



**Map 1: Map of island Timor and journey from west to east.**

Source: Chandra Jayasuriya.

# Introduction

This book tells a story of how I have come to know island Timor and, ultimately, why I think these understandings matter. It's a story I tell in snapshots from a six-month journey in 2018 with my family as we travelled from one end of the island to the other (see Map 1). It is a story of personal encounters with people who call Timor their home and of encounters with the landscape itself. And, given that this is an island divided, that story of division is one I must also tell.

Like the cloth or *tais* I bought on my first visit to the country, this is a story told by the threading together of the warp and weft. The lengthwise 'warp' dwells in the experiences of the two decades of my involvement with Timor-Leste and, more particularly, the months I spent travelling with my family from west to east across the island. The crosswise 'weft' is made up of the stories and ideas that shuttle back and forth across the island to create the shared fabric of Timorese people's lives. These often deeply cultural stories and ideas weave and continually reweave together the past, present and future. They connect not only the people but also the languages, lands, waters, animals and plants that comprise this rich and varied landscape. These are reoccurring stories across time and space that are suffused with ideas about the profound life-organising significance of insiders and outsiders, the mountains and the sea, the trunks and the tips, the darkness and the light, family and marriages, traditions and modernity. The threads of these diverse preoccupations cultivate and nurture relationships, revealing layered interconnections between people and the land and an astonishing depth of historical attentiveness. While these stories and their spread across the island are the core concerns of the book, in this introduction I first sketch some of the history of my involvement with Timor-Leste. I then address a topic that so often encases, masks, foils or even brings these deeper cultural stories to the fore: the paradoxes of development.

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After my first fateful visit to Timor in 1997, I returned to Australia to complete my postgraduate studies on Indigenous ownership of Kakadu National Park. Then, in 1999, when I was still a student in Darwin, the East Timorese gained the miraculous right to vote in a referendum—to choose whether they wanted to stay with Indonesia or cut their ties and become an independent nation-state. They chose the latter option, and resoundingly so. When the Indonesian state followed suit and withdrew from the territory, its military and their civilian militia burnt most of the tiny half island to the ground. Those Timorese that could, fled in horror.

Some of them came to Darwin. My doctoral supervisor, Marcia Langton, rallied her networks including the then head of the Northern Territory's Aboriginal Medical Service, Pat Anderson. Together our group set up a makeshift refugee emergency centre. In the centre, those arriving from East Timor found camaraderie and access to the services they needed. The refugee families were deeply traumatised and in desperate need of reprieve. When Marcia and I went to fetch them from the motel where the refugees were being housed by the government, we found it was being decked out in red and white streamers. Red and white are the colours of the St George Rugby Club, a team who had made it to that weekend's grand final in Sydney. The motel owners bragged that they had now converted the Timorese refugees into St George supporters. Yet these colours were also the colours of the Indonesian flag—*merah putih* 'the red and the white'—a political symbol that the murderous Indonesian military had literally forced the Timorese to swear allegiance to over 24 brutal years. Marcia, an Indigenous Australian who knows well the everyday effects of lingering colonialisms and insensitivities, was incensed and pointed out the unfortunate coincidence to the motel owners. They couldn't see the problem. Marcia recalls the Timorese simply shrugged at her with resignation. What could they do?

Marcia had been to Timor before. In 1991, when the occupied territory had first started to open up to the outside world, she had travelled there with a nun on a humanitarian mission. In her 2001 Overland Lecture 'Senses of Place', delivered at the Trades Hall in Melbourne, she had reflected on her experiences in East Timor and on the similarities and differences between the Indigenous Australian and Timorese fight against colonialism and for self-determination. She recalled how, in this first visit to East Timor, people spoke with her very little; they were too scared.

Yet she saw in their eyes the all too familiar gaze of a people subjected to colonialism and almost unspeakable shame and horror. She also recognised their determination to continue to fight, and the depth of faith they had in themselves and their traditions. Participating one Sunday in a Catholic mass delivered by the Nobel Peace Prize–winning Timorese Bishop Dom Carlos Belo, she and the other attendees steeled themselves against the whirr of two Indonesian military helicopters that were intent on intimidating the parishioners from above. As Marcia explained:

We wondered, as I am sure the parishioners did, if the Indonesian military would burst out of their spiteful airborne strategy and start shooting. And it was then that I understood that if they did, it would not matter. And this was the point of spirituality and culture: the protection these provide is simply a knowledge that self-respect is as important as all other virtues.

Marcia visited the territory for a second time in the immediate wake of the 1999 referendum. She was there for a language conference and the leaders of the freed territory were trying to agree on a workable language policy for the new nation. While the political elite had been educated in Portuguese, a newer generation of budding politicians and academics were educated in Indonesian. Both languages were vying for political ascendancy. Alongside the lingua franca, Tetum, most people additionally spoke one or more of Timor's more than 30 indigenous languages.

Language policy was and remains a flashpoint issue in the tiny nation. Used often as a tool to wield power and status, divergent views can trigger deep recriminations and anger on all sides. While Portuguese and Tetum eventually became the new country's designated official languages, with Indonesian and English as working languages, the status and recognition of indigenous languages has been more opaque. Amid at times controversial public debates, some Timorese have forcefully continued to assert colonial ideas that consider indigenous languages to be backward or unsuited for the modern world. Some raise concerns about the potential for the official indigenous language policies to divide rather than unite the country. Others have more mundane concerns, and some parents who are fluent in indigenous languages—but who worry about their children's educational future—ban indigenous languages from being spoken at home. A minority of public advocates are more supportive: they recognise that the majority of rural Timorese primarily speak one or more of these indigenous languages at home and they have advocated for these languages to be recognised in the national curriculum.

Language is, of course, not the only controversial post-independence issue. So, too, in the early years was the status and role of diaspora Timorese, many of whom were returning to help rebuild their country after spending a large part of the occupation overseas. In late 2000, Marcia and I were invited to visit Timor-Leste by Hilario Goncalves, our friend and karate teacher in Darwin. Hilario—or Sensei, as we called him—was a compassionate and highly skilled diaspora Timorese who had long lived in Darwin where he worked as a draftsman on remote Aboriginal community housing. In late 1999, after the United Nations had taken control of the still smouldering territory, Hilario had seized the chance to return to his homeland. There he worked as a United Nations (UN) volunteer in the Land and Property Unit, helping them for more than a year as they tried to piece his country back together. He was also slowly piecing his own family and his place in it back together. When Marcia and I visited, Hilario hired a car and drove us eight hours to visit some of his family in Fuiloro in the far east of the island. When we descended from there to the coast on the eastern tip, I thought we might have entered paradise. We found ourselves in a tiny fisher's camp replete with pandanus-fringed squeaky white sands and crystal-clear waters. Tropical forest ran from the mountains to the sea. A little island called Jaco beckoned from across the strait.



**Photo 2: Sunrise at Jaco.**

When he had arrived back in Timor after the referendum, Hilario had mostly lived and worked in Dili. By the time we visited him there in late 2000, he was deeply disillusioned. His homecoming had been sweet, but a bitterness was creeping in. He had seen the UN at its best and at its worst, only the sting of the latter was now prevailing. The waste, the opportunism, the cultural blindness, the exclusions faced by Timorese people and, above all, the sheer madness of the bureaucracy were breaking him. The UN, he said, treated his country like it had no leaders, rules or laws of its own. For them, he implied, Dili (where most UN personnel were headquartered and rarely left) was like the lawless Wild West. He had decided to leave. ‘I’ll come back once they are gone,’ he said.

So, Hilario returned to Darwin. The UN mission stayed in Dili, ‘managing’ the country on and off until 2012. When they finally left, it was not without a legacy. While other diaspora Timorese stayed on, later filling important positions in the new government and bureaucracy, their re-entry into the country at the time of a bloated UN and aid economy saw many of them tarnished by their fellow countrymen and women as opportunists. Even the fiercest supporters of independence were at times lumped in with those who had vocally supported Indonesian rule and who, much to the chagrin of those who stayed, had now returned to enjoy the benefits of independence. In many cases, which ‘side’ people took through a long and tortuous occupation was neither clear cut nor fully knowable. All these issues continue to simmer in the background of Timorese politics and everyday life.

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Following my first visit to an independent Timor-Leste in the year 2000, I began to visit the country regularly from 2004. In the intervening period I had moved to work at the University of Melbourne and married a man I had met in the Melbourne suburbs—a Timorese man called Quintiliano Mok. While I have since carried out long-term academic research in the country, it is the experiences of travelling to Timor-Leste with Quin and spending longer periods of time with his extended family in the eastern region of the country that has most profoundly shaped my sense of Timor-Leste.

Much of this time has been spent in the country’s second city of Baucau in a home shared by Quin’s father, many of his children and grandchildren. In these experiences, the figure of my father-in-law, now deceased, looms

large. My father-in-law, Jose Maria Mok Kingsang, was of Timorese-Chinese descent; his own father had arrived in Baucau from China and married a local woman from the Baucau hinterland sometime around the turn of the twentieth century. In 1974, soon after the Indonesians first invaded, Jose fled to the mountains to become a guerrilla in FALINTIL, the East Timorese resistance force. In the late 1970s, when the East Timorese resistance leaders decided that they had no choice but to encourage a mass civilian surrender, it was Jose who bravely led down countless starving families from their mountain hideouts to the town of Baucau. He was then jailed and tortured for many months, subjected to the same treatment that had earlier been inflicted on his eldest son Domingos in retribution for his father's resistance activities in the jungle. During that period, the twelve-year-old Quin took on the role of delivering food daily to his father in prison and was forced to witness despicable acts of torture.

Later in the Indonesian era, my father-in-law opened a restaurant on the family's sprawling property in a central part of Baucau. At considerable personal risk, he lived a double life, hosting Indonesian military commanders in the restaurant while securing an urban hideout and meeting place for FALINTIL resistance guerrillas out the back. It was there in 1991 that Marcia first met my future father-in-law.

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Two years after Quin and I were married in a small gathering in my mother's garden in Tasmania, we held a much larger wedding at Jose's home in Baucau. Quin was made an Australian citizen and we began travelling to Timor-Leste frequently. We eventually had children and, together with Quin, I began carrying out research across the Baucau region. During this time, I slowly began to notice a pattern in the way people would treat me. While we never foregrounded our family ties, the people we met were always very keen to establish who we 'really' were. Once people had found out who Quin's father was, they would suddenly open up. Most often they would find some kind of extended family connection between us. Sometimes it would turn out that they, or one of their family members, had actually attended our wedding. In turn, their worlds opened up to me.

The encounters and experiences I have had as a result of these family connections, this journey from the outside in, are not stories I find in other accounts of Timor-Leste. Neither are they things I have previously

written or spoken about much myself. The encounters enabled through this kind of hyper-networked social world are not easily translated to my everyday experiences of life in urban Australia.

Family life in Timor-Leste is busy; there are always a myriad of extended family rituals and other gatherings to plan for or to attend, and some kind of intra-family crisis is never far away. People across large networks gather frequently to get married, commiserate, argue, fight, mourn, negotiate and celebrate. Ancestral communication and rituals need to be continually attended to, patronage networks must be cultivated, crops need to be sown and harvested, and resources, including property rights, must be carefully monitored and manoeuvred for. Within an extended household, there is very often tension, especially between siblings and their families, and sometimes the potential for violence. Frequently in such large family groupings unexpected pregnancies occur, adding both joy and burden to the lives of those caring for the large numbers of children already present in the household. All of these events are larger than the individuals concerned, drawing in transgenerational groupings that span extended families spread out across the country, the entire island, other countries and even continents. Given all this, I have never felt the need to leave Jose's family property in Baucau to feel a deep and immediate connection with the wider world.

This is not an optional social world nor is it always satisfactory, but neither is it, for me, too onerous or forced—it simply spirals and unfolds. When things go wrong, whether it be a death or a car breakdown on remote roads, these family networks swing seamlessly into action. There are always multiple people on hand to call for assistance or support and somehow it always seems possible to mobilise quickly the necessary skills to resolve an urgent circumstance. Even, or especially, in more dire situations, it is this familial and collective capacity to pull together and mobilise that continually surprises me.

Immediately upon arriving in Timor-Leste, I feel arising in me a slower sense of being. Before long, this slowness will merge with a liveliness as I am once again engrossed in activities of Timorese life: traversing its diverse landscapes, moving with the threads and knots of tightly packed kin relations and negotiating pathways through the subtly interwoven worlds of deep custom and modern aspiration. The richly networked cares and concerns of Timorese life will once again intervene and take over my everyday world.



These familial experiences are, in many ways, both central to and a world away from the capital Dili and its preoccupations with development politics, nation and capacity building. After freeing itself materially from the shackles of the Indonesian occupations and a much longer history of Portuguese colonialism, Timor-Leste became emblematic as the world's newest nation-state and associated nation-building processes. Yet, in the minds of many, these histories linger only too deeply. When the UN took control from 1999–2002, plans were hatched immediately to usher in a new democracy through free and fair party political elections and to put in place new techno-bureaucratic systems. By the time the Timorese were able to assert effective control over their country's governance, the aid and international optimism had largely dried up, deep fissures in the national political leadership and across the country had solidified and the nation's peace needed to be renewed afresh. Thankfully for the aspirations of rapid growth and development in the national economy, oil and gas monies flowing in from the Timor Sea meant a new tap could be turned on. By the second decade of the twenty-first century, the Timor-Leste government was intent on developing its own oil- and gas-led economy. The country was awash with the hope of prosperity.

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In mid-2018, while passing through Dili, I received an invitation from a foreign diplomat to address her staff. She and I had met before when I addressed her in her home country about culture in Timor-Leste. She wanted me to offer a similar briefing to her program staff and associated donor organisations working in Timor-Leste. Some of their Timorese counterparts and staff would also be at the presentation.

Having been told I could not take a mobile phone or computer into the meeting room without prior security clearance, I arrived empty-handed at the compound. Given the high level of security, I was surprised by my low-key vetting by the Timorese staff. I announced in Tetum that I was there for a meeting and apologised for being 15 minutes early. They quickly looked for my name on the list and let me through. Another woman had also arrived early. 'Are you here for the meeting?' she asked when we had cleared security. 'Come on in.' We walked past a tall man, presumably the head of mission, who cheerily waved us through. The woman and I quickly found common ground and cause in our interest in all things Timor. Engrossed in our conversation, I was surprised when I looked up to see the time was well past the hour. The head of mission entered

the room in a fluster. ‘We are all here,’ he assured the many people now gathered there. ‘It’s just that we are having a slight problem locating our speaker.’

After I had properly identified myself as the speaker, we went around the room introducing ourselves. Many of the foreigners in the room were eager to hear from me on how they might overcome what they termed the ‘cultural barriers to development’ in Timor. While some mentioned ideas around working with culture, others framed their problems in terms of Timorese culture and the barriers it created for their work. I began my presentation suggesting that many ‘cultural barriers’ may in fact emanate from the non-Timorese culture. There may be unexamined barriers to thinking through different understandings, even different realities. I suddenly felt nervous. I didn’t want to offend the people I was here to engage. The woman I came in with looked across the table and smiled. She gave me a wink, letting me know it was okay with her. I relaxed a little.

The questions I received were diverse. They ranged from domestic violence, marriage exchange, land laws, agriculture and nutrition (and food taboos), economic surplus, cultural ceremonies, history and the post-conflict reinvigoration of tradition, post-conflict trauma and violence, health and healing (particularly for women), economic priorities and youth attitudes, ritual resource governance and the effects of such practices on conservation and community governance. My head was spinning.

The many Timorese staff of the various organisations in the room conveyed, in a variety of ways, their commitment to customary processes and exchanges, despite the real difficulties they pose. Quite a few noted their own partial resistance to some customary practices, mainly because of the ways they drain their own ‘city-based’ economic resources. Constant obligations to customary sets of relations are a burden on such Dili-based Timorese. Even if they don’t always have to travel back to their districts or related communities for rituals, they are expected to send money home to assist in enabling the rituals and the transfer of goods. Yet even the most critical voices conveyed the necessity of their participation in such exchange processes. What was important, some said, was their obligation to honour their ancestors, no matter the difficulties for their individual livelihoods.

Such broad acceptance was a revelation for many of the foreigners in the room. Outsiders tend to hear the criticism of customary processes by Timorese people as a signal that they would prefer to abandon such practices. In this instance, the Timorese staff expressed an in-principle commitment to ritual and custom, despite the misgivings and hardships they might entail. This distinction is very important. At one point, one of the Timorese women remarked on how her rural parents attributed her success in life to their ongoing ritual sacrifices and honoured ancestral connections. This comment prompted much laughter around the room among the foreigners and the Timorese (including the storyteller herself). But their laughter was, I discerned, of a different order. One group was incredulous; the other group laughed in acknowledgement of the deep paradoxes and contradictions within which 'modern' Timorese live their lives.

In my many conversations with foreign aid and development workers in Timor-Leste, I have noticed that it is often within the agricultural sector that development workers struggle most, especially with the cultural aspects of Timorese livelihood practices. With their focus on efficiency and markets, foreigners will often remark on the travesty of wasted resources and priorities given by rural people to ceremonial life. They observe that people who are so poor and nutritionally challenged think nothing of slaughtering many of their livestock for rituals. All that good food, just wasted. They lament that Timorese rural people continue to feed their children poor-quality foods despite all the nutritional education that has been delivered. The Timorese are criticised for being slow to immerse themselves in the market economy. Another criticism is that Timorese have such large families and invest so greatly in marriage exchange. Some outsiders perceive that these priorities, along with what many consider to be futile ceremonies, are placed above children's health, wellbeing and education.

Other foreigners are more circumspect and reflexive. One woman from an international organisation told me once how over the four years she had been in Timor she had been introduced to customary practices very slowly. Reflecting back, she said that it felt like every six months or so her Timorese staff ramped up her exposure to 'cultural aspects' of their work. She noted that this was usually just when she had begun thinking that she understood Timorese ways of doing things. Her work helping to set up community conservation areas had been constantly challenging, not least because of the time each negotiation took. She said she was finally

learning that if a section of the customary community was missing (if, say, individuals had moved from the community or fled to West Timor) then governance negotiations could not proceed until a way was found to ameliorate or address their absence. In such cases, communities needed time—and sometimes a lot of time—to figure out a way to make the absent party present, to enable processes to move forward so a governance arrangement could be negotiated and agreed. Problems, she had learnt, would also arise when people now living in a particular community were claiming or using land that was not customarily theirs. In these cases, complicated negotiations were needed to find a way to involve these people in governance relationships. These fraught and emotionally charged processes all took time, with people also needing space, and sometimes outside assistance, to negotiate a way forward.

My role at this briefing was awkward, as was my very presence as ‘key speaker’. I was a foreigner being asked to speak to a bunch of other foreigners in the East Timorese capital about Timorese culture. Why had they asked me? Why had I accepted? Why, even as I made sure to give space for the Timorese present to respond to the questions posed, did I feel compelled to add other perspectives? It was not a role I relished, and I felt very uncomfortable. But I also felt like being this spokesperson was something that the many Timorese people I had lived and worked with over many years expected me to do.

Most Timorese people grow up learning that knowledge is partial, that your perspective depends on where you are from. They know, too, that rural Timorese norms and customs are different across the country; sometimes they are even different in the same village. They know, because they continually do it, that ‘truths’ about places and histories and cultures are worked out in the moment, in context, and in constant negotiation with others. Even so, given the chance, most Timorese will forcefully put forward their particular view of the world. Foreigners in Timor are inclined to be in search of facts and absolutes. Hence, when an individual Timorese speaks about ‘their culture’, these outsiders don’t hear it as partial—they hear it as fact.

My work as an anthropologist and geographer forces me to pay attention to the partial truths and constant negotiations that make up people’s lives. Because I am trained to think this way—to pay attention, listen, observe and unpack the nuance—I comfort myself in uncomfortable circumstances, like this donor briefing, that it is this ‘academic rigour’

that I can offer in such conversations. Of course, there are also Timorese anthropologists, such as Josh Trindade, an anthropologist and senior government adviser. For people like Josh, this cultural ‘translator’ role can also, I imagine, be uncomfortable. At international forums I have watched as he has carefully explained particular Timorese social and cultural histories and processes. Often, after such presentations, there will be someone in the audience (a foreigner or a Timorese) who will imply that he doesn’t really understand something. For Timorese interlocutors, the concern is usually cultural (‘this is not how my group see it/tell it/do it’). For foreigners, the sentiments expressed are often ‘anti-culture’, implying that culture is being used as an excuse for poverty or inequality. Despite the challenges, Josh remains nonchalant: ‘It’s my job to try to explain these things,’ he says. I would hazard to guess that it is also something he feels is his cultural duty.

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As I set out above, much of my own partial understanding of Timorese life and lives comes about through the intimacies and confusions of life lived as an ‘outsider’ through the *longue durée*—life lived with my Timorese husband, extended family and friends working together, eating together, celebrating and mourning together. And sometimes fighting together. As I have come to know more about the richly interconnected worlds of Timorese cultural and ecological communities, I have also learnt about their life pathways. I have begun to see and, more importantly, feel the connections between people, their lands, waters, local histories, politics and associated rituals of life and death. As I have investigated these connections as an academic, people often explicitly ask me to record and take their stories to those in power. I have come to realise that people do not share their stories without reason; they expect me to weave something new with their knots and threads. As the cloth takes shape, so too do my obligations to these people and all their varied aspirations.

While I have written academic books and articles around these topics, here I tell a more personal story of chance encounters and brief anecdotes, of hunches gleaned and insights sharpened—often painfully so—during my many years carrying out research in the country and during the travels I made across the island with my young family in 2018. I have learnt, over the years, how it is often the quotidian or seemingly unremarkable stories that I stumble upon that lead, eventually, to the greatest understanding.

I have learnt about the need to give these stories and encounters time, and to take the time to tune in, to notice, to see, to hear and to feel things in often unaccustomed ways.

Throughout the book, I reflect on encounters and my own intimate and proximate relationships with a range of people: customary leaders, families, farmers, drivers, members of Timorese civil society movements, international development workers, university students and national political leaders. These encounters and the associated stories, beings and places reveal both the everyday politics and poetics of life on island Timor. While the book tracks a journey across the island, each chapter has its own specific and cross-cutting themes and, as such, can also be read on its own.

I begin this story with an opportunity we had to spend an extended period of time travelling through the country, and our arrival in the far west of the island. Although I had been travelling to Timor, often with Quin and our children, every year for more than a decade, I had not spent much time in Indonesian West Timor. Quin and our children had never been there. So, we decided to begin our six-month trip to the island by flying via Bali to the Indonesian provincial capital of Kupang. Through encounters in the capital and rural areas, cross-island cultural similarities and differences are thrown into relief. Whether they be refugees from Timor-Leste's 'independence vote' or ordinary West Timorese, a variety of perspectives underscore how lives on the Indonesian side of the border are entwined with historical and contemporary events in Timor-Leste. In Chapter 2, a visit to Timor-Leste's exclave of Oecusse draws out the everyday challenges of post-conflict rebuilding and economic development. According to many local people, customary processes are being sidelined in the government's rush to showcase the development possibilities for this enclave. The question is, at what political cost?

Chapter 3 reflects on the history of movements across a long-contested border and the ways in which local people's awareness of their shared history and culture is shaped by their complex personal circumstances. Through personal stories and encounters, we can glean the reasons why people choose to settle on either side of this new international border. In Chapter 4, in a village straddling Indonesia and Timor-Leste, we explore the ways Timor's migratory wild honey bees challenge the division of colonial borders that have long separated people, places and histories

in the region. With bees understood to be spirit people, their travels and honey are shown to be essential to the material and spiritual unity of life for border peoples.

Heading to Dili, in Chapter 5, our gaze shifts to the politics of *lulik* (ancestral potency, sacred, forbidden, taboo) and the ways in which politics in Timor-Leste is as much about ancestral pathways as it is about democracy. Both processes involve deep understandings of power. Reflecting on a national election campaign, we trace the way in which an ancestral politics is made visible, plays out and becomes legitimised. In Chapter 6, a journey from Dili to the smaller island of Atauro involves encounters with island residents that draw out the ways in which centuries-long migrations across the region are encoded in the landscape and made present today. The challenges of re-establishing connections to the past and among people are illuminated in unexpected ways.

Arriving in Quin's hometown of Baucau in the east of the island, Chapter 7 focuses on the ways in which cultural life in this region is organised around the flow of water. These above- and below-ground flows bind together and course through the veins of both people and their landscape. Some worry that a proposed industrial development might threaten these flows. This question, they say, will be answered by the response of the ancestral realm. Likewise, Chapter 8 examines how illness and healing are understood through the consubstantiated relationship between people, their environments and their ancestors. Following the healing journey of a young man and his extended family through a spring-based ritual, we see the interwoven nature of these relations and the ways in which these practices underpin understandings of health and cultural identity. Continuing on with this theme, Chapter 9 traces everyday life during the rice harvest season in the village of Bercoli, showing it to be richly punctuated by hard work and play, ritual and proscription. What you can and cannot do is a matter of continual negotiation and anticipation between people and the spirit realm. It is a life with its own complex rhythms and, despite the challenges, a shared commitment to living together well.

Chapter 10 provides insights into what happens when you take 20 Australian university students on a study tour of this complex land. How do they and their hosts respond? Leading this field class is an annual role that I have, sometimes reluctantly, taken on as a way of bringing foreigners (my own students) into the ambit and intrigue of Timor-Leste

and its citizenry's lives. What relations and understandings can be forged and negotiated in these often-unsettling spaces? In Chapter 11, continuing the theme of unsettling spaces, we learn how rights to land, especially women's rights to land, is a major issue in post-conflict Timor-Leste and the subject of critical debate. In little-recognised counter-narratives, rural people subtly speak back to these debates from their own historical and cultural circumstances. Their commentary and practices elucidate the perverse effects of a development agenda that seeks to supersede rather than work with local lives and priorities. In Chapter 12, we also explore the ways in which, in Timor's rural areas, people are frequently preoccupied with the past. Addressing the past is the only way, they say, that they can live well in the present and ensure the wellbeing of future generations. Culminating in highly organised and affective performances of cultural capacity, these ritual practices are vital in enabling healing at multiple levels and time periods.

In the final chapter and the subsequent epilogue, we draw some conclusions around the ideas and practices of living well in a house-based society. House building brings people together and enables relations to begin and, in some cases, to be concluded. For my own family, house building is a statement of reconnection to a place and its people. In an increasingly volatile global context, the future of this reconnection is both comforting and uncertain.

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The themes that shape this book and my own thinking about Timor-Leste emerge through this journey from west to east, from the outside of Timor-Leste into its rural heart and back out again. These recursive movements from the outside in are also the movements and structures that organise Timorese cultural life. Josh Trindade often talks about Timorese culture as having an inner realm and an outer realm. At the heart of the inner realm lies the concept of *lulik*, which can be at once an idea, an object, a being, a place, a phenomenon, a word or a practice. While *lulik*, as Josh says, is the core orienting principle of Timorese lives, for foreigners, little of this is immediately apparent. Rather, visitors to the country—usually development workers, business people, diplomats and their associates—are exposed and familiarised in the first instance to an outer, more public realm, one dominated by the secular concerns of politics, development



and the formal economy. Yet, for Timorese themselves, even this outer realm is intimately linked to the inner realm of *lulik* and their own intensely networked ancestral, historical and interpersonal concerns.

This book is about spiralling down through these layers to find a country and its people redolent in the capacity to accommodate and value both of these life realms. It is an enticement to others to encounter the island and nourish their own curiosity for, and relationships to, the land, its people and its spirit.

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