Rose, Michael (2020), *Indigenous Spirits and Global Aspirations in a Southeast Asian Borderland. Timor-Leste's Oecussi Enclave*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 232 pp.*

This book is a compilation of different stories that explore a common theme: the complex relation between the *meto* (the indigenous/familiar) and the *kase* (foreign) modes of life in the enclave of Oecussi, Timor-Leste. Written by anthropologist Michael Rose, the book draws on the author's experience in the region initially as a United Nations (UN) advisor and later on as a researcher.

The *meto/kase* relationship is discussed in the context of different dynamics at play in the highlands and lowlands of Oecussi and how they interact with each other. In Rose's words, "the practice of life in Oecussi is something that emerges from the contingencies of this "crossing", from movement between a highland space where *meto* matters and revolves around ritual/family/ /duty/agriculture that are imperative, and a lowland domain where money and outwardly orientated aspirations have become dominant in day-to-day life" (p. 36). In practice, *kase* and *meto* constantly connect and what often appears to be the dominance of the *kase* world actually reflects a more complex process, where *kase* is "enabled by the support of ever-present but typically invisible *meto*" (*ibidem*). It is this crossing and mobility process, and how it affects identity, that is at the heart of this study.

Theoretically, the analysis is influenced by three complementary approaches discussed in chapter one: theories of encounter, theories of change, and theories of experience. The work of James Scott is taken as a starting point to understand different forms of resistance to exogenous forms of governance and is complemented by theories of change and experience as Rose is interested not only in these interactions per se, but in how they evolve over time. The six chapters that follow dive deep into the experiences of local actors that navigate through the *meto/kase* realms while considering these three elements.

Chapters two and three recount stories from 2011 and 2012, when the author was first in Oecussi as a young UN adviser to the Timorese government in a program devised to create employment and improve labour conditions in the district. As he recalls, the problems encountered were too complex to be reported in standard bureaucratic forms. They represented deep ontological tensions that local actors had to deal with, and which had bodily consequences that often resulted in misfortune, sickness and even death. This tension is exemplified in two different stories. In chapter two, Rose shares the story of a young man from Oecussi who went to study geology in Dili and, facing the tension between traditional beliefs and the new body of scientific knowledge, he actually suffered physical distress and sickness. Chapter three then presents the case of a man who once was a prominent entrepreneur and public servant in Dili and eventually, accused of embezzlement, became a pariah when he went back to his community. In both cases, while moving to urban contexts where *kase* modes of life prevails, these actors carried *meto* understandings which profoundly affected their life experiences.

* Available at http://devpolicy.org/publications/books/MRose_indigenous-spirits-and-global-aspirations-in-a-southeast-asian-borderlandDevPol.pdf. Accessed on 09.04.2021.

Chapters four to seven explore stories from 2014, when Rose went back to Oecussi as a researcher. Chapter four problematises the implementation of the Special Economic Zone (*Zona Especial de Economia Social de Mercado em Timor-Leste*, in the original), highlighting the role of spirits as agents of resistance to "high modernism". Chapter five recounts the work of a local Catholic healer, his collection of sacred stones and the incorporation of *kase* instruments to explain and validate the efficacy of his work. Chapter six tells the case of a public servant working in the government office charged with protecting the environment, who was also the nephew of a prince in Oecussi – the latter in charge of protecting the forest –, and how the *kase* and *meto* logics of these positions often conflicted. As these functions were based on different sites of legitimacy and different logics, this partly enabled his work by reinforcing his authority in Oecussi, but it also made it complicated as these different positions led to different attitudes related to rule enforcement.

Chapter seven juxtaposes two parallel events taking place in the village of Kutete: the reluctance of local farmers to adopt new agricultural methods, and a ritual speech performed in a local school to help students pass the exams and succeed professionally thereafter. While the first case reflects a clear resistance to *kase* methods, in the second case *meto* rituals were used to foster prosperity perceived according to *kase* ideas of success.

The rich description of these experiences, accompanied by constant reflexivity by the author, makes this book very engaging and easy to read. Throughout so many different stories, the *meto/kase* fluid relationship becomes very visible in all its complexity, confirming the argument that the distinction between these modes of life is not clear cut and that it must be understood from the point of view of experience. In Rose's words, "The good things of the outside world are pursued not through rejecting the *meto* ways of the village, or collapsing them into the *kase*, but through the ritually mediated and repeated negotiation of travel between them" (p. 227). While much of the discussion is framed within anthropological approaches, this book, which I vividly recommend, is of interest to academics and practitioners from different fields, particularly Development Studies and International Relations, as the relation between *meto* and *kase* is exemplar of the limitations of big international projects, not least in the context of international statebuilding, where the ultimate end is to create a new social contract "from scratch" (often ignoring already existing social contracts). The emphasis on experience is of particular importance. Often policy literature presumes a linear logic on how societies function and develop. Conversely, much of the critical academic literature on peacebuilding, also influenced by the work of Scott, often stresses the aspects of local resistance as the primordial element of these global/ /local encounters. In this book, Michael Rose shows how these dynamics are much more fluid and less distinct as it appears at first sight. Resistance to and the embrace of the *kase* world go hand in hand, and how they interact is in constant motion.

The emphasis on experience and narratives further contributes to a broader discussion on the constitution of knowledge. Drawing on postcolonial critique, Rose engages with a crucial question in the conclusion that is "what is deemed valid knowledge?". By trying to unveil local narratives, Rose found that the ways to legitimise knowledge have been changing in the *meto* realm, as "today fluency in and identification with ways of sense-making that are comprehensible and valued by the outside world have become

prestigious and potentially lucrative" (p. 161). How this is affecting Oecussi – and indeed how these processes affect societies more generally – is an important matter worth investigating more thoroughly in future research. Academically, this discussion points to the fundamental need to question and dissect the role of critical academic thinking in interpreting societies. While this has been generally discussed by authors such as Boaventura de Sousa Santos and Linda Smith, this book offers solid empirical evidence of how crucial this task is and how "truths" can differ when comparing those of the person who experiences them and those of whoever analyses these experiences from the outside.

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