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BALTHASAR KEHI AND LISA PALMER

Hamatak halirin

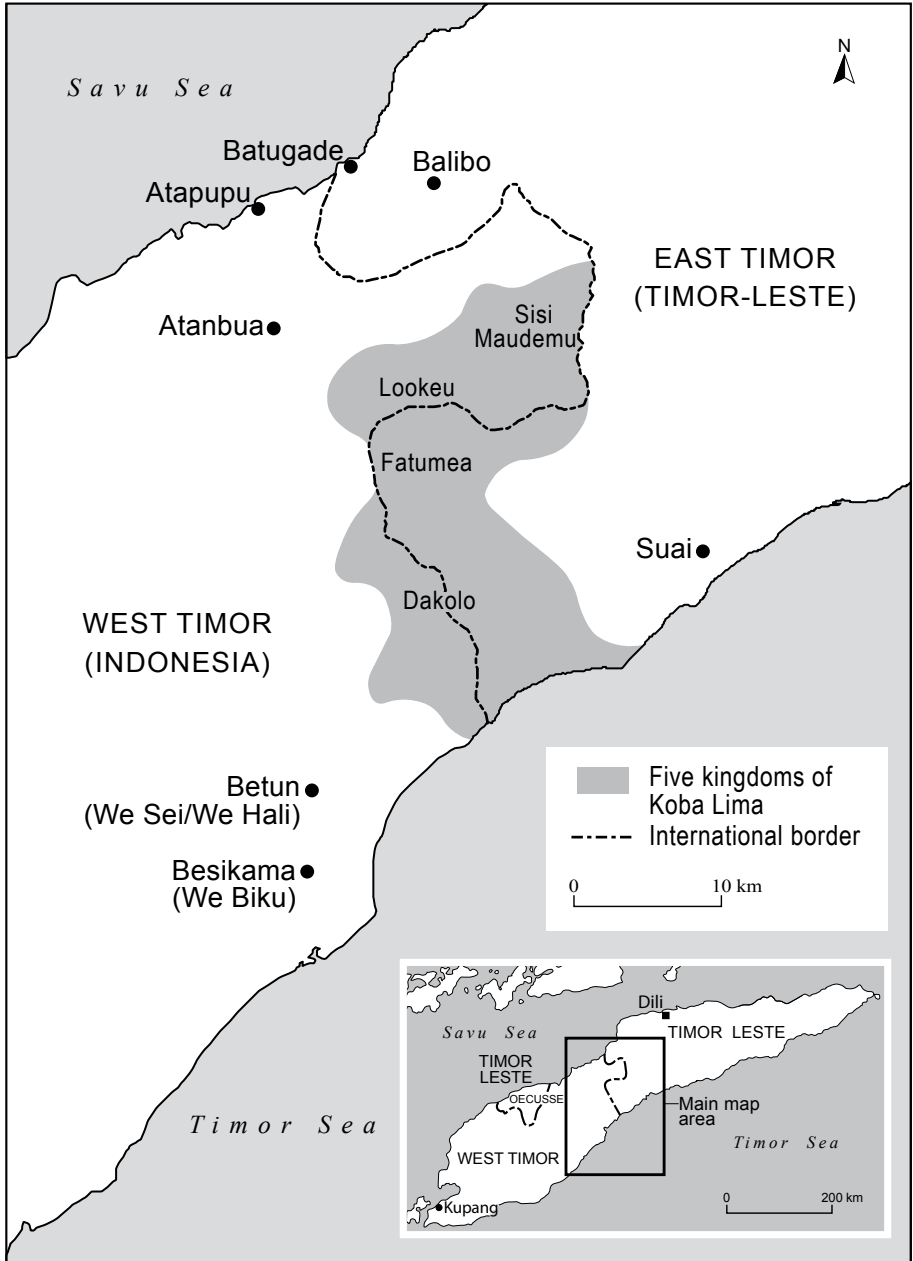
The cosmological and socio-ecological roles of water in Koba Lima, Timor

Introduction

Focussing on the Tetun speaking kingdoms of Koba Lima, an area straddling the borders of independent East Timor and Indonesian West Timor (see Map 1), this paper is an exploration of customary understandings of water and its centrality in the layers and nuances of local socio-ecological and cosmological thought, practices and experiences. Like many other eastern archipelagic societies, in the myth of creation of Koba Lima, it is said that in the beginning everything was water. Here, water is considered to be the mother, while fire is the father. Given the original undifferentiated unity of the world, in other contexts the mother is also said to be the stars and moon (with the latter known to reflect the image of the sacred banyan and bamboo back to the earth), and the father is the sun, the eternal light and fire. It is believed, we argue, that it is through the intermingling of water and fire that the spirit of life is transformed into life itself and eventually into death. Documenting this profoundly holistic, poetic, and many layered understanding of being is a contribution of distinctive insights to the literature concerning the socio-cosmic dualisms found at the heart of Timorese and other eastern archipelagic societies (Fox 1980). By tracing water's agency and presence in foundational dualisms such as male and female, sky and earth, wet and dry, hot and cool, light and darkness, day and night, we argue that while water can be located at one pole in a dualism, it is also a pervasive or holistic element which is central to both the expression of cosmological ideas and the understanding of life itself. It is also a 'metaphor for living' (Fox 1980:333). Within the schema

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Map 1. Five kingdoms of Koba Lima

of a 'cyclical movement between human and spiritual modes of existence' (Hicks 1996:614), water is seen by the people of Koba Lima as the mother, the critical life enabler, the most important element without which *matak malirin* (*matak* = newly green or sprouting, *malirin* = cool), referring to good health and productive life energy or life force of human beings, plants and animals, cannot be experienced. Water is the *matak inan malirin inan* (the mother of the greenness, the mother of coolness), that is, the mother of good health and productive life force or life energy (Vroklage 1953b:88, 97).

To make our argument, we trace the intermingling of the spirit world of life and death as it relates to several named springs connected to the ancient kingdoms of Koba Lima. We examine how the interdependent niches of life, death, and reproduction are maintained, and at times crossed, through careful attention to metaphorical boundary work; and we use this conceptual frame to unpack the hydronyms and meanings of the places we discuss. We then connect the mythic accounts and ritual practices told to us and carried out largely by men with the ritual practices of women and traditional midwives labouring at the cusp of life by the domestic hearth. What the boundary making, crossing, and at times intermingling between spring water, ritual, and birthing practices teaches us is the depth of interconnected relationships between people in Koba Lima and visible (*roman* or *loron roman*) and invisible (*kukun* or *kukun kalan*) forces and environments. This is a life which is different from what is comprehended through scientific or secular reason, a life which remains full of fascination, wonder, mystery, awe, and enchantment (Otto 1927:95-6; Ingold 2006) as it relates more to feeling (*horan*) and the inner world of experience (*laran* or *neon laran*) than to reason (*hanoin*) and the outer domain of experience (*liur* or *luan*) (Mulder 1978:15-8, 102-5).

The research process

In March 2011, the authors travelled with a group of Kehi's extended family to three water springs near the East/West Timor border and learnt about the water stories or hydronyms connected with these places. There had not been much change since Kehi last saw them in 1966. Two of these springs were in Oe Alas (the jungle of rattans), a 4 km long sacred forest which still remains intact in spite of the 25 years of acceleration of modernization and development programs during the New Order regime of President Suharto (Murtopo 1972). In the late afternoon and evening we met with 50 people from East and West Timor who had gathered together to talk with us (the group comprised male and female elders from the kingdoms of Lookeu and Dafala as well as Fatumea). We listened to them telling us the stories about those springs and the ceremonies connected to them. A pig was killed as an offering to the invis-

ible ‘custodians or owners of the springs’ (*we nain*) to ask for their permission before talking about the springs in a respectful and praising manner, a manner which is called in Tetun Los *taek no kneter*. We shared the meal together. The next day we continued our meeting with a small group, mainly the guardians (Nadus Seran Memik and others) of those springs, to tell us in more detail the histories of the springs. We closed our conversation with an offering, in the form a chicken to be slaughtered later, for the invisible ‘custodians or owners of the springs’. This is called closing the mouth and closing the door (*taka ibun* and *taka oda matan*) after the ritual of opening the mouth and the door (*loke ibun* and *loke oda matan*) to the sacred and enchanted realm.

The next evening we held a long meeting with Suri Burak Dato Alin Fatumea, the 82 year old *makoan* (‘master of sacred stories’) from Fatumea¹ in East Timor who had generously walked five long hours to meet with us. He was assisted by two young *makoan* of Fatumea and Lookeu, Nai Manek Aluman and Nai Manek Asuk. After dinner and a small rite involving sacred betel leaves (*takan tahan*) and areca nuts (*bua klaut*) we started listening to a story from 8pm to 4am. This sacred story of the Fatumea source or origin waters reached its peak around 3am when the ‘queen of stars’ appears (*fitun nain sae*) and the world comes to its perfect stillness, solemn silence, peace, and constellations (*rai nakmaus nakmatek*). The ‘queen of the stars’ is very significant in the history of the kingdoms of Koba Lima (Fatumea, Lookeu, Dakolo, Sisi and Mau Demu) especially of Fatumea, the origin place of the first human beings. This goes back to the presence of the first four human beings (three brothers and one sister) when:

<i>Rai sei klot.</i>	The world was still narrow
<i>Sei manu matan,</i>	still wide as the eye of the bird
<i>Sei bua klaut.</i>	and as the sliced areca nut.

And when:

<i>Feto seluk sei la iha</i>	Other women [except the sister] did not yet exist
<i>Rai sei dasan</i>	The world was still empty
<i>Uma sei la no klotan</i>	The rooms in the house still did not have walls
<i>To'os sei la no kladi.</i>	The fields still did not have boundaries. ²

The brothers were known as Lau Halek, Kehi Halek, Bau Halek, and the sister as Naba Halek. They were the sons and daughter of the enlightening ones: the

¹ Sometimes pronounced and spelt Fatumean.

² These last two lines are the metaphoric and poetic expression for physical and cultural nakedness, and for the non-existence of norms and rules, and for the unity or union of the divine and the non-divine, the above and the below (*leten no kraik*).

sun (*loro*) being the male deity, the moon and the stars (*fulan no fitun*) being female deities. Lau Halek and Kehi Halek died without wives and children. The older brother, Bau Halek, who was the first king of Fatumea, had no other choice but to marry his own sister, Naba Halek, to give birth to humanity which was still inseparable from divinity, when 'the deities were still humane and the humans divine'.³ The marriage between Bau Halek and his own and only sister Naba Halek shows that once upon a time 'the rooms in the house still did not have walls, the fields still did not have boundaries' (see above). But in order to marry her as the only woman in the world, he had to change his last name into Bau Nahak. The change of his last name shows that they are not from the same father. Their marriage after the change of his name, set the norms for the generations to come: 'the rooms of the house have walls, the field has the boundary' (*uma no klotan, to'os no kladik*). However, they did not have children to populate the world. Upset by her husband, Naba Halek returned to her parents up in the sky. From that moment on the ladder that connected the earth below and the sky above disappeared. The divine 'queen of the stars' (*fitun nain*) then came down to the earth after the middle of the night (around 3am when everything was in perfect stillness, constellations and peace) and slept with him (Bau Halek). Their marriage was blessed with many children, male and female, to populate the world. That is why the sacred story of the source waters, the origin springs, of the first We Sei (male) and We Hali (female) and their sacred act of life-generating is to be told only in a respectful and praising manner when the 'queen of the stars' appears. Following his telling of the story of the sacred source or origin waters, the master of the sacred stories ritually closed his revelation by replacing the lid on his sacred betel-nut basket. This is likewise a ritual act of praising and respect, that is, the act of:

Didin hikar, sara hikar
Nai Lulik Waik, Nai Manas Waik.
Nee leten ba, nee aas ba
Tan ita hakur tian, ita sakar tian
Bei sian ukun, Bei sian dalam:
'uma no klotan, to'os no kladik'.

Putting back the wall, putting back the curtain
of the deity of the great sacred, the deity of great heat
up there in the sky, up there in the highest.
Because we have violated, we have gone against

³ 'Da die Götter menschlicher noch waren, waren Menschen göttlicher' ('Here the Divine was still human, and the human was still divine') and prior to 'Die entgötterte Natur (that is prior to "the disenchantment of nature")' (Schiller 1958:35).

The rule of our ancestors, the way of our ancestors: 'the rooms have walls, the field has the boundary',
 [that is, we have gone over the walls and the boundaries of most sacred and enchanted world].

The next afternoon we had a meeting with ten old women sharing with us their wisdom and knowledge about pregnancy, childbirth, and the one-month period of intensive care for the mother and the baby after the birth, the so-called 'sitting by the fire' (*hatuka hai*). During this time the baby is not allowed to be taken outside the house until the *hosai-lawarik oan* rite, that is, the rite of bringing out of the house the baby for the first time and presenting him/her to the whole community, during which time he/she is ritually blessed with sprinkles of sacred water in order to grow in *matak malirin* (good health and productive life energy). We then closed the previous evening's discussion with the ritual slaughter of a pig and shared a communal meal cooked by the men. Following this we underwent a ritual purification and empowerment ceremony called *kaba* in which the crunched betel leaves and areca nuts paste was ground up and pressed into our upper abdomen (heart) and the crown of our heads (where it was blown on) before we (and the surrounding environment) were sprinkled with sacred water infused with drops of the sacrificed pig's blood. The *kaba* was intended to be enabling and restorative—making us free (*mamuk*) from attack by dangerous essences and allowing us, and the space around us, to be full with *matak malarin* (good health and productive life energy). The *kaba* was also intended to open one's heart (*loke hirus*) and to open one's mind (*loke neon*) to the *matak malirin*, that is to think and feel clearly, to have a peaceful and clear mind (*neon mon*, where *mon* refers to a clear pool of water) and a clean heart (*laran mos*).

What follows is an account of these days and the profound wisdom shared with us during the period.

The political and historical geography of the original Koba Lima

Koba Lima are Tetun Terik or Tetun Belu or Tetun Los words, the language spoken in different parts of East Timor and West Timor especially along the borders, which literally means Five (Lima) Baskets (Koba). A *koba* is used for (1) putting in betel nuts, silver and gold coins used as offerings to deities as well as to ancestors and other invisible spirits (such as the custodians or owners of the land, water, or forest) during religious ceremonies at the main pillar in sacred houses, at sacred springs or sacred lands, (2) putting betel nuts and lime to respectfully and amicably welcome guests, (3) putting money, such as silver coins or gold coins for respectful and amicable exchanges during

the traditional marriage and other communal ceremonies. For people of Koba Lima in both West Timor (*Loro Toba*: *loro* = sun, *toba* = setting or sleeping) and East Timor (*Loro Sae*: *loro* = sun, *sae* = rise), *koba* (along with *tais* or hand-woven textiles) play an important role in strengthening respectful and amicable relationships between individuals and between communities, and between the communities and the invisible spirits (deities, spirits of the ancestors, spirits of water, land, and forests as well as mountains).

Symbolically and historically, Koba Lima refers to a sacred geography involving a coalition of five Tetun speaking mountain kingdoms in the areas along the borders of East Timor and Indonesian West Timor. These kingdoms are Fatumea, Dakolo, Lookeu, Sisi and Mau Demu. Initially there was only the kingdom of Fatumea, then a coalition of three was formed by three brothers called Uma Tolu (*uma* = house, *tolu* = three) or Koba Tolu (but better known as Uma Tolu) consisting of Fatumea, Lookeu and Dakolo.⁴ Sisi and Mau Demu are wife-taking sacred houses (*feto sawa*) for Fatumea, Lookeu and Dakolo who relate to each other as *husar* (literally connected by the umbilical cord) or *maun-alin* (older brother-younger brother). Fatumea, Lookeu and Dakolo are wife-giving sacred houses (*uma mane*) for Sisi and Mau Demu. A political coalition of Koba Lima was then formed based on wife-giver/wife-taker marriage relationships. Unlike the clan sacred house (*uma lulik*) of the four other kingdoms, the sacred house of Fatumea has remained at the same place on top of a red rock (*fatu* = rock, *mea* or *mean* = red) from the beginning. This sacred house is called *uma metan Fatumea* (*uma* = house, *metan* = black) and *uma kiik nakroma* (*uma* = house, *kiik* = small, *nakroma* = bright).

The sacred houses of the other kingdoms have been moved to different places due to wars and the colonial division of Timor. The sacred house of Lookeu, for example, has been moved to five different locations. The first (the original) and the second ones are in Portuguese Timor or the present day East Timor (that is in Foho Lor Lookeu and in Hali Lulik, the origin of Hali Lulik in West Timor), the third, fourth, and the fifth are in West Timor (Wani Kroti, Au Ren and Batulu). But from time to time the people of Lookeu go to the site of the original sacred house in Foho Lor Lookeu for communal ceremonies. The largest kingdom in terms of the size of its land and the number of its people is Lookeu, which consisted of territories ruled by nine *dato* (the nobles below *liurai* = king) before the colonial division of Timor. The second largest kingdom is Dakolo. When Timor was divided by the Dutch and the Portuguese in 1859 Fatumea, a half of Lookeu, and a half Dakolo remained

⁴ Grijzen 1904; Pélissier 1996. In Grijzen (1904) Lookeu is spelled Lokeoe, while in Pélissier (1996) it is spelled Loquéo. We consider the correct spelling to be Lookeu. In Tetun Los, *loo* = settlement, Lookeu is an abbreviated version of 'Lookakeu' meaning 'settlement of pine trees'. Other nearby places are called Loofoun ('new settlement'), Loonuna (or Loonunak = 'settlement of the *nunak* tree'), Loofehan ('settlement of the flat land') and Lootebok ('settlement of the wooden plate').

with the Portuguese Timor, while the other half of Lookeu, the other half of Dakolo, the whole Sisi and Mau Demu became part of the Dutch Timor and in 1945 Indonesia (when Indonesia won its independence from the 350 years of Dutch colonization). The land of Sisi and Mau Demu is called Fatuk (rock) Mau Demu—a stunningly beautiful mountain near Lamaknen and near the border with the District of Bobonaru in East Timor.

The colonial imposed division has been disastrous for the people of Koba Lima and the wound of this forced division remains unhealed. Wars have scattered the people of Koba Lima to different places both in East Timor and West Timor. For example, a village (*suco*) in the subdistrict of Tilomar (Tilumaar or Tilunmaar, which was part of the kingdom of Dakolo), East Timor, is called Mau Demu and a sub-village (*aldeia*) in the subdistrict of Suai, East Timor, is called Lookeu, and a village (Indonesian: *desa*) in Besikama, West Timor is called Loo Foun because when the people of Lookeu fled and settled there they named it Loo Foun (new settlement). With the help of the Bunak people from Bobonaro (Bobonaru) in Portuguese Timor, the king and people of the kingdom of Fialaran invaded and defeated the kingdoms of Sisi and Mau Demu which were the neighbour of the kingdom of Fialaran in the north of Belu. After three years of war (1914-1917) the defeated kings and their families and people then fled to and settled in the territory of Dakolo in Dutch Timor which is now in the south of Belu District (Indonesian: Kabupaten Belu). This part of Dakolo is inhabited by people of Dakolo, Sisi and Mau Demu who identify themselves as people of Koba Lima. This territory is now called 1. Koba Lima Subdistrict (Indonesian: Kecamatan Koba Lima) consisting of five villages, 2. East Koba Lima Subdistrict (Indonesian: Kecamatan Koba Lima Timur) consisting of four villages in the district of Belu. Although many of the people of Koba Lima live in different parts of Timor due to war and displacement, they do not forget their roots and from time to time they go to their sacred houses, springs and the graves of their ancestors to pay their respect and bring offerings. The particular word in Tetun for bringing offerings and paying respect is *hanai* (from *halo* = to make, *nai* = deity) meaning to praise the deities of the great sacred and the great heat (*nai lulik waik*, *nai manas waik*) present in the sacred house, in the sacred springs, sacred lands, and also in the graves of the ancestors.

Fatumea: The origin and the transformation of the world

As discussed above, Koba Lima was formed as the coalition of five kingdoms with Fatumea as the oldest and the most sacred kingdom. The four kingdoms regard Fatumea as the origin, the place of the first people (*rai oan*: literally 'the first children of the land'). People of Koba Lima (Fatumea, Lookeu, Dakolo, Sisi and Mau Demu) also believe that Fatumea is the origin place of the first

human being, not only of Koba Lima but also of the whole world. There is a familiar lyric among people in Koba Lima about Fatumea as the origin of Uma Tolu and Koba Lima and of humanity of various colours. The lyric goes like this: 'the yellow bird was laying an egg on the slope of Fatumea (red rock), frightened by the thunder she cracked her egg'.⁵ Symbolically, it has a two-fold meaning. The first is the birth of the Uma Tolu, and then of Koba Lima from the same mother, Fatumea. The second meaning is the mythical meaning, that is, the birth of human race that spreads to different parts of the world in different colours and features. As the world was being transformed by the creation of these features, there was still much to be worked out, many things that needed to be negotiated and settled among human beings and animal beings. While space does not allow us to describe this process of negotiation and settlement here in detail, four critical events are sketched below.

Firstly, as the waters retracted and the mountain peaks emerged there was an ongoing tension between the beings of this emerging world (*rai klaran*) and the beings already inhabiting a world of water. At first the 'custodians or owners of the sea' (*tasi nain*), the *Nai Bei* ('great ancestors') and 'custodians or owners of the water' (*we nain*) manifest here as people with crocodile tails, refused to make space (*sia la fo fatin ida*). But in order that the sea would give way and provide pathways for the spread of human beings an exchange was 'negotiated'⁶ and the leaders of *tasi nain*, Lin Berek and Mali Berek, were decapitated and their heads brought to Fatumea for a celebration at the ritual centre known as Sadan Wehali Molin We Hali, Sadan We Sei Molin We Sei. The 'custodians or owners of the sea' then made space, the waters began to recede, pathways and places were created for the first people to populate. In exchange, the first human beings promised to forever praise and respect the 'custodians of the sea' through a web of complicated ritual practices and perpetual offerings stretching from the mountains to the sea. *Nai Bei* is the respected name for crocodiles (*lafæk*) as they are the 'great ancestors'.

Secondly, these origin waters faced an additional obstacle in the form of an impenetrable rock face to the north. While the waters could flow south via three rivers to the south male sea (*tasi mane*), the pathway to the north sea (*tasi fetu*) was blocked by a rock face. A small rice bird (*manu hare* called *lamin*) appeared and pecked a hole in the rock face allowing the waters to flow north via three rivers to the sea, Mota Hali Boe or Mota Talau, Mota We Merak, and Mota Bauk Ama, decreasing the water flow to the south and enabling the appearance of the plains (*rai fehan*) on the south coast which is, after the imposed division of Timor, in East Timor (Suai and We Keke) and in West Timor (Laran, Besikama, Betun, We Bria Mata, We Oe or We Biku,

⁵ 'Manu modok natolu Fatumea lolon, rona kukur tarutu nuduk roe tolu.'

⁶ Decapitation was only possible with the heroic acquiescence of the *tasi nain* (Lin Berek ho Mali Berek fo isin = Lin Berek and Mali Berek gave their bodies).

and Haitimuk). The rock face at the entrance to the female north sea is called Fatuk Lamin Toti (literally 'rice-bird pecked rock face') (Grijzen 1904:8-10) which is beautifully visible from the top of the mount Fatumea called Bei Ulu Molik (literally 'the bald head of the grand ancestor').⁷

Thirdly, the 'custodian of the tracks' (*inuk nain*) and the 'custodian of the path' (*dalan nain*), named Bei Leki Nai and Bei Nai Berek, are entreated by 'the deity of the great sacred, the deity of the great heat' (*nai lulik waik, nai manas waik*) through the previously mentioned first king of Fatumea, Bau Nahak (Bau Halek),⁸ to plant two fast growing species of tree called *ai donu* and *ai kala* across the emerging lands, thereby stabilising the earth, providing fodder and enabling fire. In these understandings water is female, the purveyor of life and unity, it gives life to vascular land plants and these plants make fire possible. It is fire that ultimately transforms life. On the other hand, vascular land plants such as *au* (bamboo) and other spring associated trees and plants, such as the banyan (*ai hali*), water tree (*beko* and *ai-we*), pandanus (*hedan*), preserve water drawing it to the surface and/or preventing erosion.

Fourthly, the first human beings also had to negotiate their ecological niches with other animal beings especially goats (*bibi*) and buffalo (*karau metan* or *karau Timor*) (Therik 2004:251). At one time people ate grass, goats and buffalo ate corn. Yet this made no sense to the first people as buffalo and goats had big strong stomachs and there was little corn. People meanwhile had delicate small stomachs and there was so much grass. A meeting between the people and the animals was called and the problem was discussed. The people suggested that if they swapped food sources each could be better satisfied and in addition the rampant growth of grass could be controlled by the healthy appetites of the animals. The animals sounded their approval and the exchange was completed.

What these transformative instances make clear are the processes through which, after the emergence of Fatumea, the world was (and continues to be) transformed through the negotiation of actual and metaphorical socio-ecological niches and boundaries. As we will see below, in this ongoing negotiation of place and space, water is a critical enabler and a *conditio sine qua non*, an essential condition. Its metaphorical associations with blood and milk ensuring that it is through water that the boundaries separating categories, even places and spaces, are weakened and are ultimately able to be exchanged (Hicks 2004:39, 102-8).

⁷ Lewis (1982:66-71) writing about the origins of the world for the Tana Wai Brama in East Flores notes that the agents in this transformation are crocodiles, eels, prawns and birds.

⁸ In prayers asking for rain in the kingdoms of Wilaen and Dafala (wife-takers of Lookou) the name of Bau Nahak is mentioned many times as the king of the wind – *anin* (wind) Bau Nahak that brings rain (Vroklage 1952a:56, 89, 93).

Spring water and the spirit world of Koba Lima

In the Tetun speaking areas of Timor (especially in Koba Lima in East and West Timor), people believe that there are many deities – male and female deities. Deities are called *maromak* (the enlightening ones) which are associated with the sun, moon and stars.⁹ The sun (and by original association fire) is associated with the male deity, while the moon and the stars (and by original association water) with the female deities. Fire is associated with maleness (*hai nee mane*); water, including rain, with femaleness (*we nee fetu*).¹⁰ Thus *maromak* (one who gives light or enlightens) or *nai maromak* (the king or queen of enlightenment) refers to both male and female deities. The female deity is called *ina maromak* (the enlightening mother), the male deity *ama maromak* (the enlightening father). It is believed at the beginning there was the unity of the above and the below, between the sky above as the upper lip and the earth below as the lower lip: *uluk leten no kraik sei ida, leten no kraik sei too malu, lalean no raiklaran sei too malu* ('once upon a time the above and the below were still one, still connected to each other, the sky above and the earth below were still connected to each other').

In this cosmological setting, spring water has particularly important functions and symbolic associations. People carve sacred wooden statues (*ai tos*) which are male and female, representing the male and female deities as a couple: *ina maromak, ama maromak* (the enlightening mother, the enlightening father) *mak fo we, mak fo moris, mak fo matak mak fo malirin ba ita* (who give us water, who gives us life, who gives us good health and productive life energy). These statues are placed in front of large sacred banyan trees at the head of sacred springs and as we will see later the first offering to be made at the consecration of communal sacred houses is made at the sacred spring prior to the celebration, followed by the sprinkling of this holy water taken from the sacred spring at the sacred house celebration itself (Neonbasu 2005:237, 239). As it is green and cool as well as fertile and life flourishing, the environment around springs, pools, lakes or along river banks is seen as *matak malirin nakonu* (full of good health and productive life energy) (Grimes 1993:174-5, 194-7). In Koba Lima, as with other localities across the region, particular water bodies are considered critical sites for transformation, communication

⁹ Vroklage 1953b:136-9. It is salient to note here that the Austronesian speaking Waima'a and Nauteti and Papuan speaking Makassae and Fataluku populations in far eastern Timor all refer to divinity as Sun-Moon or Moonsun, while the Austronesian speaking Kemak refer to the 'Male Sun' and 'Female Sun' (McWilliam and Traube 2011).

¹⁰ Traube (1986) working with the Mambai and Forman (1980) working with the Makasae in East Timor, asserted that rain is believed to be fertilising male semen which transforms into milk on the land. However, the people of Koba Lima consider rain to be an essentially female substance emanating from and rising up to the sky with the *iss ho beran* (breath and energy) of the land (*ina maromak*) before falling back to the earth as rain (Rodemeier 2009; Palmer n.y.).

and exchange between the visible and invisible worlds.¹¹

Several times a year, depending on the signals read by the *makoan* ('master of the sacred stories') or *lia nain* ('custodian of the sacred words'), people go to sacred springs to make small offerings in the form of the best parts of a cooked animal's meat and rice (usually the best rice, that is black or red rice or fox-tail millet or sorghum) and betel nut to 'the custodian or owner of the water' (*we nain*). Usually there is a stone altar near the sacred springs where offerings are made. After prayers and offerings, people, and also animals and plants, such as rice, millet, corn, beans, sorghum and others, are blessed with holy water drawn from the spring by way of sprinkling the water, usually using a particular small leafy branch of a plant called *klirin* (which means 'making cool' and which grows near water and is evergreen) on the people's head, and on top of the animals or fields. This process will *hamatak halirin* (bring good health and productive life energy) to all those concerned, as well as preventing divine and ancestral curses, condemnation and death, and chasing away malevolent spirits. Thus it is water and its powers of cooling greenness which defuse the destructive powers present in both the visible and invisible worlds (within individuals, communities and environments) and enable these to be transformed into good health and productive energies.

Crossing boundaries: The work of hydronyms

Agents of transformation: We Lulik, We Bukurak, We Biku, We Hali and We Sei

In Fatumea there is one spring called We Lulik at the top of the Bei Ulu Molik ('the bald head of the grand ancestor') mountain (around 3600 feet (1252 metres) above sea level). The spring is believed to be connected with the sea as its waters decrease during the low tide of the ocean, and are full during the high tide. It emerged first when all else was sea. This is the most sacred spring for the people of Koba Lima. It has a particular sacred name, but because of its sacredness and because the respect for and fear of its great sacredness and great heat, its name can only be mentioned at those rare times when community sacred offerings are made.

We Bukurak (*buku* = a dark colour, *rak* = blood), is another sacred spring at Fatumea, where the spirits of the dead and the living enter and exit from this world (*raiklaran*). It is in the rainforest called Alas Bei Laran (literally 'the forest of the heart of the ancestors') on the slope of the Bei Ulun Molik mountain. What happens in the spring water is an exchange of blood between the newly born (through the blood of life) and the blood which leaves the bodies

¹¹ Palmer 2011, n.y.; Hicks 1996, n.y.; Traube 1986:185-6; Forth 1998; Rodemeier 2009; Boulan Smit 1998:110-1, 124; Lewis 1982:77-8; Molnar 1994:265; Langton 2006.

of the dead several days after death (the blood of death). Hence this water is the place of transfer between life and death, the souls pass in and out transferring their blood in the water, the ultimate cosmic exchange (in the underworld male and female intermingle). Although the water of We Bukurak is not drinkable, it is sacred water. It has a yellow and red colour that looks like blood. The story was told (with respect mixed with fear) to us thus:

<i>We Bukurak</i>	We Bukurak
<i>Ita moris husi nia</i>	We are born from her
<i>Itakan ina niakan raan</i>	She is our mother's blood
<i>Raan iha mak ita iha</i>	Where there is blood there is life
<i>Moris s tuir We Bukurak</i>	Birth follows We Bukurak
<i>Moris mos tuir nia</i>	Death also follows her path
<i>Ita hotu hotu sai</i>	We all emerge and die following her
<i>no lakon mos tuir nia</i>	path
<i>Hosi We Bukurak ne</i>	From We Bukurak
<i>Sai ema hotu hotu</i>	Everyone emerges
<i>Metan, mutin, makerek</i>	Black, white, coloured.

We Bukurak also has a metaphorical and symbolic meaning. It refers to menstruation which is called *ran mies* (unused and dull blood) or *ran tur fulan* (literally 'blood of moon sitting') or *tais kador* (literally 'dirty cloth') (Vroklage 1952a:429) and the blood that comes from the mother when she gives birth. It refers to life. It also refers to death, to the blood that comes out from the dead body. Here We Bukurak are disguised sacred words (*lia fafalun*) used for the sake of politeness and respect.¹²

In Fatumea there is another named spring We Biku (*biku* = does not flow or spread or piling up). Although it is a sacred spring, it is less sacred compared to We Lulik on the top of the Bei Ulun Molik mountain. It has a different kind of sacredness:

<i>We Biku</i>	We Biku
<i>Nee ita hotu hotu niakan</i>	Belongs to us all
<i>Ita hotu hotu</i>	All of us
<i>Biku iha nia</i>	Are piled up there.

¹² These transformations of life and death enabled through water are complemented by the actions of the invisible *rai oan* (the first child of the land) whose role it is literally to end life and make space for new beings. A descendent of the *rai oan*, known as the *nai uma kukun* (the king of the house of the invisible ancestors), guards the sacred house known as *uma metan rai oan* (*uma* = house, *metan* = black, *rai* = land, *oan* = child). This is the *uma kukun* where live the invisible first ancestors (*bei kukun sia*).

From this origin spring as the eternal mother, the eternal life-generating and life-bearing mother, we get two more springs:¹³ We Sei, where the water flows through bamboo (*au*) and falls to the ground (male) and We Hali, the water where the woman sits like the banyan (*hali*) roots (female). More importantly, We Hali and We Sei are poetically and respectfully disguised or wrapped words (*lia fafalun*) for female and male genitals both of which are called the sacred ones (*lulik oan*). We Sei is male because it is also associated with the way men urinate (while standing) and the penis, We Hali with female because it is also associated with the way women urinate (sitting down) and female genitals. *We sei* and *we hali* are sacred or holy because without them life-generating or life-giving and life-transformation activity is impossible. They are sometimes called 'the place of life-giving' (*buat moris fatin*) or 'the tree of life' (*buat moris hun*) or 'the very essence of our being' (*buat isin lolon*). Because they are the essence of life or life-giving entities, they are sacred and are treated with solemnity or praise and respect. These life-giving *we sei we hali* are rooted in or originate from the eternal We Sei We Hali which are seen as *itakan hun* ('our roots'). The interaction between *we sei* and *we hali* is not just the Latin *copula carnis* or *actus carnalis* and *actus eroticus* and *amor erotica*, but also and more importantly the mystical and spiritual union of two little sacred ones (*lulik oan*) and their whole beings. It is an act of *matak malirin* that generates life and productive life force, good health, love, fertility and happiness. It is an *actus humanus* (human act), *actus divinus* (divine act) and *actus cosmologicus* (cosmological act), an *amor humanus*, *amor divinus* and *amor cosmologicus* (a human love, divine love, and a cosmological love):

We Hali, lihun nee fetu
We Sei, sei nee mane

We Hali na mamar we sei
We lihun mesan dei la dadi
We Sei-We Hali, foin dadi
 generates life
We Biku sai We Hali-We Sei

We Hali, the pool is female
 We Sei, the flowing down water (like from the waterfall) is male
 The female entices the male
 Water pools alone cannot generate life
 The encounter between We Sei-We Hali
 From We Biku comes We Hali-We Sei

It is interesting to note that people in Koba Lima use *we sei* to refer to man in general (male genitals in particular), *we hali* to woman in general (female genitals in particular), that husband and wife are seen as *we sei we hali*. It is clear here that acts of life-giving and life-nourishing involve water. We Sei in this case is male, associated also with bamboo (that symbolizes the penis) and,

¹³ Therik (2004:239) records a different version of the sacred story of the earth as told by Piet Tahu Nahak who makes mention female water/spring (*we hali*) and male water/spring (*we sei*) as 'the source of the upbringing' (*foin nia ha'ak wa'i mata*) or consciousness.

as explained below, the ultimate male origin, fire. As a male and female pair, We Sei and We Hali are symbolic representations of the transformation of life made possible by intermingling of the spirit of life (water) with fire. Fire is commonly made by the vigorous rubbing of a sharp slender (male) piece of bamboo across a hole carved into the middle of a semi-sphere (female) piece of bamboo which has been filled with a ball of shaven bamboo fibre. As the fibres ignite in underbelly of the female bamboo, it is this visible eye of fire (*hai matan*) which transforms into life itself:

<i>We iha tiha</i>	We have water
<i>Au iha tiha</i>	We have bamboo
<i>Hai la iha</i>	But we have no fire
<i>We tau ba au (feto no mane)</i> (male and female intercourse)	Putting water into bamboo
<i>We feto</i>	Water is female
<i>Hai mane manas</i>	The hot fire is male.

Space does not allow us to discuss the connection between We Biku, We Sei We Hali in the highland of Fatumea with the kingdom of We Biku We Sei We Hali in the lowland plains of Betun, Besikama and Kaminasa in West Timor and Suai Loro and Suai Kamanasa in East Timor (compare Francillon 1967; Therik 2004). But a few lines need to be written about this connection. According to the master of the sacred story of Fatumea, Suri Burak Dato Alin Fatumea (23 March 2011) and other elders of Fatumea and Lookeu, the great Timorese kingdom of We Hali originated from Fatumea:

We Sei We Hali are originally in Fatumea. Later people from Fatumea took water from We Sei We Hali in Fatumea in a bamboo cylinder with a branch of the banyan (*hali*) tree in Fatumea, and brought them to the flat land. While pouring the water into the ground and planting the banyan branch, they said: 'We Sei...ee...ee....We Hali...ee...eee.... These lands will no longer be covered by the tide and the flood.' And they remained there and named the place We Sei We Hali.¹⁴

A traditional invocation of the centre of the kingdom of We Sei We Hali in West Timor, as recorded by Tom Therik (2004) refers to Fatumea as the origin of We Sei We Hali, that is, as the primeval origin place of the first human being and 'the first place to dry' (*maran uluk*):

¹⁴ 'We Sei We Hali iha Fatumea. Ikus mai ema hosi Fatumea lori we au bonun ida no hali hakon ida nodi ba fehan. Too fehan ba sia tolo we iha au bonun nee ba rai, no kuda hali delun nee nodi temi naake: "We Sei...ee...ee...We Hali...ee...eee.... Tasi la sae ona, meti la sae ona." Ema sia nee hela iha iha fehan We Sei We Hali fehan nian'.

<i>As bei sia, tua no nurak</i>	Oh ancestors, young and old
<i>Ah Fatumea ee Marlilu Haholek</i>	oh Fatumea, Marlilu Haholek
<i>Uma metan sia ee uma lulik sia</i>	the black houses, the sacred houses
<i>Bei sia iha kukun kalan,</i>	ancestors who are in the dark and night
oh enlightening mother (female deity),	
<i>Ah ina maromak ama maromak</i>	enlightening father (male deity). ¹⁵

According to the people of Fatumea, following the separation of the world 'above' and 'below' (*leten no kraik fae malu*), the highlands of Fatumea emerged first, with the lowlands (*fehan*) emerging as a result of the descent of peoples from Fatumea. These people known as '*inuk nain*' and '*dalan nain*' (see above) ritually opened up the river valleys enabling the sea to descend. According to the people of Fatumea, the descendents of these ancestors remain in the lowlands in both West Timor and East Timor today where they continue to ritually guard the coastal plains ensuring the sea and the sacred ancestral rulers (*Nai Bei*, the honorific name for crocodiles) do not make a return to the ritual centre of Fatumea.

Return to the source: Springs and the consecration of Uma Lulik (sacred houses)

In the kingdoms of Fatumea and Lookeu, as in the three other kingdoms of Koba Lima, the largest offering at the most sacred springs takes place only once every twenty five years along with the community celebration of their sacred house called *dahur uma lulik* that lasts for three weeks. The last community celebration of the sacred house of Lookeu took place in Lookeu of West Timor in November 1992 and was preceded by the biggest offering and celebration at Lookeu's most sacred spring, We Lulik or We Uas (*uas*=the original spring), in Foho Lor Lookeu, in East Timor. *Dahur uma lulik* Fatumea took place in 2010 and around 40 cattle and buffalos, more than 100 pigs, and countless chickens were slaughtered, during this celebration, preceded by the offerings and celebration at the most sacred spring, other sacred springs, sacred lands, forests, stones, hills as well as trees, and ancestral graves. It is only during this celebration that the sacred objects of the ancestors (*bei siakan lulik*) ordinarily kept inside the sacred house, are displayed to the wider community. They belong to the whole sacred house community, the dead and living as well as the lands, waters and mountains (Vroklage, 1953a:415, 478). Here we focus on the offerings and celebrations made around the most sacred spring, and the holy water which is carried in two green bamboo cylinders (*au bonun*)

¹⁵ A sacred story called *Rai Lian* (Language of the Earth) told by Sam Kehik Seran refers to Fatumea five times in one page (Therik, 2004:248).

covered with a special hand woven textile (*tais*).¹⁶

We take as an example, the offering and celebration at Lookeu's sacred spring in 1992, one week prior to the sacred house celebration and two weeks prior to the community blessing with holy water to mark the end of the sacred house celebration or feast. One week before the opening of the sacred house celebration in Lookeu, West Timor, at least two hundred people, men and women, young and old, of the Lookeu kingdom in East Timor and West Timor, gathered together at Lookeu's most sacred spring called We Uas in Foho Lor Lookeu, East Timor, for a sacred water ritual and offerings. They were there for two nights and two days. Thirty pigs and more than one hundred chickens were killed for the offering and celebrations around the spring, the site of the first sacred house of Lookeu, and site of the first ancestral graves. The activities prior to and after the offerings were made included cleaning up the areas around the sacred spring, storytelling, prayers, singing and dancing, preparation of meat and other foods for the offerings. After midnight around 3am when the 'queen of the stars' (*fitun nain*) appeared, the cooked food along with betel-nut offerings were placed on baskets called *hane matan* and were offered to the invisible owners of the sacred spring, the invisible owners of the sacred land and the ancestors by the *lia nain* ('custodian of the words') coupled with prayers. Following this the food and meat as well as the people were sprinkled with holy water (*we lulik*). Water was taken by the *lia nain* from the surface of the sacred spring and put into two bamboo cylinders (*au bonun*) and covered with woven cloth (*tais*), and placed on the altar made from stone at the head of the spring. This rite is called 'taking the top of sacred water' (*kuru we fohon*). Before the water was taken from the spring a poetic prayer was chanted by the *lia nain* in which *matak malirin* is repeatedly asked for.¹⁷ The following day the sacred water in the two bamboo cylinders were carried by two young and strong men dressed in sacred heirloom ornaments to the spring called We Onu (*we* = water, *onu* = plants that look like small bamboo which grow only in swamps) near the site of the current sacred house of Lookeu in West Timor. The bamboo cylinders filled with sacred water were then placed at the small altar made of rocks at the head of the spring next to two wooden statues of male and female deities (*ai tos*). Several people stayed there to guard the water until the last night of the sacred house celebration. A week later the celebration at the sacred house of Lookeu started. All people from the kingdom of Lookeu who live anywhere within or outside the territory of the kingdom came to the sacred house bringing with them pigs, buffalos, cattle, rice, betel nuts, cloth, drums,

¹⁶ Likewise the Balinese *Agama Tirtha* or 'Religion of Water' centres on the acquisition and dispersal of sacred water carried in sacred bamboo cylinders (known as *sujung*).

¹⁷ Vroklage 1953a:521-5. Vroklage recorded a rite '*hamulak ba oras kuru we fohon*' from Lassiolat which is very similar to that of Lookeu and other Koba Lima kingdoms.

and other things for the celebration which lasted for three weeks.

In the afternoon of the last day of the celebration of the sacred house, around four hundred people went from the sacred house of Lookeu to We Onu (one kilometre away) where the bamboo cylinders filled with holy water were still being guarded. Again two young and strong men walked in a procession with the crowd led by women beating their drums and men beating the gongs and singing and shouting. On the arrival at the We Onu spring, people danced and sang accompanied by the beating of drums and gongs around the spring. After a special prayer, the two young men carried the holy water in the bamboo cylinders, followed by the people in procession.¹⁸ At the sacred house more people were waiting for the arrival of the sacred water, singing poems, dancing and beating of drums and gongs. The two bamboo cylinders were taken inside the sacred house and placed in front of the main pillar, the sacred pillar. A large red male pig and other five other pigs were killed by skilful individuals and the blood of these pigs was poured on the top of the sacred flat stone near the pillar next to the holy water. Several special baskets called *koba* with betel leaves and freshly sliced areca nuts were also placed as offerings next to the holy water in front of the pillar. Outside people were dancing and singing. Around eight o'clock at night the sacred prayer and history of creation (*lia lulik*) were sung by the *makoan* ('master of the sacred stories') reaching its peak at three o'clock in the morning when the 'queen of the stars' appeared and ending shortly after that. This was then followed by the *matak malirin* prayer¹⁹ and the sprinkling of the holy water over the people, the sacred house, the seeds, and the *hai matan* (literally 'eye of the fire') referring to hearth and also symbolically to families (*uma kain*) and clans (*uma fukun*) within Lookeu and within Koba Lima as well as the sacred houses of Lookeu and Koba Lima and of other related kingdoms. The sprinkling of *matak malirin* in the form of holy water was made not by the elders of Lookeu but by the elders of the wife-giving houses of Lookeu (these elders are referred to here as *malun*). In the morning after the sunrise the spectacular event of the so-called *ta karau* (the sword sacrifice of large male buffalos) took place. After the deities and ancestors were offered the best parts of cooked meat and rice in special baskets (*hane matan*) placed in front of the sacred pillar, people ate their last meal together at the *sadan*—the gathering space in front of the sacred house. Cooked rice and meat and drinks (locally produced alcohol) were placed on top of large newly made mats (*biti*) and the people ate together. After that people in groups returned to their homes in different parts of East Timor and West Timor bringing with them the *matak malirin* for prosperity and

¹⁸ Ordinarily such bamboo water cylinders can be carried by anyone, but in this ritual context the overwhelming power of their sacredness creates a great heaviness necessitating that they be carried by young strong men.

¹⁹ Vroklage 1953b:15-6, 18-9. Two examples of prayer to ask for *matak malirin* from Diruma and Bekotaruik.

well-being, and also the memorable joy of the community feast and of listening together to sacred story of creation, of the communions with their ancestors and deities, of renewing and strengthening their community ties.

The sacred path: We Nea, We Kalabiun, We Fulan and We Feto Fouk

Oe Alas (forest of rattans) was traditionally a territory of the Kingdom Lookeu. It is now part of the Kingdom of Dafala (wife-takers to Lookeu). In this rain-forest there is a spring known as We Nea (originally *haknea* = kneeling or *knea* = knee). The place was so named when the ancestral 'owners or custodians of the water' (*we nain*) Leki Mauk and La Mera Mauk came across the spring where one or both of them were shot in the knees by a traditional weapon of a hidden enemy. The pair crawled on their knees one kilometre through a forest of sacred bamboo to the spring of We Kalabiun (*kalabiun* = spinning top), where they washed their wounds and were immediately healed. Since this time warriors from the houses connected to Oe Alas have always gone to We Kalabiun to be healed. The healing waters of We Kalabiun are held in a self-contained pool with the water entering and exiting through a sinkhole. Given its healing properties, the people suspected that the waters of We Kalabiun must be truly sacred and hence connected to the sea (*we sai t'oo tasi lulik tebes* = water that flows to the sea is really sacred). To establish this fact the people threw into it a rice threshing implement (*nesun*) tied with a male head scarf (*lesu*). Sometime later the rice threshing implement appeared in the female north sea off the coast of Atapupu. There is a poem from the Uma Mahawar (the sacred house of Mahawar which originated from Fatumea), the owner of We Kalabiun, about the connection between We Kalabiun and the sea, a direct connection that waters of the area's rivers do not have:

*Fatu Baa Dafala rarin besi
Dadolen murak rarin besi*

Fatu Baa Dafala is of the iron pillar
of silver block, of the iron pillar

*Mota hotu-hotu la lao sai tasi
Ulluk lubuk Dafala lao sai tasi.*

All rivers are not connected to the sea
The headless Dafala (the Kalabiun spring)
is connected to the sea.

Today both springs continue to be guarded (*daka*) by 'the owners or custodians of the water' (*we nain*), a complement of people, animals and vegetation. As well as the living descendants of Leki Mauk and La Mera Mauk (Uma Mahawar, Dafala), the springs are guarded by sacred eels (*tuna*) at We Nea and sacred eels (*tuna*), crocodiles (*lafaek* or *nai bei* = 'great ancestors') and pythons (*likusaen*) at We Kalabiun. The water supply at both springs is said to be protected by the roots and shading tips of the *au* (bamboo), *hali* (banyan) and

beko (water tree). When the community related rituals take place at the springs the sacrifices made to the ancestral spirits and deities will be received by these animals and passed on to the invisible sacred world who in return bless the community with good health, productive life energy and fertility (*fo matak malarin*) (see also Traube 1986:194).

The third spring in the complex is known as We Fulan. While the spring belongs to Uma Mahawar the name for the spring was given by two kings from Lookou, Tita Lorok and Daka Lorok. Passing by the spring on their way to conquer the lands of others they '*hafula*' (furtively survey) the area in order to ascertain if others were in the vicinity. So We Fulan refers to the water where they *hafula malu* (where they furtively survey each other).

The fourth spring in Oe Alas is called *We Feto Fouk* (*feto fouk* = daughter-in-law). Here on occasions a ceremony will be held and holy water will be taken from the spring back to the sacred house of Uma Mahawar where it will be sprinkled over a new daughter-in-law (who is also called *feto uma nain* = the custodian of the house), during a special prayer, who will be blessed with *matak malirin* and welcomed as a new member of Uma Mahawar (Vroklage 1952a:353-7; Neonbasu 2005:322). As in other water sprinkling ceremonies the green leaves used to sprinkle the holy water over the new daughter-in-law is taken from the *kalirin* bush (*kalirin* = making cool).

According to the elders of Lookou, Fatumea and Dafala, water is the sustenance of humanity and all living beings. It is likened to the breast milk of the mother (*we hasusu ita*) or the blood of the earth (*rai niakan raan mak we*).²⁰ In places like Oe Alas the forest is sacred with the living vegetation seen as guarding the water, and forbidden from being cut. Even in the case of dead vegetation a meeting of the four land owning houses is needed to consider requests to cut and use it. Punishment for the cutting of the wood without this permission comes not only from the elders but also through sickness, misfortune and even death befalling the offender or their family as a result of angering the spirits of the forests, water and the ancestors. As well as the specific instances mentioned above, people will frequently go to the springs to carry out rituals relating to requests for or problems with rain, health, the fertility of crops and animals as well as human beings.

Ancient mobilities, modern displacements: We Feto

Several kilometres away from the springs of Oe Alas near the village of Taek Soruk are another set of springs known collectively as We Feto (*feto* = woman). We Feto refers in particular to one spring on the edge of a river bank where a

²⁰ Vischer (1992:83) who writing about Palu'e, elsewhere in the archipelago, remarks that water circulating underground between the mountains and coast is likened to the blood in the body.

story tells of an old woman who went missing when she went to fetch water at midday. When her husband went to find her all he found by the spring was her earthen cooking pot (*sanan*) and a dried bamboo cylinder called *au toka*. It is a common belief in Taek Soruk²¹ as well as in Koba Lima that it is dangerous for a woman, especially a pregnant woman, to go to spring at midday because this is the time that malevolent spirits are believed to be most active and they may harm her. Further upstream from We Feto is another bank edge spring known as We Lalosuk (*lalosuk* = stirring up from the ground) with a large stone altar on the river's edge. Some years ago the people from the house connected to this spring moved it to Manuleten (*manu* = bird, *leten* = above the ground) near Oe Alas. A large collective ceremony was held at We Lalosuk and 50 chickens were sacrificed along with a pig before water infused with the blood of the pig was placed in a green bamboo cylinder and carried in a baby sling to the new location in Manuleten. Here the 'child' (*oan*) of We Lalosuk was thrown to the ground to create a new spring We Katimun (*katimun* = a type of tree that grows near water spring) in Manuleten. The mother water (*we inan*) at We Lalosuk has been diminished since.

This process may also be carried out in the case of forced relocation of communities as was the case when the Lookeu origin community of Foho Lor Lookeu in Portuguese Timor was forced to flee to Dutch Timor. As described above near to the site of this original Lookeu sacred house is a spring known as We Uas ('original spring') which is also known as We Lulik (Sacred Spring). This spring originated from the most sacred spring, We Lulik, at the top of the Bei Ulun Molik mountain in Fatumea, whose name is so sacred that it cannot be mentioned without a proper ceremony. The water from this original We Lulik was put into a green bamboo tube or container covered with woven cloth and carried to Foho Lor Lookeu and poured, with a ritual, on the ground there. A new spring emerged and was called We Lulik Lookeu. This was long before the Dutch and Portuguese colonial division of Timor in 1859. After the division of Timor, the water from We Lulik Lookeu was put into a bamboo container and was carried to Fatu Katouk, a part of Lookeu in Dutch Timor, a short distance from Lookeu in Portuguese Timor, and poured on the ground there under the shadow of a *katimun* tree. A new sacred water spring emerged there and was called We Katimun (not to be confused with the previously mentioned We Katimun in Manuleten). In these and many other cases what is embedded in ancient socio-ecological connections and mobilities are critical transformative processes through which people are able to carry their

²¹ Taek Soruk is a part of the territory of the ancient kingdom of Lookeu and the majority of the people in Taek Soruk belong to the kingdom of Lookeu and identify themselves as people of Lookeu and as such as the people of Koba Lima. Today, due to wars and displacements and changes to political territories, administratively they belong to the kingdom of Fatu Baa. Their elected leader is currently a son of the traditional ruler of Lookeu.

'tradition' with them, deal with displacement and retain tangible connections to their source and community.

Ensuring life through the combined essences of water and fire

The water-bamboo-fire transformation of the spirit of life into life itself, and bamboo's role in ritually moving water, is a process recast in childbirth when a baby's umbilical cord (*husar*) is cut by the friction of two smaller pieces of male and female bamboo.²² Prior to cutting the cord the midwife will gently pull out the placenta, regulating the baby's breathing and ensuring that the two internal arteries and one vein (referred to as the *hali musan* = banyan tree seeds) visible in the umbilical cord are evenly distributed between the baby and the placenta (referred to as the baby's *alin* = younger sibling). This ensures that the breath will stay with the baby and not transfer to the 'younger sibling'. The cord will then be cut with the friction of a small sharp male piece of bamboo (*fafulu*) placed over a semisphere of female bamboo. As a consequence of this severed connection between mother and child, life balance and *matak malirin* must be restored in a subsequent month long process of post-natal ritual (*hatuka hai*). Water and fire which are associated with femaleness and maleness play the most important roles during the post-natal ritual period (Graham 1991:227-34; Forman 1980; Therik 2004:188-96).

After a wait period of one to three nights the baby's 'younger sibling' (placenta), which has been placed inside a bamboo cylinder (*au bonun*), a ritual basket (*hane matan*) or an earthen pot (*sanan*), will be ritually carried to a sacred banyan (*hali*) tree where it is left among the branches. The banyan tree is considered to be a mother whose branches and inner sap or milk will continue to protect and nourish (*hasusu*) the baby's 'younger sibling'.

After the birth of the baby, the mother and child will be moved into the kitchen area where they will stay for the next month warmed by the fire. This period, known as 'sitting by the fire' (*hatuka hai* or *tur hai*), is an intensive period during which time the fire will be continually burning and water will always be on the boil. For the first two weeks after giving birth the mother will be bathed in warm water by her female carers seven times each day (for the final two weeks of the post natal ritual period this will be reduced to three times a day). This water will be infused with medicinal leaves and roots and each day the mother will drink an infusion of wild turmeric (*kunir*), ginger (*masimanas*), and a particular type of wild chile called *kunus ai lete* (a climbing chile whose leaves are similar to that of betel leaves and which has medicinal power with its fruits

²² Therik 2004:255; Aoki 1996:57. Therik (2004:212) argues there is also a symbolic equivalence between childbirth and agricultural rites.

tasting hot and bitter). Depending on the physical and mental health of the woman, bitter traditional medicinal drinks of leaves and bark will also be prescribed by the traditional healer (*matan dook*: literally 'one who sees far') and the midwife (*makaer badut* or *makaer kmii*: literally 'holder of the candle nuts', that is, one who knows how to massage and wash the baby and the mother with candle nut chew). The baby will be bathed twice a day in warm water infused with medicinal leaves and roots before being massaged with candle nut chew and then wrapped in cotton cloths and nappies (called *kneras oan*) dried and warmed over the smoking fire on top of a special piece of bamboo with three branches hanging above the fire. The process of care is incredibly labour intensive and men and women from the husband's house will assist in sourcing wood for the fire and water for boiling and bathing as well as nutritious foods. This labour is accounted for in the term *ai-we* (wood-water) or more politely called *takan bua* (*takan* = betel leaves, *bua* = areca nuts) or *sirih pinang* in Malay (Grijzen 1904:55-60; Vroklage 1953:210-1) and when a female baby grows up and leaves the house through marriage this will be something compensated for in the marriage exchange negotiations—an exchange that ties the two houses inter-generationally both the living and the dead.

After the one month period of post natal ritual, comes the rite of *hasai-lawarik oan*, that is, the rite of bringing the child for the first time outside of the house in the presence of the whole community. Ash from the fireplace which boiled the water and warmed the mother and baby for one month is put into a coconut shell and taken together with the baby to the juncture of a nearby path or road. The ash in the coconut shell is then spread on the juncture (the 'crossroads of life and death', Reuter 1996:130). The child is then taken back, usually by the midwife or one of the aunts, to the front yard of the house for the community celebration where the baby and the mother are sprinkled with holy water and the baby's head (except the tip) is shaved (see also Therik 2004:196; Hicks 2004). Following this rite the mother continues to bathe using warm water twice a day and continues with a nutritious diet until six months has passed. The extended family, including other children, share in some of the responsibility in taking care of the baby. The baby is warmly surrounded by these people as she/he grows.

Conclusion

As with other peoples across the wider region, for the people of Koba Lima in both East Timor and West Timor the past is not gone forever, the past is in the present and the future, and the future is in the past. People have a thick relationship with their ancestors in the dark underworld (*kukun kalan laran*), with their descendants, with their springs, lands, forest, animals, skies, sun, moon,

stars, sea, rivers, lakes, stones, trees, the foods that nourish them and with the male and female deities which are both transcendent and immanent. Their actions are put into the perspectives of their ancestors and their coming descendants: *ba bein ba oan sia* (going back to the ancestors and going forward to the descendants), and into the perspectives of their deities as well as their natural environments. As with neighbouring groups,²³ the recent past is associated with 'the transmission of life via the vital energy released and recirculated at death [here, in spring water] while mythical time is associated with the source of vital energy which supplies "extra" life to reactivate the life cycle' (Clamagirand 1980:150). For them beauty is not only visible but also invisible. By placing themselves within nature, the people of Koba Lima are able to see, experience and participate in the hidden secrets and the hidden beauty of the enchanted and sacred realm that gives and sustains their meaning of life.

Spring water as the ultimate source of life and death is at once the umbilical cord (*husar*) of humanity that is inseparable from divinity and nature, and the pathway to its resting place. The sacred source known as We Biku (and its male and female complement of We Sei and We Hali), and the place of transformation known as We Bukurak all reveal the sacred secrets of the ongoing transformation of life and death of humanity. Water is also the ultimate arbiter of justice. Its blessing brings with it cooling greenness that enables clear judgment, love, good health, productive life force or energy and fertility.

What the stories recounted have revealed in this paper is that water is the blood and milk of the mother transformed into life itself through father fire. For the people of Koba Lima water is 'the mother of all beings' (Escuer 2011). In common with those across the region this figures prominently in their cosmological beliefs and ritual practices. Yet in contrast, for example, to Bali where the local Austronesian/Hindu religion is widely known as '*Agama Tirtha*' (Windia 2006; Lansing 2006) or the 'Religion of Water', on island Timor and in eastern Indonesia the equally central religious, socio-ecological and cosmological role of water has not been the subject of sustained analysis. At least for one Timorese society, as shown in this paper, water is considered the critical enabler of life, it is the *matak inan malirin inan* (the mother of greenness and the mother of coolness, of good health and productive life force) for human beings, animal beings and plants. In the nuanced and multi-layered poetry recounting the transformation of life and death in Koba Lima, what is revealed is a complex socio-ecological world where water both permeates and connects the boundaries between visible and invisible realms and beings.

²³ Along with the Tetun speaking kingdoms of Koba Lima the other linguistic groups straddling the border area are the Bunak and the Kemak.

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