The Politics of Culture and the Culture of Politics – a case study of gender and politics in Los Palos, Timor Leste

Yvonne Corcoran - Nantes

Status of women - background
- Women constitute 49% of rural sector labour force
- Over one fifth of the female population illiterate
- Fertility rate of 7.7
- 29.2% of the representatives in the National Parliament

Independence and Underlying assumptions – gender equality and cultural challenge
- Changing perspectives and ‘mindsets’
- Independence as a conduit for new ideas
- Resistance as a modernizing experience with respect to gender equity and communal experience.

Fight for Freedom and Radical Politics
- Women constituted 30% of the resistance in combative and non-combative roles
- Clash between politics and culture ameliorated for a time.
- Fretilin issues of gender equity on the political agenda.
- Radical politics and unequal consequences

Independence, Gender Relations and Cultural Politics
- Women as outsider in the political process
- Patriarchy and cultural realignment
- ‘Sweet Freedom’ and normalisation
- Practical gender issues
Thinking about Culture and Gender Relations

- Marriage and bride price (barlake)
- Caste (Ratu, Paca, Akan & Acar)
- Adat/Customary law and marriage
- Gender and the question of social value

Marriage, Gender Division of Labour and household resources

- Men principal providers, women principal carers
- Custom not always translated into practice
- Women control the finances
- Joint decision making

Challenges to Custom and practice

- Women’s heavy involvement in economy inducing change
- Young men and women challenging tradition
- Affirmative action for women in local politics.