



# Tetum Ghosts and Kin: Fertility and Gender in East Timor

*David Hicks*

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## **Tetum Ghosts and Kin: Fertility and Gender in East Timor** David Hicks

In the second edition of this study of religion and kinship in East Timor, David Hicks argues that reproductive rituals and ideas regarding fertility and gender direct the notion that for the Tetum-speaking people of Caraubalo suku, in the district of Viqueque, life and death derive from the same source. This source is the world of the ancestral ghosts (the mate bein). The soul of a person (the klamar mate) who has died becomes transformed by ritual action into an agency for life-affirming fertility, that is, an ancestral ghost, and it is from the ancestors that fertility, which sustains life down the generations, originates. Incorporated into this complex of ideas regarding life, fertility, gender, and death, are two recreational institutions, cockfighting and kick-fighting, which Dr. Hicks argues are ritualized manifestations of fertility and infertility respectively, as well as gendered aspects of the sacred (lulik) and secular (sau) worlds. In addition to contributing to the comparative study of ritual and indigenous notions of reproduction, the second edition of *Tetum Ghosts and Kin: Fertility and Gender in East Timor*, provides an ethnographic portrait of village life among a people whose traditions were about to be abruptly devastated by war and conquest. In a summary retrospect he outlines the events that overtook the East Timorese between the time of his first period of fieldwork and East Timor's becoming a nation on May 20, 2002, and concludes with a brief description of the present condition of Caraubalo.

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