

# Animal sacrifices: a Mechanism to silence the Spirits of victims of violent deaths *Mate Mean* or Red Death in East Timor

## Sacrificios animales: un mecanismo para acallar los espíritus de víctimas de muertes violentas *mate mean* o muerte roja en Timor Oriental

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Then God said to Abraham:  
“Take your son, your only son,  
whom you love—Isaac—(...) [and]  
Sacrifice him (...) there as a burnt ...”  
(Genesis 22:2)

“...Abraham built an altar there  
and arranged the wood on it.

He bound his son Isaac  
and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.” (Genesis 22:9)

“...he reached out his hand and took the knife  
to slay his son.” (Genesis 22:10)

### Abstract

This paper reports animal sacrifices witnessed between 2010 and 2013, during exhumations performed by the forensic team of Serious Crimes Investigation Team (SCIT) of the United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNMIT). The exhumations were carried out within the framework of the investigations conducted by the United Nations (UN) to clarify the crimes committed during the armed conflict in East Timor in 1999. Therefore, the bodies exhumed correspond to the victims of this event. In this pages, the sacrifices are subject to an anthropological interpretation, with a symbolic perspective. To this end, the procedures, artifacts and other elements, present in the practices observed, are described in detail, arguing that this practice corresponds to older traditions, previous to the imposition of the Catholic religion in Timor, and it was a mechanism of interaction among the family group, as well as a tool of communication with the afterlife.

**Keywords:** ritual; sacrifice; offering; ancestors; East Timor

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## Resumen

Este artículo reporta sacrificios de animales presenciados entre los años 2010 y 2013, durante exhumaciones realizadas por el equipo forense de *Serious Crimes Investigation Team* (SCIT) de la *United Nations Mission in East Timor* (UNMIT); las exhumaciones, fueron realizadas en el marco de las investigaciones adelantadas por la Organización de las Naciones Unidas (ONU) para aclarar los crímenes cometidos durante el conflicto armado de Timor Oriental en 1999; por lo tanto, los restos exhumados correspondían a víctimas de tal suceso. En estas páginas, los sacrificios son objeto de una interpretación antropológica, con perspectiva simbólica; para tal efecto, se relatan de manera detallada los procedimientos, artefactos y otros elementos que hacen parte de las prácticas observadas, argumentando que corresponden a tradiciones anteriores a la imposición de la religión católica en Timor, y que es un mecanismo de interacción del grupo familiar, así como de comunicación con el más allá.

**Palabras clave:** ritual; sacrificio; ofrenda; antepasados; Timor Oriental

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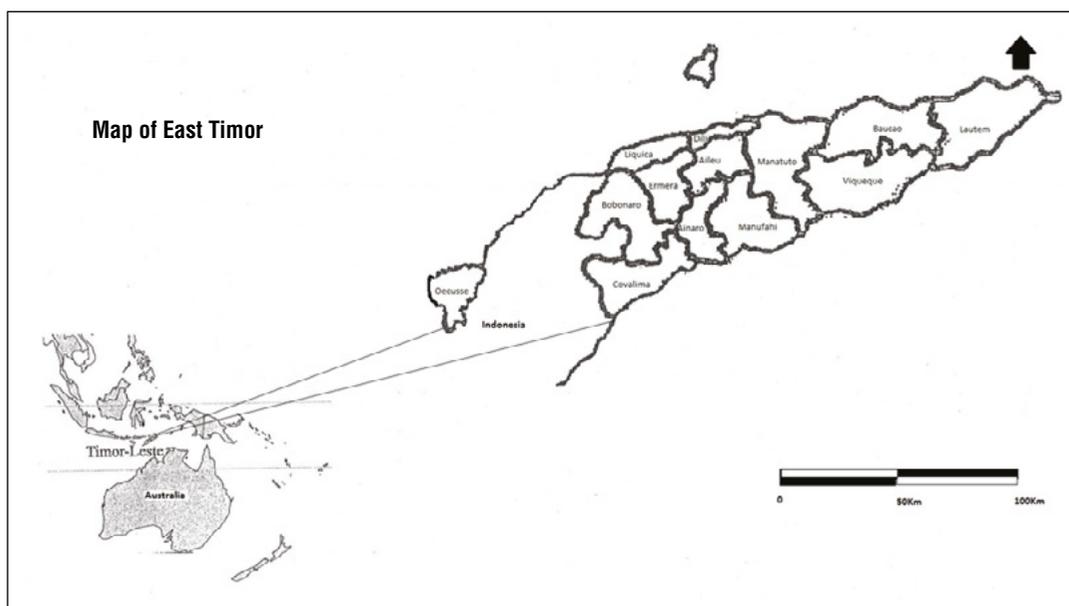
## Introduction

Timor-Leste (Figure 1) was a Portuguese colony, and its first contacts with Europeans occurred around 1512. However, only until 1702, Portugal sent the first governor to this territory. Portuguese had dominion over East Timor until 1975; that year, after gaining independence from Portugal, Indonesia annexed East Timor to its territory. Then, in 1999, the Timorese proclaimed their independence through a referendum; and on May 20, 2002, the birth of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste became official (Durand, 2009).

East Timor is characterized by a wide ethnolinguistic diversity, reflected by the existence of more than twenty different languages, which are grouped into two large linguistic branches: Austronesian languages, which extend from Taiwan, through the Philippines and Indonesia, to Madagascar; and the Papuan languages, spoken in the Moluccas

Islands, New Guinea and the Melanesian world (Durand, 2009). The few ethnographic research in the region is limited to research on speakers of the following languages: Tetun in the Viqueque region; Kemak in the town of Marobo; Mambai in the area of Aileu and Kemak in the city of Atsabe; communities in which there is a strong syncretism between traditional beliefs and the Catholic religion, according to Clamagirand and Traube (cited by Molnar, 2005).

The Catholic religion is precisely the one, which predominates in Timor, with Muslim, Hindu-Buddhist and Protestant minorities. Initially, the Portuguese introduced Catholicism; however, by 1975 72% maintained their traditional beliefs. After the invasion by Indonesia, the Catholic Church became a defender of the population against the brutalities of the Indonesians, as a mechanism of peaceful protest and the voice of the independence speeches, which resulted in massive conversions of Timorese (Molnar, 2005).



**Figure 1.** The map shows the location of East Timor in Southeast Asia and the thirteen districts that make up the country.<sup>3</sup>

Among the beliefs of the Timorese are concepts such as *lulik*, which refers to sites, objects, and sacred people. The sacred places are linked to the founding ancestors and the creator god and include mountains, forests, rivers, caves, etc. The sacred objects are represented by relics that according to oral tradition are related to the god of heaven, mother earth or battles against the lord of the ocean (Molnar, 2005). Among the relics are the skulls of enemy warriors (Durand, 2009), which are piled to form artificial terraces, which are called *Uma lulik*.

## Materials and methods

During the years 2010 and 2013, a UN team carried out investigations of crimes against humanity that took place in East Timor in 1999, which were committed by militias organized with the approval of the Indonesian authorities, as a mechanism to destroy the independence preten-

sions of the Timorese. In this context, to collect evidence on the crimes committed, 59 exhumations were carried out, aimed at determining the cause of death of the individuals and verifying their identity. It is worth mentioning that in several cases their relatives, who recovered the corpses shortly after their death, but who had doubts about the identity of the remains, had buried the remains.

The exhumations in clandestine burial sites also pursued the dignification of bodies, which after being identified must have a dignified burial, an aspect mentioned by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC, 2017) when it affirms that families and communities have the right to bury their dead according to their traditions and customs.

To locate the corpses under analysis, the researchers collected data on the location of the graves and the potential victims they housed. For the exhumation and examination of the remains, the Minnesota Protocol or Manual on the Effective

3. Elaborated by Edixon Quiñones Reyes.

Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions governs the forensic anthropologists of the UN. (UN, 1991).

In the place where the grave is located, the forensic anthropologist is the authority, together with his assistant. The excavation is done with archaeological techniques, recording the process through photographs, notes, and drawings. Then, in the laboratory, the forensic team analyzes the remains. The anthropologist determines the sex, the age, the stature of the individual, reconstructs and records the *perimortem* lesions, on which the forensic pathologist relies to determine the cause of death.

Subsequently, the anthropologist collates the data obtained from the remains with the information provided by the relatives, to determine if the body matches the victim. However, bone samples are taken for DNA analysis, in case of doubts about the identity of the corpse. On the other hand, the forensic pathologist makes the report of the necropsy and signs the death certificate, while the anthropologist prepares a report that accounts for the entire process.

In five of the exhumations, the relatives of the victims made sacrifices and offerings of animals: on the first occasion, a rooster was sacrificed and offered before the exhumation. The second time, a piglet was sacrificed and offered before the excavation; in two subsequent cases, a rooster was sacrificed after digging up the remains. At the last opportunity, a rooster was offered before the exhumation, and a piglet was sacrificed after the remains were recovered.

In this context, one of the authors (Quiñones) who worked as a forensic anthropologist for the UN, recorded photographically, and through annotations, the rituals and sacrifices referred here. Based on these data, this paper seeks to

answer the question: what purposes or meaning do these sacrifices take on for these communities that suffered the armed conflict in East Timor during 1999? The way to interpret these meanings was based on the analysis of the visible and invisible, moral and normative contents, the forms of the symbolic elements of the sacrificial materials and the rituals in which they are inscribed, cultural and religious practices which in turn have particular ontological meanings for the participating individuals and their communities of origin (Darton 1986, Geertz, 1997, Jackson, 2012, Rosaldo, 1991, Turner, 1988). Finally, we examine how these worldviews are connected and linked to a social context in which physical violence and hunger prevail.

## Results

Sacrifice has been an object of study in the social sciences, especially sociology and anthropology, from the very beginnings of these disciplines. Its conceptualization has varied depending on the time and the theoretical school from which these interpretations were generated. In evolutionary views, sacrifice was one of the characteristic elements of the wild tribes. According to Tylor (1889) sacrifice consists in giving a gift or donation to a deity; it is done by men, to get a benefit, repair damage or compensate an offense. For Smith (1894) sacrifice consists in communion between men and gods through the consumption of the offering. Later, functionalist proposals framed the analysis of sacrifice in the importance that it had for the union of the community and the temporal and spatial spheres that it unites. Durkheim (1982) considered it as a communion ceremony in which union with the god is produced through the offering. Hubert and Mauss (1981) defined it as an act whereby the sacrificer modified his moral condition or that of specific objects with which he is bound, through the

consecration of a victim; in other words, it constituted a communication mechanism between the sacred and the profane. Evans-Pritchard (1957), on the other hand, defined sacrifice as the offering of one life to replace another, and other authors also emphasized the way in which these sacrifices are associated with prophecies, divinely inspired announcements, and omens. (Grottanelli, 1999).

Contemporary postmodern approaches place the sacrifice beyond the community-sacred sphere linkage. They proceed to examine in what ways this association symbolizes and links discourses, needs, and concerns of the community that seek to be channeled to avoid and explain, especially, the emergence of violence. They also provide emotional states to the community and strengthen their trust and belief in reality. Sacrifices, moreover, must be understood taking into account the lifestyle of the communities in which they take place because their symbolic meaning is connected to that context (Geertz, 1997, Girard, 1983, Jackson, 2012, Rosaldo, 1991).

The previous views are associated with studies that have specifically investigated the sacrifice of animals. Hoskins (1993) analyzed the sacrifice of the water buffalo among the Kodi community of Indonesia. The sacrifice of the water buffaloes is executed after several days of festivities celebrated with music, songs, and prayer; Hundreds of guests congregate in the central plaza of the town to participate in a ritual meal and the spectacle of the slaughter. A buffalo is taken to the center of a circular arbor, where a young man cuts a knife in the neck; later, another young man inflicts slashes on his haunches; Once the animal is immobilized, one of the men stabbed him in the neck.

One to one, between five and more than a hundred animals, are slaughtered in the same way,

and none of the bodies of the Buffaloes can be removed. At the end of the slaughter, ritual specialists and priests extract the viscera of the animals to interpret them and thus verify that the sacrifice has been received by the spirits to whom it was dedicated. Later, the meat is distributed according to the status of the assistants, their clan and their participation in previous festivities. Four nights later, the horns are organized in line, constituting the ladder that carries the message of humans, which travels tied to the souls of the buffaloes and whose destiny is the spirit of the world; the arrival of the souls of the animals is confirmed by the sacrifice of a chicken. Finally, the horns are removed and hung in the house that financed the party to be commemorated by future generations (Hoskins, 1993).

The author presented an interpretive model focused on the ritual drama of death and the powers of divination of the body of the dead animal in which it combines two approaches: first, the symbolic, based on metonymy and metaphor, identity and differentiation. And second, the performative, which looks at the sacrifices as transforming mechanisms of the relations between the sponsors of the sacrifice, the officiants, the spirits and the audience. With this, she sought to go beyond the plain interpretation of the distribution of the flesh as a symbolic reconstruction of the structure of society. It is an attempt to escape death by defeating unwanted aspects of human life (mortality, servitude, etc.) and uncertainty about control over land and other material possessions. The sacrifice implies the subjugation and conquest of the animal, but also ambivalent feelings that precede this conquest. The act implies brutality but also laughter, especially the nervous laughter to see fleetingly reflected in the eyes of the victim. After death, the interior of the animal's body is examined through divination because it is believed that internal geography of human problems is regis-

tered in the animal's organs. The sacrificers identify themselves in the animal's entrails, and as a result, they understand certain social issues in a different way (Hoskins, 1993).

Brisebarre (1993) presented a reflection on the sacrifice of sheep in Muslim enclaves, located in the suburbs of Paris. Such sacrifices are made during the celebration of *Id al-Kabir* or great feast. This feast takes place two lunar months and ten days after the month of fasting called Ramadan. In this ritual, the father slaughters a sheep in commemoration of Abraham's sacrifice.

Given that in France sacrifices in the home are considered illegal, Brisebarre (1993) focused on the families' strategies to carry out the sacrifice, citing examples ranging from clandestine conduct within the home, to unsuccessful attempts to implement public sites for the celebration of *Id al-Kabir*, and the strong opposition that this initiative received from administrative and public health bodies, as well as from the non-Muslim community.

On the other hand, the use of public slaughterhouses for that purpose seemed an unrealistic solution, since some establishments did not authorize families to sacrifice their animals. On the other hand, others even provided specialized personnel to facilitate the sacrifice. However, one of the problems of this solution was the difficulties to make the consumption of the animal as an integral part of the ritual, mainly when the slaughterhouse was far from the family home.

According to the researcher, there is a great difference between the symbolism of the animal selected by the father and that of an animal brought in from the slaughterhouse. Another drawback of this practice is the reduction of the father of his role as the sacrificer, like that on whom falls the responsibility of cutting the

throat of the animal. Additionally, the family is deprived of a ritual that is part of their culture and traditions, and, therefore, must be performed at home (Brisebarre, 1993).

Finally, the author called for exploring solutions that may have arisen in other European countries, as well as in large Muslim urban centers, such as the city of Istanbul.

Sandweiss and Wing (1997) conducted a review of ethnohistorical and ethnographic data on the use of guinea pig (*Cavia porcellus*) as food, medicine, divination instruments and sacrifices in Peru, to interpret the findings of this animal's remains that were naturally mummified at the archaeological site of Lo Demás, in Chíncha, Peru.

The authors reported that from the time of the colony, until now, the guinea pigs are sacrificed to the mother earth (*Pachamama*) and the mountain of the spirits (*apus*). They are used to diagnose diseases by interpreting the viscera; to accompany the dead; to appease the deities, and to predict the future. This practice is ancient and dates back to pre-Hispanic times; additionally, the ancient inhabitants of Peru also used dogs and birds in their rituals, as evidenced by the findings of Lo Demás (Sandweiss and Wing, 1997).

Wiget and Balalaeva (2001) described the collective reindeer sacrifice (*myr*) carried out by the Khanty of the Surgut region in Siberia, a town whose social organization is patrilineal, its lineages are grouped into clans and fed by hunting, fishing, and reindeer herding.

Two types of sacrifices that end with the consumption of the executed animal exist among the Khanty: one, the sacrifices with blood, in which the blood of the animal is preserved and con-

sumed, and the meat is eaten raw. And two, the sacrifices without blood, in which the flesh of the animal is boiled and consumed. The first ones do not have fixed dates and can be organized collectively or individually for births, funerals, and petitions; the second ones have definite dates and can be offered, among other things, during seasonal changes or before epidemics (Wiget and Balalaeva, 2001).

The place of the *myr* is revealed to the *chirta-ko* (knower) by a dream; generally, it corresponds to a site with mythological meaning. The ritual begins the night before the sacrifice through songs accompanied by drums. The songs are dedicated to the spirits while the *chirta-ko* performs a divination rite through the consumption of hallucinogenic mushrooms. After the trance, the listener answers questions from the assistants about the *myr* (ordering of the offerings, certainty about the site, etc.) among other topics, such as health and the problems that afflict the community (Wiget and Balalaeva, 2001).

In the *myr* witnessed by the authors, the women were restricted to the cooking area, while the men prepared the ritual area, assigning space for an altar (which consisted of a table) and another for the fire. Additionally, with a metal sheet, they created an anthropomorphic figure, which they referred to as “the black man of the disease.” Later, they arranged offerings on the altar that ranged from textiles to canned food and money.

Eleven reindeer were brought for sacrifice (one given by each family). The men organized themselves in a line offering the animals to the deities through prayers. Later, one by one the reindeer were hit in the head with the back of an ax. When the animal fell, a knife cut was stabbed in the neck. Later, the reindeer were skinned and discarded, and portions of flesh and blood were thrown to the “black man of the disease” to avoid

diseases (Wiget and Balalaeva, 2001).

The entrails of the animals were cooked, distributed and consumed by the assistants. After the feast, the flesh was divided equally among men. Afterward, men and women performed thankful prayers, installed an altar in the forest and hung the reindeer skins on the trees as they prayed that the deities would receive the spirit of the sacrificed animals. Finally, on the night of the sacrifice, the *chirta-ko* performed another divinatory session with hallucinogenic mushrooms, after which he informed the attendees that the offerings had been received by the deities (Wiget and Balalaeva, 2001).

In conclusion, the authors argued that processes such as the imposition of the Orthodox Church, the shaman’s persecution in the Soviet Union in an attempt to impose atheism and the destruction of sacred sites for the Khanty through oil exploitation, have negatively impacted the traditions of the indigenous communities of Siberia. These customs persist because they dramatize the fundamental relationships of the Khanty world and their practice requires that participants reinforce their commitment to their traditions and beliefs.

Hasu (2009), referring to the Chagga patrilineal community of northern Tanzania, describes two rituals related to death. The first corresponds to the funeral in which a goat is sacrificed; the second occurs approximately one year after the death of the individual and is executed through a ritual in which a cow is sacrificed. According to this author, the objective of these two rituals is to facilitate the transition from deceased to an ancestor.

Hasu embraces Werbner’s procedural model, for whom the sacrifice has a binary character, represented by metonymy and metaphor. In this sense the sequence of the rite is closely related to the

remains of the victim, as a metaphor of kinship and socialization: the body must be dismembered to create a new synthesis, a new inner self and a new moral state of being. The dismemberment of the offering and its subsequent recombination is a process of deconstruction and construction (Webner, cited by Hasu, 2009).

The model described distinguishes between deconstruction, reconstruction, communication with the deities, communion with the people, states of entry (invocation of the ancestors and dedication of the "victim"), separation (deconstruction of the 'victim' and construction of the offering), aggregation (communication and communion with the ancestors) and exit (separation of the ancestors and communion with humans) (Hasu, 2009).

The author applies this model in the following way: first, the animal is offered to the ancestors through prayers. Once the sacrifice is made, the body is dismembered following specific categories of relationship, which is a metaphor for the patrilineal social organization of the community. Next, small portions of each part of the body of the offering are cut and placed in the grave for the deceased to share with the ancestors, while the men present consume roasted portions in the very place of the ritual. In the end, the men retire to eat the rest of the animal, this time with the women who had stayed in the kitchen preparing other foods and cooking parts of the animal that were delivered to them after the dismemberment.

Hasu concludes that these rituals constitute a modern version of the ancient Chagga tradition, in which the second ritual was performed to exhume the ancestor and pose his bones in a clay urn. Additionally, he mentions that in spite of more than one hundred years of Christianity, the rituals and the current religion are not mutually exclusive, in fact, the second ritual is usually

scheduled in December, the time of the Christian festivities. Finally, the author assures that the sacrifices can still be interpreted from the classical perspectives; that is, as an act of communion between the living and the ancestors through a shared food.

Kalandarov and Shoinbekov (2009) presented a description of the funerary rites of the indigenous people of Badakhshan, an autonomous region of Tajikistan, where the predominant religion is Islam.

The population studied has the belief that the body of the deceased is occupied by a demon or spirit, which can cause harm to the living; consequently, cleansing rituals must be executed, so that the earth accepts the body of the dead and heaven admits the soul and thus prevent the spirit of the deceased person from causing evil to the living.

The rituals last for three days and begin with the hands and face cleaning of all those attending the cemetery, before entering the house. Subsequently, all household objects (pillows, bedding, etc.) that were in contact with the dead body are washed. During those three days, the men who attended the funeral gather in the house to pray for the soul of the deceased, to facilitate their redemption and ascension to heaven; likewise, they light six wood chips (two per day) to illuminate the way of the spirit. The third day they perform the sacrifice of a sheep: the man in charge must know the steps of the ritual and their respective prayers, from the washing of the abluion of the animal to the execution of the sacrifice and the preparation of the meat of the sheep for the food (Kalandarov and Shoinbekov, 2009). This sacrifice is a ritual of cleansing and purification, in which the blood of the animal is used to wash the utensils that were used in the preparation of the body of the deceased and to dig the grave. Besides, the sacri-

fice is performed according to Islamic rules and seeks the protection of the living before the spirit of the dead, transfer the sins of the deceased to the sheep, and the dead animal helps the soul of the deceased to cross the *Sirat* (bridge that passes through hell and leads to paradise) (Kalandarov and Shoinbekov, 2009).

The authors concluded that the funeral rituals, despite having Muslim influence, correspond to practices prior to the propagation of the Islamic religion in this region, exemplifying the cultural identity of its inhabitants, their traditional view of the world, their beliefs in relation to the death and in particular his perception about life in the afterlife.

It should be noted that among the indigenous peoples of Timor, animal sacrifice is a frequent practice. These sacrifices are usually directed to the ancestors. The sacrifices are made to cover the obligations of kinship and social relations. They are used as gifts or can be received as gifts. Sacrifices are made in marriages, in the construction of sacred houses, in funerals, which require significant amounts of animals (water buffalo, goats and pigs) (Molnar, 2005). The next section is a proof of it.

### The animal sacrifices in Timor

Regarding the rituals in East Timor, Fidalgo (2015) presented an extensive work, which addresses, among others, the rituals related to death. Particularly, it is striking that:

The deceased usually contacts the living for some reason that afflicts him, which is common when the spirit considers that the livings are not observing the ritual obligations that they have towards him (an appropriate burial, the making of offerings, etc.). This type of communication, very associated with violent deaths (mate mean, “red

death”), was referred to me on countless occasions in relation to people who had died in the jungle while they were part of the guerrilla, after the Indonesian invasion, whose bodies had not been found nor, consequently, received burial ... (p 198).

Below, the rituals and sacrifices of animals witnessed during the exhumations are described, in the chronological order in which they were recorded.

### First sacrifice

This sacrifice took place in the district of Covalima, on May 26, 2010. On that occasion, the victim's brothers slaughtered the rooster and watered the blood on the grave (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** The sacrifice of a rooster in Covalima: with the assistance of his brothers, the older brother is responsible for slaughtering the offering.

Then they left the animal lifeless on the side, and the older brother proceeded to deposit leaves and betel nuts<sup>4</sup> (*Areca catechu*) on the grave and to make a prayer (Figure 3).

4. Betel is a palm whose nut is considered the fourth most consumed psychotropic in Asia, after tobacco, alcohol, and caffeine. Apart from its medicinal uses, it allows communication with the world of spirits (Shafique, Mirza, Vart, Memon, Arain, Tareen, Haq, 2012). In East Timor it is customary to apply lime to the leaf, roll it over the nut and chew the mixture.



**Figure 3.** Layout of the offering: Previous to prayer, the elder brother, deposits the leaves and betel nuts on the grave.

Once the exhumation was over, the brothers lit a fire in the cemetery and proceeded to roast the animal and then consume it (Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Preparation of the food: one of the younger brothers performs the cooking of the rooster offered.

### Second sacrifice

On September 30, 2010, in the District of Bobonaro, an older adult deposited a traditional textile called *tais* over the grave, on which betel leaves and nuts rested while making a prayer (Figure 5). Subsequently, the victim's brother proceeded to sacrifice the piglet by slashing the heart (Figure 6). Then the animal was opened, its viscera removed

and the older man continued to read them. Once this process was completed, the exhumation was carried out.



**Figure 5.** Preparation of the offering: The senior man arranges the *tais* with the betel leaves on the grave.



**Figure 6.** Sacrifice of the Piglet: on the side of the tomb, the brother of the deceased stabbed the animal in the chest.

### Third sacrifice

On December 17, 2010, in the Manatuto region, once the exhumation was completed, the victim's brother made a prayer while holding the rooster (Figure 7). Next, with the help of one of the participants, the bird was slit, while the blood was poured into the empty tomb (Figure 8), then proceed to cover the hole.



**Figure 7.** Preparation of the offering: the brother of the deceased prays the animal before sacrificing it.



**Figure 8.** The sacrifice: the animal is slaughtered, and its blood poured on the grave.

#### **Fourth sacrifice**

On May 23, 2011, in the district of Oecusse, once the exhumation was completed, the family members placed candles around the grave, introduced a banana tree inside it and then proceeded to cover the hole with their hands ( Figure 9). Located around the pit, they performed a prayer in the native language with the offering in the

center; subsequently, they cut the cock, letting the blood flow over the grave (Figure 10).



**Figure 9.** Closure of the grave: the participants cover the hole with their hands



**Figure 10.** Prayer and offering: gathered around the grave, the participants perform the sacrifice of the animal.

#### **Fifth sacrifice**

On May 27, 2011, in the district of Oecusse, an older man put food on the grave (water and cookies) (Figure 11). Later, he proceeded to perform prayer while two other participants completed the sacrifice of the rooster while pouring the blood of the offering in a container (Figure 12).



**Figure 11.** Food on the grave: the older man performs prayer with food on the grave.



**Figure 12.** Sacrifice of the rooster: it is observed how the blood is poured into a container, while the old man continues the prayer.

Once the sacrifice was made, the entrails of the offering were read (Figure 13). Once this procedure was completed, we were allowed to exhume.



**Figure 13.** Reading of the entrails: the viscera were extracted to proceed to its reading

Once the exhumation was finished, the same men who sacrificed the rooster proceeded to sacrifice a piglet. As with the previous offering, the blood was collected in another container (Figure 14).



**Figure 14.** Bleeding of the piglet: it is observed how the participants spill the blood of the animal in a container.

It should be noted that in none of the cases we observed the dismemberment of the animal, the only thing found was that, with the exception of the first sacrifice (exhumation attended only by men), the food was prepared and distributed by the women, who unlike the fourth sacrifice, they always kept to the margin of the ritual and the exhumation, locating themselves in isolated places.

It is unknown if there was any differentiation in the distribution of meat, which could account for the status of individuals within the family group; the distribution is a metaphor that recreates the structure of the community and in particular that of the family that made the sacrifice. What can be said is that there was a clear

differentiation of functions between men of the family and women.

## Discussion

Animal sacrifice in East Timor is practice before the imposition of the Catholic religion; however, it is not clear if it is a custom that tends to disappear, given that the ritual performed only in five of 51 exhumations. The sacrifices outlined above show differences in their execution, local variations with similar meanings in a country where there are more than twenty ethnolinguistic groups. Note that the first sacrifice took place in the Covalima region, where there are two languages, bunak and tetum terik. The second sacrifice was executed in Bobonaro, where two languages, bunak, and kemak are also spoken; the third sacrifice took place in Manatuto, a Gallo-speaking region; the last two sacrifices took place in Oecusse, where Kanaleko is spoken. In addition to local languages, Tetun has been declared a national language, in an effort to establish a vernacular language.

The people who performed the sacrifices were usually the brothers of the victim and especially the older brother, while the women were not allowed to approach because, they said, that was work for men. When inquiring with them through interpreters and local staff that worked with forensic investigators, about the purpose of the same, diverse but connected answers were obtained, which speak of the ways like the sacrifice (to the time history, offering, petition, conjuration) unites culture with the sacred sphere (Geertz, 1997 and Turner, 1988): it is done by tradition; the sacrifice is dedicated to the ancestors (dead dad, dead grandparents, lines of male and female blood by father). It is done to prevent tragic deaths in the family from happening again, and the blood of the animal replaces the bones that are removed from the grave.

It is necessary to point out that both the rooster and the piglet constitute domestic animals, which are habitually consumed; of which, in a ritual context, their viscera are looked for to interpret a message, in a divinatory act to know if they were going to have good fortune or confirming if that was, in fact, their dead relative, which was cause for joy. And from which his blood is used to wet the soil of the grave. The important thing is that both the viscera and the blood point, or will point out, that the community is ready to receive the remains. The blood marks the newly discovered territory, the dripping of the blood on the grave symbolically reaffirms that those remains were already of the community and that the blood replaces them provisionally.

When asked about the viscera interpretation, it was learned that they showed whether or not it was a good omen to proceed with the unearthing of the remains: if the viscera showed that it was positive, the exhumation could be continued; otherwise, the sacrifice could be made up to three times. If at the third opportunity the reading was not positive, it was necessary to desist from the excavation, because it could have negative consequences for the family of the deceased.

With the exception of the first ritual, where the animal offered was consumed in the cemetery, in the other cases, the meat was prepared in the family's house after the exhumation, according to how it was expressed by the relatives, who generally invited the researchers forensics to share the meat of the slaughtered animal, which was always accompanied by rice and drinks.

An analysis of the sacrifices witnessed in East Timor demonstrates that they fit the model applied by Hasu (2009) as follows:

1. The entrance: this was done through prayers and the provision of food or betel leaves and seeds over the grave.

2. The deconstruction of the “victim” and the construction of the offering: It happened through the sacrifice of the animal, which from that moment was constituted as an offering.
3. Communication and communion with the ancestors: the communication was presented through the reading of the viscera, while the communion was carried out with the spilling of the blood on the grave.
4. The way out, the separation of the ancestors and communion with humans: The departure and separation of the ancestors occurred at the time of leaving the place. Communion with humans was presented through the consumption of the meat of the animal offered. It is then indigenous groups that face from their thoughts, from their worldview, the reunion with loved ones. Both the one who has disappeared and the ancestors, among whom the deceased is now and in which, as in other regions of the Asian continent, the consumption of meat is initially an act of communion between the community and the ancestors (Hasu 2009; Kalandarov and Shoinbekov, 2009).

However, analyzing these animal sacrifices followed by the exhumation involves:

One: take into account the social context and the socioeconomic conditions in which they occur (Girard, 1983, Geertz, 1997, Jackson, 2012, Rosaldo, 1991). In this sense, communities and people who suffer from a permanent lack of food carry out the consumption of the meat of the animals used in these rituals. Therefore the consumption of the same, which is a form of communication with the ancestors, also represents the need not to waste a scarce and appreciated food like meat, in a region where rice is the main constituent of the diet. Bear in mind that for

each exhumed corpse, the family received from the UN economic support of fifty dollars for the expenses incurred in carrying out the rituals.

Two: animal sacrifices are rituals linked to a long tradition of thought that are part of the identity of these communities. In addition, they have the characteristic that they are carried out in the 21st century, in a continent and in a region in which the religious syncretism, product of the successive colonizations (especially the Portuguese), has led to the Catholic beliefs to be mixed with the views of the ethnic groups of the interior of Timor. An aspect that on the other hand is highlighted in the theoretical discussion by the authors who have also analyzed animal sacrifices in Asia and Africa in the 21st century (Hasu 2009, Kalandarov and Shoinbekov, 2009).

Three: the sacrifices were made in conjunction with the exhumations of bodies that were the result of armed conflict. For these reasons, animal sacrifice in these communities of East Timor is not only a ritual practice in the classical sense, which allows the communication of the profane sphere with the sacred sphere and as a mechanism for the interaction and integration of the family group (Hubert and Mauss), (1981). The animal sacrifice also indirectly refers to the circumstantial, unwanted link of Timorese culture with another culture, because this practice is in response to the UN request to exhume the remains to clarify a truth in a context of serious violations of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law. This UN request is produced because the victims were also “sacrificed” in the middle of an armed conflict of which they were not participants. This situation exposes the community itself to dangers because the opening of a grave (due to the need for exhumation) can bring affections caused by spirits, according to local beliefs.<sup>5</sup>

5. There were cases where exhumations were not allowed because the

These animal sacrifices are given, remember, because the exhumation carried out by the forensic anthropologists comes to interrupt a cycle; if it is understood that the community had already previously identified these remains. The buried body already belonged to the ancestors, but it is unearthed to confirm that it is indeed who it is said to be.

The particularity of the sacrifices examined here is that they were offered to victims of whom their relatives were sure of their identity and to whom they were already located among their ancestors. In that sense, the sacrifices in East Timor were not rituals designed to facilitate the transition from deceased to ancestor, but a way to reconfirm that indeed their relative was already among the ancestors, a way to avoid the danger posed by the spirits of the dead when the tomb opened (it meant placating them, reassuring them). It is a way of asking that never again violent deaths or mate mean (red death) as referred to by Fidalgo (2015) or at least not by violent events such as those that occurred in 1999.

And it is with this last purpose that the exhumation is integrated, it becomes an added part of the ritual in East Timor. The ritual as a whole becomes syncretic, although the parties do not necessarily know the real dimensions of each procedure: neither the investigators know the details and the knowledge concentrated in the divination, nor the Timorese know the rigors in the excavation and the registry of the obtained data. The remains, due to the exhumation, are now remains examined, washed, photographed, certified, wrapped, approved, re-baptized by the international community, and then returned to be deposited in the same grave. The exhumation is a protocolized, regulated, paid ritual: a

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tradition was that you could not bother a dead person. It was also heard that when there was a missing person, there were people who adopted the dead and then they said that they did not accept that they should touch the grave because they already had their dead.

scientific ritual, western science that meets local knowledge. It does not replace the other ceremony, but does it become part of it? Does it become part of the history of the community? Are you reminded, will you be remembered as such? And even though it is an effort to know the truth around conflict and despite respecting the divinatory tradition that links the community with the ancestors, is the exhumation a colonizing ritual? Is it also part of that colonization of the West? Can it be named that way?

In any case, the sacrifice and the exhumation bring together two times and cultures, two perspectives on life and death. In this situation that unites two cultural practices, the exhumation charges and acquires a symbolic meaning that affects and benefits both the West and the communities of East Timor, and that as a cultural practice does not contradict the other desire that is implicit in the animal sacrifice. According to the testimonies of those who made the sacrifices, the sacrifices are made so that violent deaths do not happen again. As an exhumation is an act that reveals the identity and circumstances of the death of a victim, and in turn affirms and supports the truth about the occurrence of widespread violence and death, it constitutes a triumph against death. It means to snatch that victim from those who sacrificed her, that sacrifice is reversed. Of course, if you understand the murder of that person by the Indonesian invader or the Timorese militias organized by them, the substitution of one life for another (Evans-Pritchard, 1957). The perpetrators take that life to achieve and propitiate (in the sense that Levi-Strauss (1995) and Girard (1983) raise as the symbolic conditions necessary for the sacrifice to be effective) the imposition of another life in ideological, economic and cultural terms where the intention of those who killed was to impose another social order. If it is thought that there were thousands of deaths, then the sacrifice of

each person was part of the great sacrifice that for the perpetrators contributed to achieving the objective they pursued with the violent actions. Also, if sacrifices, as Durkheim (1982) said, unite the people who made the sacrifices with their god, in the armed conflict of East Timor the symbolic god was the political, economic and ideological interests that guided and supported the Indonesians.

However, the above is also a sample of how these processes are carried out in communities that in one way or another are affected by the process of globalization of violence and solutions to it (Sassen, 2007), where they enter mediate international organizations in the process of clarification of these facts. Which provide financial assistance to some members of the communities to finance their rituals of animal sacrifice that precede the exhumation, due to the low purchasing power these communities have.

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