

Webs of Legitimacy and Discredit: Narrative Capital and Politics of Ritual in a Timor-Leste Community

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This article explores the interconnections among origin narratives, migration patterns and ritual authority in a Timor-Leste community. By recognising the dimension of rituals as sources of power, we analyse the different ways social actors negotiate their position in social space by either supporting or contesting the legitimacy of the ritual leaders. We suggest how, in a context with historical levels of high migration and immersed in rapid social change, precedence is not only challenged by modern ideals around individual rights and choices, but by the re-interpretation of mythical narratives and the access to ritual performance. The paper provides a discussion of the notion of narrative capital and shows how subordinated classes resulting from development policies from past state regimes articulate new forms of social mobility in the contemporary context of rural Timor-Leste.

Keywords: Narrative capital; Ritual authority; Politics of ritual; Timor-Leste; Precedence

Introduction

The concept of narrative capital has been used in seemingly different ways within various fields of expertise. Among others, the term is echoed in literary analysis, gender studies, organisational and tourism research, medical sociology, and learning theory. In the field of literature studies and audiovisual analyses, the notion of narrative capital can be found referring to the accumulative capacity of authors, novelists, and storytellers to engage the readers in their works (for example, Decock 2003) or the efforts invested by them in guiding the stories towards specific directions (for example, Heise 2014). In the area of gender studies, Theidon (2006) refers to narrative capital when showing the differential capacity of some categories of victims to impose

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their narratives of violence in the frame of the Peruvian post-war Commission of Truth. In organisational research, Carlsen and Pitsis define the notion as ‘the value of adding chapters to organisational life stories in terms of sustaining positive legacies and generating new possibilities for development and growth’ (Carlsen and Pitsis 2009, 464).

However, in recent times the term has attained significance in the fields of medical sociology, tourism studies, and learning research (May 2004). Ivor Goodson (Goodson 2006, 2012, 2013, 2007) refers to narrative capital in building a broader learning theory that suggests that in contemporary societies, where individuals face increasing flexibility in many realms of their lives, flexibility of response and the ability of re-selling are required, and it is within this re-selling process that narrativity takes a central role. His hypothesis goes on to show that not all individuals deal equally with this process and that their capacity to re-self depends on their narrative capital, which he defines as ‘an armoury of narrative resources with which we not only render accounts but flexibly respond to the transitions and critical events which comprise our lives and equip us to actively develop courses of action and learning strategies’ (Goodson 2013, 74). From medical sociology, Baldwin (2013, 112) proposes a blurred definition of narrative capital as a stock of stories, the extent of which ‘determines the possible responses and hence contributes to the narrative environment.’ Touristic studies have also contributed a great deal to narrative capital theory by analysing the discourses of western tourists from different cultural backgrounds (for example, Cater 2011; Marques 2007, 2010; Noy 2004a, 2004b). Drawing on the work of Scheibe (1986), touristic research has paid much attention to examining how tourists construct their self-identity through the narrated stories of their travelling experiences. This capacity to ‘re-construct the self’ through stories of the exotic appears as one of the main values for investing economic capital in tourism (Noy 2004a, 2004b) to the point that we can talk about the building of narrative careers, as Cater (2011) points out among divers: the emergence of ‘egotourism’ (Wheeller 1994).

While one source of the notion of types of capital is the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, not all authors link the concept of narrative capital to the broader theory of practice, social space, and fields. Among those who recognise his influence in providing a foundation for their theoretical discussions, Noy (2004a, 2004b) considers narrative capital as a subtype of cultural capital, while Goodson, for example, seems to refer to an opposite type of capital that can even counteract the ‘old patterns of cultural capital and social elitism’ (Goodson 2007, 248). Furthermore, authors contributing from different disciplinary angles to narrative theory seem to put much emphasis on narrative capital as a characteristic feature of contemporary societies, together with an excessive attention to the self and its construction.

Building upon ethnographic research conducted between 2007 and 2011 in a Timor-Leste community, in this article we aim to contribute to the field of narrative studies by discussing some of the issues mentioned above from an anthropological perspective. Furthermore, we aim to contribute to comparative regional ethnography by exploring the local operation of what has been considered a common social feature of

Austronesian structures of relationships: the notion of precedence.² Here we describe and analyse how the local system of authority is contested³ by subordinated groups resulting from development policies of past state regimes, focusing our attention on the narrative dimensions of this contestation. We suggest that the notion of narrative capital is crucial in understanding the nuanced complexities of the social system, the political dimensions, and the practical operation of one of the main fields of power within the system of precedence: the field of ritual.

Faulara, a Migrant Community

Faulara⁴ is the name used by the inhabitants of the district of Liquiçá to refer to an *aldeia* (hamlet) of Lepa. It is located in an alluvial plain formed in the downstream region of the Lauli River⁵ in the only non-mountainous part of the *suku*⁶ Leotelá, Liquiçá District, North West Timor-Leste.

People in Faulara are mainly peasants, as only a few formal remunerated jobs exist locally, consisting of teachers of the primary school and agricultural extension workers, as well as seasonal income-generating activities provided by the state and aid organisations. The settlement is located in an important area for agricultural production, and it is one of the few places in the district where wet-rice production is practised, due to the permanent source of water from the Lauli River.⁷ However, most rice producers do not obtain more than one harvest per year. Once the rice season is over, farmers start preparing the rice fields to cultivate maize on them, developing an agricultural diversification pattern. Cassava is also grown, usually within the house gardens. Seasonal fruits such as pineapples, mangoes, or bananas are used as cash crops. Timber from the small teak plantations fulfils household needs, and it is an occasional source of income. Another important economic activity is rearing of livestock, including cattle, poultry, pigs, and goats. Some households may sell some of their animals when facing financial or food supply problems, but they are mainly stored for special occasions and important events during the life cycle of the household (rites such as marriage or death, as well as other ritual or ceremonial events).⁸

Being a small settlement, there are not many references in the historical sources to Faulara. Through the local narratives, inhabitants of the hamlet claim that during the Portuguese time the place was a *suku*, called *Lauli-Lau*, which was dependent on the military post of Boebau.⁹ They recount that the *suku* was integrated into Leotelá by decision of the Portuguese in order to re-populate the area by inviting people from neighbouring areas of the district after the local population was decimated due to an epidemic skin disease.

During the last stage of Portuguese colonisation, the Plans of Development (*Planes de Fomento*) for the period 1953–1979 established the Loes River as one of the target locations for boosting agricultural development, specifically through the Third Plan of Development for 1968–1973 (Presidência do Conselho 1967). Meanwhile, a Portuguese company, the *Sociedade Agrícola Pátria e Trabalho* (SAPT), was constructing one of its agricultural centres in the neighbouring area of *suku* Asulau in 1967 (da

Conceição e Sousa 1967) on the other side of the river. These activities made some people arrive to settle in the area.

During the occupation campaign of East Timor by the Indonesian army, the area of Liquiçá was taken over in 1979. After that occurrence, some reconstruction plans began in the hamlet and nearby places. Works for agricultural development started in the mid-eighties, attracting more people to establish their residence in Faulara and nearby hamlets. In 1981, CRS (Catholic Relief Services) and USAID established the East Timor Agricultural Development Project (ETADEP), which was transferred to Timorese control later under the name of the ETADEP Foundation.¹⁰ The river-banks of first the Asulau Saré and second the Faulara were cleared of a cane-like grass (*saccharum spontaneum*) in order to make the place available for irrigated rice cultivation. Cattle were distributed among the settlers to be used for ploughing muddy paddy fields (Martin-Schiller, Hale, and Wilson 1987; USAID 1987). In 1985, according to the accounts of the local inhabitants, the construction of the irrigation system began.

However, beyond the movements of people boosted by agricultural development initiatives, most of the 824 inhabitants of the hamlet—distributed in 128 households (NSD & UNFPA 2011) arrived in Faulara in 1996–1997, with the official opening of a transmigration settlement created by the Indonesian regime (CAVR 2005, 116–117).

For the most part, they were ‘local transmigrants’¹¹ from within Liquiçá District; some Indonesian settlers came to live there as well, but it is said that they left the country in 1999, after the referendum for independence. The second most important group in the area is comprised of the descendants of Búnak-speaking people from the Bobonaro District,¹² with now their second, third, or fourth generations born in Liquiçá. They claim to have come to Liquiçá long ago for a different set of reasons. Some claim to have been forced to move by the Japanese, others are said to have come as merchants to the post of Boebau, and others have come to work as labourers in the fields of the Portuguese SAPT. There is a minority of settlers who claim to belong to lineages originally from the districts of Ermera, Baucau, Aileu, Manatuto, or Suai, but most of them are originally from Liquiçá. Due to this heterogeneous population, the public language in Faulara is normally Tetum (Timor-Leste’s official language), but other languages such as Tokodede (the native language in the area), Mambai, or even Búnak are used in the household domain.¹³ Nonetheless, it is quite common to find people knowing all those languages and shifting from one to another without difficulty. Bahasa Indonesia is widely known, while Portuguese, though understood by social elites, is only really spoken well by a handful of people.

Faulara then has experienced a number of processes of migration under different state regimes. While since independence in 2002, the drainage of people has largely been directed towards the capital city, as happens in many other rural areas of the country (NDS & UNFPA 2011), the remaining dwellers are a mixture of native inhabitants and migrants from different historical times and from a varied set of origins, both social and geographical. Almost all of them have resettled (whether by force or by

opportunity) as a labour force for the agricultural industry; however, some of them, pertaining to families well positioned in the Portuguese administration, were resettled by the colonial rulers as political administrators.

The Making of the Rural Classes: A Field of Narratives

When referring to the rural areas of Timor-Leste, external observers consider 'the rural' as formed by an artificial social uniformity. Authors using an objectivist approach consider social stratification in the rural areas as a result of wealth differences when referring to the 'poorest rural' communities (for example, NSD 2011) or in terms of disparities in access to basic services when considering some groups the 'most vulnerable' sectors (for example, RDTL 2009). The above historical account of Faulara, however, points to social boundaries beyond wealth and access to services which the inhabitants stress in discourse and practice: the boundary between native occupants and migrants. This difference is not set, however, on the basis of rigorous historical accounts, but by virtue of the position of the different dwellers' lineages with respect to an origin narrative.

As in many other settings in Timor-Leste and the Austronesian region, an origin narrative structures and provides sense to the social order (McWilliam 2005) by indicating which of the lineages is the original kin group with preferential access to the land,¹⁴ locally referred to as *rai-na'in*. In Faulara, this mythic-historical episode recounts that a lineage called *Lauli* 'handed over' a woman of their own house¹⁵ (*Dau-Roma*) to the river.¹⁶ This 'handing over', which metaphorically refers to a human sacrifice, implies the consideration that the river was married with the woman. By this action, the *Lauli* lineage created an alliance with the *Lauli River* itself, which is presented in the narrative as *Dau-Roma's* husband: *Blea-Kasa*, a male spiritual entity that is considered part of the river. Through the metaphorical marriage, the *Lauli* lineage became the wife-giver to the river. This fact has many implications. First of all, it brings along the transference of a specific attribute that only *Blea-Kasa* possesses as a spirit, the quality of *lulik*.¹⁷ Secondly, it implies an asymmetrical relationship, as in Timorese custom the wife-taker (the river) is considered a debtor of the wife-giver (the lineage).¹⁸ Traditionally, in Timor-Leste each lineage is bound to other kin groups by relationships of wife-giving (*fetosaa*) and wife-taking (*umane*); each new alliance is preferably set among the available spouses of a specific lineage, by which the alliances between kin groups are reproduced. In order to carry out the marriage, the representatives of each lineage (called *lia-na'in*) negotiate the *barlake*¹⁹ (bridewealth). The bridewealth is deemed as a payment through which the male spouse rewards the ascendants of the bride for their hard work in bearing the child to adulthood. This debt is deferred throughout the life cycle; the male spouse contributes water buffaloes and/or goats and other goods when a ritual of the bride's family takes place (either a marriage or a mortuary ritual) or simply when they need them. Wife-givers would contribute pigs to the rituals of their wife-takers; however, the wife-takers are considered as subordinated to their wife-givers, as the latter are

deemed to be life givers (Clamagirand 1980; Fox 1980; Hicks 1984). Only when the payment of the *barlake* is complete (which might take decades) will the bride become a member of her husband's lineage. Thirdly, the Laueli lineage established itself through this event as the legitimised channel of communication with the river. As happens with the *fetosaa* (wife-giver) — *umane* (wife-taker) alliance, by this marriage the Laueli kin group holds the right of summoning the river and requests goods from him.²⁰ Finally, the narrative goes on to declare that once Laueli settled after the metaphorical marriage, one new lineage, Asumanu, came to live in the settlement in the position of wife-takers, receiving from Laueli some authority over ritual affairs.

On the basis of this narrative, both lineages are considered the legitimate *rai-na'in* or the kin groups with preferential access to the land, socially differentiated from the newcomers or *la'o-rai* families. This separation has an economic correlative. First, the original lineages are owners of the majority of the best paddy fields; *la'o-rai* families only have access to these lands through political decisions (as in the case of the families of those who were nominated local administrators by the Portuguese rulers), marriage alliances (with the 'original settlers'), or simply by occupying the land (as in the case of some pieces of land that were created some years ago as a result of the changes in the river bed; these lands are less productive and are prone to flooding and other events). While some of the *la'o-rai* families have rights of exploitation of paddy fields, they are considered to be 'originally' the property of the *rai-na'in* lineages, which hold extensive properties for the cultivation of rice. Currently, however, this stratified picture is experiencing profound changes, with the rapid transformation Timor-Leste is experiencing, including new livelihood opportunities opened in the city, the increased access to formal education, and the pension system.

The Ritual Power of the *Rai-na'in Kaer Bua-Malus*

The above mythic-historical event is widely acknowledged by most people in Faulara and is never disregarded, at least in public. However, not all the members of the Laueli kin group can communicate and summon the river through ritual action. Every lineage has a group of representatives involved in marriage negotiations and other lineage affairs—such lineage affairs are locally known as *lia*—which are referred to as *lia-na'in*. As well, every single lineage group has at least one representative dealing with the rituals linked to the spiritual realm or the sphere of *lulik*, the prohibited or taboo. This figure might be referred to as *lulik-na'in* (the one with privileged access to the *lulik*) or as in Faulara: *rai-na'in kaer bua malus* (the land-owner who wields the areca leaf and betel nut, the devices through which the ritual authority communicates with non-human beings). This figure is regarded as the main ritual authority in the geospatial domain where his lineage has a precedential access. As such, he is the only one with the capacity and authority to perform the communications with the river. The most important ritual performed by the *rai-na'in kaer bua malus* in the yearly calendar is the *nahe biti*.²¹ The inhabitants of Faulara consider that, as

they use the banks of the river to produce rice, they need to give the river something in return. The ceremony, locally conceptualised as an act of *fó-han rai-lulik* (feeding the sacred land), is performed in order to observe this reciprocal system between humans and the realm of *lulik*, sacred or taboo (Traube 1986, 2011), keeping the metaphorical idea of equilibrium between them (Pena Castro 2010). Of the meat of the animals sacrificed during the ritual, the *rai-na'in kaer bua malus* keeps a share for himself, along with other goods serving as payment for his ritual assistance.

Ideally, the position of *rai-na'in kaer bua malus* is passed down from one generation to the next, being the retiring person acting as the one who selects his successor (preferably his eldest son or a younger agnate, but not necessarily) among the most salient candidates within the *rai na'in* lineages (with a preference for the members descended from the original settlers). Every new apprentice will spend some time assisting the ritual authority, learning the metaphoric language of the ancestors and the way the mythical narratives should be recounted, as well as their content. After some years learning the secrets of the tradition and *lulik*, he gets to be the functionary wielding the position. This moment is a transition in which he stops being just a regular person and actually becomes a ritual specialist.

As an ideal rule, this is the system of inheritance that governs the succession to this position. However, this consuetudinary model of inheritance does not operate as a rule that social actors mechanically follow. The actual process of inheritance is rather a negotiation between this ideal normative framework and the practical constraints impeding its realisation.²² Far from being a prescription, the norm is rather a model of reference for the actual practice (Couceiro Domínguez 1999).

The Conflictive Inheritance of the Position of Ritual Leader

The inheritance of the position of *rai-na'in kaer bua malus* has been in recent times anything but clear. Currently, the inheritance of the *kaer bua malus* position is one of the main sources of discussion between two figures who claim to have the legitimate right to wield it: Romino and Andino. Before 1999, someone from the Lauli lineage named Mausari held the position. Because of his connections with the pro-Indonesian militia (his only daughter was married to a member of *Besi Merah Putih*²³), he flew to West Timor after independence and settled there, never returning to Timor-Leste. He was not considered to be pro-Indonesian himself, but because of his age and the fact that his daughter was the only immediate family he had left, he decided to stay with her. It is not clear how and if he actually passed the *kaer bua-malus* position on, as the country was involved in political turmoil, and Faulara was not isolated from these occurrences.²⁴ Neither Andino nor Romino ever mentions to whom Mausari may have passed the position.

Andino belongs to the Lauli lineage and, as such, claims the right to be the interlocutor with the river; Romino, on the other hand, is from the Asumanu lineage, a wife-taker of the Lauli lineage and considered the second kin group arriving in the area, but still considered *rai-na'in*. When interviewing them, only Romino mentioned

Mausari's passing of the position in an indirect way; he claimed that the *lulik* objects that Mausari had were now in his possession. Both of them claimed that their *aman sira* ('fathers')²⁵ held the position before them and that they passed it on to them. Although the ideal establishes a clear inheritance preference within the lineage of Andino, some inhabitants claimed that it was fair for Romino to carry on with the position because when Mausari was in Faulara, it was Romino's family (his wife-taker) that took care of him, whereas his 'sons' (his brother's sons, from the Lauei lineage, Andino among them) did not look after him at all. In the words of the former chief of *suku*, Fontino: *sira mak hamoos nia mii, raut nia tee* (they were the ones who cleaned his pee and picked up his poop); a 'nurturance ideology' (Narotzky 1991) appears here as a main feature for the legitimisation of the production and reproduction of local social relations.

Contrasting Legitimacies for Wielding the Betel and Areca

When defending his legitimacy as the ritual authority, none of these claimants mentioned the passing on of the position from Mausari as the source of his claims, but rather used other arguments to obtain social acknowledgement. Both of them recognise the same narrative of origin that recounts the marriage between Lauei and the river; as well, they both recount a similar version of the advent of the lineage Asumanu, which arrived to marry a woman from Lauei in Faulara; furthermore, both of them recognise that there was transference of the ritual power passed from Lauei to Asumanu at some point in a mythical past, but with nuances.

Andino bases his claim over the ritual power on the canonical myth. By emphasising the fact of being the primary wife-giver, he discursively sets up an asymmetrical relationship between them based on the order of precedence of the two lineages. In his recounting, Andino ends up saying that his ancestors nominated Romino his 'secretary' in the ritual affairs because the Lauei family representatives were busy with the political affairs and that, although he has rights over the land as wife-taker of Lauei, there is still an unpaid debt between Romino's lineage (Asumanu) and his own: a bride price that was never settled by Asumanu ancestors for the original marriage.

On the other hand, Romino's claims for legitimacy are based on both a narrative and a dream. Unlike Andino, he explains that the transference to his lineage of the ritual power from Lauei was not because of a functional division of the work (political/ritual) as Andino states, but because of the fact that the Lauei lineage was not able to carry out ritual tasks. Added to this argument, he also supports his claims by referring to a dream. He recounts that his dead father talked to him in a dream, allowing him to continue with the ritual duties. This event of the dream is widely repeated among people using his services as yet another example of Romino's legitimacy. In this dream, his dead father told him: *kaer, Ó bele kaer mais lalika ko'alia* (you can wield it [the betel and areca], but you do not need to talk). By this account, Romino tries to add legitimacy to his claim and provides an explanation of one of his main weaknesses when performing the *nahe biti* and other rituals: he does not

know how to 'speak the words' (the metaphorical language of the ancestors), as is the duty of the one who wields the *bua malus* (betel and areca). As they explained, Romino's father died when he was still a child and he never taught him the art of ritual performance. To carry on with the position, Romino would only need to make the offerings and prepare all the elements needed to perform the ritual, but thereafter he 'hands over' the talk to his 'dead father' who, from the other realm, will talk on his behalf. Against these arguments, Andino is known as the one who 'knows the words', and he uses this skill as a proof of his legitimate claim over the position. Romino, however, states that he is not Andino's 'secretary' nor under his authority.

In sum, Andino does not delegitimise Romino's right to hold the position of *rai-na'in* and to perform the corresponding tasks, as both are considered *rai na'in*. However, he emphasises an asymmetrical relationship between them. Romino, though, claims that only he could perform as *rai-na'in kaer bua malus* and that Andino has been illegitimately trying to get the position from him. In this regard, Romino explains that at some point he offered Andino the opportunity to get back the position, but in order to 'do it properly' he would have to give him ten *tais*²⁶ and ten pigs, which Andino has never brought along. When it comes to practical matters, however, they both let the people decide (not without exerting pressure on the decision) which one of them they should summon to perform the rituals.

Contested Authorities: After Cutting the Tree

Not everybody agreed about the arguments of both claimants, however. It was quite common for the people in Faulara to speculate about Mausari's fate in West Timor, but for the most part people choose the *rai-na'in kaer bua malus* who defends their interest or who asks a lower fee for the ritual services.

The family of Salustião, for example, comes from the Búnak area and settled in Faulara three generations ago to work in agriculture. Once they had an argument with Romino, caused by the cutting of a tree in the forest. Romino claimed that the tree was his property because the forest fell within his area of ritual authority. As a penalty for the transgression, he asked from the family 100 US dollars or a big pig and one *tais*. Privately, the family did not agree with the claim and the fine, but after a couple of days of negotiation, the problem was settled with the promise of giving a piglet and one *tais*. The family of Salustião had been a strong supporter of Romino's claim against that of Andino. They used to recount that Romino's services in the *nahe biti* ritual had worked well up to the present day and that their harvest of rice was always successful. In 2009, while attending to their *nahe biti* ritual, they even claimed that during one rainy season the river was about to destroy their paddy fields and that Romino avoided it by standing in front of it and throwing an egg into the water. After the problem with the tree, the members of the household shifted their position and started to express their intention of not summoning him anymore because he abused his power as *rai-na'in*.

After the event, the family talked with Lario da Silva about it. Lario is a member of the social elite. His father was originally from Baucau, in the northeast region of Timor-Leste, from where they were brought by the Portuguese. His family's migration was due to the Portuguese provision of a position in the local administration to his father. The neighbours recount the conflicts that his lineage, newcomers but with power to command over the district affairs, had experienced in the past with the original *rai-na'in* lineages of the area of Leotelá and the fear that his father caused among the inhabitants of Faulara. Lario speaks a bit of Portuguese and was one of the leaders of the *Frente Klandestina* (civil supporters of the resistance against Indonesia) in Faulara. He constantly used an extensive range of political legitimacy markers (Silva 2008) to symbolically reinforce his position; whereas he was not a formal authority of the traditional system nor of the current state, he was still considered a charismatic figure in the area. He is currently involved in politics and has managed to be a key element in channelling agricultural state aid, capitalising the distribution of money and other means of production (tools, machinery, and so on).

He used to plot against both *rai-na'in kaer bua malus* in small gatherings of people. One day, he went to the house of Salustião and had breakfast with his family. The family told him about the problem with the cutting of the tree. Immediately afterward, he gave a speech to the family of Salustião about Romino and his whole family's bad behaviour as *rai-na'in*. He said that he was also tired of them, as they were 'thieves', often killing other people's animals for their daily consumption; he even recounted that Romino's elder brother was caught stealing other people's fruits. Discursively he tried to delegitimise both lineages' *rai-na'in* status by saying that they were also *la'o-rai* (newcomers) once and that they were given the position by their *umane* Laueli. He even compared the mythic-historical legitimisation of the marriage of Laueli with other narratives he knew from elsewhere in Timor-Leste by saying: *será que sira nia abó tun mai husi lalehan iha rai ida ne'e? Lae!* (Perhaps their ancestors descended from heaven in this very land? No, they didn't!).²⁷ By articulating this argument, he discursively blurred the order of precedence that was based on the mythical narrative, placing imaginatively the *la'o-rai* families (incomers)—his group—and the *rai-na'in* lineages or original settlers—those of Andino and Romino—at the same level. Referring to other narratives he knew about other lineages within Timor-Leste whose ancestors descended directly from the sky or ascended from the land, he undermined the legitimacy of the *rai-na'in* as a 'traditional' social order of precedence in Faulara by indicating that, in the end, 'they' (the *rai-na'in*) are, like 'us' (*la'o rai*), newcomers to this land.

Lario, making use of the narrative resources available, challenges the power of the *rai-na'in*, and places himself as a defender of the most disfavoured classes within the social space, the newcomers. In this way, he negotiates a better position for himself in political affairs: the less the power of the ritual leaders, the better his position to manipulate events to his favour. It is not coincidental that he sponsored a group of *la'o-rai* people as his candidates for the *suku* election of 2009. Nor is it coincidental that he, along with other *la'o-rai* and without any of the two *rai-na'in*, wrote a petition in

2003 sent to the administrator of Liquiçá Sub-district (copied to the administrator of Liquiçá District, the National Directorate of Local Development and Territorial Management, and the National Parliament), in which they asked for the recognition of Faulara as an independent *suku* from Leotelá, under the recovered name of the old *suku* Lauli-Lau (see above).

During the above conversation, Lario ended up saying that if there is a legitimate *rai-na'in* he is the one living in Atambua (Indonesia); given that Mausari is alive and that both Romino and Andino are 'robbers', he said that when there is a problem it should be solved by crossing the border and consulting him.

Discussion

The ethnographic account above serves to illustrate the linkages between narratives and the power sourced by ritual. In analysing this case study, the idea of narrative capital is of much use, but what do we refer to when we talk about narrative capital? We will try to answer this question by discussing the approaches to narrative capital of several authors, taking as a basis the above ethnographic description.

First of all, we are considering narratives as a form of capital, which Bourdieu understands as any kind of resource that provides power or makes possible relations of domination (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2013; Bourdieu 1991, 2000b). As for any other type of capital, its accumulation requires specific investments or 'social labour' and takes its value from its inscription in a field—a field of forces and a field of struggles (Bourdieu 1991, 2002) whose requirements are imposed over the individuals (Bourdieu 1991, 49). In this case, we could consider that we are referring to the field of ritual. Ritual is a main source of power within the system of precedence and the positions of the different agents in the field determines largely their social status, even with respect to land tenure. We have seen here how different actors are competing for the power sourced by the ritual by deploying different strategies, some of them eminently economic (for example, when any of them decides to charge a small amount for the ritual services), others social, others discursive, and others narrative.

Three narratives form part of the game of authority and discredit described above. Firstly, the founding narrative of the Lauli River divides the social space in two groups, the so considered *rai-na'in* or original groups and the *la'o-rai* or newcomers. This separation has an economic correlative: the first groups are the ones with privileged access to the best paddy fields, while most of those who have the worst paddy lands or who do not have access to rice fields at all are within the newcomers' group. The first group, the *rai-na'in*, is further divided into two subgroups, the lineage *Lauli* (wife-giver) and the lineage *Asumanu* (wife-taker). A second nuanced narrative is articulated by each of the ritual representatives of the two lineages, Romino and Andino, who openly struggle to get the status of *rai-na'in kaer bua malus* in the area. The most disfavoured group, the newcomers, is also divided into two: those who migrated as political appointees during the Portuguese time and

those who migrated as members of a labour force, among them all those who did not have access to rice fields or who accessed those with lower quality. Lario belongs to the first sub-group while Salustião's family belongs to the second sub-group. The description above shows how Lario, in order to gain favour from the family of Salustião and assembling himself as a symbolic representative of the newcomers, articulates a narrative in order to blur the frontiers between the *rai-na'in* and the *la'o-rai* lineages. While Andino and Romino opt for conservative strategies by defending the orthodox narrative, which provides them with legitimacy to wield the position, although with nuanced disagreements, those having less capital of various types, including not having the rights provided by the founding narrative, deploy strategies of subversion by articulating narratives of discredit they have access to: a heterodox narrative (see Bourdieu 2000a).

Based on this analysis, it is worth re-assessing some of the approaches to narrative capital. Scholars from sociology, learning theory (Biesta et al. 2008; Goodson 2005, 2006, 2012, 2013, 2007), and tourism research (Cater 2011; Marques 2007, 2010; Noy 2004a, 2004b) have thoughtfully considered narrative capital as a resource for the presentation and re-construction of the self. Baldwin, from the sociology of health, has focused on interviews done with patients with dementia (Baldwin 2010), Goodson and colleagues have established their ground on life stories and biographical accounts (Biesta et al. 2008; Goodson 2013), while Noy (2004a, 2004b) has conducted interviews with returned tourists. These methodological approaches, where the individuals build a self in front of the interviewer or researcher, have had a theoretical consequence: an excessive focus on the individual and the distortion of the social dimensions of the economies and politics of narrative.

The construction of the self is a political act, and, as such, it takes place in a specific and structured social space or field (Bourdieu 1990), which sets the parameters of its own contestation. Not all the individuals can access an infinite range of narratives (Baldwin 2013), and there is a limited range of selves that one can build up. Furthermore, some social contexts will bring along censorship of specific narratives. Salustião, the newcomer from the lower social scale, could never invent a totally new narrative suggesting that his lineage is the original settler in the region and that, as such, he has the right to the best paddy fields. He could attempt it, but such a strategy would have negative consequences for him and his family. In his works, Baldwin talks about the 'narrative dispossession' suffered by patients with dementia (Baldwin 2010); in a way, we have shown that the founding mythical narratives are socially regarded as legitimately recounted only by the *rai na'in kaer bua malus*, so that all the rest are socially dispossessed of the legitimacy to recount it. However, as a newcomer, Salustião has access to some other narrative resources that allow him a certain subversion and control over the ritual leaders. We can consider then Salustião not as dispossessed, but certainly he is narrative-poor.

What we suggest here is that the 'politics of the self' should be inscribed in the specific fields where they take place; each field has its specific norms and it is by reference to such norms that some accumulations of narrative capital might be more

effective than others. Narrative competition is crucial within the system of precedence, structured on the basis of origin, and the social system sets the very rules of the struggle. For example, in front of the ritual authorities, Lario would gain symbolic credit recounting stories from his past in the resistance movement, but he will not discredit the *rai na'in* in public talking about the issue of the founding narrative that he recounted in the private space of the house of Salustião. The games of credit and discredit through the narratives of the others and the use of narrative resources beyond the self are crucial in drawing general theories on narrative capital. We consider here the existence of a network of narrative resources which agents with contrasting interests access in order to raise their own or the other's profiles, or simply to discredit others' positions (discrediting the own social position is not common, but it also might happen).

This brings us to a second question: is narrative capital a subtype of cultural capital (Noy 2004a, 2004b) or is it a completely different type of capital (Goodson 2013)? It should be noted that the notion of cultural capital remains not well defined by Bourdieu and as with many other concepts, he did not provide specific guidance for its study (see Couceiro Domínguez 2005). Broadly speaking, it can be understood as a set of cultural resources, knowledge, education, and skills in which the agents invest (Bourdieu 1979, 1984, 2000b). Defined in such a way, we suggest here that narrative capital is a different type of capital, not a subtype of cultural capital.

However, there is one dimension of narrative capital, namely narrative capability, which can be acquired through transformations of cultural capital. Narrative capability is defined as the capacity to be heard and acknowledged (Watts 2008). Following the ideal rule, the potential candidates for becoming ritual authorities invest a great deal in acquiring knowledge and skills to perform rituals: mastering the metaphoric language of the ancestors and knowing the founding narratives, which only they are supposed to know and which only they can recount in public events (they are considered 'masters of the words'). Everybody in the village knows the founding narratives, and some might recount them in private gatherings, but not in public, as doing so is regarded to bring along misfortune or sickness to the non-authorised storyteller. Hence, it can be considered that the ritual authorities invest great efforts and time in acquiring cultural capital (the mastery of ritual language and the proper recounting of the origin narratives); this cultural capital brings along the legitimacy and authority to recount in public certain stories that everybody knows; that is, provides them with narrative capability.

However, cultural capital is not the only source of narrative capability. We can ask ourselves why Lario is entitled and has the capacity to access different narratives to discredit the ritual authorities: in contrast to Salustião, he has a great deal of social and symbolic capital provided by his origin and position in the local political arena (participation in the resistance movement, political allies, the origins of his family and its members' power over the district affairs). He also has institutional cultural capital (formal studies during the Portuguese time embodied in knowledge of the Portuguese language), which invests him with authority to speak in public and use his narrative

resources (possibly greater than Salustião's) to discredit others' narratives. We consider that by defining narrative capital as a subtype of cultural capital we might obscure the operation of the system of precedence, where the boundaries between lineages are set mostly on the basis of narratives, not on the basis of the level of formal education. In contrast to cultural capital, narrative capital is widely accessible (can be accumulated simply by everyday experience); what cultural capital provides, as social capital does, is narrative capability. But most important, contrary to cultural capital, narrative capital can be used as a more accessible resource for social contestation and the questioning of orthodox modes of social differentiation.

In sum, we can say that narrative capital refers to the narrative resources of which an agent makes use to access power, either by raising one's own profile or by discrediting the other's domination. This accumulation, linked to the accumulation and transformation of other types of capital (social, cultural, symbolic, and economic), may contribute to social reproduction, but also to the questioning of the social order and hence, social change. Defined in this fashion, there seems to be no arguments to consider narrative capital solely as a feature of globalisation and the contemporary world; rather, it is a ubiquitous feature in power struggles.

This conception of narrative capital brings us to a third point of discussion. Biesta and Tedder, in analysing the interlinkages between narrativity and agency, propose that the learning gain arising from the narrative process is a means through which individuals achieve agency (Biesta and Tedder 2008; Biesta et al. 2008; Tedder and Biesta 2008). This conclusion can only be reached by a process of de-contextualisation of the individuals from the social and practical conditions where narratives are deployed. As we show in this article, narrativity does not bring along agency; rather, it is a deployment of agency itself, as is any social practice. By enunciating his narrative of discredit, Lario is not only justifying his actions or setting the foundation for more aggressive practices against the ritual authorities; he is acting in society by talking about society, he is investing in his self and acting over others' selves, and he is contributing to change by performing change through narrative 'social labour'.

Conclusion

In this article, we have shown that in the power disputes related to access to ritual authority and land tenure, narrative capital takes a central role. A founding narrative divides society into two groups, both of which deploy narrative strategies of legitimisation and discrediting that, at the same time reproduce, but can also put into question local social order and its nuanced boundaries. The first group (*rai-na'in*), which is dominant in terms of access to land, articulates orthodox strategies, while the second (*la'o-rai*), which has only gained access to the land by political appointments, marriage alliances, or lastly, occupation, opts for the heterodox. However, by entering into the game of legitimacy and discredit through narrative and narrative interpretation, both groups act in terms of the parameters set by the rules of precedence, while negotiating over the field of ritual and the whole social space.

These struggles and the way they take shape are a historical product. On the one hand, they are the result of the continuous migration flows that have taken place along the history of Faulara, whose population has, far from having remained stable throughout history, experienced continuous endogenous and exogenous impulses for change. On the other hand, they are the result of subsequent development policies in the frame of different state regimes (Portuguese, Indonesian, and the current independent government) that included resettlement as part of political appointments, migrations as part of agricultural development initiatives and, lastly, forced movements of people. Finally, these power struggles take place in a national context of rapid social change (embeddedness in a monetary economy, high migration to the capital city, the emergence of an urban middle class) in which traditional systems of authority and power are being put into question.

In this article, we have shown how this process of change is subject to social negotiation, and how in this process of negotiation, narrative capital takes a central role. We further suggest that the concept of narrative capital is crucial in the understanding of the current dynamics of the system of precedence, articulated on the basis of a specific notion of origins. As well, social systems structured under principles of precedence are a privileged ground for narrative research as the parameters of sociality, as both domination and contestation, have a strong narrative component.

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Notes

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- [2] Conceptually defined in contrast to hierarchy (Acciaioli 2009; Forth 2009; Fox 1994; Kaartinen 2009; Smedal 2009) and developed as a tool for the comparative study of Austronesian societies (Fox 2009a; Molnar 2011), the notion of precedence delineates an archetypal model of relative social and categorical relationships (Fox 2009a), a specific principle of social differentiation.
- [3] In this regard, see the contributions of Butterworth (2009) and Vischer (2009a), who focus on discourse and ritual as domains of contestation. For the most part authors have focused on the

- categorical roots of the system (Fox 1994, 1995, 2008; Reuter 2009), conceptual dimensions (Fox 1994, 1995, 2009a), or its normative expressions (Fox 2009b). Other authors have focused on the metaphorical dimensions of the model (McWilliam 2009) or on the linkages between social knowledge, local narratives, and the spatial domains—see the contributions by Fox (2006) as well as Molnar (2011). On the historical transformations and its linkages to other systems of status, see Lewis (2009) and on its current transformations in the context of independent Timor Leste, see Molnar (2006).
- [4] The name is composed of two *Tokodede* words: *fau* (rubber tree) and *lara* (place), meaning ‘the place of the rubber trees’. Folk narratives recount that the name came to be after a colonial agricultural firm promoted the planting of this particular species in the area. Available sources confirm that the Portuguese SAPT (*Sociedade Agrícola Pátria e Trabalho*) was the one that started the production of rubber (Martinho 1948) and the only one that kept promoting its exploitation in Timor-Leste (Clarence-Smith 1992).
 - [5] The *Lauei* is one of the three main tributaries of the Loes River, one of the most important rivers in the country.
 - [6] A *suku* is an administrative subdivision comprising a number of hamlets or *aldeias*. Currently, the administrative structure divides Timor-Leste into districts, sub-districts, *suku*, and *aldeia*.
 - [7] Mello, Costa, and Matos (2010) report on disruptions in the patterns of rice production as result of changes in the Loes River bed; however, such change has not been observed during fieldwork around the Lauei River.
 - [8] For the case of Timor-Leste, see Traube (1980a, 1980b) and Hicks (2007). See Howell (1996) for the analysis of sacrifice in Eastern Indonesian societies.
 - [9] Boebau was a military post (*posto*, in Portuguese) created in June 1896 (Duarte 1944, 37), shortly after Governor Celestino da Silva promoted the new administrative division of Portuguese Timor into military commands (Roque 2012). It was short-lived, being integrated into Liquiçá in 1934 (Belo 2011, 215). Its ruins are still standing in the mountainous village of Manati, *suku* Leotelá. Before being a post, it is mentioned in historical records that go back to the sixteenth century as being a small indigenous kingdom (Belo 2011).
 - [10] *Yayasan ETADEP* is the oldest local NGO in East Timor.
 - [11] Called *Alokasi Penempatan Penduduk Daerah Transmigrasi* (APPD) in Indonesian (Ottens 1986).
 - [12] On the linguistic groups of Timor, see Hull (1998).
 - [13] Mambai is the second most commonly spoken language of the country (after Tetum), being the main language of four districts (Manufahi, Aileu, Ainaro, and Ermera) with a presence in some regions of two others (Dili and Liquiçá) (Araújo e Côrte-Real and Hull 1998; Araújo e Côrte-Real 2003; Fernandes 2006). Búnak is spoken in some regions of four districts: Suai, Ainaro, Manufahi, and Bobonaro (Schapper 2009, 2011; Sousa 2010).
 - [14] The principle of precedence informs social structure by linking notions of origin and order in complex ways (Fox 1995). See the collection edited by Fox and Sather (2006) and the one edited by Vischer (2009b).
 - [15] Locally referred to as *Uma lulik* (sacred house), the lineage as a whole is defined with respect to a common mythical ancestor (Hicks 2007; McWilliam 2005; Traube 2007). As well, it refers to one of the lineage core symbols, the sacred house (Gárate Castro and Assis 2010; Hicks 2008; Traube 1986).
 - [16] Contrary to some other Timorese mythic-historical accounts, where the common mythical ancestor of a lineage arises from the land or descends from the sky, the lineage Lauei did not claim to be the original people of Faulara, but arrived generations ago from a place they called *Bee-Sai-Bee Tama / Luka-Vikeke*, using a similar system of geographical reference as the one studied among the *Atoni Pah Meto* by Andrew McWilliam (2006[1997]).

- [17] The concept of *lulik* has been defined in different ways among authors working in the area. It has been referred to as sacred (Barros Duarte 1975), taboo (Forbes 1884), as spiritual potential (Molnar 2006), or as magic (Ospina and Hohe 2001): objects, spaces, and narratives which are set apart (Hicks 2008). In the words of Traube, *lulik* signifies a 'relation of distance' (Traube 1986).
- [18] In some parts of Timor-Leste, as in many other parts of Eastern Indonesia, the wife-giver group is deemed superior to its wife-takers (Hicks 2010; Traube 1986).
- [19] On the *barlake* and the exchange of goods in marriages and mortuary rituals, see among others, the work of Barros Duarte (1979) or Forman (1980).
- [20] Note that in the narrative the Lauli River is considered a male agent.
- [21] Literally, *nahe biti* means 'stretching, lying down, or unrolling (*nahe*) the mat (*biti*)' and refers broadly to the settlement of disputes. The main study dealing with this concept is the work of Babo-Soares (2004), who defines *nahe biti* as a measure of reconciliation or as an institution of the customary justice system.
- [22] For some interesting examples of the flexibilities in the process of inheritance and the creative ways found by Timorese communities to deal with the constraints in its realisation, see D'Andrea, Silva, and Yoder (2003).
- [23] *Besi Merah Putih* ('red and white iron' in Indonesian) was the name of the pro-Indonesian militia from Liquiçá district.
- [24] Faulara was one of the places in which pro-Independence supporters sought refuge within Liquiçá district after voting in the referendum for independence (CAVR 2005, 115–116).
- [25] In this case refers to the male members of their progenitor's generation within the lineage, not to the broader notion of ancestors, usually referred to as *avó sira* or *bei'ala sira*. Actually, in drawing upwards the line of inheritance, it can be found that the position of *rai na'in kaer bua malu* has been wielded by members of both lineages: Romino's father was recognised as a *rai na'in kaer bua malu*; as he died young, the position was wielded by Andino's father's elder brother (*aman-boot*) and afterwards inherited by Andino's father's younger brother (*aman-ki'ik*), Mausari, who broke down the inheritance line.
- [26] *Tais* is a traditional Timorese woven cloth. See de Fátima Sarmiento Ximenes (2012).
- [27] In some narratives of Timor-Leste, the founding ancestors of the house are believed to be beings that descended to the land or came from heaven. There are still some other narratives in which the founding ancestor is believed to have been born directly from the soil (*naklosu-mai husi rai*).

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