated the population as 'rational actors' who have been awaiting the introduction of democracy. One exception in the scholarship is a superb recent study by Elizabeth Traube that examines how local myths about a prophet have been incorporated into accounts of the nationalist struggle, and the belief that this prophet will return to create a utopian order. This is not a vague promise set in a distant, unspecified future. This prophetic movement, Traube argues, 'drew on a more widespread expectation that [the achievement of] nationhood would usher in a general utopian transformation.'[6]

While most East Timorese rightly hoped for a better future, and while some may have dreamed of a utopian transformation, the reality remained one of poverty, unemployment and the emergence of new inequalities. On 20 May 2003, the first anniversary of (the restoration of) independence, President Gusmão bluntly summed up the situation: 'The problems of the whole country can be summarized as follows: there is little food in the fireplaces; agricultural crops are either not sold or are sold at extremely low prices; the prices of imported goods are an insult to the buying power of the population. There is no prospect for employment for our youth, and both the legal and the infrastructural conditions of the country do not attract investors.'[7]

3 The name Amaurot is derived from the Greek 'amaruroton', meaning a shadowy or unknown place. See editors' comments in Thomas More, *Utopia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, revised edition 2003), p. 5.

4 More, *Utopia*, p. 38.

5 For discussions of millenarianism and messiahs, see Jorge Barros Duarte, 'O fenómeno dos movimentos nativistas', *Sér Antropogbiologia*, Lisboa, 5 (1–2), 1987–88: 41–52; and Geoffrey Gunn, *Timor Loro Sae: 500 years* (Macau: Livros do Oriente, 1999), p. 280.

6 Elizabeth Traube, 'Unpaid wages: Local narratives and the imagination of the nation', *Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, 8, 1 (2007): 18.

7 Xanana Gusmão, 'On the occasion of the first anniversary of independence', 20 May 2003, in Xanana Gusmão, *Timor lives! Speeches of freedom and independence* (Alexandria, NSW: Longueville Books, 2005), p. 229.

A mere four years after attaining independence, the new country was plunged into a spiral of violence. The number of people killed during the crisis was relatively low – official figures are under 50 – but tens of thousands of people were displaced from their homes and places of residence. By the end of 2006, the government and aid agencies were providing humanitarian relief to 168,000 individuals — or roughly one in every six East Timorese. Thousands of homes were destroyed and many more illegally occupied. To avoid the horrific details and utter lack of direction, in Dili, this was referred to as the 'crisis', or simply the 'situation' (*situação*). Absolute levels of violence decreased during the April–May 2007 presidential elections and the June 2007 parliamentary election, but since the formation of a new coalition government led by José Alexandre 'Xanana' Gusmão in August 2007, there was a new wave of violence and displacements. Utopia would seem to be the furthest thing from anyone's mind. And yet, the current crisis may serve to highlight competing East Timorese visions of the ideal society. If Vieira de Mello's vision of the UN building utopia from the ground up has proven to be illusory, we might also ask what has happened to East Timorese visions of a radically different social order in which citizens are free from poverty, unemployment, squalor, hunger, violence, and where work gives way to pleasure, learning and art?

While Traube concedes that '"[p]rophetic movements" which anticipate a divine coming remain a minority phenomenon, officially stigmatized and marginalized by pagans and Catholics alike',[8] this paper will consider utopianism within popular East Timorese political thinking on a broader basis. To do so, this paper will first outline elite visions of a new political order before turning to explore two competing strands of utopian thought in East Timor — one that I will term 'monarchism', and a second that I will term *cultura*. These strands of utopianism do not focus on a 'root of all evil' or specific institutional arrangements *per se*, but rather offer critiques of the current Dili-centrism and propose very different sets of founding principles from which radically different social relations would follow. It would be a mistake, I believe, to dismiss these as either lingering vestiges of irrational tradition or mere propaganda. Instead, we need to take popular East Timorese political thinking seriously for the simple reason that the prolonged crisis is fundamentally a conflict over competing visions of who the East Timorese people are and who they wish to be.

The impossible dream

In the grand Palacío do Governo on the Dili waterfront, offices in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are decorated with a poster produced to celebrate Timor-Leste's independence on 20 May 2002.[9] Along the bottom of the poster is a quote from the 1996 Nobel Peace Laureates José Ramos-Horta and Bishop Carlos X.F. Belo: 'Even the most impossible dream became reality!' The poster depicts the city of Dili as seen from the sea (see Figure 1). The foreground is made up of figures: on the far left, one sees Bishop Belo and José Ramos-Horta, resistance leader Xanana Gusmão, UN Administrator Sérgio Vieira de Mello, the commander of the

8 Traube, 'Unpaid wages', p. 19.

9 I am grateful to staff in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for providing two of these posters from a water-damaged box on the floor of a cluttered storeroom.

Figure 1. The impossible dream

international peace-keeping force Peter Cosgrove, and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, all being serenaded by a man with a guitar; in the centre foreground are three women (presumably mestiça) wearing dresses and waving the new national flag; and to the right there are more abstract portrayals of Timorese – some wearing headdresses, others sarongs, and still others apparently naked – dancing the traditional *tebe-tebe* near an enormous crocodile, the symbol of Timor. Behind these figures, one sees the Dili waterfront: on the left a giant banyan tree, under which there are peasants in traditional dress, a cock-fighting pit, goats and pigs, and beyond lies the Santa Cruz cemetery; in the centre an ominous military hovercraft is docked next to the enormous Central Maritime floating hotel; and to the far right there are modern sailboats, the busy cranes of the port and finally the lighthouse. Beyond this, Dili appears: the *Palació do Governo* and modern government buildings, around which are interspersed the spires of Dili's cathedral and churches, the mosque's copper dome, a Balinese temple gate and a profusion of ritual houses with peaked roofs. As one's eye rises up the hillside, this mixture of secular modernity and the sacred becomes more abstract, culminating on the right-hand side in the shadowy outlines of two skyscrapers-to-be, jutting above even the Dare Seminary and dark green hills. The scene is framed by two classical columns, to the left of which one sees the immense Christ the King statue looking out at the world, and to the right a stark white cross.

The scene is Shangri-La by the sea, or perhaps a mini Monaco with tradition. The artist commissioned to produce the poster may be a Croatian who emigrated to Australia, but this is in every respect a luso-tropical fantasy.[10] The city gleams.

10 Carlos 'Charles' Billich was born in Lovran, Croatia in 1934 and emigrated to Australia in 1956. 'In his own auto-biographical notes, Billich tells us that as a child he identified himself with the aesthetic

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One assumes it must be run with great efficiency and boast a booming economy. There are no burned-out buildings, no street children, no angry, unemployed youth. Nor are there white UN Toyota Prados zooming by to patronise the businesses opened by foreign carpetbaggers. One imagines that after visiting the waterfront, President Gusmão, Foreign Minister Ramos-Horta and Sergio Vieira de Mello will return to the *Palació* for a chat, perhaps attend a wedding at the Cathedral, and finally gather with the mestiça cheerleaders in the wood-panelled dining room of the Vasco da Gama restaurant for *bacalhau à bras*, sardines and *vinho verde*. When the dancing and cockfights conclude, one supposes, the men and women in headdresses and sarongs will pay their respects at the Santa Cruz cemetery or perhaps at a ritual house before dispersing back into the verdant hills from where they came. At the time of independence – the achievement of which truly meant fulfilment of an impossible dream – this poster captured a vision shared by Timor's elites across party lines.

The central feature of this vision is a modern, rational state. The Portuguese colonial state, of course, was anything but modern. The upper reaches of the administration were filled by officials sent out from the metropole, the lower rungs largely occupied by mestizos and *deportados*, and villages ruled by local chiefs. Together they presided over an economy in which forced labour propped up the export of coffee and copra, but in which the state budget consistently relied on subsidies from Lisbon. Following the April 1974 Armed Forces Movement, which overthrew the Caetano dictatorship and promised a hasty decolonisation, the youthful nationalists who formed the *Associação Social Democrata Timorense* (Social-Democratic Association of Timor) adopted the motto '*unidade, acção, progresso*'. Their emblem included a gear 'symbolizing industry by which is intended the incremental movement to the harmonious development of a Timor-Leste that is truly free and independent'.[11] By contrast, the occupying Indonesian state was anything but rational. The thin façade of civilian administration and the partial Timorisation of the civil service could not conceal the fact that the territory was run by military officers intent on pacification, profit and promotions. It was against this background that, after 1999, the UN and members of the national elite began the process of state-building. Needs would be identified, studies conducted, meetings held and policies formulated. These policies would be implemented by a well-oiled and committed civil service. And of course, both policies and their implementation would be to the liking of a cooperative and appreciative citizenry. In practical terms, however, the modern, rational state meant that positions would be available for the educated based on merit, and social services provided to those living in the districts based on need.

The city, too, would be modern. In collaboration with international donors, the UN and the new Fretilin government set out to renovate destroyed government buildings. The *Palacío do Governo* was given a fresh coat of paint, the Comarca prison was

symbols of the Italian regime; as an adolescent he was enchanted by Art Deco which in Italy fell under the well-known 'Futurist' movement in the arts which for some was associated – rightly or wrongly – with the Fascist regime. Today, he is classified as a "surrealist" painter.' See http://www.istrianet.org/istria/illustri/billich/index.htm (last accessed on 5 Aug. 2008).

11 'Constituição do Governo da República Democrática de Timor-Leste', in *Timor-Leste: Uma luta heróica* (Lisbon, no date), p. 19. In Sept. 1974, the name ASDT was changed to *Frente Revolucionária de Timor Leste Independente*, abbreviated Fretilin).

renovated (for use by the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation) and the lighthouse spruced up. Regulations were announced prohibiting citizens from allowing pigs and other livestock to roam the streets. International planners descended on the city to conduct studies for the preservation of historic sites and long-term planning. In early 2006, a team of Portuguese architects and engineers from Lisbon's Technical University, funded by the Portuguese state development agency, unveiled 'daring' long-term development plans for Dili and Baucau. The first scenario called for moving the national airport from Dili to Baucau, relocating the country's main port facility form Dili to Liquiça, and replacing the 'unauthorized housing' in both cities.[12]

The UN presence and the vision of modernity of the nationalist elites privileged the capital. In their influential study *The rebellious century*, the Tillys note that Tocqueville's classic work *The old regime and the French revolution*, included a chapter titled, 'How in France, more than in any other European country, the provinces had come under the thrall of the metropolis, which attracted to itself all that was most vital in the nation.' The Tillys observe that 'A lexicon which permits "province" to mean every part of a country but a single city would be fantastic almost anywhere else.'[13] A similar usage emerged in Timor from the time of (the restoration of) independence, whereby 'the districts' came to denote everything outside of Dili. This clearly symbolised the primacy of the capital and the centrality of capturing access to the central state. Against such thinking, President Gusmão warned: 'Timor-Leste cannot exist [only] in Dili, or only in the districts.'[14]

Citizens, however, seem to pose a peculiar problem for elites dreaming of modernity. This is most clearly seen in the condescending comments made by officials about low levels of education, poor human resources and irrational behaviour. One of the most striking examples of this is a statement by then Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri a year after independence during a seminar on increasing professionalism within the national police force: 'I think that seminars like this can change the mentality of the police force which is still coloured by the legacy of the colonial mentality. I think this colonial mentality is not only in the police; the public also still has a colonial mentality.'[15] The elite's ambivalence about the population over which it rules is perhaps best illustrated by the ubiquitous photographs and artworks depicting 'traditional' Timorese, called Maubere, dressed in colourful sarongs, armbands and headdresses, and wielding machetes or swords which decorate government offices, private banks and the homes of many well-to-do Dili residents. These images may be markers of nationalism, but one cannot help but imagine the shock created if a real Maubere dressed this way were to walk into the Ministry of the Interior or the ANZ bank.

This vision of Dili as a modern city providing for the populace is not simply a product of elite imaginings: within Timorese society there were (and are) also expectations that independence would mean the state would provide for the population. It is often

12 'Development plans for Dili, Baucau unveiled', *Lusa*, 1 Feb. 2006, translation posted on http://www.etan.org/et2006/january/28/01dvelop.htm (last accessed on 30 Sept. 2008).

13 Charles Tilly, Louise Tilly and Richard Tilly, *The rebellious century, 1830–1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 25.

14 Gusmão, *Timor lives!*, p. 231.

15 Quoted in 'Warga TL masih "bermental colonial"', *Suara Timor Lorosae*, 3 June 2003.

said that during the Indonesian occupation members of the resistance told people that when East Timor won its independence everyone would live in a 'white' (i.e. modern) house in the cities. Whether this was propaganda spread by the resistance or simply a popular story spread by word of mouth, it is clear that most East Timorese believed that with independence would come prosperity. In the words of Elizabeth Traube:

> Such hopes were often depicted in negative, condescending terms, as a foolish belief that all desires would be instantly gratified with independence, that things would henceforth 'simply appear' (*mosu de'it*). Thus political leaders, church authorities, indeed, anyone aspiring to be a 'modern' subject would frequently construct 'the people' as the Other, the backward, uneducated, irrational masses who did not understand that progress demands continuous discipline and sacrifice and who expected immediate rewards.[16]

For the nationalist elite, the outbreak of violence in April–May 2006 and the prolonged crisis have revealed Dili's failure to be the site of modernity and rationality. In this context, the impossible dream has taken on greater urgency. A first example of this is seen in plans to address the problem of internally displaced persons. In August 2006, the Ministry of Labour and Solidarity produced a document stating that there were 168,000 internally displaced persons, a truly remarkable figure given that according to the 2004 national census, the population of Dili was 175,000. Proposals were then made to build semi-permanent housing for refugees in Hera, to the east of Dili, and in Tibar, to the west of Dili. There may not be anything utopian about semi-permanent housing (and the experience in many countries is that semi-permanent quickly becomes permanent housing), but in an important sense, this plan conforms to the elite vision of the future: it facilitates the removal of tens of thousands of 'unwanted' people from the districts who occupied empty and abandoned houses after 1999 and formed an embarrassing, and at times threatening, lumpenproletariat. The removal of even part of this lumpenproletariat into apartheid beyond the Dili hills rescues the city for the modern elite.

A second example involves the beautification of Dili. In early November 2006, as violence continued in Dili, Prime Minister José Ramos-Horta announced that the vast parking lot in front of the Palácio do Governo was to be turned into a park. 'We are transforming this beautiful area into what it once was, when the Portuguese were here. These parks will provide a place of peace and beauty for everyone. There will be lighting, gardens, chairs and tables. I hope families will enjoy this beautiful area.' He went on to explain that security guards would be posted to ensure safety: 'We will have 60 security guards mainly from the districts. They will dress in their traditional clothes and be there 24 hours a day.'[17] This is eerily reminiscent of the colonial practice of posting 'moradores', or traditional soldiers conscripted by local rulers, wearing only short *lipa* (sarongs), anklets, headdresses and bearing swords, who stood at attention in the blistering sun in front of the Governor's palace (see Figure 2). On completion, the park turned out to be a concrete slab, blistering hot under the tropical sun and slick in a torrential downpour.

16 Traube, 'Unpaid wages', p. 18.

17 'Palácio do Governo front park being transformed', *Guide Post*, Nov. 2006, p. 6. The budget for the new park was reported to be US$660,000; reported in 'Jardin Palacio Do Governo transforma ba ema hotu', *Suara Timor Lorosae*, 7 Dec. 2006.

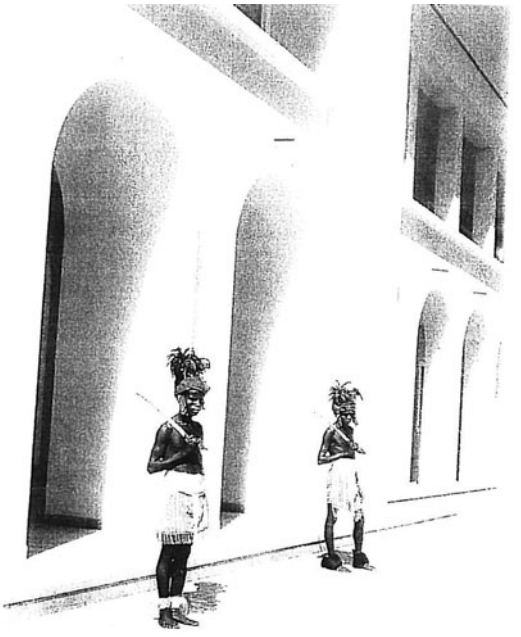

Figure 2. Morador guarding the *Palacío do Governo*[18]

Ironically, as the crisis deepened, visions of a brilliant future persisted. In mid-2007, computer-generated pictures circulated on the internet depicting dazzling ultra-modern housing to be built along the beach to the east of Dili (see Figure 3). Soon thereafter, during the national election campaign, Xanana Gusmão's party CNRT put up campaign banners that included more such images. One of these – titled 'Liberate the Homeland, Liberate the People!' – shows glistening glass skyscrapers on a pristine waterfront (see Figure 4). Other banners show Xanana Gusmão in military fatigues in front of satellites, rockets and jet-fighters bearing the East Timorese flag.

A third example of the latent tension between elite visions of modernity and reality involved efforts to end the violence and encourage the tens of thousands of internally displaced people to vacate the squalid camps. After repeated promises, cajoling and even threats by the state failed to resolve the crisis, in late 2006, President Gusmão appealed to tradition to end the violence. The reason for the ongoing violence, it was suggested, was that weapons taken out and given blessings for use in 1975 – first by Timorese against other Timorese, and later for use against the invading and occupying Indonesian forces – had not been properly decommissioned. Throughout early December, regional committees carried out a 'Sharp and Pointy Weapons Programme' [*Programa Halot Meik no Kroat*], in which ceremonies were held in the regions to return machetes and spears to their scabbards. Sadly, neither the rational, modern state nor these ceremonies appealing to tradition proved successful and violence continued.

18 Photograph from Luís Filipe F.R. Thomaz, 'Timor: O Protectorado Português', in *História dos Portugueses no Extremo Oriente, 2° Volume: Macau e Timor. O declínio do Império* (Lisbon: Fundação Oriente, 2001), p. 519.

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Figure 3. Computer-generated image of future housing

Figure 4. 2007 CNRT campaign banner

Against this elite vision of progress and modernity, competing visions of Timorese society have not only persisted but flourished, and it is to these that the remainder of this article will turn.

King of kings

One strand of utopianism in East Timorese political thinking might be glossed as 'monarchism'. This involves an intermingling of claims of descent from a great kingdom, reverence for ancient royal regalia given to local rulers by the Portuguese, the colonial promotion of feudal indirect rule, confusion sown by the overthrow of the Bragança monarchy in 1910, and from 1975 until the present an eclectic and eccentric reading of local politics within a much larger lens of global affairs. East Timorese have

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drawn on these elements to produce images of a radically different social order in which chaos and poverty give way to harmony and prosperity. Before considering contemporary monarchist visions, it is first necessary to provide a brief overview of historical antecedents.

With the opening of trade routes in India and the east, the Portuguese encountered a series of powerful kingdoms — the Moghul court, Kotte and Kandi, the Buddhist courts of Ava and Ayutthaya, the Sultanate of Aceh, Mataram, the Sultanate of Gowa, the Middle Kingdom ruled by the Son of Heaven and the Tokugawa Court. Portuguese scribes may have noted the local names and differing conceptions of power, but these were all understood as being realms, domains and kingdoms with a hierarchy of kings (*rei/regulo*), vassals (*vassalos*) and subjects (*almas* [souls], *reino*, *povo*). The Portuguese response in the 'islands at the end of the world', as the Solor and Timor islands were known, was no different. The earliest Portuguese documents first identified a 'King of Timor' based in Mena, and later two 'imperial' realms — Servião in the east and Belos in the west. The historical record and research suggest that Wehale was a 'feminine' centre of ritual power, under which there were subordinate 'male' kingdoms.[19] When the Portuguese sacked Wehale in 1642, members of the royal family are said to have fled east, marrying into the families of local chiefs. Indigenous claims of legitimacy have frequently appealed to descent from Wehale, even in cases where this is highly improbable.[20]

Monarchy in Timor was in large part a product of the Portuguese empire in Asia. Following the appointment of the first Portuguese Governor in 1702, local rulers were granted military titles (Capitão Mor, Tenente, etc.). When the Portuguese fled Lifau and moved their capital to Dili in 1769, they sought to incorporate local rulers (*liurai*) into a system of vassalage by granting titles, patents and symbols of royalty in return for loyalty, manpower and access to trade networks. The quintessential grant was a sceptre (*rota*) symbolising rule. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Portuguese granted *rota* to vassals and sub-vassals, creating what Shephard Forman has described as 'a nested hierarchy of domains in which local "lords of the land" were given lesser titles of military rank and insignias of office in successive campaigns of pacification'.[21] But *rota* were not only distributed by colonial rulers and their vassals; Timorese also produced them, in some cases down to the household level, disseminating the very idea of monarchism and producing enormous potential for conflict.[22] This was the feudalisation of Timor in the image of medieval Portugal. There has been fierce competition up to the present over royal paraphernalia, simultaneously symbolising and fuelling monarchism in Timorese political thinking.

19 See H.G. Schulte Nordholt, 'The symbolic classification of the Atoni of Timor', in *The flow of life: Essays on eastern Indonesia*, ed. James J. Fox (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 231–65.

20 According to some accounts, Xanana Gusmão is one such descendant of Wehale.

21 Shepard Forman, 'East Timor: Exchange and political hierarchy at the time of the European discoveries', in *Economic exchange and social interaction in Southeast Asia: Perspectives from prehistory, history and ethnography*, ed. Karl Hutter (Ann Arbor: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, 1971), p. 108.

22 I would like to thank Janet Gunter for this valuable insight. Gunter elaborates on this in an unpublished article, '*Kabita-Kaburai, de cada dia*: Indigenous hierarchies and the Portuguese in Timor', pp. 7–9.

One of the most extraordinary instances of this involves royal patents that, although increasingly rare, are still held by some families. It would be quite understandable for families holding such patents dating back centuries to harbour disdain for poor Portuguese colonial officers or, worse yet, deportees from Lisbon. Monarchism was an ideological response to the increasingly painful humiliation of an impoverished colonialism.

The overthrow of the House of Bragança in 1910 created a terrifying crisis in Portuguese Timor. The governor was reluctant to announce the Republic, only doing so under pressure from a small but vocal modernist faction. Most civil servants and military personnel in the farthest reaches of the empire were conservative by nature and poorly informed about change in the metropole. But the abolition of monarchy was most deeply felt by Timor's burgeoning royalty. No longer would they be able to requisition labour at will or administer the collection of local taxes unmolested, and the school for the sons of *liurai* would either be closed or enrolment opened to non-nobles. The proclamation of the Republic did bring changes — the seizure of Church property by the state, the partial transformation of traditional rulers into colonial civil servants, and most importantly, new impetus for the head tax established in 1908. Although the *liurai* played a leading role in many regions, it was the aggressive expansion of the head tax rather than monarchism or nationalism (as is often claimed) that was the primary cause of the great rebellion in 1911–12.[23]

In contrast to the declaration of the Republic, the Japanese occupation of Portuguese Timor presented the *liurai* with new opportunities. Across Portuguese Timor, *liurai* not only collaborated with the Japanese military, but viewed their presence as a chance to evict the long-time white overlords and reestablish royal authority. Following the Japanese surrender in 1945, the returning Portuguese regime wasted little time in punishing collaborators, including large numbers of *liurai*, who were sent into internal exile on Atauro island.[24] This, however, did little to dampen monarchism within East Timorese political thinking, in part because the nested system of 'little kings' had already taken root, in part too because the Portuguese lavished praise on those *liurai* who had remained loyal to their colonial masters.

The overthrow of the Caetano dictatorship in Lisbon in April 1974 was greeted in Portuguese Timor by a rush to establish political parties. In mid-1974, a number of *liurai* formed the Popular Association of Monarchists of Timor (*Associação Popular Monarquica de Timor*), which later changed its name to Sons of the Mountain Warriors (*Klibur Oan Timor Aswain*, abbreviated KOTA). The monarchists argued for '[a]n indirect electoral process [that] would allow each tribe to choose a chief from a hereditary line of males; the chiefs would then choose the parliamentary representatives from among themselves; and the parliamentary members

23 On the rebellion of 1911–12, see René Pélissier, *Timor en guerre: Le crocodile et les Portugais (1847–1913)* (Orgeval, France: 1996), pp. 254–7, and Katharine Davidson, 'The Portuguese colonisation of Timor: The final stage, 1850–1912' (Ph.D. diss., National University of Australia, 1994), especially ch. 8.
24 Although complete data on *liurai* punished for collaboration are not available, the scope can be gauged in reverse from the relatively small number of *liurai* and village heads who subsequently received lavish praise for their loyalty to Portugal. See, for example, Luna de Oliveira, *Timor na história de Portugal*, vol. IV (Lisbon: Fundação Oriente, 1999), pp. 185, 193–7.

would choose the King'.[25] While most foreign observers dismissed the party as 'traditionalist, conservative and anything but popular',[26] journalist Bill Nichol suggested that, if not for their own ineptitude and the administration's refusal to allow the party time on Radio Timor, 'the Monarchists could have attracted the largest number of supporters of any political movement in Timor'.[27] The potential of monarchism is illustrated by a KOTA rally held on 26 January 1975, in which as many as 10,000 people in traditional dress danced to the beat of drums in the park in front of the *Palacío do Governo*. During the rally a message to the Portuguese people was read out, part of which stated:

> In the Oath celebrated between the *regulos* (rajas) and the Portuguese of the bygone era, figured a compromise of honour undertaken to carry out by both parts equally. From the Timorean part, there was a performance of compromise as sealed up by the Timorean *regulos* of yore with the first Portuguese callers who set their feet on this land. The Oath was accomplished with blood-letting of both Timorean regulos and the Portuguese elements present, mixed with wine, and such mixed wine was shared and drunk by all jurors, thus sealing the Pact of Eternal Alliance amongst the people who made contact and got known. In compliance of their compromise, Timorean people have shown their almost religious and undying love and consecration to the Flag of Portugal, including sacrifices offered in holocaust on the altar of the Portuguese Fatherland, throughout the history of colonization…[28]

This was not simply a longing for a bygone day of kings and social order or a call for the establishment of an anachronistic political system like the Sultanate of Brunei. In an interview in 2003, KOTA leader Clementino dos Reis Amaral claimed that the party was established in response to the dangerous polarisation in the territory between the pro-western Timorese Democratic Party (*União Democratica Timorense*, UDT) and the allegedly pro-communist Revolutionary Front of an Independent East Timor (*Frente Revolucionaria de Timor-Leste Independente*, Fretilin). According to Amaral, the party leaders believed that monarchy provided an alternative whereby Timor could avoid ideological conflicts, and this could ultimately provide an example to the world of how the Cold War might be overcome.[29] Neither was to be the case. Under the Indonesian occupation, hereditary rulers within the pro-integration party Apodeti were appointed to the puppet administration, and over time, *liurai* were invited to Jakarta and blood ties with local rulers on nearby islands were celebrated. But under the occupying regime there was no place for monarchism as a political ideal.

Remarkably, two weeks after Indonesian President B.J. Habibie's January 1999 announcement that he was willing to hold a referendum on the future of East Timor, the Macau East Timor Association sponsored the First Convention of East Timorese Traditional Rulers. *Asiaweek* reported, 'As some sort of autonomy becomes a possibility for the province, the chiefs – who are still respected in the rural areas – are considering

25 Bill Nicol, *Timor: The stillborn nation* (Victoria: Widescope International Publishers, 1978), p. 52.
26 James Dunn, *Timor: A people betrayed* (Milton, Qld: The Jacaranda Press, 1983), p. 75.
27 Nicol, *Stillborn nation*, p. 52.
28 KOTA, 'Message … for the Portuguese People', quoted in Nichol, *Stillborn nation*, p. 53.
29 Interview with Clementino dos Reis Amaral, 2002.

ways of reasserting their influence. Discussions in Macau ranged from self-government to economics and defense – and the establishment of a senate of liurais.'[30]

Although KOTA remains active, today monarchist utopian thought is best illustrated by the Timorese Peoples' Party and its president, Jacob Xavier.[31] Xavier was born in Hatumera village, Ainaro District in 1936 and given the name Eduardo. In 1948, he was baptised Francisco Xavier, but has used the name Jacob Xavier throughout his adult life. After attending primary school in Ainaro, Xavier studied at the seminary in Soibada, the higher seminary in Dare, and earned a degree in theology from the Seminary of Saint Joseph in Macau. Returning to Timor in the early 1960s, Xavier first taught at the Dr Machado Senior High School in Dili for two years and then served as the Administrator of Luro Sub-District in Lautem for another four years. He takes particular pride in having sought to curtail the despotism of the traditional village chiefs. 'When I was a sub-district administrator I often fought against the Portuguese [colonial] government and the *liurai* who whipped the common people.' In 1967, he was conscripted for military training in Portugal, after which he was posted in Dili and then again in Portugal. He was appointed to be a district administrator in Angola in 1970, a position he held until Angolan independence in 1975. According to his followers, Xavier signed the document granting Angola independence from Portugal, for which he was arrested and briefly imprisoned in Portugal. After his release from prison, Xavier claims to have completed a doctoral degree in theology at a Catholic University in Portugal, a second doctoral degree at Coimbra University (for which he wrote a thesis about civil rights), and in 1991, yet another doctoral degree in Canonical Law from Macau.

In 1979, while still in Portugal, Xavier was involved in the formation of the Dili Timor National Liberation Movement (*Movimento Nacional da Libertação de Timor Dili*), but left the group because of internal disputes.[32] In 1985, he established the *Movimento Popular Timor-Leste* (Timor-Leste Popular Movement), taking the movement's blue and white flag (which closely resembled the royal flag of the Bragança

30 'Less-timid Timorese', *Asiaweek*, 26 Feb. 1999. See also, 'East Timor: Ramos Horta sends message to meeting of "liurais" in Macau', *Lusa*, 11 Feb. 1999, translation posted on http://www.etan.org/et/1999/february/8-14/11ramos.htm (last accessed on 5 Aug. 2008). In an interview in 2007, KOTA President Manuel Tilman insisted that the first *liurai* conference had been held in 1998 and a second conference in Peniche, Portugal, in Apr. 1998. This seems to be an attempt to claim that the *liurai* were active prior to Indonesian President Soeharto's resignation and that the *liurai* conference paved the way for the formation of National Council for Timorese Resistance (*Conselho Nacional da Resistência Timorense*). Information kindly provided by Selma Hayati, who attended the February 1999 conference in Macau and interviewed Manuel Tilman on 11 February 2007 in Dili.

31 The discussion in the following three paragraphs draws on 'Dr. Jacob Xavier: Budaya Timor harus direfleksikan dalam konstitusi', *Cidadaun* No. 13, first week of Nov. 2001, p. 4.

32 The establishment of MNTLD in Portugal may have been related to the emergence of clandestine networks in Dili (involving some former UDT members/sympathisers, with alleged links to Deputy Governor of East Timor, Francisco Lopes da Cruz) that participated in the 10 June 1980 attack on the broadcasting facility in Maribia military barracks in Becora. In 2003, Jacob Xavier voted against legislation on former combatants because it failed to include data on MNTLD. See *Suara Timor Lorosae*, 1 Dec. 2005, quoted in UNOTIL Daily Media Review. Note also the close similarity between MNLTD and a group called *Movimento Libertação Timor Dili*, which Mari Alkatiri claims was organised in Lisbon prior to 1975. See CAVR, *Chega! Final report of the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in East Timor*, part 3, p. 26 and footnote 84 for sources.

dynasty) to the United Nations.[33] The following year was a turning point in Xavier's life and political claims. 'Fifty years after being born', he explained, 'some Portuguese and American family members told me I was the true heir to the Portuguese throne. I didn't believe it, but then I investigated and today I have no doubts.'[34] By virtue of his right to the Bragança throne, he is also related to the English royal family. An article in the Lisbon daily *Lusa* explains that the English royal family had a bar of uranium given by the Kennedys installed into Xavier's head. The reason, according to Xavier, is '[t]o be always contactable and to be oriented by the best principles'.[35]

In 2000, Xavier returned to Timor-Leste and eagerly plunged into the political fray. When he learned that the Timor-Leste Popular Movement did not meet the requirements to register for the 2001 election, together with several associates, he established the Timor Peoples' Party (*Partido Povo Timor*). The party's Secretary General, Francisco Pinto, is a descendant of the *liurai* of Uatucarbau, in Viqueque. Xavier's eccentric claims fuelled the party's campaign in the 2001 election. During the campaign he told audiences that his sacred house (*uma lulik*) was Buckingham Palace, and that when his party won the upcoming election, Buckingham Palace would send large bank transfers to Timor. But bank transfers were only the beginning. He believes that gold from Timor, to which he personally has a claim, was stolen and was used to establish the World Bank. 'I am owner of the World Bank', he explained on television. 'Tomorrow whoever would like money can go request it at my bank.' The next day a crowd gathered at the gate of the World Bank compound in Dili. 'They only didn't give them the money because I am still in court to reclaim possession of my bank. But the people that went there came with a paper from the bank saying that they were there and when the bank is mine again I will give them the money.'[36] The claim caused sufficient consternation that the World Bank representative in Dili issued a public denial of Xavier's claim. Today Xavier is best known for yet another banking scheme: he argues that Timor needs to have two banks – one for royalty (*liurai*) and the other for the common people – earning him the popular name 'Mr. Two Banks'.

Xavier's electoral promises in 2001 proved to be surprisingly successful and PPT won more than 9,000 votes (mostly in Ainaro, Oecusse and Dili), gaining two seats in the Constituent Assembly, which was later transformed into the National Parliament. He has been an active and vocal member of parliament. Despite the monarchist views shared by PPT and KOTA, Xavier's claims about stolen wealth have brought the two party presidents into conflict. On 5 May 2005, *Timor Post* reported: 'The President of KOTA party, Manuel Tilman, has narrowly missed being attacked for the second time by members of the Timor People's Party (PPT) over PPT's claims that he is hoarding over $2 million stolen from two bank accounts in the United Kingdom. Approximately 20 members of PPT surrounded Tilman outside his home on Wednesday morning demanding to know where he has put the money. Tilman

33 Interview with Francisco Pinto, 20 Dec. 2006, Dili. Some authors use the slightly different name, *Movimento do Povo de Timor-Leste*.

34 'The heir to the throne of Portugal and the owner of the World Bank was also elected', *Lusa*, 8 Sept. 2001. I am grateful to Janet Gunter for translating this article.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

told *Timor Post* that he immediately called the police and due to their quick action, he was not assaulted. He said that Jacob Xavier, President of PPT, must take responsibility for the latest incident, adding that Xavier needs medical assistance, as sometimes he is normal while at other times he exhibits signs of being ill.'[37]

In 2006 Xavier was already campaigning for the yet-to-be-scheduled 2007 elections. A foreign friend of mine attended a PPT rally in the small town of Casa, after which he found himself eating lunch with Jacob Xavier. The stories flowed fast: Xavier explained that he has a computer in his body, a detachable penis, and that he has written a book about 'where God lives'.[38] When I asked PPT Vice-President Francisco Pinto about the party platform, he explained that PPT wants there to be two banks, wants the Ten Commandments to be enforced, and is anti-communist. When I pressed for more details, he and his friends said that they did not know, explaining that Jacob Xavier studied theology and speaks in 'high' language that they do not understand.[39]

Whether one is sympathetic to monarchism or not, it would be a mistake to underestimate the extent to which these views resonate within East Timorese society. Xavier and his party PPT threw their support behind KOTA's Manuel Tilman in the first round presidential election on 9 April. Tilman received 16,534 votes, or 4 per cent of the total number of valid votes, polling first in seven villages in Ainaro District. In the July parliamentary election the Democratic Alliance of KOTA and PPT won 3.2 per cent of the total, earning them two of the 66 seats in the national parliament.[40]

Cultura

A second strand of utopian thought in East Timorese political thinking is premised on the unique mystical powers of the land and objects. Power, it is argued, is not inherent in individuals, human relations or wealth, but rather emanates from the 'sacred land' (*rai lulik*) and sacred, or *lulik*, objects of Timor. It must be summoned and tapped to bring the greatness of the homeland and its people to fruition. Appeals to this indigenous source of power typically emphasise its existence but say little about how, once unleashed, it will reorder society. In 1974, such conceptions of power were at times called on by the political parties. For Fretilin, which looked to social democracy as a vehicle for the modernity that Portuguese colonial rule had failed to produce, this theme emerged tangentially in speeches and radio broadcasts. José Ramos-Horta, who almost single-handedly produced and controlled Fretilin press statements, once announced that after achieving independence Fretilin would 'open' the sacred Mount Ramelau and distribute the riches within to the populace.[41] The monarchist party Sons of the Mountain Warriors (*Klibur Oan Timur Aswain*,

37 Summarised in UNOTIL Daily Media Reports, 5 May 2005.
38 I am grateful to Leong Kar-yen for this information.
39 Interview with Francisco Pinto, 6 Dec. 2006, Dili.
40 José Ramos-Horta emerged as a landslide victor in the second round presidential run-off. Four parties dominated the parliamentary election: Fretilin received 20 per cent of the vote, Gusmão's newly formed CNRT won 24 per cent, the ASDT-PSD coalition won 15 per cent and PD won 11 per cent, which translated into 21, 18, 11 and 8 parliamentary seats respectively. CNRT, ASDT-PSD and PD formed a coalition government, headed by Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão.
41 Nicol, *Stillborn nation*, p. 159. The author does not provide a date for this statement.

KOTA) called on what Jill Jolliffe has termed 'mystical rites of the traditional culture'.[42] (In contrast, the pro-Indonesian party Apodeti explicitly argued against such a position on grounds that 'the existing culture of traditional mysticism of our Timorese ancestors … has been forgotten…'[43]).

Since 1999, East Timorese have made frequent appeals to tradition and culture. The anti-government organisation CPD-RDTL has fashioned a populism that celebrates the symbols of 1975 against the cynical machinations of the Dili elite. The Social Democratic Association of Timor (ASDT), established by Francisco Xavier do Amaral (who was the first president of ASDT/Fretilin in 1974–75), celebrates Maubere — the Timorese personification of the poor, downtrodden sons of the earth. The monarchist party KOTA flies two flags – one for the party, the other a black flag representing Timorese 'culture' – and proposed that the constitution acknowledge and maintain 'traditional culture'.[44] Since 1999, however, this vision of a radically different social order derived from the mystical powers of Timor has often been associated with a group called Colimau 2000. Although it is generally accepted that the *Comando Libertasaun Maubere* (abbreviated Colimau) was involved in the resistance against the Indonesian occupation, it has been portrayed by the government, the United Nations and the press as a 'disaffected group' that had been involved in security disturbances.[45] Because the name, leadership and beliefs of the group have undergone a series of extraordinary transformations, it will be useful first to trace what is known about the group before examining the utopian vision made in the name of 'culture'.

The organisation and at least some of its beliefs have their origins in a religious group called *Sagrada do Coração de Jesus* (Sacred Heart of Jesus), formed in the mid-1980s by a man named Martinho Vidal in the Hatu Builico area of Ainaro District. In addition to Martinho, there were initially 12 members in the group. Over time, three of the members became involved in clandestine activities: one based in Colimau village in Bobonaro, one in the central sector, and one in the east. While other clandestine groups drew on magic, the members of *Sagrada do Coração de Jesus* placed their faith in one God and took Jesus as their symbol and protector. In 1994 or 1995, the Bobonaro District Military Command began to use the name Colimau to refer to people involved in the clandestine resistance. Drawing sustenance from their belief that there is only one God, the members of SCJ increased their activities. At some point in the 1990s, Martinho allegedly had a dream that in the year 2000 Timor-Leste would win its freedom from Indonesian

42 Jill Jolliffe, *East Timor: Nationalism and colonialism* (St. Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1978), p. 67.

43 Ibid., p. 64.

44 Clementino dos Reis Amaral argued, 'We are not suggesting this because we have ambitions to become like kings of old. But the constitution should give authority to traditional leaders who are village heads and hamlet heads so that they can resolve cases that arise.' Quoted in 'Usulan Kota untuk lestarikan kultur tradisional TL ditolak', *Suara Timor Lorosae*, 13 Dec. 2001.

45 In an annex titled, 'Descriptions of key disaffected groups', a USAID report describes Colimau 2000 as 'a small sect with animist beliefs' that believes that 'fallen independence fighters will come alive again and return from the forests to lead them'. See Michael Brown *et al.*, 'Conflict assessment: East Timor', produced for USAID/East Timor and USAID Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation, 18 May 2004, p. 52.

colonialism. After this dream, Martinho called a meeting at a cave in Ai Turi Laran, on the outskirts of Dili, to which he invited his 12 followers and a number of market vendors. Those present believed that the dream was a prophecy. Word spread in Dili's markets.[46] The prophecy and millenarian dream of independence in 2000 also spread back to the village of Colimau and beyond. In November 1998, one of the SCJ/Colimau organisers played a central role in a highly controversial attack on the Indonesian military in Alas, in which a number of weapons were stolen from the Sub-District Military Command. At the time of the attack in Alas, SCJ members gathered to pray in the cave at Ai Turi Laran.[47]

There are many competing accounts of the origins and development of Colimau during the Indonesian occupation. According to one of these versions, there were three founding members, the most important of whom was staunchly pro-American. This individual is alleged to have been present at the 1983 cease-fire agreement when Falintil commander Xanana Gusmão met with Governor Mario Carrascalão. The leaders and followers of Colimau are good people, it is said, because they want justice. What makes this call for justice unique is that it is a demand that justice be served to all parties that have committed crimes or violated rights — the Timorese parties to the conflict in 1975 (UDT, Fretilin and Apodeti), Indonesia, as well as Australia.[48] This focus on justice gave rise to the name Colimau Lia Loos — True Colimau or Colimau for Truth.

When the results of the August 1999 referendum were announced, it seemed that Martinho's prophecy was to be fulfilled a year early. In the violence after the referendum, the organiser who had once been based in Colimau village was killed and the others scattered, some seeking refuge in the hills and others fleeing to West Timor, where some remain to this day. Although the original members of SCJ/Colimau fell inactive, in 2000 a younger generation, including Gabriel Fernandes, Osorio Leki and Bruno Magalhães, was quick to take up the Colimau banner, giving rise to the new name Colimau 2000.

In 2001, this new generation of Colimau activists developed links with the *Associação dos Antigos Combatentes* (Association of Former Combatants), an unofficial veterans' organisation patronised by Rogerio Lobato, brother of deceased Fretilin Prime Minister Nicolao Lobato. Rogerio was the highest ranking East Timorese in the Portuguese military in Timor before the Indonesian invasion, served briefly as Minister of Defence, and then left the country in December 1975, spending the next 24 years squabbling with other Fretilin leaders overseas. He returned to Timor in 2000 and immediately sought to build a personal basis of support among veterans, martial arts groups and unemployed youth, at times using the name *Força Base de Apoio* (Forces of the Resistance Bases) and later AAC. In the months before the transfer of sovereignty from the United Nations to the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, AAC brought hundreds of self-proclaimed veterans into Dili, where they were drilled and then marched in the streets, much to the dismay of Dili

46 It is interesting to note that beginning in 1994, there were a series of market riots in East Timor in which East Timorese attacked Indonesian vendors who had entered the territory after the 1989 'normalisation' of Timor.

47 All information in this paragraph is from an interview with Meta Mali, 26 Dec. 2006, Aileu.

48 Confidential interview, 15 Aug. 2006, Dili.

residents and the UN. At the time of independence, Rogerio Lobato was a surprise selection as Minister of Internal Affairs. Ordered to leave Dili after independence, Colimau and AAC were soon involved in violent incidents against other clandestine organisations in Atabae, Maliana and Suai, resulting in the arrest of a number of Colimau leaders.[49]

As reporting about Colimau intensified, rumours soon spread in Dili about Colimau activities at a location called Orsenaco – an acronym derived from the complete name *Organisação Resistência Social Nacional Cooperativa* – near Turiscai, in the central highlands. Some people said that Colimau 2000 was building 'sacred houses' to represent each region of Timor. In other accounts, Colimau had established an agricultural commune, with work shared equally between members, had its own bishop and priests, rejected the Timorese government and refused outsiders entrance to the area. The Catholic Church took this as a serious threat. During mass at the Dili Cathedral in August 2002, the Vicar General of Dili told his congregation that Colimau 2000 is 'not only a political organization, but also a sect that rejects the universal mission of the church'. Colimau, he explained, has its own bishop, priests and nuns, tells followers to reject the Catholic Church, and believes that 'in 2003 God's son will descend to earth'.[50] These accusations were denied by one of the original members of SCJ/Colimau, who provided an abbreviated version of the organisations origins and participation in the resistance.[51]

Official concern about Colimau 2000 increased in late 2002 following highly public elite friction and rioting in which the Prime Minister's house was burned down. In early January 2003, reports emerged that Colimau was extorting money from villagers in Atsabe, Ermera District, and charges were levelled that the group had connections to pro-Indonesian militia in West Timor. President Gusmão responded by ordering the military (F-FDTL) to resolve the problem. The military operation netted 31 individuals accused of being Colimau members, all of whom were subsequently released because of a lack of evidence.[52] Further arrests followed in Covalima District, including individuals identified by the prosecutor as being the Bishop of Colimau, the Commander-in-Chief of Colimau, a man who claimed to be Jesus Christ and a woman who claimed to be Mary.[53] In March, an Indonesian military officer in West Timor announced that Bruno Magalhães had travelled to Atambua, West Timor, to meet with militia leaders and to purchase weapons. On his return to Dili, Bruno was again arrested and detained for five months, but was eventually found not guilty and released. In a subsequent interview, Bruno provided a bizarre explanation: the militia were in fact created by the pro-independence resistance in order to foment instability; senior militia leaders were actually pro-independence;

49 On these incidents, see 'Rakyat Bobonaro diteror', *Suara Timor Lorosae*, 18 June 2002; '11 anggota Colimau ditangkap', *Suara Timor Lorosae*, 28 June 2002; and 'Kolimau 2000 kontinua ataka povu Maliana', *Suara Timor Lorosae*, 26 July 2002. Bruno Magalhães was arrested in Suai on 7 July 2002. Gabriel Fernandes was arrested in late July and detained for 30 days.

50 Quoted in 'Colimau 2000 tantangan berat bagi Igreja TL', *Suara Timor Lorosae*, 14 Aug. 2002.

51 See statements by Meta Mali in 'Colimau 2000 tak lawan pemerintah dan gereja', *Suara Timor Lorosae*, 3 Sept. 2002.

52 'Lagi, 16 pengacau ditangkap', *Suara Timor Lorosae*, 16 Jan. 2003; and '31 anggota Kolimau 2000 diadili', *Suara Timor Lorosae*, 18 Jan. 2003.

53 Reported in '18 penganut aliran "ganjil" diadili', *Suara Timor Lorosae*, 1 Feb. 2003.

and it was now necessary to reassemble all resistance groups under the banner *Cruzeiro de Sul* (Southern Cross), based in Orsenaco.[54] Following the highly public vilification and arrests, Colimau 2000 disappeared from the political scene.[55]

In early 2006, members of the army petitioned the president about alleged discrimination against soldiers from the western districts (Loromonu) by commanding officers from the east (Lorosae), resulting in the summary dismissal of soldiers. During a five-day protest in front of the *Palacío do Governo*, hundreds of sacked soldiers were joined by relatives and sympathisers, including individuals associated with Colimau 2000. Former Colimau 2000 front-man Osorio Lequi called for the resignation of Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri and Bruno Magalhães procured a banner reading, 'Anti-communist, anti-terrorist'. On the fifth day of the demonstration, rioting broke out, shots were fired and the army was called in to restore order, further exacerbating the situation. Minister of Foreign Affairs José Ramos-Horta first issued a press release blaming Colimau 2000 for the disturbance, though a week later in an address to the UN in New York, he blamed PDRT, a political party formed a year earlier by several former Colimau 2000 leaders. In May, the issue of easterners against westerners was played out in clashes between the army and the police, the distribution of weapons to civilians and communal violence that forced tens of thousands of people to flee their homes. These multiple pressure points eventually resulted in the arrival of an Australian-led peace-keeping force and the resignation of Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri. It was in this atmosphere of violence and state paralysis that the youthful leaders of Colimau 2000/PDRT, now operating under the banner of the Movement for National Unity, organised protests demanding that the national flag be altered to include a cross.

Aside from various scrapes with the law, this abbreviated account of *Sagrada do Coração de Jesus*, Colimau Lia Loos and Colimau 2000 has highlighted the connection between religious belief and clandestine activities, a millenarian prophecy, a radical demand for justice, the construction of a ritual centre and commune, anti-communism and a new flag symbolising the fusion of state and church. But what of the beliefs and aims of the individuals involved? To better understand the vision that animates such activities and the attraction this may hold, it is useful to consider a recent account given by one of the principal figures. (Needless to say, individuals associated with Colimau may provide widely divergent accounts, as too may a single member depending on when and to whom he or she is speaking.) The following account was provided by Bruno do Rosario Magalhães, who was born in the village of Fahinehan in Manufahi, attended university in East Java, and since 2000 has been one of the most prominent spokespersons for Colimau 2000.[56]

Bruno explained that prior to the arrival of Europeans, the kingdom of Wehale, located on the southern plain in what is today Indonesian West Timor, was the 'child' of the original source of Timorese tradition in the central sector of Timor-Leste. Although the location is not specified, this is clearly a reference to the area in the central mountains stretching from Mount Ramelau to Mount Kabalaki and up to Turiscai

54 Personal communication with former UNTAET Political Affairs Officer, 10 Jan. 2007.

55 After his release from prison, Bruno Magalhães operated a brothel in the Farol neighbourhood of Dili that catered to Malaysian police officers serving with the UN mission.

56 Interview with Bruno Magalhães, 7 Nov. 2006, Dili.

and Maubisse. In this area, he says, there are still powerful objects – including stones and pieces of cloth – that are thousands of years old. This version is intended to counter the well-known stories about Wehale, to trump claims about local rulers being descended from Wehale, and to discredit the underpinnings of monarchist arguments. Bruno believes that when the Portuguese arrived in 1512, Timor was subjugated and the original sacred/powerful objects had to be hidden and taken from one location to another for safe keeping. The Portuguese recognised and supported new *liurai* (some of whom were indigenous, others mestiço), but these did not have a connection to the true Maubere culture. Reference to powerful objects that are thousands of years old serves to prove precedence over the swords, flags, scepters and other objects given by the Portuguese to local rulers, that have since become sacred (*lulik*).

With the hasty declaration of independence on 28 November 1975, Bruno explains, Timor regained its glory. However, power struggles between Timorese, and more importantly the threat of communism, led the United States to approve the Indonesian invasion. According to Bruno, Fretilin President Nicolau Lobato, who was a devout Catholic and not a communist, had to be hidden but is still alive today, living in a great city in the mountains.

Bruno explains that in 1986 he was the head of a Catholic youth group close to Bishop Belo. He says Americans and Australians posing as missionaries came to East Timor to help the resistance. One of these Americans provided a five-volume set of books written by the Israeli intelligence agency Mossad that was used as the basis for building the clandestine resistance. Like the apostles, groups were formed with 12 members, each of which then established another group of 12 and within three years, the resistance had spread throughout the territory; all just in time for the 1989 visit of Pope John Paul II. The resistance groups, Bruno explains, were called *Commando Libertasaun de Povo Maubere* (the Maubere People's Liberation Command), abbreviated Colimau, and *Organisação Resistencia Sosial Nacional Cooperativa*, better known by the acronym Orsenaco.

In 1999, Bruno continues, with support from the United States and the United Nations, Timor-Leste was finally freed from Indonesia. Colimau members believed that East Timor would gain independence in 2000. With the transfer of sovereignty on 20 May 2002, the greatness Timor had lost in 1512 (and nearly regained in late 1975) was finally restored. At least it should have been. The problem, in Bruno's view, is twofold: first, Fretilin – which is really a movement, not a party – gained power when the Constituent Assembly was transformed into Parliament and former Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri – 'who does not believe in God' – is a communist, which is not appropriate for Timor;[57] second, the various clandestine and resistance groups that were once united under Colimau have not been given an opportunity to speak and have not been acknowledged. Because of this, they do not recognise each other for what they are — all members of a single family. In 2000, Colimau built a meeting hall, several smaller buildings and a traditional house for sacred objects near Turiscai, in the central mountains, to represent all 59 resistance groups. When asked about the number 59, Bruno explained that that is the number of beads on a Catholic rosary,

57 With a wry smile, Bruno added that communist ideology is actually good, but is simply not appropriate at present, though it might be in 30 years time.

each bead representing one of the clandestine groups and the rosary as a whole symbolising Colimau and Orsenaco.[58]

This vision of a radically different social order is premised on the question of representation and subterranean wealth and power. Bruno acknowledges that the Democratic Party of the Republic of Timor-Leste (PDRT) is often associated with Colimau 2000, but he is quick to explain that political parties can only be partial representations of the whole. Whereas Orsenaco seeks to reunite the resistance groups that no longer recognise one another, the National Unity Movement aims to capture the whole that democratic politics has obscured. To do so, Bruno calls on 'cultura'. This is not a matter of social relations, but a force that resides in powerful objects, some thousands of years old. He cites as an example a rock that gives off fire but does not burn its caretaker. The power of 'cultura' can give rise to the ideal society. For this to happen, he wants to arrange for these objects to be brought to Dili so that the uniqueness of Timor and the great power that lies within can be demonstrated to the world. The problem is that resources are needed in order to access this power. Here Bruno explains that Timor is rich in resources — marble, gold, oil and uranium. The key, of course, is uranium: the one substance of sufficient global importance to attract the interest of the great powers that must recognise the even greater mystical force that emanates from Timor. Accessing this power, it is suggested, will not only enable the creation of utopia at home; it also holds the key to resolving global problems, including the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, which is itself an expression of the 800-year war of the cross and the crescent moon.

Although Bruno does not provide details about the social or political organisation of this utopian Timor, he does provide an image. He says that there is a great city in the mountains of Timor that is more beautiful and more prosperous than Dili. In this Shangri-La, Nicolau Lobato and other resistance leaders are still alive, often joined by members of the CIA and FBI, watching over the political fracas below.[59]

Visions of tomorrow

Jacob Xavier and Bruno Magalhães may be eccentric, even delusional, but it would be a mistake to dismiss their accounts of a radically different social order out of hand. There are at least three important reasons for this. First, despite their obvious differences, it should be clear at this point that the monarchist and mystical-cultural utopias draw on a common reservoir within popular East Timorese political thinking. This begins with the myth of great subterranean riches. Jacob Xavier claims that gold stolen from Timor was used to found the World Bank, which is rightly his. Bruno Magalhães speaks of gold, marble, oil and uranium. The notion of great wealth may originate with seventeenth-century Dominican accounts about a copper mountain, and persist today in hamlets where people speak of vast quantities of gold waiting to be mined.[60] Both of these men are also fiercely anti-communist and argue for

58 The number 59 is significant for another reason in Timor: in 1959 there was a short-lived rebellion against Portuguese rule.

59 I am grateful to Aderito de Jesus Soares for this information, based on a conversation he had with Bruno Magalhães in Dili in September or October 2006.

60 On copper in Timor, see Geoffrey Gunn, *Timor Loro Sae: 500 years* (Macau: Livros do Oriente, 1999), p. 76.

the centrality of Catholicism. PPT calls for enforcement of the Ten Commandments. Bruno demands that a cross be added to the national flag — suggesting that an ideal society would be based on a fusion, not separation, of church and state. Many Timorese would agree. Perhaps the most extraordinary parallel is the view that Timor holds the key to resolving global conflict. For KOTA in 1975, monarchism in Timor was to be a model for overcoming the Cold War. For Bruno today, the mystical power of Timor provides the key to the ongoing crusades. Like ritual speakers (*lia nain*), both men draw on the stock of popular beliefs and stories to create accounts that resonate within their society. This is not to suggest that audiences believe these accounts unquestioningly, but to argue that the familiarity of the component parts make the larger picture seem familiar as well.

The second reason for taking these accounts seriously is that they are critiques of the present social and political order. Rejecting the elites' Dili-centric vision of a modern state as the answer to Timor's woes, Jacob Xavier appeals to a wholly different organising principle: monarchy. Not a descendant from a royal family, and well aware that many within the nationalist elite do have such credentials, Xavier's claim of being the legitimate heir to the throne of Portugal makes him the ultimate *liurai*, and his claim of owning the World Bank guarantees the resources to do far more than any government will achieve with money from East Timor's new Petroleum Fund.[61] Similarly, Bruno Magalhães rejects the nationalist elite's vision of a modern, rational state, calling instead for a very different social order based on the unique spiritual power of Timor. Both reject the Dili-centric approach, one by decentralising power from Dili to the local chiefs, the other by situating the ultimate source of power in the central highlands and fantasising about a glistening city in the mountains. These critiques may seem exceptional, but it is important to bear in mind that since the onset of the current crisis in mid-2006, it has become increasingly common to hear East Timorese talk about the need for authoritarian rule to restore order and even fantasise about being incorporated into Australia or becoming a protectorate of the United States. Is monarchy really a less likely scenario?

The third reason to take popular political thinking seriously is simply that the political engagement inspired by these visions makes a difference on the national political stage. The monarchist parties PPT and KOTA won a combined four seats in the 2001 national election, and although their total fell to two sets in the 2007 election, there is every likelihood that as dissatisfaction grows, so too will support for monarchism. Participation in elections and parliament by no means suggests that Jacob Xavier or Manuel Tilman have or will be coopted and acquiesce to the mainstream model of a rational, modern state as the solution to Timor's growing pains. Instead, Parliament provides them with legitimacy and a stage from which to galvanise undercurrents of dissatisfaction. Similarly, Bruno and his brethren in Colimau/PDRT have already demonstrated that they have the ability to contribute to the formation of public opinion, either negatively, by providing a bogeyman which authorities can blame, or more actively, by labelling unloved leaders as being communists and even terrorists.

61 This fund was established in 2005 to manage the revenue Timor-Leste receives from offshore oil and natural gas.

During the 2007 presidential campaign, KOTA presidential candidate Manuel Tilman introduced a remarkable fusion of these 'monarchist' and 'cultural' visions with 'socialism'. It is worth quoting at length from an article that appeared in the Lisbon daily *Público*:

> He declares himself socialist, monarchist and mystic. Manuel Tilman is in front of the flag of the party he runs, KOTA, explaining its meaning. It is not easy. 'Black represents the darkness, white the light … There is a movement from the darkness to the light. Then we have the numbers 8 and 1. And 8 is magic, also among the Hindus and Buddhists. On its side, it means infinity in algebra. The 1 signifies that we believe in just one God.'
>
> 'This flag has existed in Timor since the first men, 6,000 years BCE.' The same flag? 'Exactly the same. It has existed since the beginning, in keeping with our suppositions, representing, now, our difficulties … There were two confederations – that of Lorosomo [*sic*, Loromonu], with 16 kingdoms, and that of Belos, with 36. Each one had a king, but there was a treaty to divide the powers. Lorosomo [*sic*] had the political and religious powers. The one on this side, the Belos, the military and administrative. That is why we are so irascible…. Politically we are separated. But we are just one nation. I have a project of unification, but it is not for the moment. On the other side, they also know and adopt this flag.'
>
> Manuel Tilman did not adopt it. He always had it at home, he tells. 'It was property of my grandparents. I am the descendent of the earlier kings of Timor.' He is, then, a monarchist. 'Yes. One of the flags we adopted is that of the monarchy.' And is his party religious? 'No. It's a party of tradition and ethnology. Look at these symbols.' He approaches a sort of tree trunk with three branches next to a wooden cross. 'This is an "*aitos*," adored since time immemorial. It symbolizes the fertility of the earth and the existence of only one God. We had this. The Christians brought that [the cross], that means that our God had already revealed himself in other parts of the world. The two complement each other. Politics mixes with culture. The cultural identity of the people is mystical. I want to recover this.'
>
> In the Timorese political spectrum Tilman is considered on the extreme right. He denies it. 'I am socialist. Not like in Portugal, where the Socialists are republicans and lay people, like Mario Soares says. Here it is necessary to adapt socialism to the cultural reality of Timor.'
>
> 'I have a subsidy project. There is nothing more socialist than this. It is what I call the system of four subsidies: for birth, for marriage, for family benefit, and for funerals. Funds would be taken from the Petroleum Fund to budget these, under the rubric of the Ministry of Social Security. The President and the Parliament could do this together.[62]

The spirit of this essay and Tilman's own proposal require that we pose one further question: what would a utopian demand be for East Timor today? Independence has been achieved, but has not brought an end to poverty, unemployment, violence and human rights abuses, let alone the coming of a golden age of prosperity. In answer to this question, Fredric Jameson has proposed that a utopian

62 Paulo Moura, 'O Socialismo místico de Manuel Tilman', *Público*, 1 Apr. 2007; translated by Janet Gunter.

demand today would be full employment on a global scale. Fulfillment of this simple demand – well within our capabilities – 'would at once usher in a society structurally distinct from this one in every conceivable way, from the psychological to the sociological, from the cultural to the political…' In short, it would require the radical overhaul of all existing social relations.[63] Limiting the discussion to Timor, however, it is difficult to identify a single demand. Full employment? It would be all too easy for the state to use oil revenue to create public work schemes such as the curiously named current 'work for pay' programme, but there is little reason to think that many East Timorese are interested in menial work at insulting pay rates, less still to think that such schemes would lead to a radical transformation of social relations. Or perhaps the establishment of a functional and universally accessible judicial system? Again, however, it is difficult to imagine such a system having an impact on the continuation of social stratification between *liurai*, commoners and slaves, the adoption of children into forced labour, or the severe problem of protein deficiency common in many areas. Perhaps a utopian demand for Timor today would need to begin by addressing the enormous divide between Dili and life at the hamlet level. For many educated people today, the sociological distance between Dili and Colimau or Cacavem is far greater than that between Dili and Jakarta, Sydney or Lisbon. But the formulation of such a demand remains elusive.

63 Fredric Jamison, 'The politics of utopia', *New Left Review*, 25 (Jan.–Feb. 2004): 37.