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# **PACIFICATION AND REBELLION IN THE HIGHLANDS OF PORTUGUESE TIMOR**

## **Abstract**

This chapter explores different historical representations of the pacification campaigns in Portuguese Timor, which led to the destruction and division of a highland domain in the early part of the twentieth century. Sources in the Portuguese archives attest to the brutality of the campaigns and ruthlessness of the policies of governor Celestino da Silva, whilst contemporary ethnographic accounts represent pacification as a time of victory, when the region gained independence from neighbouring domains. The goal is to examine the reasons for such contrasting representations by examining the political context in both Portugal and Portuguese Timor, as well as exploring unofficial accounts of this period in contemporary ethnographic recollections.

**Keywords: pacification; direct and indirect rule; oral traditions; colonial violence; highlanders; state evasion; indigenous political organization; monarchism and republicanism in Portugal**

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## CHAPTER 4

### PACIFICATION AND REBELLION IN THE HIGHLANDS OF PORTUGUESE

#### TIMOR

##### Judith Bovensiepen

Towards the interior of the island in fertile mountain soil and among escarpments, lies the little *reino* of Funar. [...] The ungrateful turf makes only for bad pastures, which is why the natives use it to raise buffalo. In the smoother slopes of better soil, they plant corn that they live off. This sad people possessed nothing else, beyond their buffalo herds, a couple of hundred head, whose rearing had taken years. They thought they were rich, the poor devils, because they didn't need neighbours.

Zola (1909: 27) *Quatorze Annos de Timor*

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Portuguese colonial army launched two military operations against the *reino* ('kingdom') of Funar, which is surrounded by steep mountains. According to Zola (1909), the Portuguese colonial military attacked Funar in 1905 and again in 1907 under the pretext of putting down a rebellion. In reality, Zola argues, the attacks were aimed at stealing the highlanders' plentiful buffalo herds. The attacks by the colonial army eventually led to the total destruction and administrative division of the *reino* of Funar.

Today, Funar is a *suco* ('village') located in the central highlands of the municipality of Manatuto. Its remote and once inaccessible mountain location may well be what prevented the Portuguese colonial military from penetrating this region effectively until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> The attack on Funar in 1907 was not the last time the area was subject to an annihilating attack. During the conflict between the political parties UDT (*União Democrática Timorense*) and Fretilin (*Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente*) in 1974, Funar was entirely destroyed, and during the first years of the Indonesian invasion in the late 1970s, all of its inhabitants were forcibly resettled. Highlanders only started to return to their ancestral lands in the late 1990s.

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<sup>1</sup> Zola describes the *reino* of Funar as independent from Portuguese rule at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, yet it seems that some relations between Funar and the colonial power existed long before that. Loureiro (1935: 235) includes Funar in a list of the *reinos* that were in a dependent relationship with Portugal in 1815, listing the D. Esperança dos Santos Pinto as *coronela* of Funar. Funar only occasionally reappears in the Portuguese records of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Belo 2011: 187; da França 1897: 244-245; Pélissier 1996: 61).

Nowadays, Funar villagers again raise buffalo herds and plant corn in the steep mountain soil. Yet, many talk about the Portuguese colonial period as a time of plenty and power – especially when contrasted with the Indonesian occupation or with the years of poverty immediately after Timor-Leste regained independence. During my doctoral fieldwork (2005-2007), ‘the Portuguese time’ was described as a period when the *reino* of Funar was large and powerful – with a reach almost until Dili. Significantly, highlanders stress that Funar was independent from neighbouring domains in Laclubar (esp. Orlalan and Manelima) – echoing Zola’s description of how the highlanders’ pride derived from the fact that ‘they did not need any neighbours’. Some went so far as saying that Funar was as ‘big’ or influential as the *reino* of Samoro (located in present-day Soibada), which developed allegiance with the Portuguese colonial powers early on and appears in the earliest Portuguese list of kingdoms from 1702. ‘In the past, we ruled over all of them’ (*ulukliu, ami ukun hotu*), I was told by a member of Funar’s traditional ‘ruling’ house (*liurai*).<sup>2</sup>

In my first interviews with elders in Funar I asked them directly about the supposed revolt against Portuguese colonial rule, but they quickly denied any such occurrence.<sup>3</sup> With the exception of one research participant who had spent several decades living outside of Timor-Leste, and who insisted that Funar’s inhabitants were known for being ‘rebellious’, no one there mentioned their ancestors’ having rebelled against the Portuguese, nor did they mention an attack by the colonial army against this domain.

This chapter explores different representations of the past in both Portuguese sources and the historical narratives of Funar villagers in the present. Whereas archival resources indicate that the people of Funar were subject to two military campaigns at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many adults I spoke to in Funar talked about the Portuguese time in terms of wealth and success, when the rule of the *reino* extended well beyond its current boundaries. How can we explain the difference in accounts: the local representation of this period as the pinnacle of Funar’s power and wealth and this

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<sup>2</sup> Inhabitants of Samoro and Laclubar I interviewed rejected these suppositions and suggested that the inhabitants of Funar are self-important (*halo aan*). Zola’s account seems to support the claim of Funar’s independence, even though I found no evidence that Funar had any administrative reach over neighbouring domains – it might, however, have had a ritually significant role that neighbours paid respect to.

<sup>3</sup> The only revolt they mentioned is the famous rebellion in Manufahi in 1912, where inhabitants from Funar/ Laclubar say that they collaborated with Portugal to put down the rebellion.

particular account from the Portuguese archives that points to its violent subjugation by the colonial forces?

### **Representations of the past**

However counterintuitive it may seem, I would argue [...] that history the historian creates is in fact fundamentally different from the history people make. No matter how much of the original, experienced past historians choose or are able to build into their narratives, what they end up with will, in specific and identifiable ways, be different from the past. This is so, moreover, despite the fact that the process of narrativization in which the historian engages is not, in my view, intrinsically different from the process of narrativization in which the direct experience of the past engages.

Paul A. Cohen (1997: 3-4) *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience and Myth*

In his book *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience and Myth* Paul A. Cohen (1997) describes the Boxer rebellion in China from three different epistemological perspectives. In the first part he analyses the Boxer uprising of 1899-1901 as an event, i.e. as it has been reconstructed by historians. In the second part, he tries to explore the experience of the participants by analysing the rebellion through a number of social phenomena connected to it in local representations, such as drought and spirit possession. And finally, Cohen analyses the Boxer rebellion as a myth that has been ideologically appropriated by the New Culture movement. Cohen's argument is that one should not privilege any one of these different historical epistemologies.

As in the Boxer rebellion, different epistemologies are also at stake in the written and oral accounts of the encounter between Funar's ancestors and the Portuguese. Zola's account of the two wars of Funar mentions a man called Jeronymo. This name also appears in oral narratives told in Funar concerning the encounter between 'foreigners' (*malae*) and Funar's ancestors. In the local narrative Jeronymo is a foreigner who tries to betray the people of Funar by claiming that the king of Funar looks like a beast (*animal*). To settle the dispute, the king of Funar sends his son to meet the Portuguese administrator in Dili. This man finds the son so incredibly beautiful that he decides that Funar should be independent. The story ends by casting the people of Funar as the winners of the dispute. This stands in sharp contrast to Zola's account of the encounter between Funar villagers and Jeronymo, which describes the total destruction and division of Funar.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, in her descriptions of prophetic movements in the Mambai-speaking area around Aileu, Traube (2007: 16) also describes accounts about a man whose name she transcribed as 'Serónimo' or 'Seróni' (or 'Seróniku').

One of the questions I want to explore in this chapter is: How can we understand the discrepancy between these different, even opposed, accounts? Why is it that the local narrative that involves Jeronymo is a story of victory, whereas this singular Portuguese account emphasizes the violence and barbarity of the colonial army's attack, which ended with the destruction and defeat of Funar? The accounts cannot be put into Cohen's clear-cut categories: event, experience and myth. There is an element of all three in both accounts. Rather than treating Zola's account as 'history' (because it is a written source) and Funar's account as 'myth' or 'experience', I treat them *both* as historical and anthropological sources. It is not the aim of this article to discuss debates about using oral traditions as historical sources (see Vansina 1985). Yet, I follow the basic premise that once past experiences have been narrativised, they persist as a *representation* of the past and have political significance in the present - 'recalling is not the same as remembering' (Bloch 1998: 118).

Before discussing the two accounts, I want to stress that there are several obvious interpretations to avoid, or at least to complicate. First of all, one could say that the Timorese account is simply a deliberate *misrepresentation* of the facts. Funar was destroyed at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but today villagers recount the story as a victory, because that allows them to deal with the traumatic events of war and colonisation. They are, so to speak, in a state of false consciousness where they describe a disempowering situation as an empowering one. This approach is insufficient because it assumes that the Portuguese narrative is the 'true' or 'rational' account, whereas the highlanders are somehow deceived about the true facts of history.

Another way of explaining the discrepancy between the accounts would be to say that the Timorese narrative of the colonial encounter embodies people's resistance to the colonisers' constructions of reality. By narrating the colonial encounter in positive terms, people are asserting their agency. Although I think there may be some truth in this interpretation, I think taking this argument too far would lead to an idealisation of people's ability to resist in situations where they faced drastic colonial oppression. Rather than favour one account as truthful or factual, I want to explore what we can learn from 'crossing' the two accounts, since they both concern the encounters between indigenous highlanders and members of the Portuguese colonial military.

### **The Wars of Funar: Zola's account**

The quote at the start of this chapter is an extract from António de Paiva Gomes' (1909) powerful pamphlet, *Quatorze Annos de Timor*. Gomes uses the the pseudonym 'Zola' because the pamphlet presents a damning critique of the brutal reign of Celestino da Silva, who was governor of Timor from 1894-1908, and who pushed for the 'pacification' and ever-greater control of the mountain interior in the eastern part of the island of Timor, which gave rise to numerous revolts amongst affected domains. Zola uses the destruction of Funar as the prime example for Celestino's barbaric rule. The colonial government justified the violent attack on grounds that the inhabitants of this *reino* had staged a revolt against Portuguese rule (*indigena rebelde*, Zola 1909: 27), when in actual fact, it served the purpose of self-enrichment.

Zola's *Quatorze Annos de Timor* was published in 1909. Zola was a journalist and a doctor who specialised in tropical medicine and worked in the military, stationed in Macau, Timor and Mozambique. Interestingly, he was not only a Republican who criticised the colonial government, but also a Freemason. It is important to understand his account in the context of the tensions between monarchists and republicans in Portugal at the turn of the nineteenth century. Zola's anti-monarchist account was written when the monarchy was truly under threat; King D. Carlos had been assassinated the year before the publication of *Quatorze Annos de Timor* and anti-monarchist sentiments grew, eventually leading to the establishment of the First Portuguese Republic in 1910. As I will discuss in more detail later, Zola's account is an expression of anti-monarchism as well as a commentary on 'pacification' campaigns in Timor-Leste more generally.

Zola's description of the 'little *reino* of Funar' (1909: 27), situated in the deepest mountain interior, is reminiscent of James Scott's (2009) suggestion that highlanders of 'Zomia' (in mainland Southeast Asia), who lived outside of state control, were originally lowlanders who sought to escape state centralisation.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, highlanders are not left behind in time or remnants of the past, but state-evaders who cherish their autonomy. This idea can be found in some of the colonial discourse on highland regions, which create an image of these regions as home to 'the most hostile,

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<sup>5</sup> Zomia refers to the Southeast Asian mainland massif, containing about one hundred million people diverse in religion and ethnic background, covering an area about the size of Europe (*zo* meaning 'remote' and *mi* meaning 'people' in several related Tibeto-Burman languages). James Scott (2009) popularised this term when he suggested that it is one of the last remaining regions of the world, whose inhabitants have not yet become part of nation-states.

untamed and savage peoples' that were 'strategically chosen (...) as sites to escape' (Roque 2012: 265). These representations were part of a colonial 'science' of race, that reinforced certain stereotypes of 'black races in the mountains' that were particularly untamed and threatened colonial authority. Zola describes the inhabitants of Funar somewhat pejoratively as a 'sad people' who 'possessed nothing else beyond their buffalo herds, a couple of hundred head, whose rearing had taken years. They thought they were rich, the poor devils, because they did not need neighbours' (Zola 1909: 27). Despite the condescending tone, this seems to be a more romantic version of the stereotype of rebellious and untamed highlanders, who were proud of their wealth and political autonomy.

Zola then describes a military commander named Captain Manuel das Neves, who found out that there were large buffalo herds in Funar. When das Neves proposed to buy them, the owners refused. Hence in 1905 Manuel das Neves, together with the governor of Portuguese Timor at the time, Celestino da Silva, resolved to steal the buffalo. They declared the people of Funar to be 'disloyal rebels' (Zola 1909: 28). Then they prepared their attack. However, because of the steep mountains that surround Funar, the expedition was almost impossible. For this reason, Manuel das Neves ordered the construction of footpaths to Funar.

He assembled 800 *moradores* (soldiers, mostly Timorese)<sup>6</sup>, and launched a full-scale attack. Zola sarcastically comments that 'a pure and simple robbery would have disappointed the boastful warriors,' so they went out in mobile columns to burn huts and 'decapitate men, women and children' (Zola 1909: 28). Zola's account emphasises the brutality with which the people of Funar were killed, when their remote hideouts were found. It tragically describes how the highlanders threw themselves into a ravine when they were attacked.

The attack erupted from afar. The volleys of fire got closer, and as the shooting decimated the pitiful, they would throw themselves into the only gorge open to them. There the killing continued in abundance. The troops ran them through at point-blank range, finishing off their lives with machetes. They took their heads, for their triumph. The rebelliousness was vanquished; the kingdom of Funar, a cemetery. Among the torsos on the ground rotting in the sun were the elderly, women and children. Superb victory! (Zola 1909: 28)

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<sup>6</sup> Roque (2010:xiii) describes *moradores* as special companies of indigenous irregulars established by the Portuguese in the eighteenth century.'



The cynicism of this account reveals Zola's deep hostility towards Celestino da Silva. After the theft, the buffaloes were reported 'lost' and Zola suspects that Celestino da Silva took them into his private possession. The *reino* of Funar was divided among the three neighbouring 'kingdoms'. The largest part of Funar was handed over to the 'Chief of Manatuto' called Jeronymo. (Manatuto is a coastal town north of Funar.)<sup>7</sup>

Zola describes how the inhabitants of Funar had to suffer from the misdeeds of Jeronymo. He demanded large fines from the local population, used his position to take advantage of women, and was known for committing robberies and indecencies. When people complained about Jeronymo's misbehaviour another attack was carried out by the Portuguese colonial military against Funar in 1907. However, when the military arrived in Funar this time, the villagers had abandoned their settlements. They had fled to the most impenetrable mountain peaks (Zola 1909: 30). Based on a report written by an accompanying doctor (perhaps Zola himself), Zola describes how 300 troops searched and scorched the mountains. The ending of this war remains unclear. Although many inhabitants managed to hide, the doctor reports with shock how the troops returned with the heads of young children and an old man.

From this gruesome report, we learn that there were two wars in Funar, one in 1905, another in 1907. As a result Funar was divided amongst its neighbours. The account does not tell us which neighbours, but considering that Jeronymo is said to have been from Lacro, Funar may have been integrated into the administration of Lacro. Both wars were justified by the accusation that the people of Funar had rebelled. Both included large-scale killings and the theft of buffalo by the colonial army. It is noteworthy that the account reveals how difficult it was for the Portuguese military to penetrate this remote highland area and it implies that Funar was not under direct control of the colonial government until the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But Zola's account must also be understood in its own cultural and political context.

Zola's account is not necessarily representative of the colonial scholarship on Timor; it was written for a specific political purpose.<sup>8</sup> Celestino da Silva was anti-

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<sup>7</sup> There is different information as to how Funar is divided up. According to da Silva (1905), from 1906 onwards the land of Funar was divided amongst Samoro, Turiscaí and Laclubar, for which these jurisdictions had to pay additional tax.

<sup>8</sup> In Celestino da Silva's extensive correspondence and reports to Lisbon, now held at the *Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino* in Lisbon, no reference to the Funar war of 1905 is made. This may be because the governor decided not to report on this particular war in his correspondence to Lisbon; or simply because documentation about it did not survive in the colonial records (Ricardo Roque personal

republican, an avowed monarchist and well connected to king D. Carlos I (Roque 2010: 93). Zola was a republican intent on discrediting the governor and his account was part of a controversy about Celestino da Silva's governorship. Da Silva's republican enemies accused him of having 'polluting contact with different forms of indigenous barbarity,' e.g. by taking part in rituals surrounding severed heads (Roque 2010: 94). Da Silva led twenty-two 'pacification campaigns' in Portuguese Timor and these were carried out with virtually no regular troops, just 'indigenous irregulars' (Roque 2010: 29). Zola's description of the colonial violence committed against Funar was very much part of the anti-monarchist critique, since it stressed the barbarity of da Silva's mission, portraying it as disruptive of 'good' or civilizing colonial empires.

In his analysis of colonial appropriations and representations of indigenous practices, Ricardo Roque argues that Celestino da Silva was the target of political attacks inside and outside of Timor. Charges were levelled against him in the 1890s, the critiques grew in the 1900s and eventually led to legal action against him (Roque 2010: 93-94). Celestino da Silva was accused not just of 'barbarity', but also of robbery. He did not respond to the charges raised against him in 1906-1908 but earlier, in 1897, he did respond to the charge that he was leading the pacification campaigns for personal gains by saying that in Timor it was the customary right of a chief to appropriate the spoils of war and that he would not have been able to recruit Timorese soldiers had it not been for the promise of booty (Roque 2010: 95).

Zola's claim that Celestino da Silva stole Funar's buffalo herds must be understood behind this background, since this accusation formed part of a more general attempt to discredit da Silva's governorship. It may thus be necessary to reassess Zola's claim that Celestino da Silva stole Funar's buffalo herds, since this accusation formed part of a more general attempt to discredit da Silva. Similarly, the violence attributed by Zola to the colonial army, including the claims that 'complaints of victims are impossible because they are killed' (1909: 26-27), must be understood in context. Zola may possibly have exaggerated the violence of the campaigns against Funar to a degree, for political effect.

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communication). Celestino da Silva does however mention 'operations against the rebels of Funar' in the *Boletim Oficial*, where he names the grounds for the attack as the rebellious nature of Funar inhabitants, who are represented as disobedient, without proper authority, refusing to cultivate their land 'running about and stealing buffalo from their neighbouring kingdoms' (Silva 1905: 65ff.).

Téofilo Duarte, himself a former governor of Portuguese Timor and staunch supporter of Celestino da Silva, tried to rescue the latter's reputation by making him the main protagonist in his novel called 'The King of Timor,' the king here referring to Governor da Silva. Duarte tries to defend 'the great governor' and his reputation against the 'futile gossip and criticism in the government offices of Lisbon' (Duarte 1931: iii). The novel contains several chapters that are fictitious renderings of 'the war of Funar' and an imagined love affair between Celestino da Silva and the 'queen of Maubara'. In some ways this novel may be understood as a response to the attack on Celestino da Silva by Zola, as it reclaims Celestino's rule as a 'civilising mission', eliminates the accusations of 'barbarism' against the colonial regime by projecting it onto the indigenous realm, through lavish descriptions of 'blood rituals' that supposedly took place in Funar (Duarte 2010, Chapter 8).

The various ways in which the campaigns in Funar were interpreted and portrayed by these colonial documents tells us less about the historical events themselves, and more about the political climate in Portugal at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Representations of 'Funar' and 'the war on Funar' became the battleground for disagreements amongst republicans and monarchists who used it to defend or critique the actions of Celestino da Silva and his particular colonial approach that consisted of recruiting Timorese warriors as soldiers to fight neighbouring domains. Whereas Duarte portrayed these events as one of Celestino da Silva's victorious and heroic achievements, Zola accused Celestino da Silva of leading the campaigns for his personal gain and of being complicit in what was commonly seen as the barbarism of local practices surrounding warfare.

### **Funar's victory: the tale of Avô Masuan**

During my fieldwork (2005-2007), several villagers from Funar described the encounter with the Portuguese and with a man called Jeronymo (also described as a *malae*, 'foreigner'). People seemed to enjoy recounting and listening to this story because it is also a story about indigenous superiority. This narrative also has its political bias, since it was recounted largely by members of the elite and seems to have been used to emphasise the pre-eminence and power of the *liurai* (traditional rulers) of Funar. It was told to me in various versions. I will only recount elements that the different versions seem to have in common:

In the past, a man from Laclo named Jeronymo (or 'Jeroni') tried to deceive (*bosok*) the people of Funar. The members of the ruling house *Bereliurai* are not allowed to eat eel. So Jeronymo caught an eel and put it into the bottom of a bamboo container and filled it with palm liquor. Then he invited Avô Masuan, the guardian of the *ada lulik* ('sacred house'/house of the spiritual potency) to drink the palm liquor. With great foresight, Avô Masuan sent others to drink the palm liquor. When they had finished, the eel jumped out of the bamboo container. People were very angry, because it is forbidden (*lulik*) for members of that house to eat eel. Therefore they chased Jeronymo away from Funar.

In retaliation Jeronymo went to Dili and told lies about Avô Masuan. Jeronymo said to the Portuguese *Administrador* that the ruler of Funar had body hair like a monkey, horns like a buffalo and a navel so huge you could put a golden plate inside it. [Other versions say that he drinks palm liquor through his huge navel.] In response to these accusations, the *Administrador* in Dili asked for the son of Avô Masuan to be sent to Dili. The son is called José do Espirito Santo.

When José arrived in Dili, the administrator said: 'Ohhh! But he is so handsome (*bonito*). His face is so white, like the face of a *malae* (foreigner). If his father has horns like a buffalo, why does he not have any? If his father has body hair like a monkey, why does he not have it? He looks so good he must be a *liurai* (ruler)!' Hence the *Malae* gave a sceptre to José do Espirito Santo in order to govern Funar [the sceptre shows that he has the right to rule]. Jeronymo had failed to trick the people of Funar through his false reports. Funar won and no longer had to receive orders [probably from Laclo].

This story recounts the establishment of a direct relationship between the *liurai* of Funar and the 'foreigners' (*malae*) in Dili. It also recounts the transformation of the relationship between Funar and its neighbours Laclo and Manatuto. The coastal polities Laclo and Manatuto were among the earliest to demonstrate 'loyalty' to the Portuguese state, siding with the white Governors in the early eighteenth century. In the middle of the nineteenth century they renewed their 'terms of vassalage' with Dili on a regular basis and thereby developed a degree of supra-local authority over smaller polities in the interior. It seems that this narrative refers to the process whereby Funar's elite developed a more direct relationship with the Portuguese, one that was no longer mediated by Laclo or Manatuto.

Not belonging to Funar, Jeronymo, either from Laclo or Manatuto, is described as a 'foreigner' (*malae*), even though he might have been Timorese or *mestiço*. In Funar government officials, from the coastal towns, even if they were indigenous Timorese, were often referred to as *malae*, a term otherwise reserved for 'overseas foreigners'. In this account, physical appearance is mentioned as a factor that legitimises rule, namely

looking more like a white foreigner. José do Espirito Santos is praised by the administrator in Dili for looking beautiful and white. His white skin is juxtaposed to the animalistic features that Jeronymo attributes to José's father, Avô Masuan, who is accused of having fur like a monkey, horns like a buffalo and a navel that is so big you can put a golden plate inside it. One way of interpreting this would be to say that the distinction between the animal-like depiction of local people and the beauty of the foreign represents an internalisation of racist colonial stereotypes. It may also be a variation of the widespread identification in Southeast Asia of whiteness with high status (see e.g. Geertz 1976), similar to the Javanese opposition between *alus* (refined and cultivated), and *kasar* (coarse and crude). The opposition between the José's beauty and the coarseness of Avô Masuan's bestial appearance may have been drawn on already existing indigenous hierarchies of skin colour that were reinforced and reshaped by colonial racial ideologies.

Several other themes in this account resonate with well-known Southeast Asian *leitmotifs*, such as the idea that an adversary employed trickery to bring someone to violate their food prohibitions or that a kind of contest took place between different groups that led to one of them winning and hence gaining political power. Given that eel are *lulik*, sacred and forbidden, violating a prohibition on their consumption would certainly be status-lowering. Narratives about contests of rule are often said to involve trickery, yet just as Avô Masuan already anticipates the deceit, those subject to attempted trickery can often see through this. Moreover, the attack is motivated by the theft of buffalos, and buffalos are extremely significant for exchanges between different house groups, which strengthen the status of these groups and the alliances between them. These well-known motifs are employed to represent specific historical interactions, so that Jeronymo, apparently a mid-level colonial administrator, is cast as would-be rival of the Funar rulers.

Every time a narrator recounted Jeronymo's claim that Avô Masuan looks like an animal, the audience in attendance burst out with laughter. One explanation for this might be that people are embarrassed by such an accusation. The trickery involved in these contest narratives about the exploits of the ancestors is also commonly a source of laughter. Yet, there is also a clear moral dimension because the story demonstrates that Funar's inhabitants are in fact competent rulers. The story may express a sense of consternation over those who suggest the contrary. Rather than being passive objects of colonial conquest, as in Zola's account, the local narrative represents Funar's rulers

as active agents, who manage to overcome foreign attempts to deprive them of their autonomy and position of authority. In that sense, the story could also be interpreted as a subversion of racist colonial representation of the local inhabitants as being incapable of ruling themselves.

### **The transformation indigenous hierarchies**

In Timor, like in other places in Southeast Asia, indigenous power is perceived to be divided into spiritual/ritual and political/jural domains. This diarchic structure is frequently connected to other ‘binary’ or ‘complementary oppositions’ (Errington 1990: 18) that characterise the social and ritual organisation. Diarchic patterns are certainly evident in Funar, where power is split into political power (*ukun*) and spiritual potency (*lulik*). This particular understanding of power and its misrecognition is also at the heart of the claim that Avô Masuan looks like a beast. Avô Masuan was the guardian of the *ada lulik*, the house of spiritual potency. This significance is not recognised by the Portuguese, who define power in terms of ‘rule’ and thus give a ‘sceptre’ (a sign of political power) to his son.

People might be laughing when they hear this story, because the Portuguese administrator does not understand that spiritual potency is ultimately superior to political power. Hence when Jeronymo accuses Avô Masuan of being ugly and beastly, he does not recognise his immense strengths in the ritual realm (or if he does, he may be belittling what was once a component of power, which under indirect rule may have become an unnecessary vestige). Jeronymo claims Avô Masuan has horns like a buffalo. Buffalos are not invaluable exchange items, but these horns could be alluding to the powerful adornment that traditional authorities wear on their heads in Timor (called *kaibauk*). Golden plates (*belak mean*), which potentially fit into Avô Masuan’s navel, are also signs of potency and status. Similarly, in this region of Timor, the navel stands for spiritual centrality – it represents the origins of humankind; Avô Masuan’s large navel may therefore not be an ugly feature that shows him as a beast, but a sign of his enormous spiritual authority.

Moreover, the opposition between Avô Masuan’s beastly appearance and his son’s beauty resonates with similar representations in Timor-Leste of spiritual authorities as ‘stupid and ignorant’, coarse and badly dressed, opposed to the sharp-sighted and alert political rulers, who are associated with education and learning (e.g. Traube 1986: 55-56). The idea that despite this appearance and their inward orientation,

spiritual authorities harbour enormous powers or are the ‘true’ holders of authority plays on widespread regional variations of the stranger king paradigm, whereby the autochthonous population is thought to retain ritual responsibilities while the ‘outsiders’ gain political office.

In the account from Funar, the Portuguese gave political power (the sceptre) to the son of Avô Masuan. By doing so, they inadvertently united political power and spiritual potency - which were previously separated in two different houses - in the same named house, called Manekaoli. Even though the giving of a sceptre implies a relationship of dependency on the Portuguese who ‘gave’ political rule to Funar, this act also strengthened the position of Avô Masuan’s house (Manekaoli) and thus transformed the indigenous hierarchy. This act of unifying political and spiritual authority is not unique to Funar, yet more commonly we find accounts which suggest that political and spiritual power have the same origin but became separated when one group (or younger brother) had contact with outside power (e.g. Barnes 2011).

From one perspective, one may even say that the Portuguese made a ‘mistake’ because they gave political power to the house that bears spiritual authority. From another perspective this unification of both kinds of power in one house was legitimate, since José do Espírito Santo is the *younger* son of Avô Masuan (see Figure 1) and this fits into the widespread Austronesian pattern, whereby power is split between an older and a younger brother. The appointment hence remains within the indigenous logic, whereby the older brother is the bearer of ritual authority and the younger brother represents political power.

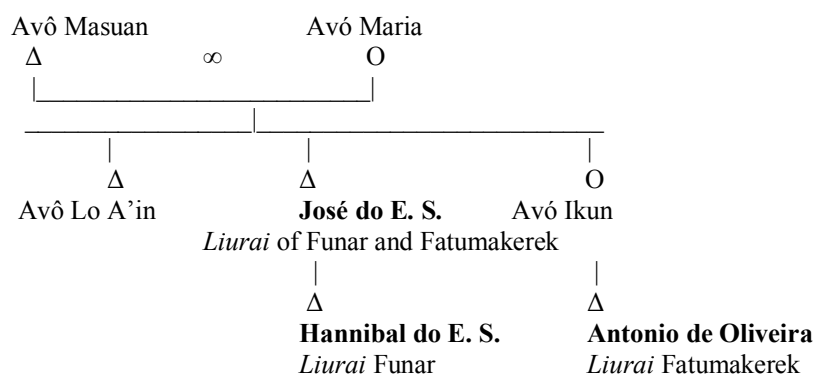


Figure 1. Simplified family tree of Liurai José do Espírito Santo

The transformation of indigenous hierarchies is expressed in terms of the unification and bifurcation of named house groups. After independence, there was a

general tendency in Funar to separate political and spiritual power into two different houses, so that they would no longer be contained within the same house. This led to a situation where a number of different origin houses claimed to possess both, a house of ritual authority and a house of political power, whereas previously they considered themselves to be independent (Bovensiepen 2014b). The relationships between diarchic elements are by no means fixed, but they can be re-shaped through different historical events (see also Nygaard Christensen 2012). Political and the spiritual domains can be transformed into the other – even though the spiritual component tends to pre-cede and encompass the political component.

In Funar today the traditional hierarchies are contested and there have been conflicts between different house groups over ownership of the right to ‘rule’ – expressed as the ownership of a ‘sceptre’ (see Bovensiepen 2014b). These conflicts over the identity and legitimacy of the ‘traditional rulers’ can in part be traced back to the establishment of indirect rule by the Portuguese. The appointment of José do Espirito Santo was probably made after Funar was destroyed and divided the second time, putting into place a new *liurai* who was perhaps more loyal to the Portuguese.

Finally, Zola’s account ends in a defeat, because it measures victory only in terms of political power and does not take into account the significance of indigenous spiritual potency. Hence the discrepancy between the two types of accounts arises from differential understandings of what constitutes power. Nevertheless, both narratives are necessary to understand the transformations of the political organisation that were put into place through the colonial intervention and it also illustrates both the physical and the symbolic violence that was committed against highlanders by the colonial military.

### **Unofficial accounts**

[B]eyond verbal narratives there are at least some and perhaps many evocations of the past in the most mundane actions. (Bloch 1998: 110)

Tracking through the forest nearby Funar in a small group of people in late 2006 on the way to the corn field, a man in his 30s, suddenly pointed to a forested area in the distant valley and said: ‘That is the “place of Jeronymo” (*Jeronymo-Ba*)!’<sup>9</sup> Over there Jeronymo came with his men from Lacro. He imitated holding a gun and shooting. ‘There is a large stone, where the people of Funar shot Jeronymo and his men.’ Astonished by this

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<sup>9</sup> *Ba* also means hamlet, settlement or place.



statement, as no one had ever mentioned a violent conflict between Funar and Jeronymo, I asked my companion to take me to the stone. But he maintained that the slope was too steep for me and refused to take me there. Knowledge about the past can be expressed in everyday situations, prompted by the geographic context, and it is thus quite different from that of official historical narratives (cf. Bloch 1998: 107).

In the evening around the fire, I asked a woman in her 80s who is the daughter of José do Espirito Santo, about the war at *Jeronymo-Ba*. She was resolute that there had been no such war and that there had never been any fighting between the people of Funar and Jeronymo. A relative interrupted her, stating that the place is not called *Jeronymo-Ba* but *Rii-Hatu* (lit. the ‘pillar-stone’). He then went on to tell me the ‘official’ account discussed earlier about Jeronymo’s false accusations (*lia falsu*) against Avô Masuan. Very few people I spoke to spoke about violence in relation to Jeronymo. Moreover, the conflict was never mentioned without my prompting and it was only when I happened to pass by the place that the variant was spontaneously offered.

Another day I heard a group of men who were sitting around smoking use the word *nona*. Since I did not understand it, I asked about its meaning. The men laughed and no one wanted to tell me what the word meant. Then one of them said ‘it is a woman like the one Jeroni had.’ I asked ‘a wife? Jeronymo’s wife?’ Everyone laughed and explained that a *nona* refers to a woman that a man has without marriage, i.e. a concubine (the term is also Tetum for ‘young woman’). On a different occasion, one female research participant claimed that Avô Masuan ‘gave’ a woman named Bii Koon from his named house (the *liurai*) to Jeronymo to marry, but this claim was contested by most other women I spoke to about it.

There are clearly various different accounts and points of view about the role of Jeronymo. Not all the adults living in Funar today have the same knowledge or are willing to share what they know. While there are clearly rumours about Jeronymo that extend beyond the official version, they are not told in public and are not readily disclosed to a nosy foreigner. Vansina (1985: 6) stresses the importance of taking hearsay and rumours seriously as forms of historical knowledge. Once an interpretation of historical events becomes commonly accepted, he argues, the information survives to the next generation and can become part of the oral tradition. The problem with hearsay about Jeronymo is that it is not part of the widely shared narratives told about the past, which made them harder for me to access.

The mode in which unofficial accounts of the past were revealed differs radically from the way official narratives were expressed. Specific ‘secrets’ were always conveyed more privately, in small groups of two or three people and with an emphasis on how this information should not be shared (Bovensiepen 2014a). The reason for secrecy might be because the gossip and hearsay about Jeronymo contain the potential to challenge the official representations of the past. As I noted before, there is no mention in any of the accounts of the violent destruction of Funar by the colonial army in 1905. Acknowledging these events might also mean challenging the position of local power-holders who benefited from the establishment of indirect rule.

A significant time elapsed between my fieldwork in 2005-2007 and the wars in 1905/07. This means that none of my interlocutors in Funar were alive during the ‘rebellion’ of Funar. I cannot say how the 1905 and 1907 wars were remembered by those who lived through them, but instead have sought to explore how collective violence may be refracted in local discourse. Of course, we can never say for sure whether knowledge of the presumably violent encounter between the Portuguese colonial army, its Timorese auxiliaries, and villagers in Funar in 1905/07 has been passed on or not. But in the material I gathered, direct references to the defeat are absent.

The official oral narrative about Jeronymo is relatively stable; it is recounted publicly and is used by members of the *liurai* to assert their position of authority, status and right to leadership. However, less formalised accounts about Jeronymo co-exist and undermine the narrative of Funar’s victory and success over Lacro. Whilst ethnographic research on political organisation helps us to understand misrepresentations in the colonial archive, Zola’s account is useful for understanding what has been omitted from Funar’s public narratives and how to interpret some of the stories that were told to me in private.

In the oral narratives I was told during fieldwork, there is another connection to Zola’s description of the wars in Funar. It is an account about how the house that initially represented political power, lost its power to the house of spiritual potency. It centers on a man called Don João da Cruz, part of the house Manehiak, the ‘younger brother’ of Funar’s *liurai* Manekaoli (to which José do Espirito Santo belongs). According to this account Don João da Cruz of Manehiak was the holder of the ‘sceptre’ and therefore the political authority in Funar, but lost his position through trickery.

One day a foreigner (*malae*) named Manuel (or *Manu Wer* in some accounts) came to visit Funar. He asked João da Cruz whether he wanted to have half a chicken or a whole chicken. Da Cruz replied he just wanted half a chicken. So the *reino* of Funar was divided up.

Although this account does not explicitly mention a conflict, it may indirectly refer to the first ‘war of Funar’ in 1905 described by Zola, since the *malae* named ‘Manuel’ could refer to Captain Manuel das Neves from Zola’s account.<sup>10</sup> When this story was recounted, the narrator often laughed with a sense of embarrassment; maybe because they are embarrassed about the division of Funar or maybe even because they are aware that there must be more to this story.

There were other stories about Don João da Cruz, told to me in confidence by people who were not members of the *liurai* house. I was told not to repeat them to other villagers in Funar, as this could create conflict. According to these accounts, Don João da Cruz of the house Manehiak was the ‘guardian of the sceptre’ in Funar with political responsibilities. The house Manekaoli, to which Avô Masuan and José do Espirito Santo belonged, was the house of spiritual potency (*ada lulin*). I was told that the Portuguese had imprisoned Don João da Cruz and sent him to the island of Atauro. Members of the *lulik* house Manekaoli then gained political power.

There are numerous rumours about the relationship between the two houses Manekaoli and Manehiak. Publicly, people stress the common origin of the two houses and their friendly relations as elder and younger brothers. When I asked about Don João da Cruz and José do Espirito Santo (and who ruled first), the answers were usually evasive, and discussions were brought to an end by statements such as: ‘Both of them ruled both,’ (*Sira hotu ukun hotu*, Tetum). But these narratives of cooperation were undercut by secret accusations and lingering conflicts.

Even though today Manekaoli is recognised as the *liurai* house, at the beginning of my fieldwork there were rumours that the descendants of Don João da Cruz still have his sceptre, which they keep hidden somewhere. The rumored existence of the secret sceptre indicates that its guardians still have a right to rule (*ukun*). Some even said that members of the house Manekaoli tried to kill the rulers of Manehiak, who then fled to another house called Bamatak. Bamatak killed a goat and showed the blood to Manekaoli saying that they had killed the Manehiak people on Manekaoli’s behalf. But

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<sup>10</sup> There are people in Funar who carry the name ‘das Neves’ for example, like the commander Manuel das Neves in the report by Zola.

instead, Bamatak's members accepted the people of Manehiak on their land and hid them from Manekaoli, who then became the liurai.

The narrative of victory and success of the ruling houses was further challenged by another incident. During my fieldwork, a grandson of José do Espirito Santo's sister, Avó Ikun (see Figure 1.) visited from abroad and suggested that members of the ruling house (Manekaoli) had African ancestry. From his childhood he remembered that his grandmother Avó Ikun was black. When an elder recounted the tale of José do Espirito Santo's encounter with the Portuguese *administrador* in front of this man, he kept on interrupting, arguing that 'José cannot have been white because his sister (*Avó Ikun*) was black! She was African!' The surrounding men looked embarrassed; they did not want to contradict someone they respected. They agreed that she was very dark, but maintained that her brother José was white.

The matter remains unresolved. The Portuguese army regularly employed soldiers from the African colonies in Timor, so the suggestion was not implausible. In neighbouring village Fatumakerek (which was later governed by Avó Ikun's son) there were rumours that a black foreigner (*malae metan*), a Portuguese administrator, was once stationed there and that he had several concubines (*nona*) among the local women; however none of them ever bore him children, I was told; this may refer to Jeronymo, but this was never said explicitly. This is one of the many mysteries about these past events that may remain unsolved.

## **Conclusion**

I started this chapter questioning the different representations of the encounter between the Portuguese military and the ancestors of Funar. Bringing together the diverse sources, both from the colonial archives, in Portugal, and from the field, in Timor-Leste, it is possible to try to piece together some aspects of the events in the past. Given the sensitivity of these issues, this necessarily remains incomplete – and my reconstruction is one of several possible interpretations.

Funar probably remained comparatively independent from direct Portuguese control until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Until the 'wars' of Funar, relations with the Portuguese seem to have been mediated by neighbouring domains Manatuto and Lacro, which were allied with the Portuguese colonial administration much earlier. In 1905, under the rule of Celestino de Silva, and under the command of Captain Manuel das Neves, the Portuguese military and its Timorese allies attacked Funar and imprisoned

its political leader – ‘the guardian of political power’ (Don João da Cruz) in Atauro. Jeronymo, who may have been a *mestiço* from Lacleo or simply a Timorese with an official function, was then sent as an administrator to the region. Jeronymo behaved in a way that offended people – expressed by the rumours about his mistresses (*nona*), accounts about his womanising and the fact that he is described as having broken an essential taboo against the consumption of eel. The highlanders discontent with the new administrative structures may well have fuelled a second attack in 1907 as described by Zola. Since Jeronymo was from Lacleo and the colonial military drew their troops largely from neighbouring domains, Funar’s inhabitants saw this as an attack by their neighbours, even though this attack is only expressed metaphorically in the oral traditions in terms of Jeronymo’s trickery.

Funar was then divided and possibly ceased to exist as a political unit recognised by the Portuguese until a new political representative was put into place. Unwilling to appoint a member of João da Cruz’s house as local chief, the Portuguese colonial *administrador* appointed the son of the spiritual authority (José do Espírito Santo). Hence for Avô Masuan’s house, this new appointment was indeed a victory, since both spiritual and political authority, which had been previously split, came to be united in the same house. This would explain why the story of Jeronymo is told as a story of victory, whereas Zola’s account tells us about the destruction of Funar. The reconstruction of Funar meant a victory for some.<sup>11</sup>

Yet, persistent rumours and fragmented observations present alternatives to the public narratives about colonial times and undermine the official accounts of victory and triumph associated with the colonial encounters. Many of the political power struggles in Funar today are indirectly related to some of these past events and their interpretation in the present. Significantly, unlike Zola’s interpretation, in local accounts in Funar today, the ‘two wars’ of Funar are rarely recounted in terms of the opposition between Timorese and the colonial powers. Instead Portuguese intervention in local affairs is understood in terms of the transformation of local power relations: either in terms of the conflicts between Funar and their neighbours, like Lacleo (cf. Muller 1997) – or in terms of the power struggles between different named houses.

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<sup>11</sup> In order to avoid the concentration of power – or to control the territory better – power was later divided up among José do Espírito Santo’s son Hanibal do Espírito Santo, who ruled Funar, and José’s sister’s son, Antonio de Oliveira, who governed Fatumakerek (see Figure 1; see also Belo 2011: 187).

The suggestion that history is written by the winners has become a cliché. Yet it is clear that the account of Jeronymo and José do Espirito Santo strengthens the position of the *liurai*. Nevertheless, competing and unofficial accounts have survived and they continue to pose a challenge to relations of power in Funar today.

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