

Excellent work. one of
the most clearly written reports
this semester. Still, too long!

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Tetum Ghosts and Kin: Fieldwork In An Indonesian Community
By Professor David Hicks

"The chief purpose in this book is to show how ritual in a nonliterate community brings together many different facets of that community's culture—religious beliefs, kinship practices, literature, ecology, even the architecture of the house—unites them in a comprehensive system. (Hicks, 1-2)"

Due to the newness (at the time of publication: 1976) of the concept of focusing mainly on symbolism in anthropology, there were many different ways that the study can be organized. Dr. Hicks compiled his information through observing, living with, and interviewing the Tetum villages of Mamulak and Mane Hat. Accompanied by his wife, Maxine, and his infant son, Paul; Dr. Hicks lived with the Tetum for fifteen months.

The ethnography was broken down into five main aspects of Tetum life. The first being the rituals that must be carried out during birth to keep the child healthy. The second being the effect the ecology of the island has on the life styles of the Tetum, specifically the corn ritual and the seasons of the year. Along with ecology, the construction of the homes has specific meaning to the Tetum. The different aspects of the house have different sacred components that must be included to keep the ancestral ghosts happy. Marriage and death are also broken down into their respective chapters. Marriage and death (along with birth) are considered the most sacred of ceremonies to the Tetum and have specific rituals that must be completed to ensure the success of the family. They living also need to ensure that the ancestral ghosts are kept in good spirits (sorry about the pun) so there will need to be no need to exact revenge. In every part of Tetum life, there is special attention paid to the actions of a

person to make sure that nothing happens to offend the ancestral ghosts; hence the reason for the remarkable number of rituals performed for almost every aspect of life.

There were two barriers erected at the beginning of the project. The first barrier being language, many on the island did not speak Portuguese. Due to the lack of opportunity to learn the native language, The Hicks' acquired a translator until they met up with Andre Pereira, a Tetum man from the 'Tuna Clan' that spoke Portuguese learned during his schooling in Europe. This inability to effectively communicate created a barrier because many of the people didn't want to take the time to speak with "a stranger whose command of Tetum was worse than that of a four year-old child. (Hicks, 12)".

The second barrier was where the Hicks' would reside. Because there was no invitation to study in the Tetum villages, there was a bit of hesitation as to where they would live. It ended up being that they had to gain permission from the Viqueque Administration to live in a house that needed a lot of work to make habitable.

Hicks' objective was to study different rituals in relation to different aspects of lives of those who lived in the still pagan society of the Tetums'. In order to understand the Tetum rituals, there must first be an understanding of how the worlds are divided. Cross culturally, the world is divided into secular and sacred realms of life. In Tetum society, secularly the men have control over the women, however in sacred matters, the women are superior to the men. The secular world is on the earth's crust where man walks around, however the most sacred of places is within the earth. Also, in the secular world, humans have reign over ghosts but in a sacred world, the opposite is true.

The center of the earth is sacred because it is associated with Mother Earth and is a womb of sorts. "A 'pregnant stone,' the rear room (or 'womb' or 'tomb') or the house, the womb of a buffalo cow, or the sacred world itself, alternate as the birthplace of humanity in different origin myths. (Hicks 21)" The myth of the beginning of the world states that

"When the world was created no humans existed; just the sea. Then two pieces of land appeared...Bit by bit other pieces emerged from the waters until the entire island of Timor lay stretched out. Two vaginas appeared in the ground...To clamber up out of the vagina men and women pulled themselves up over the lip with creepers from a certain species of tree...(Hicks 22)"

These vaginas can still be seen today; scientifically they are limestone craters

Hicks began with the lifetime of rituals in a most obvious starting place: the birth of a child. In the rear of a home, there is a pillar called the ritual pillar with an alter circling around it. In a corner is a fireplace/hearth and in between the pillar and the fireplace is a mat where the expecting woman is to give birth. A midwife assists in the delivery. Like the Zapotecs, the father plays an important role in the delivery of the child. After the umbilical cord is cut, it is then stuffed in a pouch created from palm leaves made by the father. The pouch, bloodstained cloths, and afterbirth are then placed on the alter to help unite the humans and their ancestral ghosts.

"Five day's after the withered remnants of the cord crop off his body, a boy is carried from the house womb in his father's arms (four days if it is a girl)...As soon as the husband steps into the plaza, one of his sisters enters the house womb. She takes up the pouch with the cord and afterbirth, the birth cloths and the pouch containing the other part of the umbilical cord. These she stuffs into a dry water pitcher made of clay, which she carries through the house vagina." (Hicks 31)"

They make their way to the family shrine where the pitcher will be hung from a branch on the fruit tree in the shrine. There the pitcher will hang until it starts to decay and falls

apart. Over the next couple of days the parents will pick a name for their child. If their child cries or becomes irritated in any way soon after a name is chosen, it is assumed that the child is not happy thus causing it to be renamed.

The placing the afterbirth in a special container is similar to the Zapotecs customs. The afterbirth in a Zapotec house is placed in a clay jar that is buried by the father in the home. This is done to keep the baby's eyes from being infected (Chinas 48). However, the birthing rituals of the Tetum are different than those of the Netsilik. During labor, a Netsilik woman has an igloo built for her and enters a period of isolation because she is deemed impure. No one attends to the birthing, unless there are dire circumstances, so the mother kneels and delivers the child into a depression where she then swaddles it. Soon after, she moves to another igloo where she must remain in isolation for another month. There is a connection however, between the Tetum and Netsilik with the naming of the children. In both cases there is a strong belief that the infant itself reinforces the decision made by the parents as to what it wants to be named. If the birth is difficult, a Netsilik woman will start naming names and if the baby is born soon after, that is the name the child is given.

the last name is uttered

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The island of Timor has a vast geographic range. In its three hundred miles of length; there are mountains, savannas, and tropical forests. Because of the constant temperature during the entire year, the crop seasons in Timor are based on the rains. In November, the corn is planted. An important part of planting is the corn ritual in which is believed to guarantee a good year if done correctly and with total sincerity. The shrine located in the middle of the field consists of three flat stones, smashed bamboo cups, three holes surrounding the stones and debris, three poles stuck into the

ground around the holes, with a pole in the center. The wife of the farmer is the one who performs the ceremony because of the sacredness of the ritual. (Due to the fact of the involvedness of the ritual, I don't have the space to try a summarize it; however it is found on page 45.)

In February, the corn crop is harvested and the fields are then ready for the rice planting which will begin in March. The Tetum have to get the rice in on time so they can beat the second wet season of the year. Gardens were planted in April and by July the rainy season had ended. In August the rice is harvested and the fields are then burned to make ready for the next corn crop in November.

Livestock owned by the Tetum include pigs and buffalo. The pigs are able to be herded by a youngster and are not near as destructive as the buffalo. Buffalo were "more prestigious than economically important (Hicks 53)" and had to be a part of a herd. Hicks used the experience of one man to explain how much of a hindrance these creatures could be. The man only had two sons and had two buffalo. The sons weren't able to keep the buffalo under control, therefore the neighbors complained a lot because of the amount of destruction that was caused. One day the man disappeared and it was several days before anyone saw him again. It turned out that his cow had disappeared and he believed that a neighbor killed it.

Another important part of Tetum culture is the layout of the home as it is the center of the three most important ceremonies during life; birth, marriage, and death. The front of the house has a veranda that wraps around three of the four walls of the home. The home is also raised about three feet off the ground where pets and chickens

stay for most of the day. Tetum homes are approximately 35 feet long, twelve feet wide, and fifteen feet high.

The parts and rooms of the house are gender specific and denote what parts of the house are ruled by which sex. Examples are the front door is the masculine door, the back door is the feminine door also known as the vagina as it allows entrance into the womb of the house. Within the womb of the house is the ritual pillar with the altar. It is on this altar that the sacred pitchers of the family are found. When a mother is pregnant, she buys a pitcher for her child and then it becomes that child's for life. When the child marries and leaves home to move into his/her own home, the pitcher goes with them as the pitcher symbolized the womb of a bride. The house is regarded more as a temple than anything else and therefore is run as by the women. When the parents die, the youngest son is the inheritor of the house and all the sacred objects within that aren't a part of the death ritual. The house and sacred objects are given to the son because it is believed that the son is closest to the feminine and sacred world.

An interesting aspect of the Tetum culture is that when a female child is born, she is automatically incorporated into her father's clan. However, a son must be accepted into the clan. This usually occurs when the son wished to marry. It is the members of the clan who must raise the money for the bride wealth. Before this occurs, the men of the clan have an in depth discussion about the characteristics of the son who wishes to become a member of the clan. The senior men discuss the honor and character of the son. "Does he respect his elders? Can he recite his clan's myth of origin? How would prominent ancestral ghost rate him? (Hicks 70)." All of this is ✓

important because once member of the clan, the entire clan is responsible for his actions and vice versa.

There are three reasons why/how marriage is announced. The first is if the woman is pregnant. It is the choice of the man and woman to marry. Since there is no concept of illegitimacy, if the marriage doesn't take place, the children are adopted by the woman's mother's father or brother. The second is to have the father of the groom formally visit the home of the bride and ask for her hand, and the third is to elope. Eloping occurs when the grooms' family would have difficulty raising the bride wealth. This allows the groom's family to make the payments over a more suitable time period.

There are four stages to the ritual of the marriage. The first is for the couple to find out what their parents think of the idea. The groom's father then approaches the bride's house and has a ritual where he is engaged with the mother. In this stage, the mother asks for the gifts that are to make up half of the bride wealth. Stage 2 begins when these gifts are accumulated, approximately one month after stage 1. During stage 2 all of the men in the lineage from both the groom's and bride's clan meet to discuss the terms of the rest of the bride wealth. Also during stage 2 the actual marriage ceremony takes place with the bride's mother acting as the priestess. Stages 3 and 4 overlap and occur soon after stage 2. This is the giving of the rest of the bride wealth. There is usually a pig or two included in the bride wealth and an important part of this stage is making sure that the livestock pass the inspection of the bride's father. If not, there is the need to get a better animal and a fine to make up for the insult to the bride's family. Stage 4 is when the nuptial banquet is served and the bride wealth has been paid in full.

The amount of ritual involved in this ceremony is extremely complicated compared to those of the Yanamamo. While a woman is considered married after her first period, there is only a small ceremony to acknowledge the fact that she is now a married woman. The Zapotecs however have large fiestas to announce the wedding of two individuals thrown by the husbands family. There is also a lot of ritual involved in these marriages. Besides having two separate ceremonies, there are certain customs that have to be followed. The banns have to be read one month before the wedding day, and the parents of the couples do not attend the mass (Chinas 53). This is in direct contrast to the Tetum where the bride's mother is the one who officiates over the ceremony. Another custom is the showing of the handkerchief after the consummation of the marriage, which is to show the purity of the bride since it is spattered with blood.

The fitting close for Hicks book is the rituals surrounding the sickness and death of a person. It is believed that much of the evil in the world comes from those who are members of both the secular and sacred worlds; witches. "Witches are persons credited with the talent to propel their souls through the air and penetrate the bodies of fellow villagers. (Hicks 110)" The witches can transform their souls into all shapes, sizes and are considered hermaphrodites physiologically. They are unknown persons who live in the villages and are universally 'bad'. The opposite of a witch are the shamans who are both male and female. The shamans can foretell the future, exorcize spirits, and are healers. They charge a fee to have their services used.

When a shaman loses the battle and a witch wins, there are three connections associated with the body of the deceased. The first is that the corpse is both secular and sacred; the second is that the soul is both secular and sacred; and the third is that

the surviving kin are regarded as anomalous. Anyone who married anyone from the deceased persons family is considered a "life giver" and is part of the party who prepared the death ritual; the women prepare the food and the men prepare the coffin.

Why italics? The rite of segregation lasted until the fifth day after the death. The corpse was not quite secular but not quite sacred; at a place where they were united until the middle of the fifth day.

The rite of integration incorporates the deceased's body into the sacred world. Twelve bachelors carried the coffin to the place of internment. They moved in a systematic, swaying motion that was to keep the soul from reentering the body while saying a chant the entire time. Two virgins, who are believed to be less attached to the secular world because they haven't had intercourse yet, led the procession. The coffin was 'attacked' seven times on the way to the grave by the soul who was trying to gain reentry into the body. The men attacked the soul and on the seventh time defeated it. Before the coffin was interned, it was wrapped in the cloths of death. The clan then returned to eat a feast and tell horror stories about the deaths of individuals.

The Tetum believe that interning the body back into the ground and Mother Earth allows the soul to enter back into the sacred world where their origin is. The Zapotecs ✓ are the most closely related to the Tetum in their death rituals. There is a procession for the dead, a period of wailing, and a year long mourning period. The Yanamamo also ✓ have the yearlong period when they drink the ashes of the person but that is the last of the similarities. Because they think that it is disrespectful to let the body rot in the ground and consume the body of the dead so that it will continually live through their family. However, the Netsilik are like none of these other groups. They believe that the

heaven is up above and that only the most brave and talented hunters and the women who could endure pain can live there. The lazy and those afraid of pain would live down below, only eat butterflies, be cold and miserable for the rest of their lives. The burial for the Netsilik was very simple, they took the body out onto the ice, placed a rock at the head and at the feet and left.

Because of the way this ethnography was written, I have found it really hard to determine what Hicks was expecting to find when he did his case study. I feel that he did do an accurate job relating the rituals with their importance in the daily life of the Tetum society. Through the interviews and observations made by Hicks, the information gathered directly related to his topic of study. There were no areas that it seemed he wandered away from his goal. His information pertained specifically to the birth, ecology, marriage/kin relationships, and the death rituals. Since it seemed that he spoke specifically only about one incident his generalizations came from information about the rituals and he only included families that were really strong in the category of following rituals to the letter.

As a Catholic, I'm used to having a lot of ritual in my mass. There are certain creeds and prayers that we say every Sunday, for weddings, baptisms, first communions, and even funerals there is a mass that goes a-long. However, after reading this book, what I think of as rituals must seem pretty 'podunk' to someone who grew up with the amount of rituals as the Tetums. I live on a ranch and we raise almost 400 acres of corn. If we had to do a ritual for every so many acres or fields of corn I would really wonder if it was worth it. But it goes to show that what we grow up with makes everything else seem like a lot more work because it's "different" (back to that

term ethnocentrism again). What we grow up with, as a child may seem right. But as we grow and become under the influence of others, our attitudes change. Nobody's way of doing anything is wrong just because it's different, but neither is it the 'right' way. I was happy to learn that even though people come under the influence of outsiders as the Tetum did when they were taken over they still were able to hold on to their heritage unlike the Native Americans of our Nation. I find that to be something that they should be commended upon, because once a heritage is lost or someone is taught to believe that it should be forgotten, it is hard to regain.