

Gender Equality through Sustainable Development Goals: The Case of Timor Leste

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ABSTRACT

After gaining independence in 2002, Timor Leste set a goal for its national development as its first order of business. Timor Leste ratified Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in order to receive aid and assistance from member states of the United Nations more developed than they were. In 2013, various media outlets and non-governmental organizations highlighted significant growth that Timor Leste showed in matters of gender equality. The country became the only Pacific Asian state to have up to 38 percent of their parliament seats be occupied by women. The high level of women's representation in Timor Leste's government is seen as a way to achieve SDGs and to embody gender equality. However, in reality women still face problems of discrimination on the societal level, as seen from the still all too common occurrences of sexual harassment, as well as accessibility to jobs and education for women which are still far from the standards expected by SDGs. This article argues that the SDG as a form of globalization had not succeeded in homogenizing the culture that applies in Timor Leste. Thus, the top-down structure do not bring any implications towards the needs of women in the country. This article aims to assess the gender-gap phenomenon using three main globalization approaches mainly: homogenized globalization, polarized globalization and the hybrid type of globalization. In the end, this article will also argue that it is more relevant to see current world's culture as a product of hybrid globalization rather than homogenized or polarized globalization especially when it comes to seeing the phenomenon in Third World countries such as Timor Leste.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Sustainable Developmental Goals, Globalization, Discrimination, Hybrid.

Setelah mencapai kemerdekaan pada tahun 2002, Timor Leste menetapkan target bagi pengembangan nasionalnya sebagai prioritas utama. Timor Leste meratifikasi Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) dengan tujuan untuk mendapatkan bantuan dan bimbingan dari negara-negara anggota Perserikatan Bangsa-Bangsa yang sudah lebih maju. Pada tahun 2013, berbagai outlet media dan organisasi non-pemerintah menyoroti pertumbuhan signifikan yang dialami Timor Leste dalam hal kesetaraan gender. Negara tersebut menjadi satu-satunya negara di Asia Pasifik dengan 38 persen kursi parlemen yang diduduki oleh wanita. Tingkat representasi wanita yang tinggi dalam pemerintahan Timor Leste dipandang sebagai salah satu cara untuk menemui target SDG dan mewujudkan kesetaraan gender. Bagaimanapun, dalam keseharian wanita masih mengalami banyak masalah pada taraf masyarakat, sebagaimana yang dapat dilihat dalam tingkat kekerasan seksual yang asih tinggi, serta aksesibilitas terhadap pekerjaan dan edukasi bagi wanita yang masih jauh dari standar SDG. Tulisan ini berargumen bahwa SDG sebagai perwujudan globalisasi belum berhasil menghomogenisasi budaya yang berkembang di Timor Leste. Sehingga, pendekatan top-down tidak banyak berdampak dalam memenuhi kebutuhan wanita di negara tersebut. Tulisan ini berupaya untuk melihat fenomena ketimpangan gender menggunakan tiga pendekatan utama globalisasi: homogenisasi, polarisasi, serta hibridisasi. Pada akhirnya, artikel ini berargumen bahwa pendekatan yang memandang budaya dunia kontemporer sebagai produk dari proses hibridisasi dari globalisasi merupakan pendekatan yang paling relevan, khususnya dalam menganalisis fenomena di negara-negara Dunia Ketiga seperti Timor Leste.

Kata-kata kunci: Kesetaraan gender, Sustainable Developmental Goals, Globalisasi, Diskriminasi, Hibrid

Values are subject to change, especially with the rapidly-growing process of globalization which engulfs life with increasing intensity and scope. Traditional values are more prone to evaluation and change due to exposure to globalizing values and pressures put upon society to conform to new standards and demands. Among the traditional values which have become subject of re-evaluation in the globalized world is that of gender equality, which includes extensive debate regarding gender roles, women's rights, women's participation in politics, etc. Although may be considered as essentially the order of the day, the changing of values rarely goes without any resistance. Nevertheless, the fight for gender equality persists, and throughout the world, strides are being made towards a more egalitarian society.

Timor Leste is among the chief examples for this development in effect. Having ratified the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, Timor Leste has exhibited significant development in regards of gender equality. Timor Leste is distinctive for having the highest number of women representatives in parliament in Pacific Asia. In addition, Timor Leste has various legislation in place to ensure women's rights are upheld. Despite the efforts to actualize gender equality through securing the rights of women as a traditionally oppressed and marginalized group, Timor Leste still faces problems in regards of gender equality, especially in the societal level, as seen from the all-too-high occurrences of sexual harassment against women, as well as availability of jobs and access to education for women and girls which has yet to comply to the standards set by the UN's SDGs. In this paper, we seek to explain this discrepancy by using three main theories and approaches of globalization.

The argumentation in this paper is constructed in three parts. The first part will identify the existing views in the discourse about how the processes of globalization has affected culture. The second part presents the Sustainable Development Goals proposed by the United Nations as cultural globalization manifested, which seeks to bring changes to local cultures all over the world, including to Timor Leste culture. The main analysis makes up the third and final part, in which the prevailing culture of patriarchy in Timor Leste is examined and the effect of globalization on culture is considered.

Globalization Approach

Globalization, regarded by many a nebulous concept, is a process that is nevertheless pervasive both in daily human life as well as in discourses about that which consists human life. As part of a larger project to create an understanding of globalization and its effect, the effect of globalization and its processes on culture is an especially highly debated issue. Culture has become such a hotbed for contestation due to its intrinsic significance human activities, and more particularly because it is bound up to the basic fundamental aspects of identity in its various facets, including the personal, ethnic, religious, social, and national (Lieber & Weisberg 2002). In the discourse of International Relations particularly, opinions and arguments regarding the effects of globalization tends to be divided to two fundamentally opposing (Lieber & Weisberg 2002). On one side, the processes of globalization is regarded as a force for good which promotes integration and the removal of cultural barriers which leads to the betterment of the lives of people in society. On the other, the processes of globalization is deemed to have an adverse effect, where along with the dissolution and blurring of borders, the powers of non-traditional actors such as international corporations with questionable intent has become much larger and poses a threat to society and to countries. Regardless of how the effect of globalization on culture is perceived, it is widely accepted that globalization and the values brought about by its proliferation plays a role in how culture shifts and changes. Timor Leste society is not exempt from

this process. In viewing how globalization has affected the culture in Timor Leste, and consequentially in how gender equality is interpreted and held up at the governmental and societal level, there are various way with which to see precisely how globalization processes affects culture and in what fashion.

One argument states that globalization leads to a homogenization of culture. This line of argumentation is founded on the understanding that the market has a considerable influence on culture, in which popular culture is in large part formed by what is prevalent in the market (Ghosh 2011). Consequentially, in the contemporary era where the economy is dominated by consumers as opposed to producers, who controls the market controls popular culture. In addition, with the rapid development in the technology and communications sectors, cultural elements which are previously confined to the local level receives an unprecedented amount of exposure. More people from a much more diverse cultural backgrounds comes in contact with various foreign cultures than ever before, aiding in the acceleration of growth of cultural self-consciousness and identities (Ghosh 2011). This is said to create a cultural globalization of pluralistic cultural elements, which is not to say that globalization creates a single, monolith culture, but rather that globalization has made it possible for cultural experiences in various places around the world to be uniform in its plurality. Societies are no longer confined to the local cultural values, values from various cultural backgrounds are more readily accessible in the contemporary era than ever before, making way for the creation of a new, globally adopted culture and identity (Ghosh 2011). The concept of a “global citizen” is very much in line with this reasoning.

On the opposite end, globalization is also considered to be the harbinger of polarization. In regards of culture, globalization has been said to create a divide among its proponents and their opposition, as opposed to the homogenization argument which states that globalization constructs a new identity and poses no threat to socio-cultural identities. The polarization borne of globalization processes is said to emerge from the limitations of cultural homogenization, namely with the rise of ethnocentrism and nationalism instead of cosmopolitanism (Holton 2000). Globalization is considered to deepen instead of consolidate the rift which exists in society, in which cultural dichotomies play a significant role. Integration occurs over conflict and hate rather than peace and love, the Western and non-Western way of life othering is becoming more pervasive and more entangled with the distribution of power, all of the above and more rendered more far-reaching due to the processes of globalization (Holton 2000).

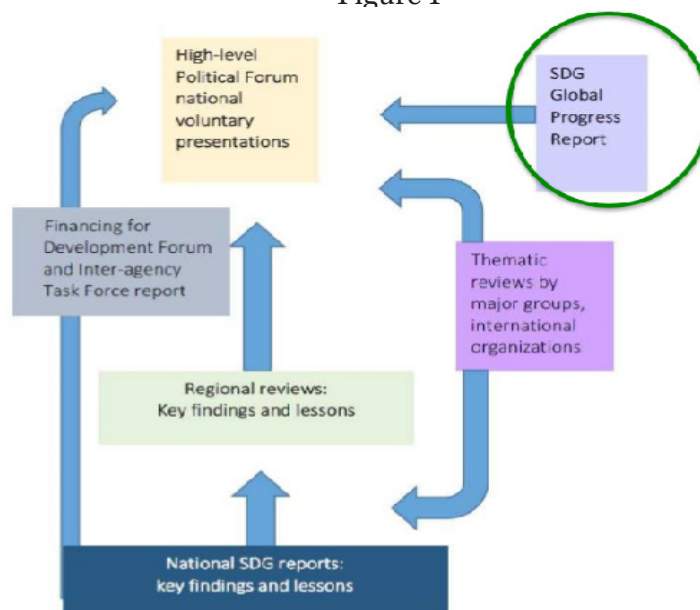
A third option to regard the effect of the processes of globalization is of the hybridization, or syncretization, camp (Holton 2000). Globalization, understood as the spread of neoliberal capitalist culture as developed in the United States, doesn't necessarily lead to homogenization, or the deletion of local values and cultural differences, nor does it polarizes and strengthen the division between cultural oppositions, but that as global influences become increasingly absorbed and adapted in local settings, there is a proliferation of cultural fusion otherwise known as hybridity (Gabriel 2015). In this line of thought, globalization is regarded not as a totalizing cultural process, nor is it a process that necessarily threatens to homogenize local cultures, but instead globalization provides conditions for the local to gain access to broader representation, which means that marginalized social groups aren't passive subjects in the top-down regimes of globalization. In other words, there is room for them to find empowerment through representation in the global system (Gabriel 2015). However, the conception of globalization as a top-down phenomenon does not take into account transformations in the social, political, and discursive that can occur when the local is brought into dialogue or contestation with the global, and as such globalization ough to be interpreted more broadly rather than only unilaterally from its effects on the local

and global.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a Form of Globalization

Sustainable Development Goals, commonly referred to as SDGs, are an extension of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) which ended in 2015. It is a new, universal set of goals, targets, and indicators that UN member states are expected to meet in order to frame or construct their political policies and agendas over the next 15 years. Both programs had similar aims, which is to boost prosperity and peace around the globe. What sets MDGs apart from SDGs is that MDGs only had 8 main goals while SDG had at least 17 goals (ICLEI 2015). MDGs and SDGs also has different principle foundations, while MDGs was meant only to help developing states catch up with their more developed counterparts and where the relation between developing and developed states is seen in a 'donor-recipient' manner, SDGs was meant to make a more 'sustainable' development for every states around the world equally (Coonrod 2014). To improve from MDGs the UN also improve their funding mechanisms for SDGs. This can be seen in how SDGs seeks a broader variety of partners willing to initiate joint programs. Other than that, it can also be seen that previously only few chosen institutions had the right to review a state's development in MDGs, in SDGs states and actors involved in the joint program may also give annual reports to the UN to help them improve the programs made (ECLAC UNSD 2017)

Figure 1



Source: ECLAC UNSD Mandate for Reporting GA Presentation

Many researches regarding international regimes and organization confirms that there are few state actors more superior than the rest when it comes to international organizational decision making (Krasner, 1982). In the field of regimes and international organization studies the UN can be categorized as an 'imposed order' organization to the extent of the 'de facto imposition' where the organization are dependent to the hegemon actors that holds main incentives for the state to execute their interest. Thus, hegemonic actors are able to push more norms and values they perceive important into the regime (Young 1982). With this context, there are two points that we can consider before going through the main analysis of the research. (1) As stated in many annual

reports made by SDGs partners, the World Food Programme (2018) for instance, had stated that Timor Leste's major programmatic risks lies in the lack of funding. (2) That the United States is one of the main contributors in the SDGs forum, and that it is proper to assume that the US remains hegemonic in the UNDG body or the SDGs forum. Therefore, the relation between the US-SDGs-Timor Leste can be seen as an economically incentivised relation to some extent which will be discussed furthermore in the analysis section. As the US remains hegemonic in the SDGs through the power of incentives, the operationalization of the SDGs (which is a result of decision making process made in the SDG forum) tends to be democratic, liberal, and secular. Most of the SDGs indicator of success are also similar to US's idea of success. The definition of 'gender equality' used by the UN to further decide what kinds of programs they should construct are similar to USA's views of 'gender equality'. For example, stated in previously MDGs Gender Development Thematic Result Reports in October 2013:

“Millennium Development Goal 3 (MDG 3) promotes gender equality through the empowerment of women by eliminating gender disparity in education, health, economic opportunities and decision making.”

Which are aligned with the beliefs, definitions and standardization of gender equality by the US that can be seen in one of President Obama's speech in the 2015 UNGA forum held in New York:

“...Development is threatened by old attitudes, especially those that deny rights and opportunity to women....”

“...One of the best indicators of whether a country will succeed is how it treats its women. When women have a job, an education, their children are more likely to get an education, their families are healthier, and more prosperous...” President Barack Obama, 2015

Whereas for several developing countries, whose government still have intense connections with religious groups, 'equality' in gender issues are seen as a notion for each two genders to fulfill two different roles assigned for them specifically since birth by their religion. In other words, to reach social development it is important for men and women in society to do what 'they should do' according to their religion. Countries like the USA and most of its Western counterparts gender equality means that in order to reach social development it is important that both gender are given the same chance and right to pursue what they feel they need to pursue regardless the socially constructed role and assignments.

In regards to the contributions that SDGs has made to culture, we turn to Timor Leste. Timor Leste had been accepting many recommendations made by the UN and several other developed countries since it became a part of United Nations in 27th of September 2002. Influenced by the numerous gender-gap cases that occur in the country and a strong belief from the UN's ideals that a country is able to develop faster only when every basis of equality is upheld, Timor Leste is actively involved in many UN resolutions that are associated with implementing gender equality.

“We consider the position of women and girls in our country a key test of our development progress” - Prime Minister Rui Maria de Araujo, 2005

In 1990, to begin their initiatives, Timor Leste joined The Women, Peace and Security resolution made by United Nations specifically for East Timor which further became the harbinger of their constitution renewal. In 2002 they also ratify the MDG and continue to join SDG due to the expiration of the MDG as mentioned before. Along with their struggle to commit, the SDG funding mechanism allows and guarantees Timor Leste to receive aid and assistance from other state governments, civil society and private sectors all regulated by the SDGs and reviewed periodically by main world economic forefront bodies such as The World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other regional banks such as Asian Development Bank (ADB) that are already mentioned above in the first section about the funding mechanism.

In 2006 a few years after the reconstruction of their constitution which is also by the influence of the SDGs, the judicial system passed a new law that requires every political party in Timor Leste to nominate one woman for every group of four candidates at national level elections. At 2009 the effort in pushing women's participation in politics became more intense as another law was enacted for every *Suku* (Village) to have at least two reserved position for women and two for youth representatives, one for male and the other for female. Then in July of the same year, another law was made where it demanded a female candidate to stand in every election to win a village chief position in Timor Leste. All efforts made by the government under the SDGs points were perceived as an improvement as it is stated again by the Prime Minister in 2016 quoted in one of Dili's newsletters:

"The work we have been doing together has been extremely important and has improved the situation of both our people and our country" -Prime Minister Rui Maria Araujo in 2016

Not only that their Prime Minister is starting to feel satisfied with the assistance given by the UN through SDG, other influential actors such as Timor Leste's Director of the NGO Forum (FONGTIL) Arcenio Pereira, other government's influential partners such as Director of the Alola Foundation, Alzira Reis does sees such growth as a a positive improvement and that it's a sign that Timor Leste does have a chance to catch up with every aspects of the SDG including the gender equality aspects (Quintao 2016). However, not all these 'numeric' and 'normative' improvements bring significance to the grassroot level. SDGs funding through NGOs and other partnering countries to Timor Leste had been known to be wholesome and that the disbursement made by Timor Leste annually for their infrastructure and societies quality improvement had been perceived as success by many actors. The data can be refered in the Development Cooperation Report made by Timor Leste's Development Partnership Management Unit, a research team under their Ministry of Finance at 2014, uploaded and updated annually.

Main Analysis on Globalization and Culture in Timor Leste

In viewing how the processes of globalization affects culture, particularly in how Timor Leste's pursuit of SDGs is considered as a process of the globalization of certain values pertaining to gender equality, one must assess the gender-gap issue in Timor Leste as part of a larger issue. One would be remiss to ignore the influence of a deep-seated culture of patriarchy on Timorese way of life. In numerous researches exposing Timorese behaviors in regulating various formal structures that exist within their society, most have stated that each of the layered structures were prone to the practice of patriarchy. This patriarchy culture is said to be rooted since the time where the Portuguese, Japanese, and Indonesians had come to colonize the land. Patriarchy had persisted long after the colonizers have left the country. During the three different colonial periods, astounding numbers of Timorese women had fallen victim to sexual assault. The abuse had gone on for long periods of time that it had been normalized. Domestic violence was perceived to be normal by the Timorese people (UN Women 2018). From this information we can see how the society in the country had the tendency to disregard women. The act happens continuously, to the point that until now that it may be considered to be rooted as a culture.

Today, we can see that Timor Leste had not fully succeeded in constructing a less-patriarchal society and a proper, equal, political environment. This is caused by their customary laws that still have a huge influence in their daily life and practice. The customary law stands as Catholic churches still holds major influence over the society and government and that a large number of these churches still support a stronger patriarchal standpoint (Hutt 2016). Public messages sent by top Timorese

cleric regarding domestic violence and gender equality remains ambiguous. Proof of this ambiguity is shown on how Timor Leste's former Bishop Belo had shown support towards a domestic violence campaign initiated by the government and considered the issue important enough to warrant lending it his profile and moral authority, but on the other hand he later projected a message in a mass that wives are obliged to accept their positions and learn to 'submit' to their husbands (Gabrielson in Graydon 2016). The trends coming from the church gave an effect on how Timorese continue to treat women as the Church relation to both the government and grassroots society are strong. Although the government had succeeded in following the SDGs and women are now seated in important positions, their presence was merely seen as a symbol and as a ritual of power while the real decision makers in public life and in politics are primarily men (Niner 2011). Decisions made by these political bodies are still driven by influential male politicians who happens to sit in a position not so far away from their female leaders. In other words, female leaders with significant political performances remains beholden under their male political patrons (Niner 2011). Thus, many women parliamentarians are viewed merely as a token representatives forced on the Timorese by the quota system.

Further research came up with other supporting findings such as the fact that there have been low public interest shown when the UN and the government had demanded women to fill the 'Xefe Suku' position within the society. The women in the villages were not interested in taking those positions either so there had been random picks done by the previous chief of village and the people. After the election came to a result, the society also does not show any interest in how these women are performing (Cummins 2011).

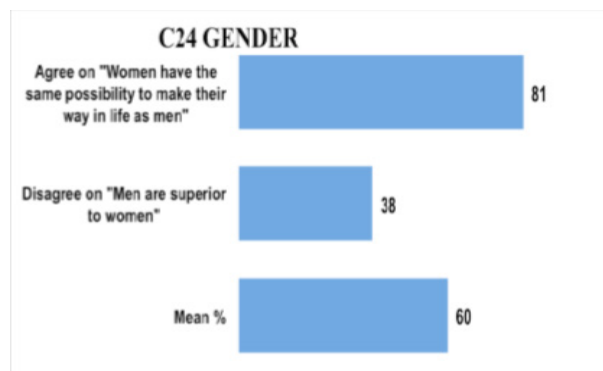


Figure 2

Source: Cultural Change Institute of Fletcher University

In addition, the graph above shows that even when there have been few changes on how the people perceive women starting in 2006, where there are at least 81% Timorese who agree that 'women indeed have the same possibility to make their way in life as men' and that they are able to handle political positions, we can still see that there are still at least 39% of Timorese agreeing to the statement of 'men is superior than women', 38% disagreeing while 23% held an intermediate position on the stance and this shows a consensus on the gender matter within the society (Basanez 2010). The 81% opinion gained is argued to be influenced by the SDG. Culture and information exchange happened between 'foreigners' who are mostly volunteers to the development of Timor Leste and the Timorese people itself that made it possible for the Timorese to give a more optimistic view to women in politics. While the 39% is argued to be the real believes that are rooted to the Timorese people. From the first two sections discussed and all the datas shown above we can see how the UN and US's efforts in pushing their gender equality agenda through SDGs as their globalization vehicle is faced with Catholic Church-driven traditional values upheld by the Timorese people which are contradictive to some extent. However, we can see that Timor Leste's government did

not really reject the SDG project but tries to keep on finding ways in implementing the SDG without having to erase or lose respect of the traditional value that are still highly valued within their society. The consequences of Timor Leste's actions is that the quota given for the women remains meaningless to the development of women in Timor Leste's grassroots society.

Considering the prevailing culture of patriarchy in Timor Leste, three main points can be made regarding the effects of globalization on culture. Firstly, that the introduction and subsequent attempt to entrench globalizing values in Timor Leste poses as a threat to the local people and their local culture. In accordance to the widely held belief of the homogenizing force of globalization on culture, globalization is regarded as a convergence to a common set of cultural traits and practices (Holton 2000). The logical consequence of this view is that globalization may be seen as a threat to the integrity of Timor Leste's largely conservative culture due to its tendency to conform culture towards uniformity, more often than not to Western and American values. This is why homogenization is often equivocated to Westernization of Americanization. In the case of Timor Leste, non-state actors such as the UN is the main driving force behind this convergence of values. The UN is an international organization which had been founded among whom by the United States, and over which –to this day– the United States still have great influence. In their attempt to fulfill SDGs as formulated by the UN, Timor Leste is inadvertently conforming to values which tends to skew more liberal values which are in no small part advocated by the United States. The American liberal values contradicts the widely observed conservative values in Timor Leste, largely rooted in religion. An example of this may be seen in how the SDGs as proposed by the UN endorses the type of gender equality which equalizes the position of men and women in politics, which Timor Leste's largely patriarchal culture stand opposed. In deciding to pursue the SDGs as formulated by the UN, Timor Leste may be considered exposed to Western values and their policies regarded as a material representation of the process of globalization, which in this case values promoted by the UN's SDGs is perceived as a globalizing popular culture threatening Timorese way of life.

Secondly, the processes of globalization in Timor Leste ultimately cannot be considered as following the patterns of homogenization. It is tempting to say that since Timor Leste has taken up pursuing SDGs, it stands testament to the ultimately homogenizing force of globalization. However, upon closer inspection, apart from the increased participation of women in the government, the larger Timorese culture of patriarchy has hardly experienced any change or convergence to the more liberal values brought on by globalization. Timor Leste's system of government is decidedly not secular and still deeply rooted in and greatly influenced by traditional and religious values. Timor Leste did not fully undergo a homogenization of values since the adoption of gender equality-oriented policies in their government is not merely based on the acceptance of the liberal values touted by globalization. Instead, there are other driving factors other than the homogenization of culture behind Timor Leste's policies, among which are economic reasons. By ratifying and enforcing policies which endorses the achievement of the UN's SDGs, Timor Leste has the opportunity to receive financial aid of considerable value from UN partners which they so needed. Financial aid which is made available through various world banks which endorses the pursuit of UN's SDGs and is advantageous especially for developing countries such as Timor Leste (Niner 2015). Timor Leste's commitments to the gender equality-related SDGs may be said to be motivated by economic interests, more so rather than by an obligation to ensure the human rights of their people as seen from the international organization theories about imposed order regimes incentives mentioned in the first section of the article.

Thirdly, the clash between Timor Leste's economic interests in pursuing SDGs and the dominating local culture of patriarchy creates a political and social condition which can only be defined as an effect of hybridization brought upon by globalization. Timor Leste's commitment to the implementation of SDGs, though based in no small part on their economic interests, has nevertheless impacted Timor Leste culture. The fact that a higher percentage of women in the government has been accepted is not something to be dismissed. However, instead of seeing this implementation as a wholesale convergence of Timorese culture to liberal values, it may be more aptly interpreted as the product of a hybridization process. In some respect, liberal values can be said to have been implemented in Timorese culture due to the acceptance of women in the parliament, albeit with a caveat: that the power that women has in government is reliant on a patron-client arrangement with the local religious leader (Graydon 2016). In order to exert any kind of influence or power in decision-making processes, women in positions of leadership in Timor Leste government must be the 'client' to a male religious leader 'patron', which in this relationship, the 'client' makes decisions and policy as instructed by their 'patrons'. This arrangement may be considered as a compromise between the globalizing values and traditional Timor Leste values – in other words, the effects of globalization on culture can be said to be a hybridizing process which creates a new, hybrid culture.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the view of globalization as having a hybridizing influence on culture is the most appropriate perspective with which to regard what is occurring in Timor Leste, and in other developing countries in general. Timor Leste has implemented policies to attain SDGs as proposed by the UN, itself a representation of globalizing values, but without completely being able to thoroughly shed contrasting traditional beliefs and values. Timor Leste continuously renews their national development strategies under supervision of the UN, who evaluates their achievements and whether or not the goals demanded by their partners are fulfilled in order to liquidate their financial aid. This process exposes Timor Leste people to globalizing or popular culture as endorsed by the UN and pushes them to adopt and implement it in their everyday lives. This shows that although globalization does tend to seek to homogenize and converge cultures, the impact and influence brought upon by its processes is not necessarily completely accepted or adopted nor is it completely rejected and opposed. Rather, it creates a situation in which both globalizing and traditional values coexist and are implemented in a hybrid culture.

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