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**Oral Literature, Gender, and Precedence in East Timor:
Metaphysics in Narrative By David Hicks. Copenhagen:
Nias Press, 2020. 190 pp. ISBN: 9788776942755**

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Oral Literature, Gender, and Precedence in East Timor: Metaphysics in Narrative. By DAVID HICKS. Copenhagen, Denmark: Nias Press, 2020, xviii, Glossary of selected Tetun words, Index, 190 pp.

This book is a collection of seven papers by David Hicks (1939), published over the last twenty years a leading authority on the anthropology of Timor. Through a systematic analysis of narratives, it brings to light topics specific to the eastern half of the island of Timor. Introduced and closed by two short texts (introduction and epilogue), the papers are arranged chronologically according to publication dates, from 1996 to 2017. They refer to materials that are sometimes more than forty years old. Each is based on a narrative analysis. And from all of them, Hicks seeks to track down recurrences to understand patterns important to various groups in Timor-Leste. The subtitle of the book is promising: the author announces that he is going to explore the metaphysics of oral tradition narratives. Short narratives, despite their simple appearance, reveal through structural analysis ‘ontological matters and themes of metaphysical significance’ (p. 4).

Hicks’s papers gathered in the book are: ‘The Ema Lisan’, ‘Gender and the *barlaque*’, ‘Making the king divine: a case study in ritual regicide from Timor’, ‘Divine kings and younger brothers’, ‘Younger brothers and fishing hook on Timor: Re-assessing Mauss on hierarchy and divinity’, ‘Impaling spirit: Three categories of ontological domain in Eastern Indonesia’, ‘Exchange, water, and motif in an etic genre of narrative’. It is indeed a good idea to bring together thought that is ordered but scattered over time due to the demands of the scholar’s life.

A short Tetun-language glossary opens the book. (Without explanation, Hicks uses the Portuguese colonial spelling, Tetum, for the language and ethnic group that are now generally spelled Tetun.) Bibliographical references are found at the end of each chapter. The prose of the book is clear and concise. Eight plates are published in the book, 7 of them in colour in the first article ‘The Ema Lisan’.

These narratives are called *lia tuan* (*lia* 'word, language, 'speech' and *tuan* 'ancient, venerable', which Hicks translates as myth). What are the sources? Found in the offices of the Viqueque administration, the first one (p. 11), written in Portuguese, dates from 1966. It is a translation of a story delivered in 1964 but the language of enunciation is not mentioned. Another is a translation from a French text collected in the Buna’ language by Louis Berthe. Some of the narratives were collected by David Hicks himself in 1973, but most of them seem to have been collected by others. Neither the original language of narration nor the language in which Hicks encountered it is specified. The formal aspect of the narratives is not described. Are they versified, as they are in many parts of eastern Indonesia? We do not know.

The concern of the book is to show features shared by several ethnolinguistic groups in Timor. Mention of these groups appears throughout, but in a rather vague manner. The map (p. xvii) points to three places: Fatuberliu, Uai Mori and Caraubalo. Are these places where the author did research or are they places mentioned in the narratives? Moreover, if the location of the various groups had been shown on the map, it would have been easier to figure out the extent of the study. Readers not familiar with Timor-

Leste have to wait until p. 56 to know that the author's fieldwork took place among the eastern subgroup of Tetun, though the book is not based solely on this population.

The great contribution of this book in my opinion lies in the grouping of the central motifs of the narratives, all of them gathered in chapter 7 (p. 127-155). 1. The relationship elder/younger brother. 2. The deception that generates the conflict and must be resolved. Several narratives begin with the identical mishap: an animal bites into a hook and swallows it. 3. The quest. In order to restore the imbalance caused by the animal's discomfort, the younger brother must travel through the underwater realm to another, spiritual world. Hicks analyses this transitional passage between the spirit and human worlds as the recognition of a mutual respect between the two worlds allowing for the restoration of health and prosperity. 4. The instrument of impalement, often a fishing hook but sometimes an arrow, a sword, or a fishing line, is always used in water. 5. The exchange benefit between spirits and human, between sea spirits (*we na'in*) and land spirits (*rai na'in*). 6. The motif of life and plenitude obtained by the multiplication of wealth, especially buffaloes in the corral. The younger brother travels or is transported to the spiritual world and upon his return assumes the office of king. 7. The motif of water that connects humans to spirits, water in which the divine lord of the water resides.

Even though some elements are lacking for non-specialists of Timor-Leste, this book is a fine effort of synthesis, searching for patterns of meaning through a structural analysis. It is definitely aimed at Timor specialists and especially for anthropologists.

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