

## *Uma Lulik* as Heritage: Authorised Heritage Discourse in Timor-Leste

*Uma Lulik como património: Discurso Autorizado de Património em Timor-Leste*

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### ***UMA LULIK* AS HERITAGE: AUTHORISED HERITAGE DISCOURSE IN TIMOR-LESTE\***

**Abstract:** Timor-Leste has endured different foreign presences: the Portuguese colonisation (1515-1974), the Indonesian military occupation (1974-1999) and, since the restoration of the national independence (2002) which has been defined the “NGOs invasion” (Brunnstrom, 2003). These different governances have produced various Authorised Heritage Discourses – AHD (Smith, 2006) whose echoes are traceable in the current national AHD. This paper, based on 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork, shows the entanglements between the previous colonial AHDs and the current one in Timor-Leste, in regard to ancestral houses (*uma lulik*). The aim is to examine heritage as a historical process by showing how the current post-colonial AHD is affected by the inference of the past and colonial perspectives on the local heritage, producing and reproducing neo-colonial governmentalities.

**Keywords:** ancestral houses, colonialism, decolonisation, Heritage, Timor-Leste.

### ***UMA LULIK* COMO PATRIMÓNIO: DISCURSO AUTORIZADO DE PATRIMÓNIO EM TIMOR-LESTE**

**Resumo:** Timor-Leste sofreu a presença de diferentes poderes estrangeiros: a colonização portuguesa (1515-1974), a ocupação militar indonésia (1974-1999) e, desde a restauração da independência nacional (2002), uma “invasão de ONG”, como foi definido por Brunnstrom (2003). Estas diferentes administrações produziram vários Discursos Autorizados de Património – DAP (Smith, 2006), cujo eco ressoa no atual DAP nacional. Este trabalho, baseado numa etnografia de 15 meses, analisa os envolvimento entre os anteriores DAP coloniais e o atual em Timor-Leste, relativo às *uma lulik* (casas ancestrais). Pretende-se analisar o património como um processo histórico, mostrando como o atual DAP pós-colonial é influenciado pelas inferências das perspetivas passadas sobre o património local, produzindo e reproduzindo governamentalidades neocoloniais.

**Palavras-chave:** casas ancestrais, colonialismo, descolonização, património, Timor-Leste.

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## INTRODUCTION

Timor-Leste is the youngest nation in Southeast Asia. It became independent in 2002, after 24 years of occupation by the Indonesian military, which began in 1975. This was immediately preceded the presence of the former coloniser, Portugal, which left the country after a long period of colonisation dating back to the 16th century. The country has been a member of UNESCO since 2003, and since 2004 a UNESCO Antenna Office has been based in Dili.<sup>1</sup> The National East Timorese Commission for UNESCO (KNTLU) was established in 2009 and since its first steps, all the projects have been coordinated together with the Secretary of Arts and Culture (SEAC). 2009 was also the year in which the Government signed the Resolution 24/2009,<sup>2</sup> approving the National Cultural Policy (*Política da Cultura Nacional*, Pt.<sup>3</sup>). As Lúcio Sousa points out, this is the first formal and official document in which the new-born nation established a conceptual political framework regarding the definition and protection of National Culture and Heritage. It is also the first governmental document in which there is a clear and open reference to *uma lulik* (T., potent houses)<sup>4</sup> as part of the national Heritage (Sousa, 2017: 432). The SEAC has shifted from different Ministries during the years, depending on the governmental administration in power: from the Ministry of Education (4th, 7th, 8th legislatures) to the Ministry of Tourism (under the 5th and 6th).<sup>5</sup> Alberto Fidalgo Castro, in his analysis of the *uma lulik* as part of the National Heritage, argues that the creation of the SEAC, associating metonymically the artistic, heritage and touristic spheres, started a process of aestheticization of the East Timorese material culture, leaving aside other important local cultural meanings. As the author also argues, this aestheticization process has its origin in the former colonial Indonesian asset (Castro, 2015). I suggest that the current aestheticization process, carried on by SEAC activities, is not only a consequence of the previous Suharto regime, but also has to do with the importance given to materiality and monumentality that has always characterised Heritage.

Heritage is a set of practices raised within the Euro-USA modernity (Smith, 2006: 29-34). Heritage discourses first arose under the pretext of modernity and since their appearance have contributed to the formation of a mentality focused on the importance

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. [https://en.unesco.org/system/files/countries/Importing/tls\\_facts\\_figures.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/system/files/countries/Importing/tls_facts_figures.pdf), accessed on 01.12.2019.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Resolução do Governo n.º 24/2009 de 18 de novembro, *Jornal da República*, Série I, n.º 41. Dili: Governo de Timor-Leste. Accessed on 01.12.2019, at [https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/tl\\_natplicyclt\\_pororof.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/tl_natplicyclt_pororof.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> In this paper italicized words and sentences indicate the use of some of the languages present in Timor-Leste, following these indications: Bahasa Indonesia (B.I.), Portuguese (Pt.), Tetun (T.). All the translations that readers may find in the text are mine, unless otherwise specified.

<sup>4</sup> I use the expression “potent houses” suggested by Judith Bovensiepen (2015).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. <http://timor-leste.gov.tl/?cat=25&lang=pt>, accessed on 01.12.2019. It has to be mentioned that during the VIII legislature, a new Ministry was created, which is the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Culture, responsible for the university education, as well as for the development of the activities related to the Arts and Culture sector. SEAC was appointed under the umbrella of this new Ministry.

of preserving the past (and at times inventing/reinventing and revitalising it) (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; Winter and Daly, 2012: 20). In post-colonial contexts, the Eurocentric conceptualisation of heritage is evident and, thus, a historical analysis of the narratives embedded in the heritage discourses raised in the colonial times is fundamental in order to understand how heritage is currently understood, especially by the governmental and official apparatuses (Ray, 2019). The archaeologist Denis Byrne, exploring the Southeast Asian conservation methods, points out that Eurocentrism permeates the governmental Heritage practices and expertise deriving from the former colonial regimes endured by the territories. He suggests that this Western and secular perspective on antiquities systematically denies the local and “popular” regimes of values in which these objects are interpreted – defining them *counterheritage* (Byrne, 2014). Prabha Ray points out that during colonisation, the focus of the narrative producing heritage has focused mainly on conservation and monuments, failing to acknowledge the social meanings embedded in those same monuments (i.e. memory of the community and cultural plurality) (Ray, 2019).

The ancestral or potent houses in Timor-Leste (*uma lulik*, T.) have always been present in both East Timorese society and in the literature about the territory. Precisely because of their social and symbolic significance, these ancestral houses have always been present both within the literature written during the Portuguese and the Indonesian colonisations (Sousa, 2017), as well as in the vast anthropological literature – which has been mainly written by foreigners – on the ancestral houses in Timor-Leste (Hicks, 1976; Forman, 1980; Clamagirand, 1982; Traube, 1986; McWilliam, 2005; Sousa, 2010; Bovensiepen, 2015). The *uma lulik* have been described and interpreted by foreigner experts and researchers, as well as deployed for political uses by the various colonial powers. This paper focuses on the Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD; Smith, 2006) regarding the *uma lulik* developed by the national East Timorese governmental institutions, arguing that the current *heritagization* process developed by the SEAC and KNTLU is largely influenced by both a Western conceptualization of Heritage based on materiality and monumentality (Byrne, 2014) and by historical interpretations that were given of the *uma lulik* – both by the Portuguese and the Indonesian occupiers. Based on 15 months of fieldwork research<sup>6</sup> in Venilale, subregion of Baukau, this paper aims to show the distances between the AHD and the local meanings attached to the Houses.

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<sup>6</sup> The fieldwork research was conducted between January 2017 and March 2018 and was multi-situated. I lived with two different families in the sub-region of Venilale, one belonging to the Makasae ethnolinguistic group (February-August 2017), the other to the Kairui-Midiki (September 2017-February 2018). I also used to visit Dili, the capital, for meetings and events organized by the National University (Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e), as well as for meetings, interviews and events with UNESCO's East Timorese representatives, SEAC staff and other meetings relevant to my research. The language I used during my fieldwork was Tetun; in Venilale, Tetun mixed with basic expressions in Makasae and/or Kairui-Midiki.

### **UMA: HOUSE AND GROUP**

It is not easy to translate the meaning of *uma lulik* into English – since the linguistic translation also implies a cultural one. However, the historical path of both the Tetun words *uma* and *lulik* can shed light on the current perspectives that exist with regard to these ancestral houses, both as objects and in terms of their social significance. The term *uma* is easily translated as “house”; however, it would be reductive to refer to the *uma lulik* as simply a house or building. House, in fact, is meant in a metaphorical way, defining the group of people comprising and belonging to it. In addition, in Venilale, *uma lulik* are not buildings used as households, for residency, but rather they are ritual buildings used on special occasions for gatherings and other ceremonies. So, the term *lulik* is fundamental because, in this case, it also indicates the fact that the houses are separate from the activities of the community’s everyday life (Traube, 1986: 142-143). In this case too, as for the concept of *lulik* that I am going to analyse in the next section, the anthropological literature comes to our aid for a better understanding the so-called “house societies”. The first author using this definition was Claude Lévi-Strauss, who, analysing the Kwakiutl *numayma* concept, identifies many examples of such societies, including many in Southeast Asia. These societies define themselves either in collective terms derived from the mythical and ancestral founder or by territorial names, referring to place of origin of the community (Lévi-Strauss, 1982). Lévi-Strauss (*ibidem*) argues that the house-based societies constitute a hybrid form between kin-based and class-based social orders, and in this respect the author uses the concept of “house societies” in an attempt to resolve the problems of both descent-group and alliance models used by the kinship theory at that time.

Janet Carsten and Stephen Hugh-Jones, influenced by Lévi-Strauss’ definition of “house societies”, but also critical of its conceptual framework, reformulate it in a volume comparing different “house societies” of South East Asia and South America (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995). House societies are taken into consideration not just as a way to categorise kinship, but they are conceptualised as physical and architectural representations of social groups.

Rather than seeing in the house the birth of a new anthropological child of alliance and descent, it is this holistic potential of viewing houses “in the round” which we would emphasize. The relation between building and group is multifaceted and contextually determined, the houses’ role as a complex idiom for social groupings, as a vehicle to naturalize rank, and as a source of symbolic power being inseparable from the building itself. (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995: 20-21)

The authors also stress the importance of the dynamics between the houses and landscapes in which they belong. James Fox (2006) focuses on the concept of origins, which are often recounted by complex narratives, telling the ancestral origins of a social group, defined *topogenies*. They recount the geographical path of a given House, focusing on the territorial trajectories and belongings, more than the historical and temporal occurrences (*ibidem*: 8-11), which indicates the importance of the places and territories comprised within the Houses. Origins are usually expressed through botanical metaphorical expressions: ancestors' origins are considered as the trunk (of a tree), while the current groupings and social alliances are considered the twigs (*ibidem*: 17). This linguistic aspect is not of secondary importance, given the fact that in Timor-Leste, as well as in other parts of the Austronesian world, people often live on subsistence agriculture; this activity moulds social and economic interactions, including linguistic expressions as well. Fox's volume also focuses on the importance of the social continuity that houses can provide, stressing the importance of the social and historical memory connected to the Houses, often represented by ancestral objects stored in the buildings, tangible evidence of the houses' past (*ibidem*: 2). As already mentioned, in Venilale the Houses are used only for specific ritual occasions; they also often store *lulik* objects (*sasaan lulik*, T.), believed to have belonged to the ancestors and representing the power and the alliances between different Houses and/or between the ancestors and natural elements.

Many of my interlocutors in Venilale, including ritual experts (T., *lia nain*), affirmed that the objects stored in the ancestral houses are much more important than the architectures of the *uma lulik* themselves, as they are the essential core of the buildings and one of the main reasons why the buildings are erected. Usually, there is a person guarding the house (T. *uma hein*), living next to it – so the objects inside cannot be stolen. During the Indonesian military occupation,<sup>7</sup> especially in 1975, when the majority of the population were hiding in the forests, and then in 1999, when the militias took over many territories, killing people and burning places, the local population tried to save the objects stored in the houses, hiding them or taking the heirlooms along with them. Unfortunately, in many cases, this was not possible, hence the objects were lost or destroyed.

In some cases, after the Restoration of National Independence (2002) many Houses decided to recreate the lost objects, with one ancestral house that I visited in Fatulia in December 2017 providing a noteworthy example. The members of this particular House

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<sup>7</sup> I would like to point out that among the interlocutors who mentioned the destructions of their ancestral houses during the horrific 24 years of Indonesian military occupation, none of them stated that the buildings of the *uma lulik* were destroyed by the Indonesian soldiers. Most of the time, the perpetrators of the destructions were East Timorese militias or members of other rival Houses.

decided to remake a flag that had been burnt during the massacres of 1999.<sup>8</sup> This flag had been donated by a Portuguese military official to the then *liurai*<sup>9</sup> of that House, when Portugal was still a monarchy.<sup>10</sup> The ritual speaker (*lia nain*, T.) interviewed during the Fatulia visit explained that when the members of the Houses decided to rebuild the *uma lulik*, they realised that the flag was missing. During a ritual offering to the ancestors made to understand the best way to proceed with resolving the flag issue, the ancestors revealed that a grandchild, who by that time was in Portugal, could help in the re-making of the flag. The young man found a book with the illustrations of historical Portuguese flags and sent the pictures home, to Fatulia. The elders were thus able to replace the flag, as they recognized the corresponding illustration sent by the grandchild. However, in many other cases, the members of the Houses do not dare to remake certain objects, fearing possible revenge from the ancestors. This concern may well have implications for the reconstruction of the *uma lulik* as well.

When visiting the ancestral houses during fieldwork research, I was cautioned by the ritual experts always whenever I was unable to examine the ancestral objects stored in the buildings – since the display of these objects is allowed only under particular circumstances. To celebrate the harvest (*sau batar*, the corn harvest and *hare foun*, the rice harvest), these objects are generally taken out from the *uma lulik* buildings through a ritual celebration in which the members of the clan participate. Traditionally, in fact, agricultural activities are connected to the House: to the ancestors, whose benevolence can be measured by the quantity and quality of the harvest and to the spirits inhabiting the land and the nature. Other rituals are performed to the ancestral and potent fields, where food is offered to the *rai nain*, the spirits who guard the land. Similar ceremonies are also performed for the *lulik* springs (*bee matan*, T.), so they will not dry out. As Lisa Palmer illustrates, in the Baukau region these spirits are often referred to as *dai* (both in Makassae, Waim'a and Kairui). Often connected to wildness, they reveal what the author defines as “inclusive sociality”, since they represent animal ancestors to which the living House members are connected (Palmer, 2015: 42-45). In those cases in which the *uma lulik*'s building has not yet been constructed, the household celebrates the harvest at the

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<sup>8</sup> The *uma lulik* I visited in Fatulia is one of the two *uma lulik* in Venilale that tourists can visit. The Friends of Venilale Association organises tours and visits to local cultural and natural assets in the area (cf. <https://venilale.com/about-friends-of-venilale/>, last accessed on 10.04.2020). During my fieldwork, I also visited the *uma lulik* belonging to my Kairui-Midiki hosts, as well as another *uma lulik* built in the Liabala *knuu* (village). My Makassae hosts, who live in Daralata, have not built their *uma lulik* yet, but they showed me the place where the building is supposed to be erected.

<sup>9</sup> Literally, *liurai* in Tetun means “lord of the land”. In Venilale, people consider that their authority and power do not derive from the ancestral and traditional customary tradition, but instead the Portuguese colonial administration granted them administrative and economic power on the territory.

<sup>10</sup> The Portuguese monarchy collapsed in 1910.



ancestral location of the House group.<sup>11</sup> The most important ceremony takes place on the 1st and 2nd of November and it is called *Finadu*, the ancestors' day, coinciding with the Catholic All Saints' and All Souls' Day, showing the syncretic articulation of these celebrations.

Agriculture is paramount for Venilale's communities, as well for their *uma lulik* activities. The agriculture cycle creates a calendar, which overlaps the Catholic/Western one: the year is roughly divided between *bai loron* (dry season: May-October) and *tempu udan* (rain season: November-May). At the beginning of the first rains (November) the corn and rice are planted. With the beginning of the intense storms (January-February) there is the harvesting of the corn and the planting of the rice, whose harvest occurs between May and June. The rainy season provides the possibility to cultivate the main cereals (corn and rice), staple Timorese foods. Therefore, it is important to take these ceremonies into consideration not only because they represent traditional practices revealing the syncretism between the native and the colonial presence, but because they are fundamental within the *uma lulik* activities concerning the production and reproduction of the spirits and beings belonging to the House. By continuing the crop cycle, they preserve the life within the House, thanks to the presence of the ancestors and other natural spirits.

Although all these dates and events are quite important for the rural communities in Venilale (and throughout Timor-Leste), and despite the fact that these rituals connect people to their *uma lulik*, to their ancestors and to the territory they inhabit (or the territory the ancestors used to inhabit), the current East Timorese AHD seem focused on other aspects of the *uma lulik*. Now that we have seen how the house has been interpreted and represented, I shall discuss the meanings of *lulik* in some more depth.

### WHAT IS LULIK?

*Lulik*, a concept that finds correspondences across the many East Timorese languages,<sup>12</sup> has been subject to many foreigners' interpretations over centuries (i.e. by missionaries, colonizers, anthropologists, NGOs workers) (McWilliam *et al.*, 2014; Tsuchiya, 2019). Defined by the East Timorese scholar Josh Trindade as the "core of the Timorese value", *lulik* represents a moral as well as a juridical source, and the word refers to the non-human realm containing the divine creator and the spirits of the

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<sup>11</sup> This happened for the family who hosted me in Daralata (Makase ethnolinguistic group); as already mentioned, their *uma lulik* has not been rebuilt yet.

<sup>12</sup> For example, in Makassae *lulik* is translated as *falun*; in Fataluku as *tei*; in Kemak and Naueti, *luli*, and in Bunak *po* (McWilliam *et al.*, 2014: 304). Ethnologue counts 20 local languages in Timor-Leste, cf. <https://www.ethnologue.com/country/TL/languages>, accessed on 01.12.2019. Cf. also Castro and Población (2017: 26).



ancestors, also including sacred regulations that dictate relationships between people, people and nature, and people and non-human dimensions (Trindade, 2012). Given its complex ontological nature, it is very hard to translate it with a single word that can take into consideration all of its semantic aspects, as some authors have pointed out (McWilliam *et al.*, 2014). Tsuchiya (2019: 94) points out that the term “came to be understood as an essential part of the unique Timorese identity” in the recent post-independence period and he suggests that this “essentialist nativism”, as he names it, is the historical result of the negative connotation assigned to the term by Portuguese missionaries, as *lulik* was to them a clear sign of pagan superstitions. During the present fieldwork research, some of the *lia nain*, as well as other elders, were reluctant to speak much about *uma lulik*, mostly because such ancestral knowledge is embedded in secrecy and can be revealed only in certain occasions and to certain people. Similarly, as observed by Judith Bovensiepen (2015: 49-51) in Funar, Manatuto, the open rivalries existing among the “keepers” of the customary knowledge (*lia nain*) do not allow the spreading of the local ancestral knowledge publicly. Furthermore, many of those interviewed, especially in the rural areas of Venilale, were surprised and often taken aback by the fact that a white (*malae*, T.) educated woman, (the perception of how I was viewed) would want to study the local traditions, ones apparently considered as “backwards” by them. There were frequent reactions of surprise at my research: from the East Timorese nuns, both in Dili and in Venilale; from my hosts, who considered it hilarious that I wanted to learn their “dialects”, from people in Dili who openly laughed at me when I stated that part of my research was conducted among the farmers in the rice fields of Daralata, and from certain students at the University (Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa’e), who recommended that I be careful with the people in the mountains because they are “*beik*” (backwards/ignorant; T.). At the beginning, I was embarrassed by these statements and I did not understand why individuals who had extended family living in the mountains would tell me that the people living in those areas were “ignorant”. Then slowly, during my fieldwork research, I realised that those comments had to be intended in a different way. Most of the people I met assumed that my behaviour, my values and knowledge were at odds with the customary knowledge prevailing in the rural areas. In a recent paper, David Hicks, exploring his historical legacy as an anthropologist in Timor-Leste, mentions that back in the 1960s, during his first fieldwork in Vikeke, one of his interlocutors (an East Timorese soldier) was wondering “why should a ‘civilized’ (*civilizado*, Pt.) person interest himself in the language and customs of people who were “uncivilized” (*atrasado* or *gentio*, Pt.)?” (Hicks, 2017: 44).<sup>13</sup> Discrimination directed

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<sup>13</sup> *Atrasado* (Portuguese) means backwards, while *gentio* (Portuguese) means heathen.

towards East Timorese cultural values during the Portuguese colonial period clearly emerges from the historical analysis of the Portuguese documentation (Rosa, 2017; Tsuchiya, 2019). I would suggest that the Portuguese colonial perspective was so clear to East Timorese people, that the “backwards” category was appropriated in the past and it is still quite present among the lowest social classes of the population, especially in the rural and mountainous areas of the country. Some people assume that white foreigners would always consider their traditions as “uncivilized”, but this of course does not mean that people consider their own traditions and knowledge as backwards.

During my fieldwork, I often heard *lulik* used in relation to places that should not be visited unless when performing a certain ritual to ask permission (*husu lisensa*, T.) through sacrifice and prayers (*hamulak*, T.) to the spiritual guardian (*rai nain*, T.) inhabiting them. The term is also used for: objects belonging to the *uma lulik*, ones that can be seen/shown only at special occasions during the year, namely after the harvesting of the *lulik* fields; food that must not be consumed before performing ritual ceremonies, namely the recently harvested rice, corn and pumpkins (otherwise the *lulik* would be angry and, hence, dangerous); and activities that must not be conducted or words that must not be pronounced. It is also used as a verb (*halulik*, T.), since ritual experts, especially in the past, knew how to infuse the *lulik* potency into objects or places.<sup>14</sup> *Lulik* is also used to refer to human genitals, both male and female as a way to avoid more vulgar words, but also stressing the potency of those parts of the body and emphasizing reproduction, which is fundamental, given the importance that people commonly give to descentance. Having children is in fact considered as the prosecution of the House, but also as a blessing from the ancestors and spirits. Finally, *lulik* can also be used to refer to Catholic practices: priests are often referred to as *amo lulik* (masters of the *lulik*, T.), for example.

The anthropologist Frederico Delgado Rosa has analysed different religious accounts from the last period of the Portuguese colonization in Timor-Leste (c. 1910-1974) in terms of what were then considered East Timorese “superstitions”. He shows that the Portuguese missionaries interpreted the local traditions and beliefs as pagan or primitive practices which deserved to be destroyed, especially the *uma lulik* and the objects stored in them (Rosa, 2017). Despite the missionaries’ description of these beliefs as “barbaric”, in antithetical opposition to their Catholic counterparts, the missionaries translated *lúlic* (or. in Portuguese) as sacred, intangible and forbidden

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<sup>14</sup> The majority of the interlocutors I spoke with, referred to past events when special ritual experts could animate certain places with special potent and forbidden words (*lulik*); they also alluded to people that in present time have this ability, but none was willing to talk about this topic with me. I guess this is another hint of the fact that *lulik* represents a potentially dangerous power and source.

(*ibidem*: 38-41) admitting, in this way, the spiritual and immaterial importance of those beliefs but also, implicitly, creating a bridge between the Catholic sacred and the East Timorese *lulik*. Ezequiel Pascoal, one of the missionaries quoted by Rosa (2017: 39), defines the *uma lulik* as temples and *lulik* as fetish objects and reliquaries belonging to the ancestors and adored by the East Timorese people in the ancestral houses.

The anthropological literature about Timor-Leste emerged from the 1960s and has tried to translate and explain *lulik*, pointing out the inadequacy of the translation of the word as “sacred”. If on the one hand Hicks translates the word as sacred, as opposed to profane, in a Durkheimian perspective (Hicks, 1976: 25), Elisabeth Traube, who conducted her ethnographic research among the Mambae ethnolinguistic community in the 1970s (immediately before the Indonesian military occupation of Timor-Leste), describes *luli* (Mambae) “not [as] an essence, but a relationship [...], a boundary between things”, to stress that *lulik* is not an inherent quality of a thing or being, but an attribute given by the same act of separation of the thing or being from the everyday life and world (Traube, 1986: 143). Lúcio Sousa stresses the conceptual proximity between *lulik* and *taboo*, stressing the dangerous power that *lulik* might have and, at the same time, distancing it from the Catholic sacred (Sousa, 2017: 416-417). Castro and Población (2017: 29) point out that *lulik* has to be understood as an aspect of the East Timorese cosmology. By analysing domestic and everyday circumstances, the authors suggest that *lulik* should be understood as the codification of the appropriate ways of establishing relationships with other entities, people and spirits (*ibidem*: 34). Judith Bovensiepen (2014) argues that *lulik* implies reciprocal relations and exchanges between humans and non-humans (ancestors, spirits, nature) through sacrifices, and as well between living human beings, since *lulik* is used to claim authority by some houses (or groups) over others. In her analysis, she stresses the importance of recognizing differentiation and identification as key processes that shape the social practices surrounding *lulik*, valued as a moral source. She translates *lulik* as “potency” or “potent”, stressing in this way its agency, being a vital energy able to animate places, houses (*uma lulik*) or objects, yet potentially dangerous and, hence, connected to prohibitions. Through this perspective, three important elements of *lulik* emerge: the first is its intangibility; the second, the dichotomic vital/destructive nature of this concept; the third and last is the active agency of *lulik*. The first and the last will be central to the discussion of the next and last paragraph, concerning the relationship between tangible and intangible heritage.

## TIMOR-LESTE'S AHD

In Timor-Leste, ancestral houses are scattered throughout the territory, presenting different symbolic and aesthetic configurations based on the area they are located, as well as the ethno-linguistic group they belong to. Currently, the *uma lulik* are recognised as traditional architectures by the government, and they are in the process of being recognised as national heritage within Timor-Leste, through various activities developed in the last years by the SEAC and KNTLU. In 2009 with the 24/2009 Resolution approving the National Cultural Policy *uma lulik* are mentioned for the first time as National Heritage in a national and official document:

As other traditions of the region, the majority of East Timorese people belong to a place and to an *uma lulik* and share a set of beliefs and values common to their community. In Timor-Leste, these values gain their own regional dimension, arising from the contact with the Portuguese colonial presence over more than four centuries. In addition, the two decades and a half of national resistance organized against the Indonesian occupation contributed to cementing the feeling of belonging to a reality with physical, linguistic and culturally specific characteristics.<sup>15</sup>

In 2015, during the 5th Government (August 2012-February 2016), Timor-Leste ratified three UNESCO Conventions: the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972); the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) and, finally, the 2005 UNESCO's Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (cf. Sousa, 2017: 434). In 2009 a UNESCO Commission was based in Dili (KNTLU), the capital city of the country and their activities are coordinated by the SEAC. The reports and publications these institutions have been published are helpful to understand the current policies developed in order to safeguard the ancestral houses (*uma lulik*).<sup>16</sup> They offer glimpses on how culture has been moulded by national and official institutions in order to create an official and national discourse about culture and heritage and, most importantly, it shows the SEAC and KNTLU's starting points for the development of a national AHD. The main goal of the KNTLU and SEAC Report (2017) is to quantitatively define and

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<sup>15</sup> Translation for the original document provided by the author of the paper. The document in Portuguese and Tetun can be consulted here: [https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/tl\\_natplicyclt\\_pororof.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/tl_natplicyclt_pororof.pdf), accessed on 01.12.2019.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. SEAC and KNTLU (2017); also Gárate Castro 2010, as well as UNESCO Jakarta *et al.*, 2015 (<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000235310>), on the "living Heritage" throughout Timor-Leste. These publications represent what the Timor-Leste government institutions developing the Heritage-making process have been produced up-to-date and they are the topic of this paragraph.

register how many *uma lulik* are present in the Marobo area and in the Oecussi district, and the conditions affecting them. The preface of the report makes it clear that the study focuses on the material perspective, although the authors recognise that the tangible and intangible dimensions of the *uma lulik* are interconnected (SEAC and KNTLU, 2017: 14). It should also be noted that the study about the Ainaro ancestral houses is mainly focused on the tangible dimension of the houses, even if there are references to the intangible dimensions that the houses have, namely the fact that the buildings are the symbolic representations of social and kinship bonds and alliances, but also the cosmological elements embedded in the buildings and, finally, the ritual dimension around the buildings (Gárate Castro, 2010). In the booklet published by UNESCO, SEAC and the National Geographic, among the national elements considered as Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), there are the local knowledge and expertise regarding the construction of the ancestral buildings (UNESCO Jakarta *et al.*, 2015). Hence, the AHD configures *uma lulik* predominantly as buildings, despite the fact that as the anthropological literature mentioned emphasizes, Houses cannot be reduced to their tangible dimension since they represent entire social groups and the alliances among them. Furthermore, *uma lulik* store the potent objects (*sasaan lulik*, T.) and they are ritual centres of the activities related to the agricultural cycle. The Houses “have an existence beyond their material form”, even if the buildings are destroyed or burnt (Bovensiepen and Rosa, 2016: 679). As shown in the example of my host family, even if the *uma lulik* has not been rebuilt yet, the people belonging to the House are still very much aware of the existence of this socio-cultural entity and act accordingly, performing rituals and conducting activities related to the House and to the clan (*uma fukun*, T.), such as the *Finadu* rituals mentioned above. Despite the fact that interviews in the KNTLU report extensively show the many intangible elements embedded within the ancestral houses, and despite the many accounts reported which declare that the potency of the houses does not cease to exist with the destruction of the buildings, the houses being the physical representations of people, histories, traditions and alliances, still, the aim of the KNTLU Report as well as of the Ainaro *uma lulik*'s Report is precisely the preservation of the tangible dimension of the buildings (Gárate Castro, 2010; SEAC and KNTLU, 2017).

One may wonder why the current East Timorese AHD is so focused on the tangible dimension of the ancestral houses and does not seem to consider the symbolic, social and ritual values embedded in the houses and, most importantly, in the objects stored in them. As mentioned, Castro (2015) suggests that one may find the origin of the East Timorese governmental post-colonial “aestheticization process” as a legacy of the past Indonesian occupation. I suggest that, in order to try and answer to this question, we

should consider both the written materials existing on the ancestral houses produced during the colonial period as well as the historical development of Heritage as a practice. Why does the East Timorese AHD not mention the supernatural and spiritual presence of the *lulik* as a relevant reason to show the importance of the *uma lulik* in Timor-Leste?

Looking back at the colonial perspective on the ancestral houses, Lúcio Sousa shows that the missionaries destroyed the houses' buildings in the attempt to destroy the beliefs embedded in them (Sousa, 2017: 419-420). Later on, the research undertaken during the 1960s then started to focus on the aesthetic dimension of the houses, describing them as temples, churches and museums, storing important historical as well as sacred objects (Sousa, 2017: 421-425). The climax of this type of analysis, focusing on the material dimension of the houses as expressions of local handicrafts, is given by the volume entitled *Arquitectura Timorense*. This book is one of the outcomes of the colonial "scientific mission" (*missão científica*, Pt.), undertaken by Ruy Cinatti and other Portuguese researchers, the results of which were published posthumously in 1987 (Cinatti *et al.*, 1987). In a similar way, in another volume, Cinatti analyses the local handicraft, presenting it as "artistic representation and motif" of the East Timorese identity (1987). The same author also denounces the "destruction of Timorese cultural values" (Cinatti, 1987: 16) that in his perspective was caused by the external (mainly Portuguese) demands of East Timorese artefacts (Silva and Sousa, 2015: 11-12). Due to this alleged progressive destruction of the local culture, hence, the author's goal with this book is to create a *repertoire* of the local art and craftsmanship, so these will not be forgotten and lost. In the present day, more than 50 years after Cinatti conducted his study, not only are the local crafts still present in the local East Timorese culture (*tais, uma lulik, belak, surik*, etc.)<sup>17</sup> but the current programs developed by the SEAC and KNTLU to encourage the production of local handcraft, as well as the inquiries and studies these institutions conduct, have also come to denounce the endangerment of the *uma lulik* and of the ancestral knowledge related to their construction.

During Indonesia's military occupation, the central government attempted to create a national ideal encompassing and embracing the diversity of the Indonesian archipelago, including the territory of Timor-Leste that, by that time, was the 29th Province of the Republic of Indonesia. A symbol of the national Indonesian motto "unity in diversity" is the *Taman Mini Indonesia Indah* (Beautiful Indonesia Miniature Park; B.I.), Jakarta's recreational open-air area that reproduces in miniature the Indonesian archipelago. This park, a project overseen by Suharto's wife, Siti Hartinah and inaugurated in 1975, can be considered a historical mark of Suharto's New Order

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. UNESCO Jakarta *et al.* (2015).



government's (1968-1998) way of conceptualising and displaying heritage as part of the supposedly national identity. The park includes ancestral houses (*rumah adat*) characterising different Indonesian regions, such as the Torajan Tongkonan, or the Rumah Melayu of the Borneo region. It also shows the willingness of the Indonesian administration to recognise a collective Indonesian identity, despite its many internal differences. The alleged diversity would be represented by the ancestral houses and architectures. Despite the government's attempt to create an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1991) encompassing all the internal ethnic and religious differences within the supposedly Indonesian national identity, the Timor-Leste paradigmatic case, as well as others (i.e. Aceh, Kalimantan and Papua), show that the effort has not yet led to the expected results (cf. Varshney, 2008).

Taking into consideration East Timorese material culture throughout history, what will later (in the current post-colonial era) be named "heritage", the *uma lulik* were destroyed as part of the evangelization enterprise during Portuguese colonisation. Later, Cinatti, a Portuguese architect and intellectual, considering craftsmanship not as a sign of idolatry but as a shining example of the East Timorese identity, denounced the supposed disappearance of East Timorese material culture due to objectification and commercialisation of the local handicrafts. Finally, the aestheticization process saw its climax during the Indonesian military occupation.

What is pervasive in the KNTLU Report and within the current national AHD is the urgent need to rebuild and renovate the buildings, emphasised by the repeated comments that the ancestral houses are endangered (SEAC and KNTLU, 2017). Pictures show collapsing roofs, rough vegetation growing around the abandoned architectures and other visual elements depicting abandonment and loss of the houses. The KNTLU Report's aim is *to register* the ancestral houses buildings within Marobo and Oecusse. The second and important element of the Report is that it describes the tangible dimension of the *uma lulik* as "endangered". Registers, lists and archives constitute fundamental devices of the Heritage-making process, *dispositifs* or apparatuses of governmentality "at a distance" that operationalize locally (nationally or regionally) the international standards of the World Heritage (Harrison, 2016). "The very act of defining an entity as endangered entails the duty to find instruments and techniques to protect it" (Vidal and Dias, 2016: 16) and these tools, such as lists and repertoires are far from being neutral, but they are the result of selections and interpretations, aimed to the safeguarding of an endangered practice or cultural asset (Vidal and Dias, 2016).

The interventions that the government, through SEAC and KNTLU, seem to be interested in developing address the "correct" use of "authentic" and "original" materials



used to build the Houses. In fact, many *uma lulik* have been rebuilt by using “modern” materials, such as metal, quicklime and cement, since they are cheap and lasting. In the Baukau region, many the *uma lulik* are built with *kaleen*, the sheet metal that is often used to build houses and the roofs of common houses in particular. Members of the Houses are expected to discuss and debate the precise ways in which the buildings should be built for a long time. In fact, making mistakes during the constructions is believed to cause deaths and diseases among the members of the House. So, even an *uma lulik* built with so-called “modern” materials will be the result of a meticulous inquiry involving the traditional experts of the Houses so that the *uma lulik* is erected in the best way possible so as not to offend the ancestors and the spirits inhabiting the buildings. In the KNTLU Report, one of the most common reasons that people present to justify the use of cement or metal sheet to build their *uma lulik* is because these materials are cheaper and more long-lasting (SEAC and KNTLU, 2017: 55-56, 80). Some people believe that these buildings make the ancestors enjoy “modernity” and contemporary facilities, while others argue that the high temperature caused by the *kaleen* turn the ancestors furious.<sup>18</sup> Many are the tales and narratives existing about the *kaleen* buildings and they all reveal indigenous and local systems of values, which often clash with the international AHD and conservation practices. In fact, the KNTLU report stands against the use of these materials as one of the causes of the current “endangerment” of the Houses, disregarding the local attempts to conserve heritage and considering them wrong.<sup>19</sup> In a similar way, the Ainaro’s *uma lulik* Report insists on the importance of restoration of the ancestral architectures, endangered by a hyper-modernization process:

It is necessary to implement an *urgent* restoration and recovery of the traditional architecture [...]. In a society such as the Timorese, *submerged in an accelerated process of modernization*, the protection of the past is not solely based on the protection of its vestiges, but also in the preservation of ancient knowledge, this *primordial* intangible heritage”, adding that “the inventory is indispensable for the knowledge of the wealth itself. (Gárate Castro, 2010: 79; my emphasis and translation)

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<sup>18</sup> In October 2017 I had a meeting with the Representative of SEAC in Baukau. He mentioned many examples of *uma lulik* built with *kaleen* in the area of Baukau, illustrating the many different opinions and stances with regard to these buildings.

<sup>19</sup> On the topic of the Western hegemony on local conservation practices, cf. Byrne (1991).

Besides the dichotomic tension that the excerpt presents between modernization and tradition – as if these two processes were intrinsically different – I want to stress the implicit and direct link between the modernization process, the consequent risk of disappearance of the “primordial” East Timorese heritage and the call for action for the creation of an inventory, as “indispensable” tools to safeguard the “ancient” heritage. I do not question the *bona fide* of the authors; instead I argue that these kinds of assumptions are the result of a Western way of thinking heritage, as an ancient relic always on the verge of disappearing and that requires safeguarding. Heritage grounds its ontology on the concept of authenticity and one of the foundational texts of the international AHD as well as of the Heritage industry is the so-called Venice Charter (International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites)<sup>20</sup> of 1964 (cf. Harrison, 2013: 61-67). This document contains the fundamental principles that guide the ways in which ancient buildings and architectures are supposed to be preserved and restored, and it is grounded on the concept of authenticity. This notion implies the importance of maintaining buildings and monuments in the same physical conditions as the historical context when they were created, by using the same materials with which they were originally built. Since the Venice Charter clearly favours European stone buildings and monuments, in 1994, ICOMOS approved the Nara Document on Authenticity. In the attempt to make the provisions of the Venice Charter more applicable and inclusive to other areas of the world where architectures often incorporate perishable materials, the Nara Document acknowledges world cultural and heritage diversity.<sup>21</sup> How have these International indications been interpreted by the Timor-Leste AHD?

Authenticity (*orijinalidade*, T.), materiality and endangerment are central in the AHD within Timor-Leste as well as within the Heritage international industry (Bräuchler, 2012: 153-155). Despite the fact that in Timor-Leste the application of actual rules and laws regarding the authentic materials seems to be still far off, the official documents published by SEAC and KNTLU represent the first attempts to shape these sets of rules and laws deployed by governmental institutions. Far from being neutral indications, these documents define what *uma lulik* should be like. Eugenio Sarmento, an East Timorese ICH expert, argues that the East Timorese ancestral houses should be considered as East Timorese traditional museums (*museu tradisional*, T.). The author illustrates that the *uma lulik*, as well as the Western museums, store objects and heirlooms with important historical and artistic values. The aim of the *uma lulik* is to preserve these objects, removing them from the everyday-life and dignifying them within dedicated

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. [https://www.icomos.org/charters/venice\\_e.pdf](https://www.icomos.org/charters/venice_e.pdf), accessed on 01.12.2019.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. <https://www.icomos.org/charters/nara-e.pdf>, accessed on 01.12.2019.

spaces: the *uma lulik* (Sarmiento, 2011). In the final part of his article, Sarmiento adds an anecdote about his university studies in Indonesia, when Timor-Leste was still part of the Indonesia. He says that his teacher stated that the most ancient museum in South East Asia was the National Museum of Indonesia, founded by the Dutch colonizers in 1778. Sarmiento did not agree with his professor's perspective and writes

If a museum is a place where cultural heirlooms are stored, then in Timor Timur we had had museums well before the colonisers were ruling us, because people in Timor always have had ancestral houses and the function of these Houses was to preserve the Timorese cultural heirlooms, with a historical and potent value. (Sarmiento, 2011: 19)

The cultural anthropologist Christina Kreps, who studies indigenous non-Western cultural practices as alternative museological and heritage preservation models, analyses the Bahasa Indonesia word and concept *pusaka* (*lit.* heirlooms) as a social construct, namely the meaning that in Indonesian is given to certain objects, and not a characteristic innate in the objects themselves (Kreps, 2009: 198). Pacific meeting houses in New Guinea, as well as East Kalimantan Kenyan Dayak rice barns can be considered as “indigenous models of museums”. In fact, as Kreps explains, they do not only store heirlooms that are considered sacred by the community, but these particular enclosed spaces and their low humidity help and allow the preservation of the objects stored in these buildings, similarly to hyper-modern Western museological techniques (*ibidem*: 195). One can easily debate whether an *uma lulik* acts as a museum: in fact, unlike public and official museums, the objects stored in the ancestral houses are rarely displayed to the public, only during special occasions, while museums are open to the public almost every day and only under special circumstances are the objects not viewed by the visitors (i.e. restorations, loans, etc.). Considering the European/Western model as the only valid conservation method reveals a certain post/neo-coloniality, which many scholars have observed to be present within the contemporary Far East and South East Asian contexts (Winter and Daly, 2012: 23-27). And as Byrne rightly points out, “alternative paradigms had gone unnoticed by Western heritage practitioners [...] because they had been subject to active suppression and marginalisation in Asia itself” (*ibidem*: 295). What Sarmiento and SEAC and KNTLU miss is the reason why these objects stored in the *uma lulik* are usually hidden and not displayed. These objects are stored in the *uma lulik* because they are believed to be potent and linked to the ancestors. They are magical and imbued with supernatural powers that have been constantly denied throughout history by the foreign presences in the country. The fact

that the East Timorese AHD fails to recognize this important aspect of the *uma lulik* reveals this neo or post-coloniality existing not just in terms of heritage but also, and most importantly, with respect to the local and grassroots cosmologies, traditions and values. Rationality and secularism have been deployed as synonyms of progress and modernity within the nation-building processes, not just in the European context, but also in many Southeast Asian countries, and beliefs such as *lulik*, considered as superstitions, have been considered as an impediment to development (Byrne, 2012: 297; Winter and Daly, 2012).

## CONCLUSIONS

*Uma lulik* are nowadays one of the elements of the national cultural heritage, considered by the government as one of the symbols of the country of Timor-Leste. The ancestral houses have been interpreted as paramount social configurations by the many anthropologists focusing on the Timor-Leste context. Hence, the intangible dimension of the houses is central to the understanding of the architectures as symbols and representations of groups of people. In Venilale, *uma lulik* are strongly connected to the territory inhabited by the different groups: the *uma lulik* connect the living groups with the dead members, together with the land the first ancestors inhabited and cultivated.

Historically, *lulik* and *uma lulik* underwent systematic attempts of erosion, since the Portuguese colonisation, during which they were considered signals of superstitions and idolatries. This was followed by a *folklorisation* which began during the Portuguese colonisation, when local artefacts started to be considered as part of the East Timorese identity, and continued throughout the Indonesian military occupation, during which Suharto's New Order attempted to create a national Indonesian identity. In this period the houses emerged as a common Indonesian aesthetic element, despite the many differences existing between them throughout the country. Nation-states, in fact, sought to create homogeneous communities, despite the ethnic and linguistic diversity present in the territory: Indonesia is one of the most paradigmatic examples of the integration and standardization of many different communities and identities within the same nation. Nation-states are also one of the manifestations of modernity and they have been built under the name of secularism and rationality, as symbols of progress and development, often excluding local beliefs (Byrne, 2012), such as *lulik*, often considered as symbols of backwardness, such as the local East Timorese beliefs.

The aestheticization of the *uma lulik* seems to persist to the present day, given the fact that SEAC and KNTLU are interested in the conservation of supposedly "original" and "authentic" ways of building the houses. In addition, KNTLU and SEAC claim that the architectures are endangered and need to be preserved through governmental

action. *Uma lulik*, then, seem to be configured as static embodiments of culture, as monuments and material objects are often imagined within the so-called International AHD developed by UNESCO rather than mediums through which social meanings and powers are produced and reproduced (Ray, 2019). The fact that the governmental heritage policies and documents focus on the aesthetic and architectural elements leaves aside local and familiar ancestral knowledge connecting people with their past and with a more spiritual and affective dimension.

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