'Died in the Service of Portugal': Legitimacy of Authority and Dynamics of Group Identity among the Atsabe Kemak in East Timor

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The paper examines the metaphors and dynamics of Atsabe Kemak group identity construction, with a strong emphasis on local cultural 'remembering' of Atsabe history vis-à-vis relations of power. The analysis utilizes the analytical frameworks of Foucault's notion of discourse and Bourdieu's concept of habitus. The secondary burial of a former chieftain highlights the dynamics of Atsabe Kemak responses to new nation-building processes and to international influences that have appeared during the United Nations' transitional administration.

As one enters the East Timorese town of Atsabe, the administrative centre of the subdistrict with the same name, one quickly notices a newly built, large, elaborate grave, paved with white tiles and adorned with fresh flowers. The grave seems out of place since it is not in a graveyard but next to the administrative building of the subdistrict, down slope, but clearly visible, from the house of the last Atsabe chief. It is also unlike the small individual graves in graveyards that mimic the shape of a house. The inscription on the grave is also striking as the name of the deceased is in small print, far overshadowed by the contrasting large inscription that follows in the Portuguese language: 'Died in the service of Portugal.' The secondary burial that resulted in this grave was a significant event for the people of Atsabe subdistrict. In 2002, two years after the conclusion of the ceremony, it was still the subject of fervent discussion. The local dialogue and exegesis tended to be spontaneous and unsolicited, frequently utilizing a historical perspective that was anchored in the view point of fresh nationhood. It was striking to hear people, regardless of social or educational status, use foreign concepts and terms that originated in the multitude of socialization and education programmes from the period of transitional administration that the United Nations oversaw. The focus of this article, on the apparent incongruous burial and its ceremony, is thus not simply an expository device, but is grounded in continuing Atsabe dialogue about this significant event. The grave appears to exemplify the metaphors of the processes of local cultural identity constructions by the Atsabe Kemak in the current environment of East Timorese national independence.

This article examines the way continuity is maintained with the past while adapting to current changes as East Timor attained independent nationhood. Various cultural

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metaphors and dynamics of group identity construction among the Atsabe Kemak are addressed, with a strong emphasis on local cultural remembering of Atsabe history vis-à-vis relations of power. Power relations within the traditional socio-political system are examined in relation to transformations through its historical interaction with the forces of the Portuguese, Indonesian and current democratic states. Kemak views on power, authority and sources of legitimizing power are considered. In this regard, this article looks at the role of local chieftains as intermediaries for the encapsulation of foreign notions of authority. Such processes of encapsulation enhanced their access to a wider scope of 'symbolic capital' that validated their place in the traditional social hierarchy. It also examines the ways in which the Kemak continually incorporate external cultural ideas into their own cultural milieu – in a sense, appropriating and localizing the foreign through a reformulation of meaning from within the context of their own local cultural categories. The reburial of the last local ruler’s father and the seemingly out-of-place grave highlight the important roles that language and the influence of the local Catholic Church play in the processes of cultural identity formulation. The discussion of these issues makes particular reference to shared cultural views in the local conceptions of power and authority, in the context of the political dynamics within the former Atsabe kingdom vis-à-vis their historical experiences.

The importance of understanding such local cultures as truly historical societies through in-depth study of cultural meaning and content of relationships of power and domination has been emphasized by Clifford Geertz. Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus is a useful framework for understanding how the Kemak generate their doxa, ‘field of taken-for-granted knowledge’, in reproducing local experiences of ‘Kemakness’ in the secondary funerary treatment of the former chief. The concepts of power, authority and legitimacy also require some consideration, particularly the way these are used in this article. In studies of politics, especially from a conflict theorist’s perspective, power has been defined as the ability to influence the conduct of others or as the power to coerce. This approach views political power in relation to political structures and tends to neglect the agency of individuals and groups in negotiating power relations that are aspects of all social relations. Power is considered from two complementary perspectives: that of political structure and agency. On the one hand, the arguments utilize some of the more structural views on power, authority and legitimacy in the sense that authority is attributed to individuals and groups since their power is recognized as legitimate through the consensus of the followers. Thus, power is discussed from the perspective of cultural institutional structures of power in the framework of social organization and socio-political relations between groups and individual leadership in the former kingdom of Atsabe.

2 By shared cultural patterns, I am referring to an overwhelming agreement on representations of political power and authority among the people of the former kingdom of Atsabe – regardless of which particular chieftdom of the Atsabe and regardless of chiefly lines (elite) or commoner representations.
Agency and consensus about power and authority of individuals and groups, however, utilizes concepts on power from the frameworks of Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault. While in a number of ways these scholars differ in approach and research interests, both had very similar concerns about power being suffused through all aspects of culture, including non-political aspects. Furthermore, Bourdieu’s focus on the ways cultural systems maintain and reproduce themselves over time and Foucault’s view of power as ‘discourse’, are more dynamic approaches to power, authority and legitimacy than the more static views of earlier paradigms, such as conflict theory. This article will utilize Bourdieu’s notion of cultural symbols and practices as cultural capital, which embody social distinctions and aid in maintaining and propagating hierarchies of power, through an examination of the new grave and the recent secondary burial of the former ruler of Atsabe.

Cultural capital can be a largely unconscious set of predispositions that emerge from socialization but also include social capital (kin relations, network of allies – both individual and groups) and specialised knowledge. Foucault views power as inherent in discourse itself, in the socialization of knowledge. For him, discourse is a system of knowledge that determines the limits of thinking and acting; that is, it is a system of possibility that is specific to places and times. This particular view of knowledge is also important for understanding the ways in which such alien concepts as ‘global community’, ‘democracy’, ‘nationhood’, ‘national identity’, ‘human rights’, ‘inequality’, ‘women’s rights’, and ‘gender issues’ were rapidly suffused and socialized by United Nations administrative personnel and various agencies even in far-flung communities as they prepared East Timor for national independence. Bourdieu argues that those with the most valued cultural capital at once reflect the norms of society and establish these norms. But those with the least amount of cultural capital also reproduce these hierarchies and thus are also agents in legitimizing the hierarchies of power propagated by those with the most cultural capital. These legitimizations are embraced in one’s *habitus*, which is a largely unconscious internalization of the objective norms and rules of a society (*doxa*), which are not rigid, and suggest the action in a given situation. Kemak *doxa* indeed underwent a number of transformations as it adapted to ideas and flow of information during Portuguese and Indonesian times, and perhaps never so rapidly as during the United Nations Transitional Administration times. For Bourdieu, *habitus* is a largely unconscious strategy that is manifest in fields of competitive struggle (whether political, economic, symbolic). Therefore, this article examines Atsabe Kemak concepts of power,

7 Indeed, illiterate vendors at the weekly market would throw around terms such as ‘gender’ (which now has been borrowed into the languages of East Timor) and ‘member of Portuguese speaking nations’, as if they have been conversant with these abstract notions all their lives. I was shocked to find their level of understanding and interpretations of these concepts as roughly equivalent to those of secondary school students in many Western countries. While the UNTAET (United Nations Transitional Administration of East Timor) might have made many mistakes, they were surprisingly successful in many of their socialization programmes.
8 Bourdieu, Outline of a theory of practice, p. 3.
9 Ideas and practices from the many different cultures and nations represented by the personnel working for the UN also had a big influence on local worldviews and knowledge.
authority and legitimacy as relationships between political structure and agency and the ways in which these are dynamic interactive processes of generating habitus in a new context of nation building. These processes are also embedded in processes of local cultural identity construction.

This work is based on new ethnographic field research among the Kemak cultural-linguistic group of East Timor. Thus it is also intended as a contribution to sorely lacking ethnographic data on highly diverse East Timorese groups. The focus of the study concerns the Kemak people of the entire former Atsabe kingdom and not just one of its tributary small chiefdoms, such as the Marobo. The Kemak group in East Timor up to the present has only been discussed by Brigitte Renard-Clamagirand’s research among the Marobo Kemak during the late 1960s. The Kemak speaking group within East Timor is spread in the Bobonaro, Ermera and Ainaro districts, with a putative origin in the Atsabe region of Ermera district. The Atsabe subdistrict in Ermera district is the centre of the former Atsabe kingdom.

Cultural background on the Atsabe Kemak

The subdistrict of Atsabe is part of the Ermera district, one of 13 administrative districts comprising Timor Leste (East Timor). The subdistrict entails the core of

10 I am grateful for the warmth and generosity of the Atsabe Kemak who are too numerous to name, from several different villages. I want to acknowledge their eagerness and often insistence to teach me at a highly accelerated pace about their history, traditions and especially language in 2001 and 2002. My cultural informants came from a wide range of social and gender classes of the population in the subdistrict, including the ‘elites’, such as teachers, catechists, the chiefly families, both secular and ritual heads of origin groups, and ordinary folk who also greatly contributed many genealogies and explanations on their understanding of political precedence in the former Atsabe kingdom and their often unsolicited perception of the rapid changes they experienced since 1999, and now with their new national independence. Discussion and analysis in this article is based on the common patterns that emerged from data acquired from all levels of society. Therefore, when local world views or views on local identity, or views on power and legitimacy are discussed, they are views voiced by all levels of the population. Both Indonesian and Kemak languages were utilized in the research. I also wish to thank the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences of Northern Illinois University for the summer faculty grant awarded for 2002.


12 The oral history from all component chiefdoms of the former Atsabe kingdom tends to depict the small Marobo chiefdom as having a peripheral position. Indeed, oral accounts suggested that the Marobo are marginal Kemak due to their intermingling with the Bunaq group over generations. It may also be pointed out that there are one line references to Atsabe in a number of historical sources. There is also a brief mention of Atsabe in a travelogue by Margaret King (Eden to paradise [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1963], pp. 59–60), mainly with reference to a cultural dance performance (the eagle dance). There are many mentions of Atsabe in travel books, such as the Lonely Planet, but providing a full bibliography of every source and every instance where the name of the subdistrict is mentioned is not the purpose of this article. For a bibliography of Timor, please see Kevin Sherlock, A bibliography of Timor: Including East (formerly Portuguese) Timor, West (formerly Dutch) Timor and the island of Roti (Canberra: The Australian National University, Research School of Pacific Studies Aids to Research Series No A/4, 1980).
former kingdom of Atsabe. It consists of 13 villages, the newest being proclaimed in 2002. Kemak social organization places great emphasis on founding villages with their associated founding ancestors. Origin groups are associated with specific founding villages. The origin groups consist of a number of named source houses. Neither of the local categories of social organization – origin group or source houses (origin houses) – can be equated with the anthropological categories of clans and lineages. Source houses are social groups whose membership crosses such categories as descent, marriage alliance, and residence since these all can be used in a variety of ways for claiming membership in a source house. Brigitte Renard-Clamagirand also refers to the Marobo Kemak as a house society. The hierarchical ordering of named source houses and social relationships are with an orientation to both place and ancestors. Named source houses are also the focus of asymmetric marriage exchanges. The source houses were the basic anchors of a highly complex nexus of alliances that united the former kingdom of Atsabe. Marriage alliances also forged inter-ethnic ties, namely with Aileu Mambai, and the Bunaq and Tetum groups of the western part of East Timor. Kemak alliance relations with these latter groups also extend into the Atambua region of Indonesian Timor. These alliances are still strongly maintained, particularly among those groups that fell under the political authority of the former kingdom of Atsabe.

According to Atsabe Kemak constructions of local history, the penetration of Portuguese authority occurred much later than in other parts of East Timor, which they attribute to the difficulty of accessing the interior and maintaining control over a widespread mountainous population. Portuguese historical accounts do not mention the Atsabe region or the liurai (chiefstain) of Atsabe until the mid-nineteenth century. René Pélissier, in his discussion of wars and insurgencies during the 1847–1913 period, makes several references to the ruler of the Atsabe domain. Dom Thomas (Nai Koli) is

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13 Some of the village names have been changed over time, or rather the original village name is now only retained in the name of a hamlet. Atsabe contains the following villages: Malabe (Ata Dame or Acu Dame in old writings), Paramin, Lalo (oral histories suggest that it was another founding origin village of the Kemak), Laca'o, Atara, Lau Buno, Boboe Leten and Boboe Craic (formerly one village Boboe), Malia Mea (the new thirteenth village branched off from Atara), Tiria Lelo (Ciar Lelo) (became central in being the village of the ruler of the former kingdom of Atsabe; although oral histories suggest that these were usurpers of authority of the first origin village of Lemian (or Lemia) on top of the Dar Lau mountain and of Lalo), Obulo (population is related to Marobo group and similarly intermarried with Bunaq), Batu Manu, and Lemia Leten (part of Lemia and the origin village for all Kemak; Lemia Craic is now in a different sub-district, namely: Hatolia).

14 While the Atsabe Kemak show slight variations with and even greater complexity than the social organization of the Marobo community in Renard-Clamagirand’s study (Marobo), the basic units of social organization – the hierarchically ordered named source houses – are also at the core of Atsabe social structure. Another, neighbouring cultural-linguistic group, the Mambai, also show similar patterns of social organization; Elizabeth G. Traube, Cosmology and social life: Ritual exchange among the Mambai of East Timor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). Indigenous conceptualization of social organization along the lines of ‘origin groups’ and ‘source houses’ is widely documented for many Austronesian societies; Origins, ancestry and alliance: Explorations in Austronesian ethnography, ed. James J. Fox and Clifford Sather (Canberra: Dept. of Anthropology, Australian National University, 1996).

15 Artur Teodoro de Matos, Timor Português 1515–1769: Contribuição para a sua história (Lisbon: Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa, Instituto Histórico Infante Dom Henrique, 1974).

recognized by the Atsabe people as the first Christian ruler from the Portuguese period. Most historical documents of the colonial era refer to regions within the current Atsabe subdistrict – Atsabe, Boboe, Obulo and Tiar Lelo – as separate chiefdoms.\(^7\)

Local constructions of social relations view the Atsabe as the encompassing kingdom, whose political authority subsumed that of Boboe and Obulo, with its centre at Tiar Lelo. Power relations among these four chiefdoms were regulated by specific orders of precedence. The political authority of the Atsabe kingdom extended over all Kemak speaking populations of East Timor, covering a geographical distribution, which aside from the region of Atsabe in Ermera, includes most of the current northern Bobonaro, northern Ainaro, and Suai regions of Cova Lima. These reckonings are based on migration and expansion through marriage and thus the foundation of new source houses. Those Kemak regions outside of Ermera were described as tributary chiefdoms to the Atsabe kingdom. The line of Atsabe rulers came from the founding source house of Tiar Lelo village. The last recognized ruler of Atsabe was Dom Guilherme Maria Gonçalves, who served as a governor of East Timor province under Indonesian rule from 1978 to 1981. His father, Dom Sipriaman served as the Atsabe ruler from 1912 to 1943. It is Sipriaman’s new grave that is the focus of this article.

An important aspect of local cultural identity that the Atsabe Kemak emphasize concerns the extent of political authority of the former Atsabe kingdom. This discourse particularly stresses the hierarchy of power relations, the political dynamics and their sources of legitimacy within their former kingdom as well as in relation to other kingdoms of central and west East Timor. Atsabe Kemak stress a Kemak identity first, but informants were just as quick to emphasize a shared East Timorese identity born out of resistance against Indonesia, as well as the new environment of independent nationhood. Furthermore, a Pan-Timor identity is emphasized by the Kemak. One of the very first parts of ‘history’ that people want to recount concerns the origin story of the common founding ancestor for all Timorese and the way the island’s political spheres of influence came to be divided into three among the three ‘sons’ of the founder.\(^18\) Another aspect of Atsabe Kemak assertions concerning their cultural identity emphasizes the Kemak language and their funerary ritual ceremonies. It should be pointed out, however, that other groups, especially the Mambai, also possess secondary funerary rites comparable to the Kemak.\(^19\) As the case study below illustrates, relations of power and authority, particularly sources of legitimacy of authority, always tended to play a role in the way the Atsabe Kemak formulate their identity in a dialectic relation to dominant powers, and indeed in relation to current constructions of national identity as a response to new nationhood.

According to accounts of the Atsabe people’s historical experiences during the Japanese occupation, the population engaged in passive resistance through non-compliance of demands for labour and material submissions of livestock and field products. Therefore, the Japanese, in order to curb this resistance and prevent its escalation


\(^8\) Indeed in some origin stories this putative common origin and brotherhood is extended to an inter-island sphere, which includes the islands of Flores, Kesar, Alor, and Ambon in eastern Indonesia.

to armed rebellion, incarcerated the Atsabe ruler and six other relatives of his house who were all in the line of succession. They were tied to a tree in the village square and, if a subject of the Atsabe kingdom did not comply with Japanese demands, one member of the ruling house was executed. All seven lost their lives, including Dom Siprianu, and open opposition was curbed. More subtle forms, such as the hiding and aiding of Australian soldiers, however, continued.

Dom Siprianu was buried with much pomp, befitting his status as ruler with enormous sacred power and as the recognized direct descendant of the founding ancestor. The grave was located facing the residence of the chiefly family. The customary secondary burial had to be postponed however, with economic reasons cited.20 Exorbitant expenses are involved in such an undertaking, not just for the hosting family and village, but also for all groups under the authority of the former kingdom. Atsabe people explained that economic recovery was slow after World War Two with severe shortages being the norm, and by the time they would have been able to perform it during the early 1970s they faced civil war followed by the Indonesian invasion and occupation.

It was finally in 2000 that financial assistance became available through a generous donation from Portugal. This made it possible to perform the most important traditional ritual of the Kemak, the secondary burial that required the sacrifice of many animals. The secondary burial ritual resulted in the expensive white-tiled Catholic grave, bearing the inscription in Portuguese: ‘Died in the service of Portugal’. In some ways the inscription contrasts with views and attitudes expressed by the majority of the Atsabe people during discussions about local history and social organization of the former kingdom. On the one hand, this was clearly a new grave in an area where only old graves of the historical period bear Portuguese inscriptions, a language very few Atsabe know. Even the surviving sons of Siprianu expressed vehement anti-Portuguese views, in spite of having served as administrators during Portuguese times. The lack of pride in Portuguese ancestry, heritage or links among the members of the Atsabe ruling kin group is contrary to views expressed in older ethnographies on East Timor cultures. Given these attitudes, the size and boldness of the inscription compared with the tiny script of the name of Siprianu, declaring ‘died in the service of Portugal’ appears contradictory.21

Historical sources, as well as oral history, indicate that the Atsabe have always had a tendency to rebel against oppressors.22 Atsabe people recount that ruler Dom Tomas resisted the Portuguese when they first penetrated the interior. He lost the war against the Portuguese-Angolan army and had to seek refuge in Atambua (Indonesian Timor).

20 The secondary burial is the means by which the soul of the deceased is transferred to the village of the ancestors on Ramelau Mountain and thus transformed into an ancestor. For similar significance of secondary burial practices among the Marobo Kemak and the Aileu Mambai see, Renard-Clamagirand, Marobo; Traube, Cosmology and social life.
22 There are many works that can be cited for this, including: Alberto Osorio de Castro, A ilha verde e vermelha de Timor (Lisbon: República Portuguesas Ministerio das Colonias, Insulindia Portuguesa, Divisão de Publicações e Biblioteca Agencia Geral das Colonias, 1943); Pinto A. Cap. Correia, Timor: De les a les (Lisbon: Republica Portuguesa Ministerio das Colonias. Divisao de Publicacoes e Biblioteca. Agencia Geral das Colonias, 1954); Hélio A. Esteves Felgas, Timor Português (Lisbon: Agência Geral do Ultramar, Divisão de Publicações e Biblioteca, 1956).
Two of his grandsons, Nai Resi and Nai Sama, contested for power, the first wanting independence from the Portuguese and the second loyal to the Portuguese. Nai Sama ultimately was executed by Nai Sama’s supporters; however, the Portuguese captured Nai Sama in Hatolia, and he was also executed. Hence, the rebellion failed. Nai Resi’s son, Dom Siprianu, remained loyal to the Portuguese, mainly, I was told, in order to avoid meeting his father’s fate and to do well by his people by working within the system. During the Japanese occupation he encouraged passive resistance among his people since he viewed the Japanese as unrelentingly brutal masters. Thus, when the Japanese executed him, he was resisting this brutality against the people of the kingdom. His successor, Dom Guilherme, however, regressed to the anti-Portuguese rebellious attitudes of his ancestors. He founded the pro-integrationist (with Indonesia) political party Apodeti (Timor People’s Democratic Association) in 1975, which was instrumental in enabling Indonesian invasion and subsequent occupation.

Therefore, there appears to be a discontinuity between colonial past and independent present, given the historically anti-Portuguese sentiments, attitudes and actions of the political leadership of the former Atsabe kingdom. So why did the Atsabe Kemak choose the inscription and style of script for the new grave of a former ruler?; how did Siprianu: ‘die in the service of Portugal’? The following sections will attempt to address the apparent incongruity of the grave through an examination of the dynamics of Atsabe Kemak identity construction vis-à-vis local conceptions of power, authority and legitimacy.

**Atsabe Kemak identity construction vis-à-vis reformulation of local power relation dynamics**

**Atsabe identity**

Dom Siprianu’s grave is the result of a secondary mortuary ritual in the complex cycle of funerary ceremonies (tau tana mae) that reflect Catholic, Portuguese and local understandings of power relation dynamics. Funerary ceremonies with large-scale animal sacrifices are the most significant in the Kemak ritual system, and are classified as black rituals, metamana no. The three main phases of funerary rites include huku bou, leko-cicir lia, and koli nugnu. Huku bou is the primary internment of the deceased that requires the sacrifice of at least five buffaloes as well as complementary amounts of goats and pigs. Leko-cicir lia is the secondary treatment rite that is the most economically taxing ritual among all rituals of the Atsabe Kemak.23 Funerary practices are also one of two types of ceremonies that focus on the maintenance of relations with ancestors and on the continuous ritual restructuring of society and the renewal of social relations between the living and the dead as well as between marriage alliance partners.24 The ai

23 Renard-Clamagirand (Morobo, 1982, pp. 143–4) refers to this as taka no lia among the Marobo Kemak with several slight variations in the ritual process. According to Traube (Cosmology and social life, p. 200), the Mambai also classify funerals as ‘black rituals’. Secondary funerary rituals are also present among the Mambai (muet-kem) although there does not seem to be an actual exhumation and reburial of the remains.

24 Maurice Bloch, Prey into hunter: The politics of religious experience (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992). The living are involved in continuous social interaction and exchange cycles of goods amongst kin. Such social and exchange relations, while transformed, do not cease just because a kin becomes deceased. Thus, the nature of relations between the living and deceased are that of relations between kin.
mea wife-giver and wife-taker houses have a central role in large-scale rituals, such as funerary ceremonies, and rituals cannot commence until they are all present. Ai mea are the houses that are the original and first wife-giving and wife-taking house to the house(s) that is/are holding the funerary rites for their deceased member(s). The attendance and participation of all the other bei-bei (regular) wife-giving and wife-taking houses is also a strict social requirement. The sacrificial animals provided by the ai mea are the animals whose blood is utilized in smearing ritual objects (such as the grave at funerals). Furthermore, funerals, like all large-scale rituals, must be attended by all the branch houses of the origin house sponsoring the ceremonies (including all the wife-giving and wife-taking houses of all the branch houses) as well as those groups/houses that are in a ka’ara-aliri (elder-younger) or sibling/friend-ally relationship to the hosting group. Through the death rituals the most important alliances across the generations are confirmed, through the fulfilment of duties via material contributions, exchanges of goods, and the ‘blessing’ of all the wife-givers of the group whose deceased are honoured by such funerary ceremonies. Indeed the role of wife-givers is part of a larger circulation of sacred power (luli) that enhances and contributes to the continuity of life. This circulation also derives from the ancestors and the deceased who will be transformed into ancestors through these rituals. In funerary rituals the contribution of sacrificial animals, in terms of amount and kind of animals, is directly related to the nature of social relationships, and the order of sacrifice itself reflects the hierarchical order of precedence in Atsabe social organization.

One of the most important rituals of the entire ritual system, readily identified by any Atsabe Kemak, is an elaborate secondary treatment of the dead. This rite is held for a group of deceased relatives (regardless of rank or social status). These secondary rites are on a grand scale for local dignitaries, such as a group’s sacred men (individuals who are believed to possess concentrated and powerful luli, or spiritual potency), the heads of source houses and their families as well as rati, nai, dato (lesser chiefs and leaders of the domain), the traditional ritual leaders and koromel bote (the ruler of the kingdom). The leko-cicir lia ritual is performed for a deceased individual if he was a prominent figure of secular power and ritual authority. This secondary treatment not only concerns the physical remains, but more importantly the soul of the dead that is transformed into an ancestor. This ceremony, however, usually takes place several years after the first interment. The Atsabe people not only raise the issue of economic expenses involved (e.g., for animal sacrifice, cost of feast, grave construction or payment to the sacred man of the group, gase ubu, who performs the Toli rite, that transforms the soul of the deceased into an ancestor and guides him to the ancestral village), but also the social scale of such rituals, particularly for members of the leadership of the former kingdom. This ritual requires the mobilization of a large segment of the population since for a ruler of Atsabe, not only the immediate kin group and network of marriage allies must participate, but

25 In the local belief system, if the secondary rites have not yet been performed, the soul of the deceased is said to stay near the house and village (asi naba coa pu). The longer the leko-cicir lia is delayed, it is believed that the soul of the deceased becomes ever lonelier for companionship, and thus calls the souls of the living to him. So a number of deaths close together in the same family is a sign that the leko must be performed and the souls must be transformed into ancestors and transferred to the ancestral villages.
also all political allies of the former kingdom. In secondary mortuary rites for a ruler, socio-political relations and alliances of an entire kingdom become reconfirmed with the fulfilment of ritual obligations and participation. Thus, Dom Sipriau’s reburial also provided a venue for reconfirming Kemak identity that is intimately tied to the traditional system of political and social organization as well as to local cosmological beliefs. The secondary funerals are an aspect of Kemak reproduction of their habitus.26

Catholic identity

Catholicism is also a very important aspect of Kemak cultural identity. The importance of Catholicism grew during the Indonesian occupation throughout East Timor when there was a high conversion rate. The Church was the main provider of protection, the vehicle of non-violent protest and critique of brutalities, as well as the rallying point for the freedom fighting movement against the Indonesians.27 Atsabe cosmology has incorporated a localized form of Catholicism and indeed 100 per cent of the Atsabe subdistrict’s population claims Catholicism as their religion.

While the form of Catholic rites may appear universal, the value that the Kemak attach to certain acts and to certain symbols is only comprehensible through the lenses of their indigenous cosmology; thus, it is localized Catholicism. While the deceased are buried in Christian graves, even in secondary rituals, the secondary treatment of the dead incorporates Catholic rites at the stage of the inauguration of the new grave, when a commemorative mass is said. During the secondary funerary rites the bones are dug up, and are cleaned and placed in state in the origin source house of the deceased. There, after extensive animal sacrifices, the traditional sacred man of the group performs a more than 12-hour chant (toli) that will guide the soul to the village of the ancestors, and thus transforms the deceased into an ancestor. The bones then are ready to be re-interned. Only at this stage is a Catholic mass performed.

The new white-tiled grave of Dom Sipriau is a Catholic grave. During weekly Sunday mass, a bowl of flower petals is taken up to the altar to be blessed by the priest. After mass these petals are sprinkled over the grave. This practice was explained as a form of protection of the physical remains from witches that might consume the human body to feed their malevolent life force. Atsabe Kemak believe that sacred power is transferred from the priest to the flowers and this sacred power (luli) prevents any witches from approaching the grave. This sacred power also is particularly potent since the flowers are not only ‘blessed’ by the priest but afterwards by the sacred man of the village or a member of the royal house, which transfers further sacred power to the petals. In this connection I want to point out that Atsabe people regard the priest as a sacred man with powerful luli, spiritual potency, which is not only derived from being associated with the Catholic faith – the primary reason priests are associated in the local world view with

26 Bourdieu, Logic of practice.
spiritual potency – but he as an individual is considered to already possess luli. In local perceptions only those already possessing sacred power will take on the office and duties of a ritual specialist or leader.

**Portuguese identity**

The Portuguese financial assistance that made the new grave of Dom Siprianu possible is an aspect of the colonial past and the international relations of the new East Timorese nation state with Portugal. These relations are more complex than the scope of this work allows for discussion. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that there is a discontinuity between the desires and motivations of the national political elite and the ordinary people of East Timor with regards to the fervent pursuit of these international relations. Portugal is one of the main donor nations in East Timor, albeit not the largest by any means. Portugal’s major contribution is in the field of education, having sent teachers and textbooks to train the younger generation in the official language, which is only known to a small minority of the entire East Timorese population.

East Timor as a newly independent nation is in the process of carving out a new national identity, not just as the newest Southeast Asian nation, but also as member of the Portuguese speaking nations of the world, thus emphasizing both a regional and global identity. The national government utilizes new state policies, ideologies, and the choice of the Portuguese language as one of the official languages in furthering their agenda. Positioning itself in the global community as a member of Portuguese-speaking nations is also an aspect of the new East Timorese government’s discourse on national identity. It seems, however, that such ‘global positioning’ on the part of the new government is also a form of justification and an attempt to quell general dismay for choosing Portuguese as an official language of Timor Leste despite the popular preference for the lingua-franca of Tetum. Nevertheless, the notion of being part of a larger international Portuguese-speaking community continues to be propagated through media programmes (radio and television in Dili, the capital) and newspapers.

Such international positioning was particularly emphasized during the summer of 2002 during the World Cup of Football (Soccer). East Timorese were glued to the television in the capital city, Dili, and were rooting for Brazil. The media encouraged support on radio, television and print media couched in idioms such as ‘Brazil is like a brother so they need our support’, and ‘they are also Portuguese speakers’. One would hear similar exclamations even in Atsabe where there is no electricity, unless one owns a private generator, and at best there is poor radio signal reception. Villagers who visited Dili at the time, upon their return to Atsabe, were agents of propagation for this discourse. Thus, even those who did not watch any part of the tournament or read newspapers picked up on these ‘globalizing’ phrases, particularly the expression that called Brazilians ‘brothers’ since they also experienced Portuguese colonialism and spoke the same language.

Language teachers from Portugal in the Atsabe subdistrict also encourage the rhetoric of ‘brotherhood’ and membership in the global community of Portuguese nations not just in their classroom lessons but also in their wider interaction with the community. Sundays, usually after Mass, the teachers visit various households (not just of the elite) and during these occasions such rhetoric is often heard in one form or another. On numerous occasions, I was asked to accompany the teachers so I could translate during
such visits. Therefore, national attempts at carving out a place in the global community are reaching places far from the capital of Dili (like Atsabe) and the national discourse on identity is made part of local reformulations of identity.²⁸

The government’s endeavours in propagating a more international positioning of East Timorese identity through a national language, which was not chosen by the electorate, exemplifies Foucault’s arguments about power being inherent in discourse itself, in the socialization of knowledge. It is not only the East Timorese government however that pursued the socialization of the concept of a ‘global community’. The United Nations was also highly instrumental in suffusing such foreign concepts as ‘democracy’, ‘national identity’, ‘human rights’, ‘inequality’, ‘women’s rights’ and ‘gender issues’. These concepts were part of the general discourse of most Atsabe residents in 2002, including illiterate peasants selling their wares at the weekly market. Therefore, their doxa, ‘taken for granted knowledge’ or discourse, system of knowledge that determines the limits of thinking and acting, were in the process of transforming. Portuguese funding for the secondary burial rites and the new grave installation of Dom Sipriano is a further aspect of the processes of socialization of a new national and global identity.²⁹

The Portuguese also pay pensions to people who served as civil servants or soldiers in the army during colonial times. Thus, the Portuguese donation towards the expenses of the reburial of Dom Sipriano was viewed by the Atsabe people as recognition of civil service performed by Dom Sipriano. It is a posthumous recognition of service and the honouring of his high status. However, this donation was also considered as something that was owed to the family of the former ruler by former oppressors, a form of restitution. In pragmatic terms, it defrayed the prohibitive expenses of a secondary funerary ritual and allowed for the final transformation of the deceased into an ancestor and the transference of his spirit to the village of the ancestors on Ramelau Mountain. Technically, during the Japanese occupation, East Timor was still a Portuguese colony. As such, colonial civil servants who resisted the Japanese were doing so in the name of their country, Portuguese Timor, and ‘died in the service of Portugal’. Hence, the wording of the inscription on Dom Sipriano’s new grave was specified as per the instructions of the Portuguese donors. The grave also serves as a permanent reminder of the past and a reinforcement of a Portuguese global identity as an aspect of a newly formulated East

²⁸ Arjun Appadurai, Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). The idea of being part of a global community was expressed in yet another manner. A frequently recounted story also surrounded the first time that the UN flag was lowered and in its place the East Timorese flag was raised. According to the various local accounts, people were in tears for days and produced a special hand woven textile (tais) in which to wrap the UN flag, as if it were a death shroud, but also to protect it and to preserve its mystical ‘sacred’ power. This flag came to symbolize liberation and protection but more importantly a recognized place in the global union of nations as a country in its own right. In September 2002 East Timor became a member of the UN, a milestone event that was celebrated and much publicized in local media. Atsabe Kemak insisted on raising the UN flag, which in 2002 was flying on a post outside the sub-district administrative compound. The UN flag not only came to symbolize liberation to the Atsabe Kemak, but a newly found possibility of ‘imaging’ a rightful membership in a global community.

²⁹ I was unable to get an accurate dollar amount from informants. Many who are not related to the family of the former ruler gave a high amount – US $4000–$5000. However, the family of the former ruler of Atsabe kingdom claimed a smaller amount – ‘about US $1000’. 
Timorese identity. The Portuguese language provides the Atsabe Kemak, as well as other East Timorese, with a way to imagine themselves as parts of a larger global community of Portuguese-speaking nations.\textsuperscript{30}

The Atsabe Kemak feel rather ambiguous, however, towards the use of the Portuguese language. On the one hand, the label of a Portuguese-speaking nation secures a place in the global community. The use of the Portuguese language as a national language, however, has less to do with a historical continuity or the past commemoration of colonial historical experiences. The use of Portuguese is rather recognition and commemoration of the decades of guerrilla war against Indonesia that resulted in the final establishment of a new nation, as Portuguese was the language of the freedom fighters. Therefore, Portuguese, while not popular, is considered a symbol of the newly gained freedom of a young nation.

On the other hand, Portuguese as a national language is resisted for several reasons. The majority of the population in Atsabe subdistrict speak Kemak and Tetum on a daily basis, and in more official matters and schools they interact in the Indonesian language. Even members of the older generation have some command of the Indonesian language. Only those few elders who have served in the Portuguese army or civil service (and a handful of former freedom fighters) know some Portuguese, and the total number of fluent speakers was estimated by local leaders to be less than one per cent of the estimated total population of Atsabe subdistrict.\textsuperscript{31} For one thing, in the local perceptions of a cross-section of the subdistrict’s population (with regards to age, gender, and other social status) knowledge of Portuguese limits access to interaction with a wider global community in terms of economic and technological development. Thus, Portuguese is being viewed as not international enough, with a local preference for English.\textsuperscript{32} Another reason cited by Atsabe community leaders concerned the fact that young East Timorese received their education in the Indonesian language. Since there is an insistence on using Portuguese in official matters, young people cannot contribute to ‘immediate’ nation building and development. Furthermore, the very real lack of knowledge and fluency of Portuguese by the vast majority of the people and a cultural preference for the Tetum lingua franca, which is also the vernacular of the Catholic Church, is also emphasized among the Atsabe people.

\textsuperscript{30} The language issue is contentious. For young East Timorese, the Portuguese, Indonesian and English languages are the means of locating the local populations vis-à-vis the global. Although the language issue plays an important role in defining the new nation, it is only in relation to East Timor’s historical experiences and current processes of seeking a place within the international community as a Portuguese-speaking nation. Benedict Anderson, 'Imagining East Timor', Arena Magazine, 4 (April–May 1993), [http://www.uc.pt/timor/imagin.htm]; Nancy M. Lutz, 'Colonization, decolonization and “integration”’ Language policies in East Timor, Indonesia', Paper presented at the annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association Chicago, 20 Nov. 1991.

\textsuperscript{31} '27 per cent of East Timorese between the ages of 35–50 can speak Portuguese, as opposed to only 11 per cent of those under 25.' East Timor national survey of voter knowledge (preliminary findings), (New York: The Asia Foundation, 2001), p. 6.

\textsuperscript{32} This also became painfully evident when from the very first day in Atsabe I was asked by local leaders, teachers, head of school and parish priest to give talks and hold discussion sessions with students as well as provide English language lessons at the school.
The politics of Dom Siprianu’s grave

Local rulers have historically played an important role as agents through whom the local culture domesticated foreign cultural forms and ideology. They were instrumental in making these meaningful within the local system of cultural ideology and practices. In this section I want to extend the discussion on the politics of the new grave of Dom Siprianu by extending the examination of ways Kemak generate their habitus in the face of culture change. A focal aspect of this discussion will consider Atsabe notions of power and sources of legitimation of power. Atsabe Kemak also find avenues to challenge, or at least question, the authority and legitimacy of traditional structural power through newly acquired knowledge and concepts from the international community (United Nations) in East Timor, as well as from the national ideology of the new government.

A ceremony of power legitimation

The political undertones of legitimation and re-affirmation of power and status of the ruling family were important aspects in the staging of the large scale, public ceremony at the dawn of independence – a re-stating of authority in the framework of yet another ‘national’ political regime. While in Atsabe it is recognized that the ruling family has in the past participated in resistance to the dominant powers – whether Portuguese or Indonesian – the degree and methods of each were different in nature. While open resistance to the Portuguese was mentioned earlier, during the Indonesian period the resistance was more ‘hidden’. Traditional rulers publicly aligned themselves with Indonesian authority through fulfilling duties of subdistrict administrators and village heads (camat and kepala desa).

Atsabe people also recognize, however, that during the occupation of both dominant powers (Portuguese and Indonesian), the ruling family experienced growing economic prosperity, which continues to give rise to jealousy. Members and relatives of the former ruling families currently fill positions of authority in Atsabe. The access to these skills and capabilities came through education, and is one of the earliest benefits of Portuguese colonial penetration of the Atsabe district. Ruling families that administered the region on behalf of the colonial empire were allowed to educate their sons in Portuguese schools. Since these individuals had both traditional and administrative status already, they also were utilized in the salaried civil service of the Indonesian regime. Often current resentment against the traditional ruling group has more to do with the economic achievements that were enabled by past political situations. In terms of access to economic resources, those who occupy most civil service positions, whether as educators, district administrators, or subdistrict East Timorese police members, can be traced through the intricate kinship ties of origin houses and marriage alliances to the ruling house of Tiar Lelo, and therefore, to the house of the chief of the former Atsabe kingdom. Among those who are not in the civil service, but are completely reliant on earning their living through farming, the most economically advantaged also belong to the same network of alliances. Thus, the closer one is related to the ruling families of traditional authority, the greater the access to highly productive lands. The traditional ruling families own the largest tracts of land and coffee plantations, and indeed the largest tract of land in the whole of the former kingdom of Atsabe is owned by the Atsabe chiefly family.

Ordinary people who did not have direct kin ties to the ruling family, or their extensive affinal network, often expressed their economic resentment in terms of the rhetoric
of inequality, such as ‘in a democracy there is no room for differential access as in a feudal system’ but ‘everybody has the same human rights for economic success’. They discussed these issues in the framework of the new knowledge and terminologies they acquired from the United Nations’ socialization programmes in preparation for new nationhood, albeit interpreting these concepts from a rather socialistic perspective. Furthermore, it must be emphasized that none of the common citizens ever expressed any resentment against the ruling family in terms other than economic. None raised the issue, for example, that Dom Sipriau was the father of Dom Guilherme, the founder of the pro-Indonesia Apodeti party, which was directly instrumental in heralding in the Indonesian oppressors,33 but instead stressed the ways in which the ruling family diligently worked for the benefit of the Atsabe subdistrict population during the Indonesian period, especially highlighting the clandestine ties to the freedom fighters. While cultural informants from the Atsabe elite, including the ruling family itself, did mention the particular role of Sipriau’s son, they mainly glossed over it by switching the focus to the prestige of his being second governor of the Indonesian province, which now encompasses the whole nation of Timor Leste. Indeed, in all other respects their account of social relations in the former Atsabe kingdom stressed all the same factors that the common people were emphasizing.

One member of the ruling family, however, did discuss the Apodeti connection and offered profuse justifications in relation to the new national political order and to the grave of Sipriau. To paraphrase his long argument, Guilherme was not so different from the line of *koronel bote* before him. He was rebellious against oppressors and wanted to protect his people. Like the rest of the populace, he was anti-Portuguese. When pointing out that Sipriau actually rebelled against the Japanese, the informant pointed out that they were still under Portuguese Timor. He suggested that the pro-integrationist (with Indonesia) party Guilherme founded was a mistake as it brought a more brutal oppressor, albeit originating in his anti-Portuguese beliefs. He justified that the *Dom* made up for it by trying to channel good works in the form of development to the Atsabe region and looked the other way when his brothers as village heads and district administrators also supported the freedom fighters. Indeed, he made Guilherme into a national hero describing him as a later political exile in Portugal fighting for international recognition for East Timor’s plight on the same footing as José Ramos-Horta (the current foreign minister and former Nobel Peace Prize winner). Nevertheless, he felt that some members of the Atsabe district might feel resentment towards the ruling family as collaborators with the Indonesians and for enabling the Indonesian invasion. Thus, in his opinion, it was very important to ‘remind’ people of Atsabe that the *koronel bote* family was the rightful authority who always had the interests of the people of their former kingdom at heart and were the quintessential rebels against oppression by outside forces. In his view, Sipriau’s grave relocation and the secondary funeral re-enforced these ideas. He also suggested that the *koronel bote* kin group readily agreed to the Portuguese inscription not just because *Dom* Sipriau was an administrator under Portuguese Timor, but also because it shifted away the focus from the Indonesian connection and

33 Jolliffe, *Cover-up*, pp. 219–27.
any possible resentment to the core traditional value and duty of the Atsabe Kemak ruling families. To protect the people and sovereignty of the kingdom of Atsabe, as was done during Portuguese times, was a legitimate expression of authority, as they were fulfilling their duty.

Therefore, a traditional funerary ceremony not only reaffirmed the customary authority of the koronel bote and his group but also served to legitimize their position in the new socio-political hierarchy – as champions of the people and their sovereignty in a new context of national freedom and democracy. By fulfilling their traditional duty, they have claims to customary authority. The ceremony also utilized symbols that are important in terms of a new national identity, the Portuguese language and Catholicism. This ceremony was therefore also a legitimizing ceremony in the context of a new political situation. While it took traditional beliefs and ritual practices as its cornerstone, it freely incorporated dominant aspects of a new national identity discourse. Key elements of the ceremony would suggest this conclusion: the timing of the ceremony being at the dawn of new nationhood; the intentional placing of the grave next to the seat of local subdistrict government (the subdistrict covers the same domain as the former Atsabe kingdom); the choice of the inscription in terms of both content and language; and Catholic elements.

Sources of legitimation of authority

The legitimation of power and authority for the Atsabe Kemak also has multi-layered aspects, and must be viewed in a historical context of dynamically adopting and grounding external forms of authority in local Kemak concepts of legitimate power. Power is an aspect of overall social organization of the Atsabe Kemak, of all social and kin relations. Local discourse and understanding of power is also embedded in the overall cultural knowledge system and is propagated and reinforced through a variety of symbolic means. Thus, it is not simply the executive power of a leader or leading group. Furthermore, the local discourse or knowledge system continues to change and is continually generated in dynamic response to historical processes and experiences. Therefore, in this section I briefly want to consider Kemak views on the sources of legitimate power.

Traditional sources of legitimacy are not mutually exclusive. Legitimacy derives through a hierarchy of precedence, which in Kemak conceptions entails: being able to claim direct derivation from founding ancestors, ancestral origin places and houses; the possession of luli (spiritual potency possessed by people or through possessing ancestral objects that are imbued with it); marriage alliances to groups and their houses that can claim a more direct derivation from Kemak sources of origin and possession of greater concentrations of spiritual potency; the sponsoring of major rituals; and, looking after the welfare of those under one’s authority. The importance of luli in Kemak conceptions must be emphasized here. Sacred objects (luli) of a group are used to legitimize the authority.34 Indeed, the possessor of luli, and the amount of it, have direct implications for legitimacy of power and authority in a given circumstance. The sacred objects of the

founding ancestor traditionally legitimized power of Tiar Lelo, and thus the koronel bote. Luli derives from the ancestors but the degree and amount of it is also hierarchically ordered. The koronel bote had the greatest concentration.

Legitimacy is also derived through political alliances. That is sub-chiefs, village and hamlet heads (rati, nai and dato, respectively) also derived legitimacy through the power of the koronel bote or rather through the recognition of their authority over their smaller domains from the ruler of the Atsabe kingdom. The authority of the Tiar Lelo group, a cluster of hierarchically ordered origin houses that ruled over Obulo and Boboe domains, governed the Atsabe kingdom. These domains of hierarchically ordered origin houses tended to be the secular leaders of a group. In some places they complemented each with a ‘sacred man’ (gase ubu) of a group. Sacred men derived their power and legitimacy through links to founding ancestors and ritual knowledge. They were holders of sacred history and lore and were imbued with sacred power more so than the secular leaders (except the koronel bote). Their domain of authority however only extended to the ritual realm. Secular leader and sacred man were not always mutually exclusive and the same person could occupy both positions. The legitimacy of the Atsabe chief was continually reaffirmed through his, and his group’s, maintenance of the traditional ritual system of the domain. By sponsoring and contributing to large-scale rituals in a manner befitting status and wealth, they maintained and enhanced their spiritual potency (luli). Furthermore, legitimacy and position in the social hierarchy was also reaffirmed by the koronel bote group’s continuation of strategic marriage alliance; the exchange system of women and material goods; as well as the mobilization of an army to put down challenges to his authority in the context of regional feuds and headhunting.

Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century the Atsabe also incorporated certain foreign elements into their sources of power and prestige. The Portuguese government and army served as one source for the ruling families. The Atsabe Kemak described their relationship with the Portuguese in terms of their own traditional political organization. In these conceptions, the Portuguese were seen as another koronel bote (or chief of a domain) that had much the same type of authority as the local ruler had over a lesser domain, chief and village head. When initial resistance to the Portuguese failed, the Portuguese came to be viewed as a higher chief that had a larger army and their own sacred men with greater concentration of luli (spiritual potency) in the form of Catholic priests. The Portuguese were viewed as possessing greater spiritual potency.

The Portuguese also had ‘sacred objects’ that legitimized their power in the form of flag and staff (much like the sacred ancestral objects of Tiar Lelo of the former Atsabe domain). Through these objects the Portuguese transferred potent power to the local ruler from the Atsabe Kemak perspective. Portuguese recognition of a local chief as a figure of authority for a domain also further reinforced the koronel bote’s legitimacy. Therefore, during the Portuguese period, the legitimacy, and thus the spiritual potency of the local ruler, was enhanced by external aspects of power that came to be grounded in local conceptions. The Portuguese ‘legitimation’ of power for the koronel bote had much to do with local views of spiritual potency.

The acceptance of Catholicism introduced by the Portuguese was closely linked with the Atsabe views on luli. Catholicism was perceived as adding to local spiritual potency (luli), or rather, enhancing the local luli with an even more powerful external luli. The Atsabe ruler gave land to the priests to build their chapel and residential units, allowing
them to undertake their missionising and conversion activities. This was no simple act of generosity, or a successful conversion to Catholicism, but a strategy that would harness the spiritual potency of the Catholic Church and further enhanced the luli power of the koronel bote, thereby further legitimizing his power and authority. The Catholic priests, in turn, were grateful to the chief, and viewed his actions in terms of those of a champion of the new faith. The secular part of the Portuguese colonial government, on the other hand, only supported and acknowledged the koronel bote’s legitimacy if it served their political ends.

The access to education by the political elite and their extended kin of the traditional Kemak organization during Portuguese times also ensured that they became the administrators, and thus people in power, after the Indonesian invasion. While the Atsabe Kemak do not view the Indonesian government as enhancing their legitimacy and potency of power and authority in the same way as the Portuguese did, their authority continued nevertheless to be sanctioned through both traditional and new state sources. As mentioned earlier, the same traditional leaders and their kin held positions of subdistrict head, village head and other civil service positions such as teaching. The enduring authority of the koronel bote and his kin group, however, was challenged quite openly during the latter part of the Indonesian occupation. According to accounts of members of the koronel bote’s kin group, economic jealousies precipitated the attacks by pro-Indonesian militia in 1999 on the family of the koronel bote, his Tiar Lelo kin group, as well as villages (origin houses) of the closest of affinal allies. Therefore, these attacks were economically motivated under the Indonesian system. However, another aspect of these attacks was emphasized to a greater degree by the ordinary citizens; namely, that the koronel bote’s family did support the freedom fighters, albeit in a clandestine manner.

Symbolic capital of authority

The reburial of the former ruler and Siprianu’s new grave reasserted symbolically the power and authority of the ruling group and their kin through the utilization of a vast historically accumulated symbolic capital of authority.35 The secondary burial of the former chief of Atsabe provided his kin group with an opportunity to defend and preserve their social status, authority and continued advantage in access to economic well-being through the utilization of highly symbolic acts and materials. The secondary funeral transformed Dom Siprianu into a venerated ancestor whose name will be remembered in a line of important ancestors considered to be in direct line of descent from the founder, Koko Lia. Thus, he became a source of powerful spiritual potency (luli) for his kin group, a potency that further legitimizes the position and authority of his group in the Kemak hierarchical social organization. The grave itself serves as a material symbol to this end.

The ceremony itself utilized a wide range of symbolic capital of legitimacy that the Kemak appropriated through their historical experiences of power relations with various

35 ‘The interest leading an agent to defend his symbolic capital is inseparable from the tacit adherence, inculcated in the earliest years of life and reinforced by all subsequent experience, to the axiomatic objectively inscribed in the regularities of the (in the broad sense) economic order which constitutes a determinate type of symbolic capital worthy of being pursued and preserved.’ (Bourdieu, Outline of a theory of practice, p. 182).
dominant powers. The secondary funeral politically mobilized an entire community—the whole of the former kingdom of Atsabe and allied former domains outside the region as well as the then ‘state’ authority, the local branch of the UN transitional government. A catechist and a local weaver, neither of whom are related to the kin group of the ruling family, both suggested similar (unsolicited) interpretations concerning the presence of the UN personnel. In their view, since they were an independent nation and part of the international community, it is only appropriate that their international kin (elder sibling—younger sibling) also participate. Thus, they not only viewed themselves as being part of the global, but incorporated the latter into their conceptualization of local social organization, where everyone is some kind of kin. The UN representation lent further legitimacy to the proceedings and enhanced and reaffirmed the status and position of the former ruler’s group.

According to the local belief system, however, people had to participate from the entire former kingdom and domains of its old and new political allies if they were not to suffer sanctions from the newly anointed ancestor’s spiritual potency (luli). In a manner of speaking, not just the status and authority but also the acknowledgement of the luli power of the koronel bote and his group were reaffirmed and legitimized. The utilization of Catholic symbols and mass enhanced the spiritual potency and protection on the one hand, while on the other it also provided acknowledgement of the former ruler’s status and authority by the religious leadership, further enhancing the status and social position of the former ruler’s group and kin. The Catholic elements also reaffirmed a strong Catholic identification of the Atsabe Kemak; an identity which is not a simple local Kemak identification but is an aspect of national identity in East Timor.

The utilization of Portuguese monetary contributions for the grave construction, as well as the Portuguese language for the inscription, made use of the symbols of authority and legitimation that were appropriated from Portuguese times at a number of different levels. It served as recognition of the koronel bote’s service in administering the Atsabe domain as the rightful leader of the region. While the use of the Portuguese language both attested to the legitimacy of the former leader in a colonial context, and at the same time in a more modern context of new independent nationhood, it also affirmed the national discourse on a new East Timorese identity that positions itself as part of a larger global identity of Portuguese-speaking nations. Given Kemak attitudes about the current language situation of the new nation, the utilization of Portuguese was highly deliberate and, as pointed out earlier, from the elite’s perspective also politically strategic. Therefore, in terms of utilizing both Portuguese and Catholic elements, the Atsabe Kemak were not only reaffirming local notions and hierarchies of authority but also participating in a national discourse on an East Timorese identity.

The placement of the grave also has a significance that reaches beyond local power negotiations and legitimation in the new context of East Timorese independence. The symbolic placement of the grave next to the building that is the seat of authority (not just in current times but in former Portuguese as well as Indonesian and UN administration times) forcefully re-emphasizes the authority and legitimacy as well as the social position of the ruling family. The choice of the grave site was conscious and deliberate by the kin group of the koronel bote. The grave is next to the current seat of power of the subdistrict government, thus acknowledging and reaffirming Dom Siprianu’s status as a ruler of a former kingdom, as well as his position in the long line of leaders fighting for freedom.
Siprianu's grave represents not only continuity with the past, but also the current restructuring of Kemak cultural identity where the people attempt to carve out a place *vis-à-vis* their new nation in the international community.

**Conclusion**

Considerations of *Dom* Siprianu's new grave highlight the continuous Kemak processes of dynamic appropriation of foreign cultural elements and symbols, and make these meaningful by grounding them in local ideology and practice. These processes are important aspects of Kemak constructions of group identity and for a cultural sense of continuity. Kemak local identity formulation is as much anchored in the indigenous ideology as having incorporated strong symbolic aspects from the outside through their lived historical experiences. This case study demonstrates how certain concepts, practices and symbols acquired through historical influences are localized through the value system of the Kemak indigenous culture, which is itself constantly changing and adopting diachronically to various forces of local, regional, national and global power relations. Some of these transformations have been much accelerated since the arrival of UN international personnel in Timor Leste.

The way the Atsabe Kemak generate the schemata of their local system – in this case study, their notions of power and legitimacy of authority – and therefore, dialectically redefine their identity in a historical context, not only establishes a continuity with the past but also generates new ways in which Atsabe Kemak can ground their local identity and practices in relation to a new national identity. According to Bourdieu:

*habitus* is an infinite capacity of generating products – thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions – whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production... *habitus*, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices – more history – in accordance with the schemes generated by history.36

Therefore, Kemak *habitus* structures their new experiences in accordance with the structures produced by their past experiences which become modified by the new experiences, bringing about a unique integration. Kemak traditional leadership and symbolic capital were historically transformed and integrated with their new experiences of authority in relation to dominant powers. Thus, 'the practices produced by the *habitus*, as the strategy-generating principle' enabled the Atsabe Kemak 'to cope with unforeseen and ever changing situations' as they adopted to Portuguese, Japanese and Indonesian authority, and more recently to national independence.37

The Atsabe Kemak's construction of their identity is continually transformed through the mediation of media as well as their exposure to the international community through the presence of the UN personnel as they come to 'imagine' their selves and their worlds in new ways.38 The dominant discourse generated and propagated by the new national government (the East Timorese political elite), as well as by their former administrators and current advisors (the international personnel of the United Nations),

36 Bourdieu, *Outline of a theory of practice* pp. 53, 55
37 Ibid., p. 72.
38 Appadurai, *Modernity at large*, p. 3.
is also beginning to change local knowledge systems and thereby provide more avenues for challenging (and for now quietly questioning economic aspects of) Atsabe Kemak socio-political hierarchies. Thus, if viewing power as discourse, more than local regional power is evident in the Kemak context. In terms of national language policies and state ideologies spread through the media, the state’s power on local, regional groups is evident. While the Atsabe are vociferous about language issues, expressing much dismay with the Portuguese language choice, at some level they are accepting it, albeit grudgingly. They are also reproducing the power hierarchies and are agents of legitimizing the power of the state: those who possess the most cultural capital. Furthermore, the global community via United Nations’ policies and international personnel, who interact with the East Timorese communities, are also greatly altering not just national but local regional discourse and power relations. They have affected not just processes of state building but also the knowledge and ideological systems of East Timor at both national level discourse and also local, regional level discourse.

The Atsabe Kemak, like other East Timorese groups, are faced with rapid cultural adjustments and transformations as they face multiple forces of change as aspects of recent nationhood and the process of nation-building. They are continually reformulating their local cultural identity in response to their new experiences through the dynamic process of nation formation in a globalised world and continue to transform their discourse of being East Timorese Kemak. Their *habitus* serves as the strategy-generating schemata through which to mediate the global with a clear desire to imagine themselves as ‘new’ members of it. They domesticate the global and thus appropriate the materials of modernity.