Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Ethnos
Journal of Anthropology

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/retn20

Governing Through Opacity: Customary Authority, Hidden Intentions, and Oil Infrastructure Development in Suai, Timor-Leste

Judith Bovensiepen

To cite this article: Judith Bovensiepen (2021): Governing Through Opacity: Customary Authority, Hidden Intentions, and Oil Infrastructure Development in Suai, Timor-Leste, Ethnos, DOI: 10.1080/00141844.2021.1965642

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2021.1965642

Published online: 21 Dec 2021.

ETHNOS
https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2021.1965642

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Governing Through Opacity: Customary Authority, Hidden Intentions, and Oil Infrastructure Development in Suai, Timor-Leste

Judith Bovensiepen

University of Kent, UK

ABSTRACT

What is the relationship between intentions – their accessibility and their opacity – and the assertion of political authority? Opacity is a central aspect of customary authority in contemporary Timor-Leste, where obscuring the intentions and motivations underlying specific actions – by attributing them to metapersons – can be a subtle way of making claims to authority and status, and simultaneously an effective way of avoiding conflict. This article examines what happened when this form of opacity-based governance was scaled up to the level of the nation, in the context of a massive oil and gas infrastructure project in Suai, Covalima. 'Governing through opacity' by mobilising local practices – when adopted by the state – brought out rivalries between groups competing for state recognition. The analysis of the emerging tensions between two ritual speakers illustrates how the implementation of this oil project and related forms of 'state legibility' undermined locally emplaced forms of authority by forcing the revelation of disparate and otherwise hidden intentions. Examining these conflicts highlights the unstable and uneven relationship between intention management and different regimes of governance.

KEYWORDS Animism; oil and gas; mimetic governmentality; opacity of mind; state legibility

Introduction

Is there an interrelation between 'states of governance' and 'states of mind'? Or, put differently, does a change in the organisation of political authority involve a change in the ways people attribute mental states? This question is at the heart of this special issue on 'governing opacity', which centres on the correlation between two seeminlgy disparate anthropological concepts, 'state legibility' and 'opacity of mind'. Connecting both concepts, we ask how ideas about the legibility of other people's minds

CONTACT Judith Bovensiepen jmb76@kent.ac.uk

change when governments implement measures of state legibility. This article will investigate this question in the context of a massive oil and gas infrastructure project in Timor-Leste, examining the role of intentions – and claims about their legibility and their opacity – in the midst of a state-led programme to make the populations living along the south coast legible and to seek their consent for large-scale land expropriations.

'State legibility', according to James Scott (1998: 2), describes 'a state's attempt to make society legible' through modes of simplification. It involves attempts to arrange populations in ways that are simplified and facilitate state functions such as taxation, conscription, and the prevention of rebellion. States establish measures, metrics and codifications that allow them to produce a detailed 'map' of their people and terrain. The 'opacity of other minds' is a concept that was developed independently – on the basis of ethnographic research from the Pacific, to describe the claims made in many of these societies that it is impossible to know what goes on in another person's mind, i.e. what others are thinking or what their intentions are (e.g. Keane 2008; Robbins & Rumsey 2008; Schieffelin 2008).[1] What came to be known as the 'opacity doctrine' (Duranti 2008: 483) refers to the explicit denial to speak about the mental states, interests, motivations, desires, or intentions of others.[2] Whilst much of the literature on 'opacity of mind' focuses on critically rethinking anthropological approaches to the role of intention in linguistic communication and social interaction, Stasch (2008) has highlighted the political dimensions of opacity statements, pointing out that 'anti-telepathy statements' are also 'pro-autonomy statements' (2008: 445). In other words, assertions about the opacity of others' minds can be expressions of a dislike of political authority, and a valuing of personal initiative and freedom.

In their introduction to this special issue, Buitron and Steinmüller (this issue) similarly identify a general, inverse correlation between the expansion of state legibility and the prevalence of opacity doctrines. In contexts where populations oppose the centralisation of power, a concerted effort tends to be made to negate the idea that it would be possible to know the minds or intentions of others, whilst increasing state legibility can be accompanied by a weakening of 'opacity doctrines'. In other words, the absence of technologies of state legibility is associated with 'opacity of mind' (i.e. the suggestion that it is not possible to know the intentions of others), whilst statements about the possibility of knowing the intentions of others (what we might want to call 'mind legibility') are correlated with state-led implementations of technologies of legibility to govern populations. The concept of 'governing opacity' denotes this correlation – namely the idea that state power requires not just 'state legibility' but also corresponds to projects of 'mind legibility'. The special issue is aimed at analysing this relationship further and exploring its ideological consequences. What are the ideological shifts that take place when states introduce technologies of legibility to govern their populations?

This article provides a possible answer to this question and introduces one particular way to think about 'governing opacity' – namely 'governing *through* opacity'. Opacity is a central aspect in the assertion of customary authority in contemporary Timor-Leste, where obscuring the intentions and motivations underlying specific

actions can be an effective way of exercising power. Via elaborate speech performances, ritual speakers locate meaning and agency in the ancestral realm, thereby obscuring any personal intention or collective interests in the outcome they are seeking to negotiate. However, this process does not only involve concealment. Customary authority is produced in complex processes that involve both concealing *and* revealing meaning, motivation, agency and intention (Bovensiepen 2014a). Authority emerges in the space between these two movements. But, what happens when this particular mode of exercising authority through opacity is scaled up to the level of the state – when the state incorporates and imitates the roles of ritual speakers? And what if power through opacity is confronted with forms of statecraft that require state legibility?

This article examines different forms of governance in Timor-Leste – state governance and customary governance – and how they transform each other in the midst of the implementation of the Tasi Mane oil and gas infrastructure project in Suai, Covalima. It does so via a focus on the interactions between 'state legibility' (Scott 1998) and 'opacity of mind' (Robbins & Rumsey 2008). More specifically it investigates how customary authorities in Timor-Leste respond to intrusive and extractive state projects of capitalist oil and gas development, which – rather than negating the legitimacy of customary authority – draw on customary practices to implement the project and legitimise it. Rather than finding a situation where increasing 'state legibility' stands in contrast and opposition to hidden customary knowledge and practices, in contemporary Suai, the new post-independence state imitates local customary ceremonies and mobilises the mediation of traditional authorities with a view to pursuing and legitimating predatory goals of capitalist oil extraction.

The relation between 'governing through opacity' and projects of state legibility will be addressed by examining conflicts over authority that came to light during the implementation of the Tasi Mane oil infrastructure project. This development project required diverse technologies of simplification in order to produce state legibility, including land expropriation, the building of roads, cadastral mapping, population resettlement, and airport expansion. At the same time, those implementing the project sought to draw on the opaque authority of local leaders in order to legitimise the project via public ceremonies. Discussing one such incident in detail, this article shows how attempts to legitimise the project via a public ceremony failed, precisely because it made disparate claims and intentions visible. By forcing different personal and collective interests to become visible and legible through negotiation and ceremony, state governance in contemporary Timor-Leste represents an intervention that disturbs local forms of opacity-based authority, thereby accentuating conflict and dissent. Analysing the interactions of these different modes of governance, and the underlying understandings of the role of intentions in shaping actions, will allow me to propose a dynamic processual approach to the relationship between governance and opacity.

The implementation of the Tasi Mane oil infrastructure project in Suai Covalima allows me to examine the interaction and mutual transformation of different historically constituted forms of governance and authority. These diverse forms include, colonial forms of governance (namely predatory and mimetic forms), 'governing

through opacity' (where customary leaders assert authority via the inclusion of 'metahumans'), and the mode of governance relying on state legibility. More specifically, the Suai case study allows us to investigate what happens when government representatives, rather than merely seeking to displace metahuman governmentality via modes of simplification, also imitate and incorporate metahuman rule as a way of legitimising their own project. What conflicts, contradictions and dilemmas does this approach produce? And how does it transform modes of governance, the management of intentions, and human relations with 'metapersons'?

This article is also a story of two men, two ritual speakers, Carlos and Luis (pseudonyms), who are expert mediators between the world of humans and the world of metahumans.[3] Luis became an intermediary between local residents and the state and tried to assist the government and oil company officials in implementing the infrastructure project, while also trying to represent the interests of affected populations. Carlos's role in this interaction became notorious largely because of his initial exclusion from the state-led project. The article discusses how disparate claims came to be seen as irreconcilable when an airport was inaugurated via a public ceremony. The ceremony itself was seen by many as a failure since key house groups refused to attend. Understanding the way these events were interpreted locally points to the conflicts that are produced by technologies of state legibility. It also highlights the different strategies local residents adopt as they engage with agents of the state and extractive industries, as well as the stategic manipulations of local conflicts by those implementing the project.

Technologies of State Legibility: Mimetic and Predatory Governance

We cannot understand contemporary responses to technologies of state legibility without considering how these have been shaped as a result of historical interactions. The diverse populations of Timor-Leste have been exposed to contacts with states and limited forms of state governance, especially the Portuguese seaborne empire, for several centuries. However, until the late nineteenth century, the presence of the Portuguese colonial state was fragile and concentrated on the coastal areas. When the Portuguese attempted to expand their power, via taxation and more direct rule, local kingdoms responded through a series of revolts. Just as the country was on the verge of decolonisation, the Indonesian military invaded and occupied the country from 1975 to 1999. In 2002, Timor-Leste officially regained independence. This turbulent history reveals a whole range of experiences with state governance, from authoritarian and extractive to relatively weak and ineffective. These disparate experiences have shaped how East Timorese interact with state representatives today – and hence also how opacity and legibility are employed by different institutions to manage intentions.

In order to explore how the Portuguese colonial regime related to indigenous populations and their customary practices, Ricardo Roque's (2012: 209) analytical distinction between *mimetic* and *predatory* colonial modes of interaction is particularly useful. Predatory forms refer to interactions that are destructive and intrusive and

aim at modifying and replacing indigenous institutions with Western or Christian ones (Roque 2012: 210). One might add to Roque's analysis that this mode would have required greater levels of transparency and legibility as a means of transforming people into 'modern' or 'civilised' citizens. It involved, in James Scott's (1998) sense, the establishment of measures and forms of codification that enabled the colonial state to produce a detailed 'map' of its terrain and people. Roque distinguishes predatory from 'mimetic governmentality' (2015) – a mode of control that involved the imitation, copying and incorporation of local customary practices into state rule. Whilst mimetic governmentality might also be interpreted as a way of making populations legible, it must nevertheless have allowed for much greater levels of opacity since it functioned via the imitation and co-optation of tradition and custom.

Whilst Roque initially draws this distinction to describe intermarriages between Portuguese men and Timorese women, these analytical categories can also be usefully extended to describe colonial modes of governance more broadly (see also Roque 2015). Let us first take a brief look at destructive and extractive forms of colonial rule that sought to replace existing means of subsistence. A major shift took place in Portuguese Timor when the colonial economy moved from the control of trade to the control of production. After the trading economy collapsed and financial surplus needed to be sought via the domestic economy (Davidson 1994: 78), the Portuguese colonial state adopted a more direct and predatory style of governance. From the mid-nineteenth century, an ambitious programme was initiated under Governor Afonso de Castro to compel indigenous *reinos* ('kingdoms') to cultivate coffee, followed by ever tighter colonial military interference and control (Shepherd 2013: 7, 36ff; McWilliam & Shepherd 2019: 275). Indigenous kingdoms responded with a mix of cooperation and rebellion, leading to a series of 'pacification campaigns' that extended into the twentieth century under the governorship of Celestino da Silva (Shepherd 2013: 7). The various projects introduced at the turn of the nineteenth century lay the groundwork for implementing 'technologies of legibility' par excellence. This meant the imposition of Portuguese military command structure to undermine and abolish the *reinos*, increasing attempts to control land, the imposition of head tax in 1906, a focus on cash crops (mainly coffee and cocoa), the founding of several agricultural societies (in 1911), state farms, and the expansion of forced labour (Shepherd 2013: 7–8).[4] This form of governance thus concentrated on controlling local populations and capturing their labour power and resources.

However, attempts to generate surplus and to expand agriculture were largely unsuccessful due to insufficient funding, even though they involved the introduction of various modes of simplification, such as census from 1900 (BODAT 1900), attempts to formalise the market system and more intensive road building.[5] This form of governance directly targeted local modes of existence and aimed at making them legible so that surplus could be extracted (Silva 2014: 127). Nevertheless, state measures of legibility were not always successful, and they were also implemented unevenly in different historical times and across different regions (McWilliam & Shepherd 2019: 276).

The need to control production required an increased encroachment into more remote areas, which produced a rapid growth of anti-colonial resentment and a

series of revolts. The colonial army drew upon troops from loyal domains to quash these rebellions. After suppresing one of the most notorious revolts – the Manufahi rebellion of 1912 (partly sparked by the earlier introduction of head tax), – large numbers of war captives were re-settled along the south coast and forced to work on plantations. After the Manufahi rebellion, the south coast, which had until then been relatively inaccessible to colonial control, was thus opened up. The wide plains – which today have become the target of large government oil infrastructure development plans – were identified as having potential for agricultural development. This involved the influx of Mambai, Kemak and Bunaq speakers from the highlands into largely Tetum-Therik speaking lowlands and coastal areas, a population movement that was to be repeated periodically at significant historical conjunctures in the century to come, the repercussions of which shape land conflicts in the region until today.

Whilst it is helpful to distinguish analytically between mimetic and predatory governance, in practice they were often part of the same process of increased colonial control – albeit with somewhat different political consequences and impacts locally. The rule of Governor Celestrino da Silva (1894–1908), one of Portuguese Timor's most influential governors, is the perfect example for how predatory and mimetic forms of governance were employed simultaneously. Roque (2015) provides a vivid example of this by describing how Celestino da Silva, who led 22 pacification campaigns (Roque 2010: 29), encouraged headhunting rituals and buffalo theft. Da Silva justified this (towards critics from the metropole) by arguing that it was the most effective way of demonstrating and extending the power of the colonial state, and that indigenous customs dictate that the winners appropriate the spoils of war. This was part of a broader approach to state governance, which also advocated studying and incorporating Timorese customary law – *usos e costumes* ('uses and customs') – into the administration of justice (Roque 2015: 71). In this context, ethnography became a key technology of state legibility (see also Shepherd 2019). Roque (2015: 86) argues that 'mimetic governmentality' in Portuguese Timor entailed 'a move toward governing others through capturing those very others' perspectives' (2015: 73).[6] However, this way of imitating local custom as a mode of rule, also entailed, in my view, keeping their own intentions opaque.

Colonial mimetic governmentality, in order to be effective, would have implied East Timorese conceptions of authority as grounded on opacity. Governor da Silva's incorporation of Timorese ritual into statecraft might be seen as an act of equivocation which implies a failure to fully 'see the world' (Viveiros de Castro 2004: 11; de la Cadena 2010: 350) of those who are being imitated. Nevertheless, it is quite possible that his performance was effective precisely because of the ambiguity that surrounded the real intention behind his actions. In other words, for East Timorese audiences, perhaps the fact the Portuguese administrators' 'intentions' were opaque to them, or not fully visible, could be understood as a sign of Portuguese possession of legitimate authority on Timorese cultural terms. Whilst encouragement of rituals celebrating the victories of the headhunting raids committed by the Timorese conscripts of the colonial army might have seemed like a validation of local practice, it was in fact a strategic tool for indirect rule. Perhaps unintentionally, da Silva thus asserted authority by cultivating

opacity and drawing on intermediaries, a strategy that may not have been unfamiliar to a Timorese audience (albeit not in the way he intended). Similar to Mamdani's (2001) description of how colonial governance shaped postcolonial identity construction in Rwanda, Timor-Leste saw a bifurcation of 'modern law' and 'customary law'. However, this did not involve the same attempts to keep 'tradition' and 'modernity' separate, but rather involved a form of 'government of and by culture' (Silva 2014).

Whilst there have been massive political changes since Portuguese colonial times and the subsequent violent Indonesian occupation, elements of these two modes of governance – governing through opacity and governing through legibility – can clearly be seen in Timor-Leste today, albeit in an altered form.[7] From the outset, the Tasi Mane project looks like a typical example of predatory governance. Initiated in 2011, this project aims to turn the entire south coast of Timor-Leste into a large-scale oil infrastructure that produces oil and liquified natural gas (LNG) transported from offshore deposits to Timor-Leste's shores. Onshore exploration possibilities are also currently being investigated. Plans include the construction of ports, a supply base, an airport extension, an oil refinery, a petrochemical complex and an LNG plant spread over three clusters. A pipeline is to transport LNG for production from offshore fields to the south coast, and a 160km-long highway is to connect the three sites. Initially, there were also plans for three grid-planned administrative cities. The entire project requires large-scale land expropriation or 'land liberation' (*libertasaun rai*) as it is also referred to.

The implementation of this mega-development project necessitated some measures of simplification and legibility. As in many other contexts (Scott 1998: 44–45), cadastral mapping offered itself as the most promising first step. Land needed to be expropriated for the project and hence land mapping was carried out in the areas where the Tasi Mane project was envisaged. So far, the project has seen most noticeable changes in one particular site in Suai, where an airport extension and highway have been implemented, and where land for the supply base has been identified. In Suai, the government, in collaboration with the oil company, identified 1,113 hectares of land for the supply base. No houses were affected, only agricultural land, which was compensated by $3 per square metre in addition to compensation for trees and plants. The airport expansion has been completed, which also included the resettlement of some residents near the airstrip, but the supply base had not yet been built. Since a change of government in 2018, progress on the Tasi Mane project has stalled.

To map the land for the project, the affected land was divided into small parcels (*parcelas*). A research team would then visit the area and record land ownership claims. An individual person was registered as the owner, despite the fact that land is rarely owned by an individual. Moreover, although land in many areas is passed on through women in this region ('only women have a right to the land', *so feto iha direto ba rai*, as some of my interlocutors would say), frequently a woman's husband, or, more controversially, a woman's brothers, would register the land in their names. The results for each *parcela* were then advertised publicly at the village centre (*sede de suco*) for several weeks. People then had time to contest the claims made by others and if there were conflicts, mediation sessions were held. Land

owners were given no paperwork or proof of ownership, apart from their *parcela* number. After any disputes had been resolved, compensation payments were made (although by 2019, those in zones 3 and 4 had not yet received compensation payments).

In most of Timor-Leste's history, there has been an abundance of land and relative scarcity of people – this meant incoming groups might 'sit' (*tuur*) on other people's land and farm, without this leading to conflict with the land-owners, since there was plenty other land available for agriculture. Ownership claims would remain deliberately opaque in these situations and could be multiple and overlapping. However, since the government has been handing out compensation payments for land along the areas affected by the oil project, the economic value of land has increased drastically and unevenly and suddenly overlapping claims have become incompatible. Combined with technologies of legibility and simplification, such as cadastral mapping, this has provided fertile ground for conflicts and disputes.

Modernist governance techniques are *in some aspect* continuous with the predatory approach of governance identified with the Portuguese colonial state, as they involve radical modes of simplification and transformation of local livelihoods. Populations need to be made legible so that resources and land can be made productive. However, we also find more 'mimetic' approaches, where the government and national oil company are engaged in staging 'ceremonies' to elicit local support – here we find examples of opacity-based practices. Government officials, oil company employees and local residents all participated in these events, yet they saw and understood them somewhat differently. For local residents, many of the rituals initiated in the context of the Tasi Mane project were aimed at asking the land spirits and ancestors for permission to erect new infrastructure; for the oil company employees and politicians, the goal seems to have been primarily to legitimise the project – although it is possibe of course that both objectives were important to many of the Timorese supporters and enablers of the project.

Not acknowledging underlying intentions – and thereby cultivating opacity – was essential for the smooth implementation of the project. However, this opacity-based approach was not always successful. In the case of one particular site – the extension of the airport in Suai – the attempt to legitimise the project via a public ceremony, failed, precisely because disparate claims and intentions became visible. In order to understand the dynamics of opacity and legibility at play during this event, we need to find out more about the background of the conflict between two important ritual speakers in the region.

Revealing and Concealing 'Words' in the Tasi Mane Project

Technologies of legibility have not just shaped local realities, local authorities have also influenced the governmental style adopted by politicians, administrators or colonial officers – even if this co-production has at times been at cross-purposes. This is not to say that governments do not impose policies – clearly they do – but that at times, state officials sanction their work via the involvement of local authorities, which also

shapes the ways in which specific policies are implemented, a process Nielsen (2011: 347) has called 'inverse governmentality'. I will now introduce two key figures whose engagement with government officials in anticipation of the Tasi Mane project quite crucially shaped how these interacted with affected communities at large.

Luis: On Not Speaking Alone

When I first met Luis in April 2015, the police were at his house. They had stayed overnight because his tires had been slashed several times and Luis had seen someone 'hiding in the bushes'. Vandals had attacked his property over several weeks, but the police had not caught anyone. Luis's house was simple and modest, made from wood, with a grass roof, cement flooring and simple plastic chairs outside. 'Why did they slash your tires?' I asked. 'Am I God?' answered Luis laughing out loud, indicating he did not know. 'I am not scared [of the vandals]' he added, with a big charismatic grin on his face. The area where Luis lives, was one of the places affected by the land expropriation. Whilst few people would lose their houses, agricultural land of a large proportion of residents was identified for the project. Many of the residents in the area were also active fisherfolk, and since the supply base, which is to be built there, will be located directly at the shore, their access to the sea will be blocked. Some other residents suggested that the attacks on Luis's property were due to his collaboration with the oil company implementing the project on the government's behalf. But, as we will see, the story is more complicated.

Luis, who is also a teacher, was perhaps in his 50s. He was strong but slender, with a grey moustache, wearing an olive-green polo shirt and red shorts. His clothes were slightly smarter than that of most subsistence farmers in the region, but not in a way that was showing off. His wife spoke fluent English, since she had been following English and computer classes offered by a government scheme in anticipation of the oil and tourism development planned there. When I asked for his full name, Luis said, 'don't write down "ruler"' (*lalika tau liurai*). It was a clever indirect way of positioning himself at the top of the local hierarchy via negation. He said that those labels are no longer used these days and wanted to be called a 'custodian of words' (*lia-nain*) instead. As a *lia-nain*, he was responsible for speaking on behalf of several places (Matai, Labarai, Beco, Fatisin, and Manikin), because 'they are all Camenassa'. Suai-Camenassa used to be an influential 'kingdom' (*reino*) that is said to have had a strong influence along the south coast of Timor in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Luis was a member of the named house, which used to represent the 'rulers' (*liurai*) of Camenassa.

Luis explained that the 'custom' (*adat*) in this region is divided into 'three regions': Loro Mane'kwaik (Loro Suai), Loro Mane'klaran (Loro Raimea) and Loro Mene'ikun (Loro Manufahi). The people of these three regions, which today form three distinct named houses, are descendants of three noblemen (*loro*); the firstborn (*kwaik*), the middle (*klaran*) and the last (*ikun*). In the past, these three noblemen had helped Camenassa to win a war, during which Camenassa gained their current territory (*lori manaan rai ida nee*). The three *loro* thus relate to each other like older and

younger sibling, whilst Camenassa represents their mother and father (*Ina Ama Camenassa*).[8] This was expressed as 'three loros, one liurai' (*loro tolu, liurai ida*). Because of the initial relationship of support, Luis stressed, one *lia-nain* was 'not allowed to speak alone' (*labele mesak koalia*). The elders (*katuas*) have to sit together to 'speak' of the origins and customs of the region; each would tell their part of an origin narrative that would together make up a greater overall account.

When I asked Luis about the origins of the people of Camenassa and his house group in particular, he told me that because this was a secret (*segredo*) he could not share this information. However, he also told me that if I truly wanted to know about the history and customs (*adat*) of the region, I would have to come back on the 28th August, when a large cultural ceremony (*seremonia kultural*) would take place in Suai. In order to finish the newly extended Suai airport, trees near a sacred (*lulik*) site called Bee Moos ('clean water') had to be cut back (*tesi ai/ aparu ai*) so that planes would be able to land safely. The ceremony was aimed at 'cooling down the land' (*halo malirin*) by performing ritual speech and animal sacrifices. For this ceremony to take place, all the ministers would travel to Suai, he told me, all the elders from Suai, the *lia-nain* from the three 'Loros' but also the ritual specialists from all the other regions of Timor would gather, from the east and west, from Luca to Ermera, and from the south to the north sea. Luis was full of excitement in anticipation of this large ceremony. He told me all the ritual speakers (*lia-nain*) of Timor would have to come and sit together since everyone had a relationship to this sacred place. All would be revealed that day. The history of Timor, and the history of the world, would be told. It was an incredibly important event when people would 'speak collectively' (*koalia hamutuk*).

I only fully understood the relevance later, when I found out that according to the origin narrative of this house group, humanity originated from the *lulik* place near the airport, where the first human beings are said to have emerged from the land [via the voice of God]. However, not everyone agreed that Luis was the person who had the right to speak on behalf of this site.

Lia-nain Carlos: On Speaking Truthfully

When I first met *lia-nain* Carlos in 2015, he did not want to speak to me. He was scared of Australian spies, he told me, and was also scared what would happen if things were not done 'correctly', because he should only speak about custom (*adat*) on specific occasions. The village chief had brought me over to Carlos's house to introduce me. But Carlos seemed annoyed by my presence, saying he had refused to speak to another researcher who had visited him not long ago. He repeated his point about the Australian spies. But when he heard me speak Tetum with a funny 'hillbilly accent', his mood lightened. He invited me to sit down.

Carlos was a thin and gentle man, with a worried and sorrowful look on his face. He was perhaps in his forties, was wearing a sarong, and had wrinkled hands, but no grey hair. Small children were running around, in and out of the house, chasing each other. His wife looked urban with large fashionable sun-glasses and jeans.

Carlos said he is the *lia-nain* of a specific named house called, Uma Dato Kain Haat – the house is the ruler (*liurai*) of Camenassa. His mother is the ritual guardian of this 'big house' (*inan hein uma boot*). A *liurai*, he explained, is 'like the president'. He listed the places over which the *liurai* had power (including Matai, Labarai, and Beco, which is relevant, since these are places where highlanders from other areas have settled and are now claiming compensation from the government for loss of land; this has led to disputes with the people of Camenassa who say they are the original landowners). The *liurai* of Camenassa is the 'biggest' (i.e. most high-ranking) house (*liurai boot liu*). *Lia-nain* Carlos mentioned other houses of high rank, specifically the three nobles (*loro*), but stressed that they do not 'rule'. They are 'only loro, not liurai' (*loro deit, laos liurai*). He mentioned the existence of other house-groups in the village of Fatisin, but 'they are only commoners, not rulers' (*sira reino deit, laos liurai*). His house represents the 'cultural rulers' (*liurai kultura*), which is different from the state rulers (*liurai estado)*.[9] But he stressed how important it is for the government to recognise 'culture', since culture has been there from the very beginning.

When I asked about the origin of the *Liurai* Camenassa, Carlos stressed that this was a very important question. But, like Luis, he said he could not tell me. 'We can only talk about where our ancestors are from during specific customary occasions (*Avo mai husi nebe – bele koalia tempo adat deit.*).' He added, 'this is truly a preoccupation of mine' *(nee preokkupasaun duni*). The topic made him nervous, perhaps because it reminded him of ongoing conflicts around the (cultural) right to 'rule' (*ukun*) and the ownership of the *lulik* site Bee Moos.

Carlos argued that it is important that the people of Fatisin give their land to the government (for the development project), because of the long fight for independence from Indonesia. 'We died for our land', he said, 'now we have to give it [to the government]' (*Ami mate tanba ami nia rai – ami tenke fo*). But he was very worried that if this transfer would not be done correctly – if they did not speak truthfully – then bad things would happen. 'You have to do things right', he said.

> If you don't do things right, there will be problems. I want things to be done with true words. You don't know what will appear if you don't. (*Tenke halo loos. Ita la koalia loos, iha problema. Hau hakarak ho lia loos. Ita la hatene saida mak sei mosu*). If you fight – [literally, if you "eat each other"], problems can appear (*Se han malu, problema bele mosu*).

Carlos repeatedly underlined that the process of land expropriation had to be done correctly or 'truthfully'. For example, a black buffalo had to be given to the land before any construction of the supply base could take place. One of the problems he foresaw was that they wanted to do the ceremony (by the airport) 'via the small house' (*Sira hakarak lao husi uma kiik*), but they had to go via the big house (i.e. his house). This is because it is his house which is connected to the most sacred sites of all. They (the members of the small house) cannot talk first. He said:

> It's not that I don't want to talk to the land – but they have to call (me). It has to be done with truthful words. It is connected to where we are from. Our culture was lost and we found it again. During the war, our customs were lost and they just reappeared. It's a very very long story. It would take me from today until tomorrow to tell you. We spilled blood to become

> the owners of the land. The three nobles do not rule. They chose 'one'. In the past, there were lots of *liurai*, but they chose one, they chose the *Liurai* of Camenassa.[10]

Carlos once again apologised for not being able to tell me the 'whole story' of the origins of Camenassa; the topic made him anxious, so we switched to talking about agriculture, which made him much more at ease.

Governing Through Opacity

In order to grasp fully how opacity and legibility can be technologies of governance, we need to consider the role of 'metapersons' or 'metahumans' (ancestors, spirits and divinities) in modes of governance. Following Sahlins (2017: 123), Buitron and Steinmüller emphasise that so-called stateless societies actually are part of 'cosmic polities' – i.e. they are 'ordered and governed by divinities, the dead, species-masters, and other such metapersons' (Sahlins 2017: 92).[11] While Sahlins holds that the hierarchies and rules of metapersons in such societies constitute 'the state' of the 'original political society', Buitron and Steinmüller point out that the government of metapersons in such societies does not correspond to the creation of legibility. In fact, not even metahumans can make the world legible from one privileged vantage point; and in many such societies, the politics of humans *and* metahumans relies on the cultivation of opacity. If a 'state' is defined by a centralisation of perspectives, then the government of metapersons cannot constitute a state. But even so, metapersons can have a domineering influence in people's lives as research from Southeast Asia shows (e.g. Shepherd 2019). And as we see in the growing literature on 'cosmopolitics' (e.g. de la Cadena 2010, following Stengers 2005), metapersons can be involved in state-governance not just in acephalous societies.

In many rural areas of Timor-Leste, the sacred potency of the land and the ancestors are seen to control the means of agricultural production, and as the primary arbiters of good health, wellbeing and fertility. The widespread attribution of intentionality and agency to sites in the landscape which are the home to spirit 'owners' makes Timor-Leste a typical example of Southeast Asian animism (Århem 2015; Bovensiepen 2014b; Shepherd 2019). However, unlike the cosmic polities described by Sahlins, Timor-Leste can hardly be described as egalitarian, since local political organisation is both stratified and contested. Individuals and groups (named houses) assert authority by delegating intention to the ancestors, which include deceased human persons, totemic animals, or sites in the landscape, such as rocks, rain, the sun, crocodiles, mountains, or land spirits. These ancestral beings are evoked to legitimise and contest often asymmetric political relations amongst emplaced house groups, and are thus agents in the mobilisation of opacity to assert political authority.

Ritual speakers, 'custodians of words' (*lia nain*) in Timor-Leste's national language, Tetum, mediate relations between humans and metahumans. Their speech performances locate agency, intention and meaning in the ancestral realm, yet skilled ritual speakers are able to manipulate and control this process (see also Kuipers 1990; Keane 1997). There is an essentialist ideology of secrecy underlying this particular form of communication, since 'the words of the ancestors' or 'true words' are

considered to represent an unchanging ancestral whole, which can only be revealed on specific occasions (Bovensiepen 2014a). In practice, however, ritual speakers are able to use their speech performances to foreground specific aspects of origin accounts, and to position themselves strategically with regards to various sources of authority – including both metapersons and state representatives. The ideology of secrecy thus enables cultivating opacity, where ancestral words are deliberately obscured and selectively evoked and where the intentions of individual speakers can remain hidden. Opacity is thus dynamic and processual, since political authority is produced through the ways in which intentions are hidden, and selectively revealed.

Unlike the Pacific cases discussed in the special issue on 'opacity of mind' (Robbins & Rumsey 2008), I have frequently come across speculations about others' thoughts, feelings and intentions in Timor-Leste.[12] People might suggest for example that someone is motivated by a pursuit for power and thus wants to 'become big' (*sae boot*); they might be theorising that others are acting out of anger or jealousy, because their inside is 'hot' (*laran manas*); or explain someone's actions via sadness expressed as being 'heavy inside' (*laran todan*). In the case I discussed, for example, residents speculated that Luis's involvement in the oil project was to strengthen his own position and 'become big'. Whilst Luis refused to speculate about the reasons for the attacks on his property ('am I God?'), neighbours were quick to ascribe motive to the vandals, who they thought were unhappy with Luis's collaboration with the oil company. In the context of the oil project, members from house-groups who made rival claims to land, accused each other of 'lying' (*bosok*), thereby imputing intention.

Making the argument that 'opacity statements' have a political dimension, Stasch (2008) shows how refusing to speculate about other people's intentions goes hand in hand with valuing personal autonomy and freedom. Assertions of 'opacity of mind' are thus 'expressions of the political terms of people's coexistence' (Stasch 2008: 443). These political terms must not necessarily be egalitarian or indicate a desire for autonomy, since they can also be found in highly stratified societies. It is nevertheless fair to say that the willingness, or not, to speculate about the intentions and actions of others, are related to 'local attitudes toward authority and responsibility' (Duranti 2015: 179). Keane (2008: 474–478) brings this to the point when he argues that opacity statements are not so much about the actual ability to read others' minds, but are rather metalinguistic claims about the relationship between public evidence and private states. The ability to keep something hidden is also a source of power; it is a way of keeping one's possibilities open. Hence how intentions are managed has diverse political consequences.

The ability to produce authority via opacity can be seen in the conflict between Luis and Carlos and the need to keep information about their house's origins opaque, until a specific moment of revelation. Their refusal to share certain kinds of information is paradigmatic of a more widespread trend. While people are not shy to speculate about each other's personal motivations, there tends to be a strong refusal to speculate about the origins of other house groups or to speak on their behalf. In most rural areas of Timor-Leste, people belong to named houses, whose members are said to share a

common origin. House-groups have origin narratives that recount their foundation during ancestral times, the journeys, trials and tribulations of their ancestors, and their relationships with specific places and other house groups. These narratives are essential to the identity of emplaced groups, to claims to land ownership and sacred sites, and to the ranked relations amongst houses and their branches.

Origin narratives are guarded by a ritual speaker or 'custodian of words' (*lia-nain*), who can reveal them only on specific occasions, like Carlos and Luis both stated. Individual ritual speakers or other house members often refuse to speak about or on behalf of members from other houses. This is why Luis insisted I wait until the grand ceremony to inaugurate the airport, when members from house-groups all over Timor-Leste would come together. These narratives provide various possibilities for political action, depending on how they are evoked and interpreted in crucial moments in time.

Origin accounts are considered to have been handed down directly from the ancestors, as 'true words' (see also Kuipers 1990). As Carlos's worry indicated, people fear that the wrong recitation of ancestral words can lead to misfortune and disaster via the wrath of the ancestors. This ideology pertains to ritual speech more generally, which is seen as reflecting unchanging ancestral words. The representation of these words as 'truth' also has the effect of delegating the intention behind these words to the ancestral realm. There are a number of mechanisms that enable this delegation of intention, including what Kuipers (1990) has called 'entextualisation', that is, the detachment of words from their immediate pragmatic context via poetic and rhetorical patterning. Performances of ritual speech during 'scenes of encounter' (Keane 1997: xiii) are thereby expressions of authority that work via the processes of concealing and revealing (see also West & Sanders 2003).[13]

However, even when ancestral words are publicly revealed, they are often evoked in such ways that they remain opaque and open to interpretation. An ideology of consensus underlies these exchanges, as ritual speakers seek to create the impression of coherence and unity over and above any discordant voices (Kuipers 1990: 169). This is partly possible, because words are seen to be beyond a speaker's intention, as agency is delegated to the ancestors (Keane 1997: 20). However, as individual speakers are seeking to create the impression of unified wills, they are in very subtle ways also seeking to control meaning.

Representing ritual speech and origin narratives as 'ancestral words', thus implies a language ideology that is in some aspects similar to opacity statements because it entails a refusal to ascribe intentions to oneself or others house groups. In Timor-Leste, this is not a generalised attitude, but one that specifically applies to ancestral knowledge, which is an important source of authority. In contrast to the doctrine of opacity indentified by scholars working in the Pacifc, which concerns the intentions of others, in East Timorese ritual contexts customary authorities especially avoid making their own intentions explicit, attributing these instead to others, the ancestors. This ideological stance can contain a range of different political possibilities, from asserting authority of the *liurai* over others, to emphasising autonomy from others by denying the *liurai*'s right to 'command'. The opacity of ancestral words allows individual speakers to adapt flexibly to new political or ritual situations, emphasising

certain aspects of their accounts to suit specific political, social or ritual situations and requirements. Whilst opacity entails many different political possibilities, it is used differently in different political regimes and, as we shall see next, is pushed to the margins when confronted with technologies of legibility.

Conflicts Between Opacity and Legibility

The Conflict (Hadau Malu)

After some weeks, and speaking to other residents, I slowly pieced together the source of *lia-nain* Carlos's anxiety. There were several things at stake, but one of them was an ongoing conflict with Luis about who had 'the right to talk about culture' and who had the right to talk about the sacred site, which was to be affected by the airport expansion.

Carlos and Luis were competitors, and the interactions with the oil company and state officials had produced a conflict between them, something those implementing the Tasi Mane project may have strategically exploited. Carlos was the *lia-nain* of the Uma Dato Kain Haat, the most senior branch of the *liurai* house. Luis was the *lia-nain* of Uma Kaukoba, a smaller branch of the *liurai* house, also referred to as one of its children. As the 'first born', Uma Kaukoba is responsible for carrying out the ceremony of prosperity (*matak malirin*). When the infrastructure project started, the government identified ritual authorities that would take on an intermediary role. Luis, possibly because he was older, more experienced and distinctly charismatic, seemed to have taken on this role, even though Carlos also at times communicated with government officials. Carlos felt excluded and upset that his role and position were not appropriately acknowledged. He also feared that if the correct 'order' of the right to speak was not respected, this could anger the ancestors in a way that would bring great misfortunes. The two men also wanted different things from the development project. Luis tried to fight for an arrangement whereby local residents would not receive compensation, but would get a 10% stake in any profits that were made in the supply base. Carlos was in favour of the $3 per square metre solution, which was adopted by most residents in the end.

Carlos's disquiet derived from the fact that his right to speak on behalf of cultural matters, and by extension about land ownership and specific sacred sites, was not respected when the government and oil company adopted Luis as their main interlocutor. Luis had been asked to help to organise and speak (perform ritual speech) at the large ceremony at the airport for the cutting of trees. Hence Carlos's comment that 'they want to go via the small house'. This led Carlos to withdraw and refuse to engage with politicians. He was worried that disaster could happen if things were not done correctly, that the ancestors would unleash punishment upon them.

Cutting the Trees (aparu ai)

Both Carlos and Luis agreed that the *Liurai* of Camenassa owned and ruled over the land from Suai to Beco and that the three nobles (*loros*) had chosen and helped the

liurai in the past. They also agreed about the power and significance of the sacred site Bee Moos, near the airport. What they did not agree on was *who* had the right to speak on behalf of this *lulik* site. They also did not agree about the means of compensation by the government.

The ceremony of the cutting of trees was postponed many times, partly because the airport extension was finished later than planned. When the ceremony finally took place in 2017, one and a half years after initially planned, it was a failure from the perspective of several house groups in the region. I was not there during the ceremony, but spoke to representatives of various different factions about it later. Different house groups could not agree about the significance and ownership of this sacred site; they could not agree about the relations they had with it, and by implication, about the relations they had with each other. Relations with place embody social relations and rank. After months of back and forth, Carlos and Luis had come to be reconciled and they both attended the ceremony. However, representatives from the three *loros* refused to attend. Representatives from Raimea and Manufahi travelled all the way to 'the older brother' Suai Loro, a house group which is located closer to the site than their own villages. However, when they arrived, they heard what version of the origin account the *Liurai* of Camenassa was planning to recount during the event, and they disagreed with it. Whilst the official account of the *Liurai* of Camenassa was that their house owned the sacred site Bee Moos, members of the three *loros* claimed that *they* owned the site ('owning' (*nain*) here refers to spiritual custodianship). Moreover, the *loros* maintained that they also ruled (*ukun*) in the past and were annoyed by the claim that they were somewhat subservient to the *liurai*. Not wanting to cause a public spat, they decided not to attend the ceremony at all.

Disagreements arose not just about the relationship between the *loros* an the *liurai*, but also about the legitimacy of the claims made by the *Liurai*, which angered members of another house-group. A ritual speaker in Manikin maintained that the ancestors of his house group were present in the region long before the *Liurai* Camenassa. The house of the ritual speaker were the original or 'true' land-owners, who had given the land to the *Liurai* of Camenassa in the past. Their ancestor, called 'Sessurai Lemo Naruk', came into being with the land. He divided all people into those who live in the mountains and those who live near the sea. He brought the rivers into being, including the site 'Bee Moos'. Because of this history, the descendants of this ancestor were the true land-owners and had a right to the site. But this right was not recognised by the government. Initially, he had also been approached by a government official, but because he could not read and write, he had simply given his thumb print to agree to the supply base. This particular ritual speaker struggled to assert his claims in a context where reading and writing was beneficial.

Finally, Bee Moos was also claimed by another controversial figure, the descendant of a Portuguese soldier and a woman from Suai. He had been the district administrator (*bupati*) of Covalima during the Indonesian occupation and was widely held responsible for killings and human rights abuses in Suai after the independence referendum in 1999. He claimed that his father had bought the land near the airport by the sacred

site to grow betel nuts. He dismissed people's claims about the sacred potency of this place, and suggested that they were making up all sorts of cultural meanings and practices in order to claim state benefits.

We can see how in a single site, several overlapping claims are embodied. But these are not just claims to ownership or spiritual custodianship, they are claims to the identity and status of different individuals and groups, and claims about how these groups relate to one another. The need to cut the trees by the airport and to carry out a ceremony to ask the *lulik* land for permission brought these overlapping claims to the surface. However, the tensions between groups have not just been produced or brought to light by the current situation, they derive from the ways in which specific groups sought alliances with powerful outsiders in the past.

By agreeing to organise and pay for a large ceremony around the cutting of the trees near the *lulik* site, the government and the collaborating national oil company were mimetically incorporating local practices and knowledge into their mode of governance. Their participation in this ritual could be done by simultaneously identifying with and distancing themselves from local residents. Working with local customary authorities as intermediaries to make the indigenous landscape legible bears certain risks: it accentuates complexity by mobilising diverse claims, it encourages the creative invention and revival of local practices, it empowers specific groups via external recognition, and finally, it multiplies claims and intensifies rivalries amongst different emplaced house groups (see also Crespi & Guillaud 2018).

However, the opposite dynamic has also been essential to the implementation of the Tasi Mane project. The cadastral mapping, which sought to simplify the local landownership regime and make it legible, was also accompanied by attempts to codify and simplify customary relations. This was not specifically government-led, but worked via 'inverse-governmentality' (Nielsen 2011). In anticipation of the arrival of the project, local house groups tried to write down the hierarchical relations amongst them and the 'customary order' of the houses, their names and their roles. Some passed this information on to local NGOs, who would seek to advocate on their behalf. Thus knowledge that was otherwise secret, and held by customary authorities only to be revealed on specific ritual occasions, came to be integrated into policy documents. This meant that the interests of those groups able to read and write and connect to civil society were more enduring and likely to be more influential.

The process also led to simplification, because contested and disparate claims were excluded, and because writing down a fixed hierarchy amongst house-groups undermined the (frequently unacknowledged) dynamism and flexibility of such relations. State legibility simplifies this knowledge in a way that it becomes manipulable. To be integrated into state pratice, customary knowledge needs to be presentable in a clear and unambivalent way. Moreover, the displacement of local ownership regimes by external legal categories also strengthened and accentuated local hierarchies. The process of creating a clear and transparent field of vision pushed complexity, rival claims, and ambivalent meanings to the margins.

Exposing Intentions

In 2017, when I came back to Suai, I learned the sad news that *lia-nain* Carlos had been killed a couple of weeks earlier. The incident took place not long after the ceremony of cutting the trees. He had just made an official complaint against the former *bupati* who had registered the land near the airport as belonging to him, arguing that this land was traditionally the land of the *Liurai* of Camenassa. The *lia-nain* had been beheaded.

They had caught the killer, a young man, with no obvious motive for the deed. Most people suspected someone else had given the orders, and some thought it was the former *bupati*. When I interviewed the latter, he told me without my prompting that he knew people were suspecting him and that he had no motive for the murder. There were other suspicions and explanations. Several local residents suggested that his death was a direct consequence of all the recent conflicts, either within the *lia-nain*'s house or between his house and others. Some even suggested that the ancestors had punished the ritual speaker for his role in the recent ceremony and for trying to make disproportionate claims to the power of the *Liurai* of Camenassa, without acknowledging the role and importance of other houses.

When I went to search for Luis, he was not at home. Other residents told me that his wife, who was still relatively young, had suddenly died of ill health. Some also suspected the conflicts within the house – and the related ancestral discontent – to be the reason for her death. Others suggested that by marrying her, he had violated marriage rules and this was the reason for punishment by the ancestors. When I finally managed to find Luis, he was at first wary to speak to me. He said he is no longer involved in the Tasi Mane project and does not really want to speak about it. His once charismatic and enthusiastic demeanour was now subdued and hesitant. Luis told me with disappointment that the large majority of residents whose land was identified for the supply base had decided to take the government's offer of $3 per square metre. He had been one of the adamant defenders of the solution that would mean local residents would retain a stake in the project – namely that they would gain 10% of any profits made. Whilst there were some legitimate criticisms of the 10% solution, negotiating the continuing involvement of local residents had been a victory for Luis. But his solution had lost out when people faced the option of immediate financial benefit via large sums of money in compensation ($3 per square metre).

The failed airport inauguration and the tragic personal consequences for the two ritual speakers illustrate the severe tensions that arose when technologies of state legibility were imposed on practices that thrive from opacity. The ritual speakers' political manoeuvring was exposed and this is said to have angered metahuman ancestors. The men were no longer able to keep their underlying intentions hidden. Origin narratives are selectively mobilised, providing the grounds for political action. But this only works if ritual speakers manage to keep their intentions opaque.

Governing through opacity by drawing on and incorporating local practices and knowledge – when adopted by the state – brings out rivalry between groups who compete for signs of state recognition. House-groups choose which part of their being to instantiate in a given situation, stressing either their connections with

outsiders, or their autochthonous origins. State recognition and replication of certain aspects of people's ancestral knowledge (framed as 'culture' or 'custom') encourages creativity, invention, and intensifies the significance of metahuman potency, which is frequently seen to precede and underlie state power. Locally emplaced metapersons are empowered by the external recognition, which can lead to an intensification of ritual practices ('hyper-animism', Shepherd 2019). However, the multiplication of claims, and the resulting multivocality and ambiguity, also produces a need for increased opacity (couched in an ideology of secrecy) in order to avoid confrontations between incompatible claims. This is how historically and in the present times, metahuman and state rule have cross-fertilised each other.

Predatory forms of modernist governance, which aim to displace or annihilate existing modes of life, tend to lead to simplification of populations and of their relations with metapersons. The land cadastre in Suai, for example, simplified land-ownership and encouraged house groups to produce simplified models of the relations they have with each other and with metahuman beings. The move towards narrowing fields of vision and producing transparency and clarity meant that practices and ideas that could not be captured by this vision would move to the periphery. Initially, this was the case with *Lia-nain* Carlos, who felt he was not properly taken into account by the government vision. It was certainly the case with the *lia-nain* of Mane'ikin, whose inability to read and write meant that all he could do was to provide a thumb-print, which by his own admission, he did without being entirely sure what he was agreeing to.

Governing through opacity and governing through legibility are not necessarily two separate modes of rule; they can be connected and combined in particular forms of governance. Separating them out analytically has helped to pinpoint the complexity of the relationship between state and metahuman governance – especially with regards to the political possibilities of opacity and the simplifications of legibility. There is no neat inverse correlation between opacity and state legibility; these two relate in a dynamic and processual way. If intentions can never be made fully transparent, neither can they be fully concealed in social interaction. It is precisely in these interstices of 'intention management' where authority appears. Increasing the involvement of the government in local affairs can thus have erratic and uneven effects. State-imposed transparency and legibility might lead to temporary intensification of opacity, as groups seek to hide the overlapping claims connected to their collective mode of being. State legibility also creates pockets of opacity and discontent at the fringes as visions start to narrow. There can be new inventions and a heightened influence of metapersons in local affairs. Yet the opacity surrounding the differently emplaced house-groups and their relations is truncated by public ceremonies aimed at legitimising state governance. When legibility moves from the realm of performance to the realm of the law, of mapping, codification and documentation (such as the land cadastre), those holding rival or alternative claims are moved away from the centres of power (historically to the highlands). This is how state governance that both displaces and incorporates local knowledge, incentivises new forms of metahuman intervention as much as it suppresses and simplifies it. It shifts the locus of opacity, and political possibility, to the margins, while simultaneously increasing its intensity.

Notes

1. Even though the 'opacity doctrine' was developed based on research in Pacific societies, it is not limited to the Pacific, as Robbins and Rumsey (2008: 408) note: '[It] is likely that in most societies one can occasionally find people ruminating on how difficult it is to see into the hearts and minds of others'.
2. Throughout the opacity of mind literature, the term 'mind' is a gloss to refer to quite a broad set of activities and mental states, including what another person is thinking, feeling, or intending. Schieffelin (2008: 434) for example, describes how Bosavi parents in PNG do not speculate about children's intentions, i.e., they will say 'you don't eat', rather than 'you are hungry'. Similarly, Stasch (2008) describes how in his fieldwork amongst Korowai, when you ask why someone did something, people say they cannot tell you about how others feel, or why they do something. Keane (2008) emphasises that opacity doctrines are not in themselves evidence that other cultures don't have theory of mind, but it is evidence that they do not choose to make statements that emphasise or speculate about other people's intentions.
3. All names in this article are pseudonyms.
4. Please note that a territory-wide head tax was introduced in 1906 and greatly expanded by Governor Eduardo Marques in 1908 (Kammen 2015: 201).
5. I thank Douglas Kammen for sharing this information about the first census with me.
6. Roque (2010, 2012) adds another mode of rule to the colonial repertoire, namely 'parasitism'. Examining the role of Timorese warriors who fought alongside the Portuguese as auxiliary troops during the so-called pacification campaigns led by the Portuguse against Timorese 'kingdoms', Roque (2010: 6) argues that '"colonialism" and "headhunting" could form a dynamic unity. Their interdependencies enabled colonial power and indigenous cultures to coexist and prosper in a reciprocally significant way, even if their distinctiveness in some manner was retained'. He characterizes this form of entanglement as 'mutual parasitism' (Roque 2012: 6).
7. Whilst there are some clear similarities between mimetic governmentality of the Portuguese colonial past and of the post-independence state in Timor-Leste, there are also significant differences, most notably the fact that all government officials and most company employees involved in the implementation of the Tasi Mane prioject are Timorese nationals. Whilst highlighting how localised customary practices can be scaled up to the level of the nation via national development, I do not wish to imply a causality nexus between the colonial past and the post-colonial present.
8. Relations of rank are frequently expressed in the idiom of kinship, whereby the older sibling is superior to the younger sibling, and the parents to the child.
9. The diarchic division between the ritual/customary domain and the political sphere is common in Timor-Leste and Southeast Asia more generally and it has lent itself to the incorporation of colonial outsiders into the political sphere (e.g. Traube 1986).
10. All translations from Tetum into English are by the author.
11. In his description of 'cosmic polities' Sahlins (2017: 92) draws on Hocart's thesis 'that human societies were engaged in cosmic systems of governmentality even before they instituted anything like a political state of their own'.
12. I have carried out over 36 months of fieldwork in Timor-Leste since 2005, most of which was spent in the central highlands. Eight months were spent doing research on the Tasi Mane project.
13. West and Sanders (2003) have insightfully theorised the mutually constitutive relationship between a drive towards 'transparency' and the increasing significance of 'conspiracy theories' or 'occult cosmologies', which are based on the assumption that 'power operates in two separate yet related realms, one visible, the other invisible (2003: 6). Whilst they do not address 'opacity of mind', their research nevertheless reinforces the point made by Keane (2008) that the ability to keep something hidden, and to control the relationship between public evidence and private states, can also be a source of power.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Natalia Buitron, Hans Steinmüller, Susana de Matos Viegas, Ricardo Roque, Mathijs Pelkmans, Meabh Cryan and two anonymous reviewers for their excellent feedback on this article. Informed consent was obtained through ongoing conversations with research participants during the fieldwork and ethical approval was granted by the University of Kent Faculty of Social Sciences Research Ethics Advisory Group (case number: 0721314).

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

Fieldwork on which this article is based was funded by an ESRC Future Research Leaders grant [grant number ES/L010232/1].

References

Århem, Kaj. 2015. Southeast Asian Animism in Context. In *Animism in Southeast Asia*, edited by Kaj Århem and Guido Sprenger, 3–30. London/New York: Routledge.

BODAT. 1900. Portaria 29, November 1899, Published in *Boletim Oficial do Distrito Autónomo de Timor*, Vol. 1, No. 6 (February 10, 1900): 21.

Bovensiepen, Judith. 2014a. Words of the Ancestors: Disembodied Knowledge and Secrecy in East Timor. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 20(1):56–73.

———. 2014b. *Lulik*: Taboo, Animism or Transgressive Sacred? An Exploration of Identity, Morality and Power in Timor-Leste. *Oceania*, 84(2):121–137.

Crespi, Brunna & Dominique Guillaud. 2018. Oil and Custom: Impacts of the Tasi Mane Oil Project on Local Communities in Suai, Timor-Leste. *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, 19(5):432–449.

Davidson, Katharine G. 1994. *The Portuguese Colonisation of Timor: The Final Stage 1850–1912* (Unpublished PhD thesis). University of New South Wales.

De la Cadena, Marisol. 2010. Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual Reflections Beyond 'Politics'. *Cultural Anthropology*, 25(2):334–370.

Duranti, Alessando. 2015. *The Anthropology of Intentions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———. 2008. Further Reflections on Reading Other Minds. *Anthropological Quarterly* 81(2):483–494.

Kammen, Douglas. 2015. *Three Centuries of Conflict in East Timor*. New Brunswick, NJ/London: Rutgers University Press.

Keane, Webb. 1997. *Signs of Recognition. Powers and Hazards of Representation in an Indonesian Society*. Berkley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press.

———. 2008. Others, Other Minds, and Others' Theories of Other Minds: An Afterword on the Psychology and Politics of Opacity Claims. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 81(2):473–482.

Kuipers, Joel C. 1990. *Power in Performance: The Creation of Textual Authority in Weyewa Ritual Speech*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Mamdani, Mahmood. 2001. *When Victims Become Killers. Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

McWilliam, Andrew & Christopher J. Shepherd. 2019. Reading Against the Grain: Ethnography, Commercial Agriculture and the Colonial Archive of East Timor. In *Crossing Histories and Ethnographies: Following Colonial Historicities in Timor-Leste*, edited by Ricardo Roque and Elizabeth Traube, 266–293. New York: Berghahn.

Nielsen, Morten. 2011. Inverse Governmentality: The Paradoxical Production of Peri-Urban Planning in Maputo, Mozambique. *Critique of Anthropology*, 31(4):329–358.
Robbins, Joel & Alan Rumsey. 2008. Introduction: Cultural and Linguistic Anthropology and the Opacity of Other Minds. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 81(2):407–420.
Roque, Ricardo. 2010. *Headhunting and Colonialism: Anthropology and the Circulation of Human Skulls in the Portuguese Empire, 1870–1930*. London: Springer.
———. 2012. Marriage Traps: Colonial Interactions with Indigenous Marriage Ties in East Timor. In *Racism and Ethnic Relations in the Portuguese-Speaking World*, edited by Francisco Bethencourt and Adrian J. Pearce, 203–226. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
———. 2015. Mimetic Governmentality and the Administration of Colonial Justice in East Timor, ca. 1860–1910. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 57(1):67–97.
Sahlins, Marshall. 2017. The Original Political Society. *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 7(2):91–128.
Schieffelin, Bambi B. 2008. Speaking Only Your Own Mind: Reflections on Talk, Gossip and Intentionality in Bosavi (PNG). *Anthropological Quarterly*, 81(2):431–441.
Scott, James. 1998. *Seeing Like a State. How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven/London: Yale University Press.
Shepherd, Christopher. 2013. *Development and environmental politics unmasked: Authority, participation and equity in East Timor*. London: Routledge.
———. 2019. *Haunted Houses and Ghostly Encounters: Ethnography and Animism in East Timor, 1860–1975*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.
Silva, Kelly. 2014. O governo da e pela kultura. Complexos locais de governança na formação do Estado em Timor-Leste. *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, 104:123–150.
Stasch, Rupert. 2008. Knowing Minds is a Matter of Authority: Political Dimensions of Opacity Statements in Korowai Moral Psychology. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 81(2):443–453.
Stengers, Isabelle. 2005. The Cosmopolitical Proposal. In *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, edited by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, 994–1004. Cambridge: MIT Press.
Traube, Elizabeth G. 1986. *Cosmology and Social Life: Ritual Exchange among the Mambai of East Timor*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo. 2004. Perspectival Anthropology and the Method of Controlled Equivocation in Tipit´ı. *Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America*, 2 (1):3–22.
West, Harry G. & Todd Sanders. 2003. Power Revealed and Concealed in the New World Order. In Introduction to *Transparency and Conspiracy. Ethnographies of Suspicion in the New World Order*, edited by Harry G. West and Todd Sanders, 1–38. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.