The return to custom: Nation-building and environmental governance in post-conflict East Timor

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Husi Cultura Ita Hatene Ita Nia Identidade
My Research

• Ethnographic detail to elucidate the ‘life of things’ and non-standard ways (Tsing 2009); diverse economies (Gibson-Graham 2006).

• Extra local/extra regional connections, mobilities and influences.

• How is the state/development sector in Timor Leste recognizing and working with the existing governance and exchange capacities of customary institutions?
The diverse economy

‘all of those practices excluded or marginalised by a strong theory of capitalism’ (Gibson-Graham 2006: 60).

Includes the informal economy and within that the customary economy.
Reading for diverse economic practices and how they are enmeshed in a larger whole.
Customary rights and interests which ‘sustain clan identity, maintain rights to land, redistribute income, and cultivate community’.
Today’s presentation

• How is the state in Timor Leste implementing the constitutional recognition of customary laws and how is this influencing current arrangements regarding natural resource management?

• Two Case Studies:
  – 1. *Tara Bandu* (Ritual regulation of resources)
  – 2. Water politics and spiritual ecology
Case Study 2: Water Politics and Spiritual Ecology: Custom, governance and development in the Baucau Viqueque Zone
Research Question

• How is the state in Timor Leste implementing the constitutional recognition of customary laws and how is this influencing current arrangements regarding land ownership and natural resource management?
Findings

1. It is local peoples themselves who are seizing the possibility of customary law recognition that the constitution provides and who are carrying out its implementation.

2. The value of customary institutions extends beyond any notion of them as adaptive institutions merely in transition to a westernized system of private land holdings.
Further issues for Research:

• How will the state and development institutions in Timor Leste recognize and work with the existing governance and exchange capacities of customary institutions?

• How can these customary institutions be supported to extend their political and economic reach and credibility (and adapt to other demands such as gender and resource equity)?
Comparative Research:

• What is the significance of ‘spirit ecologies’ and theories of a ‘diverse economy’ for environmental governance in other Asian contexts?

• How resilient is this customary governance aspect of the diverse economy and what lessons can we draw from it?