

THIS IS THE BEGINNING OF THE RELATIONSHIP': MATERIAL SUPPORTS OF CULTURAL TRANSLATION

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1. BUA MALUS²³

It was evening when we arrived at the front yard of the house. Some older women were seating there, others were cooking nearby. We were asked to sit on a carpet on the ground and a basket was given to us; it contained leaves of betel and slices of areca nuts. I took one leaf and a piece of a nut and rolled it inside the leaf as I saw others doing before. At the end, I put a bit of lime that was given to me by an old smiling lady. I put it in my mouth and a striking feeling of bitter and warm seized my mouth. At this moment, a House member, a young man in his thirties, gently nodded and said: *this is the beginning of the relationship...* and briefly explained the role of betel and areca chewing on any social occasion, to strengthen relationships, either between single encounters or, as on that occasion, at House²⁴ rituals, to salute family, friends or newcomers. After some time of resting and talking, we were invited to enter the sacred house.

The attempt to provide a description of a singular moment in the context of a unique event is itself an effort to translate in words the core proposal of this research paper: material supports of cultural translation are part of the human cultural assets to assign meaning and order to the flow of life, the path that binds people and makes social life possible in the presence of Others. The article hypothesis is that an interlaced approach should bind plants and people as artefacts and authors of cultural translation, considering the possibility that local practices are being converted/translated into national performances. In this context, the role of the translator is at stake, particularly if considered the manipulative process, which any translation involves.

The depicted event took place in the mountain village of Raifun in 2001, a Kemak speaking village in the Bobonaro mountain district. At the time, the *Mane Telu* House decided to stage a ceremony to bring together their relatives, absent and scattered for some years. The pretext was the rebuilding of part of the roof but the main concern was the reconciliation of all the members after the events that occurred in 1999.

A ceremony was accomplished during the night inside the sacred House, joining the living ones with their ancestors. A glimpse of this ritual allows us to see betel leaves being offered, disposed on the top of several bags on the floor at the base of the main pole at the

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23 "Areca and betel": I follow here the way Jesus (2003) starts his work writing, in Tetum, instead of "Introduction": "Bua malus". It is noteworthy to comment the similitude of the nouns *malus* (betel) and *maluk* (partner, relative, close own or similar), and the pronoun *malu* (one with the other or one to the other), Costa (2001). Dores (1907: 162) spells: *Malos* and *Malo*. I am grateful for Paulo Seixas comments and pertinent insights and Ângela Lopes for the reading of the English version.

24 I follow here Friedberg's (1982) proposal, of writing the word House with a capital letter as a sociological entity.

entrance. Two elderly men proceeded to circulate betel leaves above the sacs and behind the main pole. A large pig was sacrificed and his entrails were read. Its flesh and bones were cooked and rice and meat were shared among all. In the morning, a catholic priest arrived and a mess was held beneath the rafters of the house. Another small pig was sacrificed and its blood, mixed with coconut water, was sprinkled on the participants, namely the young ones, by an elder, positioned at a small altar, amid expressions of rejoice, followed by a sprinkling around the house. We departed afterwards but the members of the family remained, discussing the preparation of the complete rebuilding of the house, a project to be fulfilled in five years' time. The obligations of each household towards this major task was decided, namely the monetary contribution of each.

Going back to the description one can grasp the course of this paper: the revealing role of offering betel and areca, mixed with lime, in order to produce the quid, entailing and mediating a formal acceptance of a stranger into the event and, particularly, to cross the threshold of the sacred House in ritual context²⁵. It was, as commented, the beginning of a relationship, of a bound (exposed by offering and sharing, an act performed publicly, of a substance that reveals itself in the body - the red teeth and mouth²⁶), intermingled with conversation and disclosure of one's intent and emotions at the front of the house. To talk and rest are counterparts of this process of communication and ultimately the path to enter the sacred House.

The process of arriving, sharing betel, areca and lime, transforming it into the quid, resting and talking is a pathway, a cultural translation, not only of communion, but also of communication, in this case, of circumstantial outsiders to an inside realm. Following Weiner's (1992) proposal, an adaptation of this approach could be termed as becoming-while-sharing²⁷.

2. THE POSSIBILITY OF CULTURAL TRANSLATION IN THE EAST TIMOR CONTEXT

The paper is prepared in the framework of the proposal put forward by the research project *Translating Culture, Culture of Translation: cultural negotiation as core heritage in Timor-Leste*²⁸:

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25 I had the opportunity to enter sacred houses after this episode without the formal consumption of betel and areca, but in these cases usually no ritual was underway. The very opposite occurred several times during fieldwork.

26 The persistence of betel chewing is also a resistance practice, a subject that is still far from being studied. Associated with local, backwardness, it's also a mark of "gentiu" beliefs. At a local church, one particular priest would observe the attendants mouth before giving them the wafer at mass proceedings. Another priest told me that his parishioners of a remote parish would turn to betel and areca chewing, and other rituals, after leaving mass.

27 This article is based on data collected during ethnographic fieldwork made during my PhD research in August 2003; August 2004 and the field year September 2005 to August 2006 (sponsored by Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian small grant and Fundação Oriente small grant and PhD scholarship), and a three week journey to East Timor in 2010 (sponsored by the project *Translating Culture, Culture of Translation: cultural negotiation as core heritage in Timor-Leste*), along with bibliographic research and internet research concerning events occurring in East Timor in recent years. The bulk of the data come from Bobonaro district area among Kemak speaking communities and, particularly, Bunak ones - the centre of my PhD research (Sousa, 2010).

28 I joined this project in December 2008 until August 2010.

“The perspective proposed here is that, for one side, culture as to be understood in the dialectic translation in which each actor is an author between enculturation and acculturation, tradition and modernity and, on the other side, that translation should be understood as communicative action, profoundly socio-culturally contextualized.” (Seixas, 2008: 2).

In his article, Seixas (2009a) refers to culture as a continuous translation process, with its centrality emerging at the linguistic, social and cultural domains. Space and time need also to be considered as the translation may involve territory(ies) and memory(ies). In the East-Timorese context, a “Babel” centre for excellence and pivotal area of research, the “othering” of others is a long term process, namely: Malai; Belo-Tetum; Portuguese, Indonesia; UN. East Timor is now coming to terms with itself, obliged to reconsider colonial and post-colonial influences as a continuous challenge both to communication among the ethnolinguistics diversity and to the security of the new country.

Analysing the translating of small scale events and interactions to large scale national procedures is also an effort envisaged in the mainframe of the research effort: “(...) nation building as a social identity in the process should be approached as a broad brokerage process in which translation mechanisms (what is tradition, what they stand for and which of them) are themselves at stake.” (Seixas, 2009b: 67)

The possibility and the need to communicate, translating concepts in the socio-political arena crosscut by east-timorese cultural diversity, is a complex process. In this framework the role assigned to the translator demands further analysis. → Timor alterity has for a long time been translated to the outside world by others: voyagers, colonial authorities, anthropologists, the same development occurring inside its societies and cultures during the same period and even today, although in new ways. Several authors have discussed the issue: Traube (1986), Hohe (2001) and Seixas (2010) through the recurrent myth of the younger versus the elder brother, and the pivotal role assigned to each.

In this analysis it is important to retain the substantive change occurred in translation studies from the perspective of translation as a process of “equivalences” to one envisaging interpretations (Lima, 2010), particularly the developments towards the role assigned to the translator as an author. At this point, the issue of manipulation of the text is a paramount feature, namely through “Manipulation School” works (Lima, 2010). The fact that *admitted manipulation* occurs is tantamount to the fact that the translator as an author is not an impartial position but an active one in the process. This political circumstance is essential to understand the possibility of cultural translation.

What is the role of the translator in cultural translation, and particularly the cultural translation at stage in East Timor? As discussed elsewhere (Sousa, 2009), at the local level the claiming for a role is a consistent effort to translate local aspirations to national ones, mainly in the perceived context of deprivation towards the others (now, the role usually assigned to the younger brother, in some versions of the myth, it is performed by the east Timorese elite at Dili). This outcome can be understood as part of the citizenship building process and political participation, addressing to people’s needs, eager to participate in the ongoing re(creation) of the nation. Nevertheless, as in any other context, manipulation is

present and made by the actors, either they are local or national ones. The problem arises in the misconceptions that subsisted with the role that is assigned to each. As discussed in another article (Sousa, 2009) the legitimating of local “traditional” actors’ role in national arena is fairly distressed, lacking authority and power, which are at the hands of the State and the Church.

One example of such link is made by Foster (2002) discussing the role of “betel nut” chewing, analysing the theme of resistance of betel consumption during the recent history in Papua New Guinea, opposing an indigenous identity versus a European one. The ambivalence of its practice is still present to state officials. Nevertheless, it’s significant that, in recent years, the opposition between the quid and beer drinking as lead the first to be seen as a “civilized” behaviour, considering beer consumption a pathology reflecting an externally imposed ‘modernization’ The importance of this plant is so huge that it is part of the 124 items in the basket of goods and services used to determine the national consumer price index.

In the context of ritual, Friedberg (1980) describes betel and food as “*material supports of relationships*”, essential to maintain the flow of life. These are associated with the plants and animals that are used in specific socio-ritual contexts and that are of mandatory use in order to establish links both among humans and between these and the other beings. These elements are particularly important to analyse “the form and rate of flow of its material context” (Fox, 1980: 18), which need to be addressed in order to understand the societies being studied, namely in the context of the “ritual attractors” that are present at the houses (but also in another focal spaces). Seixas (2009a) notion of “translation artefacts” may be at hand as an operational concept to manipulate the interaction between these material supports, their topologies and translators.

The article intends to present clues for further research concerning the cultural-political practices of these non-verbal practices of sociability; social status recognition; resilience and identity, both at the grassroots levels and national ones, considering them as possibilities to readdress uneven conditions as perceived by locals. The need to empower all the participants in the continuous translation of the nation, assures them that admitted manipulation is balanced with recognition and legitimacy.

3. OFFERING AND SHARING: BETEL AND ARECA TROUGH HANDS, BAGS AND BASKETS

- *Mama lai!* Chew (betel and areca)! is a phrase often heard in East Timor, implying in it assertiveness, an invitation to share betel and areca²⁹. The *mama* is at the same time the substantive of the quid and also, as a verb, the act of chewing it. In 1961, Sá commented on this practice in the ‘Portuguese Timor’:

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29 Such interpellation is found elsewhere; see, for example, the case of Bhutan, studied by Pommaret (s.d).

“(...) with the betel leaves (malus) used as container, and the dried fruits of the areca tree (bua), as the main ingredients of the concoction, the natives make their favourite chewing (mama), something like, for us, a round green and raw ball, seasoned with lime, pepper and flavours, enjoyed by the native as an astringent and lye chewing gum, that they claim to give good breath, strength their teeth’s, comfort the stomach and deceive hunger.” (1961: 120-121).

The chewing of betel leaves and areca nuts, sprinkled with a bit of lime, is broadly dispersed both in mainland and insular South-East Asia (Rooney, 1995). The betel quid is composed of the three ingredients and they are an overwhelming presence as selling articles in every East-Timorese market. Other ingredients may be added to the mixture (as Sá noted), but in East-Timor the main ingredients are the three components mentioned, although some people, particularly elder ones, like to mix a little of tobacco.

Following Rooney (1995), the areca nut is a seed of the *Areca catechu*, of the palm family. It is fairly oval and around five centimetres long at maturity. In its earliest stage it is green and soft with a smooth exterior, which gradually turns yellowish to brownish with a rough, fibrous husk when it hardens. The young nut is juicy and sweet-tasting while the mature one is bitter and savoury. The betel leaf is from the vine of the *Piper betel* pepper plant. The leaf itself is broad, six to ten centimetres, with defined points and a prominent central vein.

The third ingredient, lime, is obtained from various sources and turned into a powder (calcium oxide) that is mixed with water to a paste-like consistency (calcium hydroxide) to make it suitable for chewing. Two ways of obtaining lime are used locally: the one obtained from limestone chalk and the other from sea shells, molluscs and coral.

The presentation of the elements, or artefacts of translation, need to be looked upon at their symbolic and social dimension. The plants represent more, and different layers of knowledge about them may be found. This entails the recognition that, like particular words in myths (as mechanisms of translations, following Seixas, 2009a), betel and areca and lime are manipulated by those that possess knowledge of its exegeses, particularly in ritual contexts.

The social use of these plants is fairly commented by authors in the area. Ellen (1991), writing on the Nualu, describe the social uses of the chewing and its role as sharing device:“(...) is therefore quintessentially both a required ingredient of, and therefore a metaphor for, sharing.”(1991:108). As the author explains:

“Chewing the betel quid is quintessentially part of the humdrum of ordinary Nuaulu life, one of the “obviousnesses” around which social interaction is structured. Paradoxically, it is this obviousness which makes it such a powerful symbol and elevates it above the ordinary. Because it is so commonplace, and because it is constantly passing between persons, it serves to express shared communion”. (1991: 112)

Rooney (1995) remarks its usage for health issues, spirits and the symbolism of betel and sexual relations. Ellen scrutinises its many social uses in divination, curing, offerings and its

consumption as a “ritual marker”. As the author comments on the initiation rituals, the betel is a marker of social relations that continues through the life-circle:

“In both male and female initiation ceremonies, neophytes are denied betel while in ritual seclusion or in a liminal condition, but are ostentatiously reintegrated into social life by being administered betel under ceremonial conditions, in a way which enforces clan and clan section interdependence, and highlights the sharing involved in taking betel. In male rituals, for example, betel passes not between clan sections, but between clans, and the relationship established between officiant and neophyte (*mon'te*) is one which continues throughout life, is reproduced in subsequent generations, and parallels the ideal symmetric movement of women between clans”. (Ellen, 1991:113)

The sharing of the *quid*, its communion, is therefore a basic element of communication. As Clamagirand (2000) reveals on her comparative article among the Ema (Kemak) and the Wewewa, the reception of a guest with betel and areca is the basis for exchange, to assume a contract, namely in the context of marriages negotiations, in which the betel and areca are used to share but also as in place of something else, namely a person. The constant property of betel and areca is, for the author, the ability to materialize a relation: among the Wewewa “(...) le partage du bétel et de l'arec apparaît comme le geste qui précède toute communication (...) the gift of betel and areca and its acceptance are indispensable to open any dialogue.” (2000: 124). To refuse is to state a claim that certain preconditions are not solved.

“(…) les dons et les échanges entre preneurs et donneurs de femmes, le flux orienté de biens e de nourriture dont participent le bétel et l'arec, assurent la circulation du flux de la vie. La continuité de ces échanges est la condition d'une pérennité du lien social comme de la vie en général.” (2000: 124)

The author analyses the social bounds, the mediation with the invisible and the identification with the personae. Following Jordaan and Niehof's (1988) study on Indonesia, the betel and areca are associated with feminine and masculine traits respectively, although this gender attribution is variable (the Nuallu, as reported by Ellen, are such a case). The social role among persons is a paramount feature of betel and areca chewing³⁰.

Betel and areca can have a concrete use and a metaphorical one; being part of the exchange practices, the ways that humans are described in the ritual narratives, like the young women and, particularly, sexual relations or interdictions. One important reference made by Clamagirand concerns the notion of the betel and areca as a sign of the appropriation and separation of participants, the living ones and the dead ones (ancestors), of objects as well as of space and time.

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30 Berthe (1959) relates several traditional verses that make allusion to the social bound but also to the interpersonal context of the betel and areca in the relations between genders, namely in courtship or between playmates Cinatti (1996) also uses the betel and areca motives in some of its poems.

This is seen in the role that betel and areca play in the life-cycle of the individual, namely through the associated objects, like the bag. The bags and baskets, masculine and feminine, and the other paraphernalia used in the chewing process are of symbolic importance as translations artifacts in the role that they assume as part of individuals' lives. These objects are, as Hoskins (1998) stated, biographical objects. These can be used even to replace the person's body, like in Geirnaert observations:

"The first stage of the ritual is dedicated to the reconstruction of the body (tau) of the deceased. This is done on the eve of Pogo nauta, in the male part of the house, a room where guests are allowed. Public activities never take place in the female part of the house. If clothes or other belongings of the victim are available, they must be brought into the room. In the case of a man, his head-dress, loincloth, broadblade knife and his betelnut bag represent his body. For a woman, the items are the same, except for the head-dress." (Geirnaert, 1989: 454)

In line of the translation paradigms depicted earlier, it has to be considered the fact that they are also subjects of manipulation. As witnessed, the possession of a deceased bag allows the keeper, and his family, to stretch his will on the relatives (but it can also be a burden). The offering of betel and areca is fundamental in any ritual and the authors writing about East Timor present concrete examples of it (Barros, 1975 and Hicks, 2004). Offering is essential for the two parties involved; it is part of the protocol and it can be sanctioned if the performance fails.

The betel and areca offerings are also essential in consecrating the House and addressing the ancestors. Cunningham (1964:55) states "(...) the alliance (affinal or political), the movement of gifts, and mutual visits are inseparable, as are the reception of guests in a house, their seating at designated places, and the passing of betel-nut." These movements can be seen also in other punctual rituals (Barraud, 1990) or community rituals, as Friedberg (1989: 553) relates in the case of the hunting rituals: "In the evening of the first day of the hunt, the game is brought to the village, where it is welcomed by a woman of the house of the 'Lord of the Seeds' with betel, as one welcomes a guest".

A last comment on the chewing of betel and areca concerns the visibility of its practice in the body. As a result of its consumption the teeth are red and this mark, particularly in elderly people, is a permanent one. This dimension is yet to be studied as a cultural resistance process that translates a will to maintain its practices. Butterworth (2009), analysing a Florenese village, comments that the hero is depicted as *Ata highi mitan*, which:

"(...) literally means 'people with black teeth'. The extended form is *ata highi mitan* here *meran* which means 'people with black, yellow and red teeth'. This phrase refers to the fact that humans are creatures who smoke tobacco and chew betel and areca quids. By smoking and chewing people are distinct from lesser creatures (for example, pigs are said to have white teeth), and are thus 'wise'" (2009:190)

The question, and quest, of identity, in confront with modernity, is a subject that would take another article on its own. But, from the observations made, this is a particular front

line of frontier demarcation. Health issues were commented by health workers concerned about the abuse of the quid (and particularly the spit practice – that can mask other health problems, like tuberculosis).

On the religious' hand, the consumption of betel and areca is associated by some as marks of "*gentiu*" practices. In a particular church, and a particular priest, the mouths of the mass attendants were scrutinised and if not considered proper they would be denied the wafer. One priest commented that, after the mass, the parish members would return to their chewing and ritual practices. There are, however, different interpretations on the issue. As I witnessed in a ritual performed in Ainaro, the return of two brothers, both priests and their sister, a nun, was made in the sacred house of the family. A ritual meal was punctuated with the chewing of betel and areca. The translation of this practice and other "traditional" rituals by the church is a challenge to the ongoing process of evangelisation of the converted (see the interview of Bishop Basílio do Nascimento with Mendes and Corbel (2004)³¹).

4. BETEL AND ARECA, MARKERS AND PATH: THE BUNAK EXAMPLE

In Bunak betel is *molo* and areca is spelled *pu*. The lime is *hau*, like in Tetun. The betel and areca were claimed as heritage from the mother sun and father moon by the first humans. And its usage at first encounters among the ancestors in their path is constant (Berthe, 1972).

In the Bunak cosmology the betel and areca are considered as the first vegetal element to appear in the world, born from a couple: Kolo Bos, the betel mother, and Kili Berek, the areca tree father (Friedberg, 1980: 500). In fact, they are considered as the fathers of the vegetable world. In Tapo, the betel line is present at the first field, it is where the bird-women, Kaka Nase-Bau, stands and was caught by the hero Mau Sirak Mali Sirak, his future husband (Sousa, 2010). Commenting on the symbolic signification of the quid, Friedberg explains:

"(...) par delà sa signification symbolique appliqué aux éléments végétaux, il y a celle qui est liée à la vie sociale et rituelle : la chique de bétel composée de trois éléments dont deux s'opposent et le troisième unit, est le

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31 The symbolic use of betel and areca was classified by some as a wafer, like the catholic one. A comment in the web reveals such a case, by Pe. Chico Moser: "... accept, both, this betel leaves, take, you two, this slices of areca, so that the breath and breeze penetrate both..."(traditional ritual in Timor). In a post the Priest comment on the red mouths: 3. Red mouths. At the free markets or 'bazaars', to endure the long hours of work and wait, women and men work and chat. Meanwhile, they chew a cocktail of lye, areca nuts, wrapped in betel leaves: ahu (lime), betel leaves (malus) and areca nuts (bua). To chew the areca nut is one of the most ancient's costumes of Asian Peoples. This exercise allows the energy to endure till the end of the day. But, the ritual also possesses social and cultural reasons. To chew the betel nut (sic) is to define the belonging to the adult world of maturity. The betel nut represents the generative strength of the women, the areca fruit the vital strength of the man, the lime, and the seed of reproduction. The process of chewing provokes an abundant reed quid. It is believed that to spit the saliva is like turning back to hearth the blood from the childbirth. To offer betel nut to a traveler is like saying "welcome/ welcome to our party". Chew' betel gives a sweet inebriation, who knows a memory of remote pre-historic journeys. Brother, do not refuse the offer of betel! Source: <http://timorcrocodilovoador.com.br/olhar-crocodilo-chicomoser-rosto.htm>

symbole de l'association, et aucun rapport entre les êtres ne peut s'établir sans elle. « (1980: 501)

Another explanation emphasizes the role of betel and areca as brokers of relations with the earth. One story³² recalls that one of the first couples had one son. But the son died and they needed to bury him. However, at that time, the earth still talked and whenever they tried to dig a hole on her, she complained. The only way that they had to appease the earth was to give her betel. She then allowed the body to be buried. Questioning the origin of these plants, betel and areca, they were described esoterically as *molo raidol pu likosaen*, and it was said that they had come straight from the sky. As for the *hau*, it was described as a "miracle" made by the people. In this interpretation it's possible to link the heavenly origin of the betel and areca with the more earthly source of lime³³.

The betel and areca quid have also an interesting link to gold in the Bunak myths. The hero Mau Ipi Gulo` (or Mau Gulo`) uses the quid, red as gold, to forge the wood arrow that he uses to replace the gold from the wound of the bird king, the father of the orange women (Berthe, 1972; Friedberg; 1982; Sousa, 2010).

Like in other examples given before, there is an association of betel with the feminine and of the areca with the masculine. Another one is the association of the betel with the sun and the areca with the moon. However, this is not a constant trait as several informants present different comments on the issue. Of particular importance to the analyses is the use of these plants as markers of socio-political status in ritual context.

As we have seen from the example presented at the beginning, sharing the betel leaves and areca nuts, to chewing then with others, resting and talking – acknowledging of one's intentions and persona – is considered the proper way to start a relationship. It is also a pre-condition to enter the House, particularly if ritual practice is being carried.

The role of *molo* and *pu* is unique. As commented on elsewhere, the quid is part of daily life and interpersonal interaction. The sharing of betel and areca is common, and there is an expectation that, at arrival, it should be given to you, either from your personal bag or the basket that every women usually has at home³⁴. Typically each person uses his/her own lime, carrying it in the personal bag, the *kaluk*. The bag is part of the person³⁵ and also his/her own substitute, particularly at the time of death and the associated rituals. The betel leaf is subject to reservations: the major leaf (*sikal*) is considered the correct one to chew, while the small one (*sis*) is considered as the proper one to be used in war ceremonies (*besi gie*).

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32 Story collected in 2010 with *matas* Moisés, House Pietaz, Malilait – Bobonaro.

33 A brief commentary, obtained some years ago "translates" the uses *molo*, *pu* and *hau* has a "Trindade", the Catholic trinity, being the *hau* considered the "holy spirit" (due to his witness, not dirty) and the reed of the quid the blood of Good.

34 During my fieldwork I bought my own basket to put on the table, with betel and areca, as well as tobacco. Every Friday, male merchants from the Lolotoe area coming with betel to Saturday market at Bobonaro were anxiously awaited on the road.

35 In 2004, a small ceremony was performed on my behalf. The *matas* of the House filled my bag with betel leaves and areca and a chicken was sacrificed.

The role of betel and areca is essential, either in health problems, divination processes or particularly in ritual context. Some brief examples will be drawn from ethnography data in order to highlight the role and significance of the leaf, the nut and the lime, particularly in the context of communion and communication.

The *hau* is used in several circumstances for health treatment, namely for particular headaches, in which it is blown over the person's head. A recurrent use of the *hau* is the *hau gone* or *hau akat* – to measure with the lime, a divination process performed when a bad dream occurred. In this process the arm is considered like a ladder, climbed with the help of the thumb and the middle finger of the opposite hand from the inner elbow to the tip of the middle finger (the upper world, separated from the earth). The *hau* is put on the base of the inner elbow and on the finger to mark the steps made to climb the forearm and the palm of the hand, considered as a bad omen. The prayer³⁶ that accompanies the act states:

1.	<i>hot o hul pan o mug</i>	Sun and moon sky and earth
2.	<i>pan ukat oen no mug lae uen no</i>	The sky and the earth are one step apart
3.	<i>lete sa pel lo malas sa logen o</i>	The stairs are broken
4.	<i>sae sa loi ni` debel sa loi ni`</i>	It is not possible to climb
5.	<i>ini na zie konta menal aoli</i>	You will tell
6.	<i>ini na sae `on pi `on</i>	You will climb and reach
7.	<i>ini na giral pisi ini na epal lel</i>	You will see and hear clearly
8.	<i>ini na tie gut ini na mogo mo gon</i>	You are at the chicken egg you are at the arm of the sea foam

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 36 This prayer was given by Eusébio in 2006, a young, but renowned practitioner of this divination process.



Photo 1. Kaluk gol gini : "to prepare the small bags" at a House ritual. The betel leaves are inside the bags and at the top. Every women and men assembled their bags (or wallets). Rice, wine and pork meat is offered. Tapo, 2003.

The use of the betel and areca to receive a guest is also common. In the spatial organization of the house a particular spot at its front is used as *malu mit golo`* - the place for the ally to seat (to rest and wait before entering the house). Whenever a new house is built, or when an old one is renewed, the ritual of *hima gol matag* - to put the new pole (the male and female poles, central to the House) - the *malu mit golo* receives, as(ou at?) each pole, a basket containing particular plants and an egg, elements that ensure freshness, as well as betel and areca.

In the marriage process the man's side gift of betel and areca to the bride's family (*molo pu atama* - to bring betel and areca) is considered the proper way to start the negotiations towards the constitution of the new couple. The counter gift is considered as a sign of acceptance and of continuing the process.

In personal rituals or House rituals the *molo pu ebel* or *molo lai* - to put down the betel and areca - is a first step that precedes any meal. In fact, almost every ritual of the life cycle and also community ones, have a first major partition of betel for the attendants and the beings being addressed to at the ceremony. In the case of a house ceremony, the betel and areca are also placed in the ritual's attractors of the house, representing the ancestors (like the masculine and feminine poles and the baskets that contain the House regalia, among others).

This division precedes any distribution of food and it is made in accordance with the precedence of the ones that are attending it (along with the food and wine process the betel and areca distribution are essential). This also occurs in the rituals at the field and animal sacred places. At the end of each housewarming or renewal of a house a small ritual named *kaluk gol gini* - to prepare the small bag - is performed. Betel leaves and areca are putted inside the bags and at the top of the pile of bags.



Photo 2. Leru: “the pantry”. It is considered a feminine space. In every ritual of the House a leru is prepared and all the supplies brought by the several households are assembled here and kept under surveillance of women. They are also responsible for preparing the baskets with betel and areca to given to the men, the public officials. Tapo 2005.

The distribution of betel and areca considering political status is discussed by Friedberg (1982, 610). In the Bunak area under study, the normal way to proceed is from the outside to the interior. If traditional authorities are present, the four outside rulers (the *bei goni`il*) are the first to receive the betel, followed by the three *hima gonion*, the inside rulers (house rulers). The House allies and its members are the last ones to receive. The number of betel leaves is an indicator and recognition of the status: four, three and one leaf. Nevertheless, the total number of leaves is contextually framed in the hierarchy present. In a House ceremony a *matas*, the head of the House, even though receiving only one leaf, is considered superior.

The handling of betel and areca is made by men but, like in other contexts, the betel and areca are assembled in a ceremony by women at the *leru*, the place organized to assemble the food and betel in any ritual ceremony of the House. In the House rituals of the cooking of rice is of extreme importance. Women play a vital role in a single, discrete but essential rite (to put a leaf beneath the basket of rice assembled).



Photo 3. Au Akat (or au gone): "to measure the arm with lime", performed by Bei José Tilman in one early morning, 2005.

Another major role of betel and areca is its association with the concept of path, translated from the Bunak *gua*. In certain ritual contexts, particularly those associated with the ritual-political functions of the realm, betel and areca distribution is described in the esoteric narrative path not only as a communion but also as a manifestation of precedence and hierarchy among the nobles, the *dato*³⁷s: *molo*¹ *dato*² *pu*³ *dato*² *gie*³ *gua*⁴ – the path⁴ of the³ noble² betel¹ and of the³ noble² areca³. The title is used only in certain particular occasions, namely the death rituals of traditional authorities or the protection rituals of the domain. In these circumstances the delivery of betel and areca lists a large number of places that are considered the proper path of arrival, forming a collective identity based on the Houses (people) and space (assembled of places and other beings). The rituals of life, namely the nomination of a House head, are done in the context of the *bul belis* (white base). In this ritual, the trail is from the exterior to the interior. In the rituals linked with death are *bul guzu* (black base), the trail is from the interior to the exterior.

In either case, the distribution is carefully observed by those that are present and can be subject to disputes if the proper order is not respected. The version presented here corresponds to the one preserved by the deceased *bei José*, from the *House Namau Deu Masak*.

Molo Dato bul belis gie

1. Tuluata Oalgomo
2. Mazop o Mail Lait
3. Ai Asa Honalu
4. Oat o Odomau
5. Lel o Sibuni
6. Soboai Oeleu
7. eme gonion ama gonion
8. dato Mone Itu
9. dato Namau
10. dato Luhan
11. dato Opa
12. dato Agu
13. dato Dato Pou
14. dato Lokal Giral
15. dato Apa Pou Holsa

Molo Dato bul guzu gie*

1. dato Mone Itu
2. dato Namau
3. dato Luhan
4. dato Opa
5. dato Agu (Sul)
6. dato Dato Pou (Tato Metan)
7. dato Lokal Giral
8. dato Tuluata Oal gomo
9. dato Mazop o Mail Lait
10. dato Oat o Odomau
11. dato Lel o Sibuni
12. mamak gonion daun gonion
13. pat o lita mamak gonion daun gonion**
14. apa Pou Holsa
15. taka kornel Mone Itu

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 37 This version is slightly different from the one I collected with *matas* Paulo Mota, the head of the House *Namau Deu Masak*, and main responsible for the *hima gonion* (the Three Houses). *Matas* Paulo Mota died in 2006.

16. dato Apa gemel'oa Pou gasai
17. taka kornel Mone Itu
18. Namau gie taka bali Luhan otol
19. Manu Gatal Deu Gonion
20. Asa Laka Dasi Lae
21. Lelo Bele Pu' Gen
22. Lese o An Po'
23. Ai Tula Makes
24. hola pese lulin hone
25. kota giri Taol Lua Po' Hol Babulu
26. Mata Basin Babulu
27. Lakus o Datoi
28. Tali Asa Zo Gen
29. Ili Bole Boubet
30. Laka Til Airan
31. Leo Bara Leo Buka
32. Bitau Airan
33. Keris Bau Pan Bau
34. Mabil'oa Mabil Mon
35. Solo Golo Il Mot si
36. Lo'o Bau Lep Gen
37. Lelo Kou Bau Kou
38. Hulu Atin Bau Gobon
39. Bau Dato Bali Lin
40. ha'al tol Mare Gatal Mone Itu

16. Namau gie taka kornel Luhan maiol
17. Ipo gita in gilin
18. Manu Gatal Deu Gonion
19. Asa Laka Dasi Lae
20. Lelo Bele Pu' Gen
21. Lese'oa An Po' Makes
22. Mape Op Ai Tula
23. Hola Pese Lulin hone***
24. kota na Giri Taol Lua
25. Mata Basin Babulu
26. Po' Hol Babulu
27. Lakus o Datoi
28. Tali Asa Zo Gen
29. Ili Bole Boubet
30. Laka Til Airan
31. Leo Bara Leo Buka
32. Bitau Al ran
33. Keris Bau Pau Bau
34. Mabil'oa Mabil mon
35. Solu golu Il mot si
36. Lo'o Bau Lep Gen
37. Lelo Kou Baú Kou
38. Hulu Atin Bau Gobon
39. Bau Dato Bali Lin
40. ha'al tol Mare Gatal Mone Itu

1 *"sai husi uma laran, mak sai"* - It begins from inside the house. The house portrayed here is the community of Tapo, composed of eighteen sacred Houses. But, in the narrative only seven, de Dato ones, are indicated.

2 *"mil lo sai o (iha laran remata ona), agora dato gun gene gie (dato iha liur nian)"* – it leaves the inside and starts the outside nobles

3 *"Dato gun gene gie teni"* – the outside nobles again.

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Other rituals take place at restricted places: the *pan giral muk gug* – the eye of the sky the nodule of the earth - and its performance is limited to those who have a ritual role. The examples given present the idea that betel and areca are part of a cosmological interpretation of the interaction between humans, ancestors and other beings. When such rituals take place outside the villages, betel and areca are usually replaced by *kabouke* (*Ficus septica*) leaves and fruit, a plant that can be collected and that some informants say it is also possible to chew, in case of absence of betel.

Being it at the life cycle rituals or at extraordinary events the role of the betel and areca as a reception marker is paramount. An example dated from 1998³⁸ depicted the voyage of the bishop Belo from Dili to Tapo to inaugurate the new local church: Cristo Liurai. Below, the final part of the narrative to the Bishop is presented:

- 22.** *Golo gene mit oa ege molo mila gie o, pu ilin gie o.*
- 23.** *Molo hot ba,a pu hot ba,a o ba,a dato juse, dato malo hot pu hot:*
- 24.** *Molo esen pu en no molo gita hau oa pu gita bako oa.*
- 25.** *Hau sa ja bako sa filat.*

- 22.** Your seating place is over there the people's betel and areca is here
- 23.** The betel sun the areca sun is there, the nobles, the noble betel sun and areca sun
- 24.** The betel and areca have been added lime and tobacco is on top
- 25.** Lime and tobacco are changed

Other examples could be given but these highlight the relation between communion and communication, stressing the existence of a proper path that translates the local notion of the correct way of being received and enters one's house or community. The role of the translator is, as commented, relevant: a *matas*, the House responsible, or the *bei*, an outside ruler, or any other element authorized to perform a narrative, along with the acts. Distributing the betel leaves and areca is a chance of reaffirming legitimacies but also of contesting them. Small plays, tricks, can be made. I was told in certain situations that a certain elder was "*halimar*" – playing –, with the holder of certain functions, delaying the distribution, waiting for their remarks – or in their silence, to prove their ignorance, thus reasserting his own authority.

5. ON NATION(AL) BIOGRAPHICAL OBJECTS: TRANSLATION OF PRACTICES AND IDENTITIES (ON CRISIS AND DEVELOPMENT)

At this point, I would like to focus in the possibility of extending the analysis to a macro level, considering East Timor territory and the nation, analysing clues to an understanding of the role of betel and areca as communion and its use as communication. Is it possible to translate a personal or community practice of offering to a national context?

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38 Part of the heritage of the Dato Pou House and the deceased *bei* António Marques.

Betel and areca do not have the same iconic display as the “house” in East Timor. The House has been used since colonial times to present to convey a synthesis of identity, or a mirror for it, if one considers its use. It is part of the imagination of the nation but it was also used in Indonesian times as a symbol of integration (McWilliam, 2005). At a mythological perspective, the betel and areca precedes the house (or, at least, are concomitant with it), but as described, betel and areca chewing is of substantive relevance if we want to pass its threshold³⁹. In this perspective it is, like a social key. The focus in the House as a representation of East Timor and its culture is supported at a governmental level, namely by the Secretary of State for Culture, as an identity icon of East Timor and a potential touristic advocate.

The betel and areca seem to have, at regional and national levels, the same omnipresence, but, as stated by Ellen (1991), its obviousness made it partially unperceived. Several examples illustrate the use of ritual and traditional practices promoted by local, regional and national (State) sponsored ceremonies.

Following the 1999 events, Babo-Soares (2004) presents an interesting proposal in the context of the reconciliation process between the “elite” and the “grassroots”, analysing how the various translations depend on the “translator” (victims and perpetrators) ability to allocate meaning to past acts and reinterpret them in the present and future of the community. In this process, the role of family or community reconciliation is made through the *nahe biti*: “Usually, such a process is finalised with the ceremonial exchange of betel nut to show sincerity and commitment”. (2004: 20).

Loch (2009) also remarks that the reconciliation process included the betel chewing:

“(…) a CAVR community reconciliation meeting may be organized according to modern international standards and supported by the United Nations, but it is eventually the traditional betel chewing ceremony and a *juramento* (oath – involving often the drinking of palm wine with blood), which reconciles the actors, and Catholic prayers frame the ceremony.” (2009: 97)

In the aftermath of the 2006 crisis, State sponsored ceremonies have been performed and are still cases to be studied. Xanana Gusmão, who was the President at that time, said that he had:

“(…) launched a commission to gather all the traditional elders (*lia nain*) of the 13 sacred houses to follow with the tradition, which - he said-has not been observed following the end of the invasion. He said he has been criticized for this but would like to follow the ancestral traditions. It is believed that the recent crisis is partly the result of not following in the tradition of putting back the swords to rest, which were taken and used as protection during the war”⁴⁰.

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39 As commented, arriving, resting and chewing the quid (either at the sacred house or its junior house) is the proper way to enter and start any negotiation. Only thief’s or someone with bad intentions does not act on this premise.

40 UNMIT Revista dos Media Diários: sexta-feira, 20 Outubro 2006

In December, 6th, Lusa commented on the realization of “hamulaks” at the thirteen districts and the concretization of a national “Hamulak”: “Halot Meik no Kroat” (to store the traditional weapons), promoted by Xanana Gusmão. At the same time an interesting presence of betel and areca among nation identity items appears in the first paragraph of the National Declaration of Students of East Timor, on 25th September 2006: *Ba Maromak, Uma no Ahi, Bua no Malus, Foho no Tasi, Mota no Anin Lulik, Husi Jako to’o Oecusse ho Lia Ida Deit* – For God, The House and the fire, Areca and Betel, Mountain and Sea, River and Sacred Wind, From Jako to Oecusse, one Word Only.⁴¹

In the political arena there are at least two parties, the Partido Democrático (PD), and the Partido do Povo de Timor that uses a symbol that is associated with betel in their flags: a basket. The explanation of its presence in the PD is made in Seixas (2006: 333):

“(…) the net and the basket are the traditional foundation of our democracy. When someone arrived or when some problem had to be solved, the elders gather around the basket, positioned at the centre. The basket usually had tobacco and corn leaves to roll, as well as betel and areca to chew, and each one would take it”

Another author also comments on its use:

“The PD integrated a betel-nut basket in the centre of their flag. The basket has a high symbolic value expressed in different kinds of ceremonies, as the consumption of betel-nut provides access to the supernatural world as well as creates relationships to foreigners.” (Hohe, s.d.).

The reception of guests, of outsiders, is a recurrent theme and plays, as explained, a major role in local rituals practices. The recent visits, both in mountain areas and cities, made by the Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão in the agenda of the popular consultation for the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP), is a good example incorporating the local, regional and national levels, with the several interests at stake. A look at official news, collected from the official web site of the government allows to glimpse the way these receptions offer possibilities for local actors to address the political elite.

“In the Lolotoe sub-district, Bobonaro district, on the 23rd of July “The population welcomed the Head of the Government, according to the traditional habits, which include dressing the Prime Minister with the traditional Lolotoe costume and make an appearance in the elders council.”⁴²

In Dili, in the Dom Aleixo sub-district:

“The Head of the Government’s party was welcomed by the community in the Comoro Bridge, following the traditional use and customs of that sub-

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41 Lia Fongtil. Edisaun 1, 20 Outubro 2006

42 Lolotoe sub-district Popular Consultation about the NSDP: Wed. August 04, 15:03 <http://timor-leste.gov.tl/?p=3545&lang=en&lang=en>

district, under the sound of the São Pedro School Band, and afterwards heading to the NSDP consultation area, where bétele leaves (preparation to chew on) and lime were delivered.”⁴³

In Maubisse, in May 16th:

“The local authorities and the population welcomed the Prime Minister, offering him with the tais (traditional cloth) and, in the middle of cheering to the maun boot (older brother) of the liberation and independence of Timor-Leste (...) Before the consultation session began, Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão was invited by the elders to take shelter at the uma lulik (Sacred House), built in front of the Church Hall and chew betel nut leaves with areca palm fruits and lime dust, at Maubisse’s traditional way, for the receptions of important guests. After, the heirs of D. Adelino Espírito Santo offered a cane from his kingdom days, symbolizing the power to be granted in Timor-Leste at the service of its People and its Well-Being.”⁴⁴

In Hatubuiliku, Ainaro District, in the 17 May:

“Xanana Gusmão was welcomed with the Hatubuiliku cultural rituals. In the welcoming ceremony, the population offered the Prime Minister a horse ornamented with a Belak (ornamental disc), according to the locality tradition. With this particular reception, among applause and the tebedai (traditional dance) rhythm (...) The ancients served the Head of Government with betel leaves. This symbolic gesture can be interpreted as an attempt to involve all, “avoiding the creation of divergence because we are tired of searching for hideouts, of living in uncertainty and experience distress. We want, with all the population of Hatubuiliku, to opt for Peace”⁴⁵

At Cailaco, Bobonaro Subdistrict in the 26 July.

“The prime minister and his delegation were as received by the Administrator of the Subdistrict and the population with Cailaco traditional rituals and clothes. The reception to the head of government was also made by elders that offered him betel leaves and areca nuts, following the traditional Quemac rite.”⁴⁶

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43 The NSDP intends to satisfy the population’s needs: Wed. September 15, 12:17h <http://timor-leste.gov.tl/?p=3839&lang=en&lang=en>

44 Prime Minister, Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão, receives cane of Don Adelino in Maubisse: Mon. June 07, 16:21h <http://timor-leste.gov.tl/?p=3166&lang=en&lang=en>

45 The population of Hatubuiliku appreciated the NSDP: Tue. May 25, 06:36 <http://timor-leste.gov.tl/?p=3095&lang=en&lang=en>

46 Tradução do Português: PEDN, Esperança de Libertação para a Comunidade de Cailaco: Ter. Agosto 10, 12:34h <http://timor-leste.gov.tl/?p=3631&lang=en&lang=pt>

The willing of the State to accept these practices, in which it is co-translator, is also seen in other modernisation practices at a regional level. In this example the betel is not directly referred to but it can be seen in the photo that accompanies the article:

“The Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, Mariano Assanami Sabino, joined the several “lia nain” (traditional timorese authority, conflict and justice mediator, “word owner”) from five sub-districts of the Lautem district, in a cultural ceremony for the blessing of 45 tractors that were delivered to farmers at the old Central Market in Los Palos.

This ceremony marked the delivery of these tractors and the beginning of their use, the blessing is a symbolic act in the sense that it helps farmers to use these machines in an efficient and effective manner, in order to reach the intended objectives.

For the Minister, “the ceremony preserves tradition and is based on our culture, as the faith in God, that encourages us to work the land and to transform a piece of waste land into an arable and productive land to thus foment our independence”.⁴⁷

The use of betel and areca at a ritual with nation(al) relevance can be seen in the ceremony that took place in Dili in June 2010. The event occurred at the Dili harbour, and it consisted in the reception and formal integration of the two war ships bought from China. On the first day, a ceremony was held at the Dili harbour, including a military parade, the formal speech was delivered by principal politicians, and the blessing of the ships by a catholic priest. The ceremony was attended by numerous guests, including Australian and Indonesian navy representatives.

As part of the “Programa”, the protocol agenda of the ceremony, the line 11. consisted of an “*Acção Ritual Tradicional*” – a traditional ritual action. This action consisted in the performance of a small group of men and women dressed in with traditional clothes. The group was composed of the Liurai Tasi (the sea king, coming from Likisa) and the Liurai Rai, coming from Motael. After the formal deliverance of the ships, the group entered the square to dance in front of the guests. At the extreme of the harbour deck, between the fore of the two ships, positioned in front of each other, a mat lied on the floor. Between the two ships, a small mat was on the floor, with thirteen small baskets and two other, a male basket and a feminine basket, with betel and areca.

After the dance, several of the politicians present, led by President Ramos Horta and Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão, took each one of the baskets and poured its content at the sea. The baskets represented the East Timor districts. I was told that they were representations of each district, and all together, the country was explained as a whole. And they represented the endorsement for the ceremony being held. This was the view of the organiser and leader of the group. Nonetheless, the inferences that could be made, the role of traditional rituals in official ceremonies were unnoticed in the State news.⁴⁸

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47 Tractor Blessing Cultural Ceremony: Mon. Outubro 11, 12:33h, <http://timor-leste.gov.tl/?p=4034&lang=en> &lang=en

48 Patrol Vessels were delivered and baptized: Tue. June 15, 00:09 <http://timor-leste.gov.tl/?p=3319&lang=en>

6. FINAL REMARKS

Rai Timur foin nalo

The island of Timor resembles the betel leaves, the areca sprout

malus tahan bua baluk

Can a plant like betel and areca translate the people or the nation of East Timor? Further research has to be done in order to analyze its use. Nevertheless, obliviousness seems to prevail, as we understand the role of these plants.

Basílio de Sá (1961) presents seven “legends” from the oral tradition of Timor in his book. The first contains the renowned myth of the origin of the island and its first inhabitant: respectively the crocodile and the young boy who rides on his back. However, the most interesting feature of the legend presented by the author is its title (above). Nowhere in the story there is a reference to this unforeseen title; in fact, betel and areca are absent references in the text. The author explains the translation of the title, adding that, by free speech it could be translated as “The beginning of Timor resembles the betel leaves and areca sprouts” (1961: 120). Sá explains that from this description “Timor begins from almost nothing, like the tree leaves, like the sprig” comparing the Timorese example to the biblical: “the kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard” (Mateus, 13-31).

It’s surprising, or not, that such remarkable suggestion of beginning seems to be overlooked by all. Their immateriality, following UNESCO’s terminology, also reminds us that any material culture needs to be addressed to along with their human counterpart. The resilience of this practice, the interpersonal, socio-cultural values and emotional attachment reveals a core centre at the construction of the identity that needs for further understanding of its many metaphors at local and national level.

Like the sacred house, the comprehension these material artifacts and they contexts of use, needs to integrate an interlaced approach to the translation of traditions as practices of citizenship, and in this meaning, of national imagination – a process that cannot end with independence. Do national actors, national authors - translators (manipulators) use tradition only as decorative scenario in State sponsored apparatus? Only further research can analyse the role of vitality and emotion attached to each actor-author-translator in the construction of paths along East Timor rich cultural diversity.