



## Unity and Division

### *Caring for Humans and Non-humans in a Divided Land*

#### *Abstract*

The border bifurcating the island of Timor was arbitrarily created in the late nineteenth century by the Portuguese and the Dutch. It is a border that has divided and separated the people of the ancient kingdoms of Koba Lima ever since, constraining relationships with their ancestral sacred sites, lands and waters. Timor's wild animals, plants and natural phenomena challenge this division. Their free co-existence and movement through the region remain essential to the material and spiritual unity of life for people along the border. The ancestral and metaphysical connections they embody and enable are continually honoured in people's ritual practice and speech, connecting and binding together what cross-island politics has otherwise held apart. In this paper, we trace the effects of this constant mingling of places, words, and more-than-human beings, and elucidate the ways they subtly re-work the material divisions of colonial and now postcolonial borders. The effects of such re-workings are, we argue, to continuously extend boundaries, to celebrate multiplicity and diversity and, despite the many challenges, to determinedly maintain a commitment to practices that ensure cross-species unity and the flow of life.

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### *Introduction*

The island of Timor was divided in the late nineteenth century by the colonising forces of the Portuguese and the Dutch. The ensuing border has continuously separated the people of Koba Lima, an ancient coalition of five kingdoms straddling the international land border of Timor-Leste and Indonesia and has constrained relationships with their ancestral lands. In this context, the free co-existence and movement of Timor's wild animals, plants and natural phenomena remain essential to the material and spiritual unity of life for people along the border. These ancestral and metaphysical connections are continually honoured in people's ritual practice and speech, connecting and binding together what nation-state politics has otherwise held apart. To illuminate the conceptual underpinnings of these indigenous cosmological and socio-political flows, we explore the relational expressions of *leten no kraik* 'above and below', *taek no kneter* 'praise and respect' and *lulik* 'the sacred, taboo, partially hidden and partially manifest realm of life's mystery'. We argue that for the people of Koba Lima these concepts are exemplar modalities for engaging *with* borders and continuously re-working ideas of unity and division, of union and separation, from the mundane to the esoteric across phenomenal and non-phenomenal (noumenal) realms.

### *Borders: Creation and Separation in Koba Lima*

Koba Lima are words of Tetun Terik, the language spoken in different parts of Timor-Leste and West Timor, Indonesia, especially along the border. The name signifies five (*lima*) baskets (*koba*), artisan objects crafted by women for social

and spiritual purposes. A *koba* is used to hold (1) betel nut and lime, often with tobacco, silver and gold coins, as offerings to the deity and to ancestors and other invisible spirits, such as the custodians of land, water or forest, during religious ceremonies in sacred houses, and for sacred springs, sacred lands, sacred trees, sacred stones and sacred animals; (2) betel nut and lime (sometimes with tobacco) as offerings to respectfully and amicably welcome guests; (3) offerings of money, such as silver coins or gold coins for respectful and amicable exchanges during marriage and other communal ceremonies. For the people of Koba Lima in both Loro Toba (*loro* 'sun', *toba* 'setting/sleeping') of West Timor and Loro Sae (*loro* 'sun', *sae* 'rising'), of East Timor, *koba* (along with *tais*, locally 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 (deity, spirits of the ancestors, spirits of water, land, forests and mountains).

Symbolically and historically, Koba Lima refers to a sacred geography involving the coalition of five Tetun-speaking mountain kingdoms in the areas along the borders of Timor-Leste and Indonesian West Timor (see Figure 1). These kingdoms are Fatumea, Dakolo, Lookeu, Sisi and Mau Demu. Originally there was only the kingdom of Fatumea; then three brothers formed a coalition of kingdoms called Uma Tolu (*uma* 'house', *tolu* 'three') or Koba Tolu, consisting of Fatumea, Lookeu and Dakolo. Fatumea, Lookeu and Dakolo relate to each other as siblings (*husar* or *binan* lit. 'connected by an umbilical cord'): *maun-alin* 'older brother-younger brother', *bin-alin* 'older sister-younger sister' or *feton-nan* 'sister-brother'. Whereas Fatumea, Lookeu and Dakolo are fertility-giving sacred houses (*uma mane*), Sisi and Mau Demu are fertility-taking sacred houses (*feto sawa*). A political coalition of Koba Lima was formed based on their reciprocal marriage relationships. Unlike the clan or origin-based sacred houses (*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(n)* 'red') from the beginning. The sacred house is called Uma Metan or Uma Kukun Fatumea. Here, *metan* 'black' and *kukun* 'dark' symbolically refer to the invisible, formless being or spirit.

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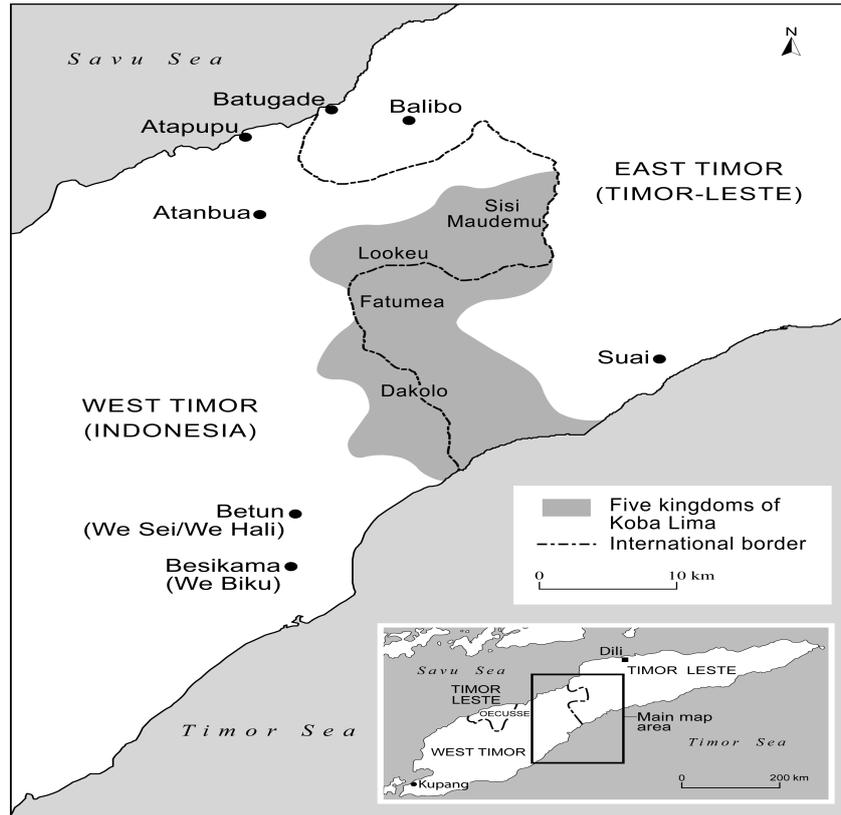


Figure 1: The Five Kingdoms of Koba Lima

Centuries ago, the Portuguese and the Dutch travelled a very long way, with many difficulties, to different parts of the world—including the island of Timor—in pursuit of happiness outside of themselves through domination of the other. The battle between the two European powers over possession of Timor took place in the seventeenth century in West Timor and ended with the victory of the Dutch over most parts of West Timor and its colonial capital, Kupang. The Portuguese claimed for themselves most of the east of the island. The conflict between the two powers continued, with this politics dividing and ruling the locals, until the island was formally divided into two by colonial agreement in 1859. The colonial border settlement was finalised in 1916. During the intervening decades, wars and resistance continued against both colonisers by the people whose ancestral lands, waters, rivers, mountains and traditions were divided against their will (cf. Pélissier 1996; Roque 2013). As with other imposed frontiers in the world, local ambivalence towards these social, cultural, political and environmental borders continues to be actively negotiated (Donnan & Wilson, 2010).

The various sacred houses of Koba Lima have been moved to different places due to wars and the colonial division of Timor. The sacred house of Lookeu, for example, has been translocated five times. After the Portuguese destruction of Uma Tolu (the three rebel kingdoms of Lookeu, Fatumea and Dakolo) in 1895, in an event known locally as Rai Uma Tolu Tohar 'the Fall of the Three Kingdoms', the sacred house of Lookeu was moved to another part of the kingdom in Dutch Timor. The colonially imposed division has been disastrous for the people of Koba Lima, and the wound of forced division remains unhealed. Since this time, wars have scattered the people of Koba Lima to different places both in Timor-Leste and West Timor. Although they now live in different parts of Timor due to war and displacement, they do not forget their roots and from time to time they attend their sacred houses, springs and the graves of ancestors to pay respect, to bring offerings, to remember their sacred origin and to receive spiritual blessing. The particular words in Tetun Terik for the honourable acts of bringing offerings, worshipping and expressing respect and love are *hanai halulik* (from *halo* 'to make', *nai* 'deity', *lulik* 'sacred'). The people of Koba Lima respectfully recognise, praise, worship and surrender to Nai Lulik Waik, Nai Manas Waik, Nai Roman Waik (the Most Sacred Deity, the Deity of Greatest Heat and Deity of Greatest Light) as the original source and the one that illuminates all. This supreme being is transcendent, formless and invisible while at the same time *iha raiklaran*: immanent in both human and non-human beings in the world.

In the oral histories of each kingdom of Koba Lima, Fatumea is referred to metaphorically as the origin place of the first human beings (three brothers and one sister). The telling of the sacred origin story in its entirety takes many hours in the form of poetic verse and can only be told by those designated as custodians of the sacred stories. A special ceremony called *loke oda matan* 'opening the door' is required before the incantation of the story to allow entry to the realm of the sacred. The story will reach its peak when *fitun nain sae* 'queen of stars' appears in the sky in the early hours, around 3 am, when the world comes to its perfect stillness, solemn silence and peace – a state expressed as *rai nakmaus nakmatek* (Kehi and Palmer 2012). Following the incantation of such stories, the custodian ritually enacts the closing of the revelations by replacing the lid on a sacred betel-nut *koba*. The end of ritual

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also involves the saying of words to seal off the door to the sacred realm:

*Didin hikar, sara hikar*                      Putting back the wall, putting back the curtain

*Nai Lulik Waik, Nai Manas Waik*            of the Most Sacred Deity, the Deity  
of Greatest Heat

*Nee leten ba, nee aas ba*                      Up there in the sky, up there in the highest

*Borders: leten no kraik 'above and below'*

When East Timor was under the control of Indonesia from 1975 to 1999, the colonial border was lifted. Although West Timor and East Timor belonged to two different provinces of Indonesia, a passport was not required to travel between the two, and so there was a natural movement of the people in their lands and among their people. To some extent these flows brought people back to their ancestors' lived-experience prior to the existence of colonial borders. Then, when East Timor became independent from Indonesia, the colonial borders were re-activated. But non-human beings—the bees, grasshoppers, butterflies, birds, wild pigs and deer, rivers, wind and air—know no borders. In this part of Timor, bees in particular are respected not only as bees, but as beloved human beings called Buik Lorok and Dahu Lorok. They are not earthly beings; they come from the realm above and are the female manifestations of the Enlightening One. (Dahu and Buik are female names, while Loro(k) refers to the Enlightening One and to the sun). During seasonal communal honey-harvesting rituals at the large trees where wild migratory bees make their homes (hanging hives), these beloved ones are addressed as beings who journey from both sides of the divided Timor border—from the mountain of Mutis in the central-north of West Timor, Indonesia, and from coastal Suai and mountainous Turiscai in the south-west of Timor-Leste. Each year the beloved ones are called to the trees in ritual verse. They are asked to continue their migrations and implored to return the following year to make their home once again in the branches of the tree. Poetic love songs of gratitude and invitation are beautifully and respectfully sung in the forest during night-time harvest ceremonies at each of the significant trees (*Wild Honey*, 2019).

For the people on the border, more important and deeper than the phenomenal

borders that separate human and the non-human beings is the non-phenomenal one—an inner or esoteric frontier that separates them from the non-bounded deity of Nai Lulik Waik, Nai Manas Waik, Nai Roman Waik. The separation is lessened through the practice of heartfelt rituals, especially the *hanai halulik* previously mentioned. In the origin narratives of Koba Lima, the universe was unified in a oneness that was beyond the present dualisms of light and darkness, male and female, heat and coolness, the above and below. When, in distant times, the separation of the universe occurred, dualisms and borders were created. *Leten no kraik* 'above and below' is the division that now separates earthly beings from the higher realm. In the past, this separation was still narrow; the above and the below were in closer connection with each other. Whenever bad events happened, including natural disasters, members of the community were called to carry out whole-heartedly the *hanai halulik* rituals to recognise, worship and surrender to the deity, Nai Lulik Waik, Nai Manas Waik, Nai Roman Waik. There remained a metaphorical ladder by which the being of the above came down to meet with the below, and the below went up to approach the above. Redolent in the origin narratives of the people of Koba Lima is a profound and almost unconscious longing for this primordial union.

Yet this past is not gone forever: for the people of Koba Lima 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 invisible or formless realm called *kukun kalan laran* (*laran* 'inside', *kukun kalan* 'darkness of night' signifying formlessness, the nature of the spirit), with their descendants, with their springs, lands, forest, animals, skies, sun, moon, stars, sea, rivers, lakes, stones, trees, and the foods that nourish them, and with Nai Lulik Waik, Nai Manas Waik, Nai Roman Waik (beyond the duality of male and female) which is transcendent and at the same time immanent, revealed in a multiplicity and diversity of forms. This immanency explains the pervasiveness of *lulik* 'the sacred' as located in sacred lands, sacred springs, sacred trees, sacred animals, sacred hills, sacred lakes and sacred stones. People's present actions are framed through 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 through the perspectives of their natural

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environments in relation to Nai Lulik Waik, Nai Manas Waik, Nai Roman Waik. When babies are named, their names will follow either their maternal or paternal ancestors. The name of the ancestor is called out to the baby, and if the baby smiles or does not cry, this is a sign that the named ancestor wants their name to be given to the baby. But if the baby later becomes inconsolable, this is a sign that the named ancestor is not the right one. The name is then replaced with that of another ancestor. This is a form of reincarnation of the ancestors and is the continuation of *ba bein ba oan sia*. Traditionally each child in a family has a different ancestral name taken from either the mother's or father's side. Caring for and communing with the non-human realm is also understood in this relational perspective.

As new religions and education systems were brought in by outsiders, and as island Timor has modernised and developed materially, caring for relations with the realm of the sacred through the communal rituals of *hanai halulik* has become less important, and the separation between the above and the below has widened. The symbolic ladder created through ceremony and ritual that connects the above and the below, overcoming separation and temporarily reuniting the earthly and higher realms, is becoming broken—or is, at least, less evident. As they become increasingly focussed on material salvation, the modern or schooled ones have lost their faith in the pervasive sacredness of Nai Lulik Waik, Nai Manas Waik, Nai Roman Waik, and in the communal sacred rituals of *hanai halulik*. In the past, people enjoyed more leisure with nature; more time was spent working for the sacred, for the above, and for the community. People were not worried about their future. Their harvest was often little, but it was enough. Now the harvest is greater and yet it is still not enough—and is never considered enough. Material needs and desires have continuously increased, and the means to satisfy them are limited.

What is more upsetting for the elders is that the schooled ones are no longer polite in their dealings with others and no longer feel embarrassed in asserting an individualistic sense of possession: 'I', 'mine', and an exclusive 'we' and 'ours', instead of the inclusive 'we' and 'ours'. These schooled ones have lost the metaphors and the subtleness of the ritual verses which created the ladders reaching between the above and below. Instead, the schooled ones speak too many empty words, void of culture. Words such as 'love' and 'thank you' do

not exist in the classical language of Tetun Terik. Instead, gratitude is embodied in quiet and subtle actions. The schooled ones like to talk, argue, to show off their knowledge and *matenek*, which may be loosely translated as 'intellect'. They are like bees who make a lot of noise when they are far away from the nectar. Yet when bees find the nectar, they become one with the source and remain still. On becoming one with the nectar, noise ceases. When the above and the below, the upper lip and the lower lip, unite, no words are produced. Silence prevails.

As previously described, the peak of the communal sacred poetic story of the origins of the people of Koba Lima is revealed in the form of ritual singing in the early hours when stillness prevails. During that external stillness and the stillness of the senses, mind and thought merges with *Nai Lulik Waik*, *Nai Manas Waik*, *Nai Roman Waik* as the unifying principle is revealed once more. When *matenek* 'intellect' intervenes in the sacred, the ladder of connection to the above is destroyed.

*Borders: Taek no Kneter 'Praise and Respect' and Lulik 'the Sacred'*

The human propensity for religion is found in our urge to communicate with the realm of the enchanting sacred (Waterson 2012, p. 413). Indeed, Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment science stands alone outside this communicative tradition, forging its theories and cosmology through a language of observation, analysis and separation (ibid., p. 413). Yet in places where people remain overwhelmingly enchanted with the world, sacred beings or elements are sought out, 'addressed, invited, hooked [and] channelled' from distant places through prayer or invocatory speech (ibid, p. 412). In the cosmologies of the traditional mountainous kingdoms of Koba Lima on island Timor, these speech practices are inscribed through narrative journeys of more-than-human beings across the sky, land and waterscape. Journeys are characterised and enabled by the 'flow of blessing' (Waterson 2012; cf. Fox 1997, 1980).

It was human experience rather than abstract concepts that informed religious and existentialist philosopher Martin Buber's writings on people's two primary

attitudes towards and relations with other human beings, non-human and more-than-human beings. The two primary attitudes and relations are 'I-Thou' and 'I-It'. The self of the I-Thou and the person of the I-It are distinctly not the same in quality. According to Buber, 'The primary word I-Thou can only be spoken with the whole being. The primary word I-It can never be spoken with the whole being' (1958, p. 3). The first mode of relation is a subject-to-subject relation or encounter, while the second is that of subject-to-object relation. Inseparable from these two modes of relations discussed by Buber are the 'mode of being' and the 'mode of having' expressed by philosopher-psychologist and sociologist Erich Fromm (Fromm 1992, 1976). For Fromm, the I-Thou relation engenders a 'mode of being', while the I-It relation engenders a mode of having or possessing. These philosophical understandings hold that the I-Thou relation is the encounter or meeting between human beings where the person as subject treats the other as a subject in their differences. The basis for I-Thou relations between human beings is spiritual: the Thou in human beings is both the finite Thou and the infinite Thou which is immanently present in human beings and non-human beings. 'The essence of man [sic] is determined by the fact that he shares in finitude and he shares in infinity' (Buber, 1958, p. 121).

The I-Thou relation is often seen, mistakenly, as excluding the so-called natural world from its realm of relation. In interpretations of the Abrahamic religious traditions, this separation goes back to the very beginning where, in the Book of Genesis, God, having created the original man and woman, authorised human beings to conquer the Earth, and to be the masters of the non-human in the oceans and on land (Gen. 1:28-29). Moreover, the I-It relation is often imported into relations among human beings wherein the other is 'thing-ified', reified or commodified as a non-human 'it' by way of sheer force, manipulation and deception.

Within the Koba Lima concepts of *taek no kneter* 'praise and respect' and *lulik* 'sacred', the I-Thou relation includes relations between human beings and the natural world. As a transcendental being, Nai Lulik Waik, Nai Manas Waik, Nai Roman Waik is believed to be unattainable, but at the same time immanently present in everything below. As such, everything is *lulik* and everything individually and uniquely has *kmalar* 'anima/soul'. These spiritual beliefs and practices of worship, pejoratively termed animism by outsiders (see

Bird-David 1999), respect and praise of non-human beings as the manifestation of the divine, and not as mere objects in terms of I-It relations. Intrinsic to the observance of *taek no kneter* and *lulik* for Nai Lulik Waik, Nai Manas Waik, Nai Roman Waik is the knowledge that all beings are unified, irrespective of difference. This unity, and the relations with the other across and between differences, nourishes human beings and provides life's meaning, fulfilment and contentment. Within *taek no kneter* and *lulik*, it is through the recognition of a unity or oneness—shared finitude and infinity, shared mortality and immortality—that human beings find space for praise and respect of all other beings. By contrast, the separateness of I-It relationality has led to the despoilment of the natural world, a process through which human self-destruction is a consequence.

In the pronominal system of the classical Tetun Terik language of the Koba Lima, there is no distinction between genders or between humans and non-human beings in the category of third-person singular (see Tables 1 and 2 below). An animal being or a plant or a thing is not referred to as 'it' as is the case in English. The third person singular pronoun is *nia* for both male and female and for human and non-human beings. A single person pronoun covering the English equivalents of 'he', 'she' and 'it', *nia* may encompass the Nai Lulik Waik, Nai Manas Waik, Nai Roman Waik, human beings and non-human beings, regardless of gender. The second person singular pronoun is *o*, or its respectful form *ita*; the second person plural is *emi*, or its respectful form *ita*. Unlike 'thou', *ita*, both singular and plural, is inclusive. This respectful form of the second person singular pronoun, *ita*, is also used to address certain animals, insects, plants, land and water, rain, seeds—notably sacred seed, such as corn, rice, millet, sorghum, beans—mountains or stones, especially at particular times and places. *Ita* is also the plural form of the first personal pronoun, as in the English subject 'we'. *Itakan* is the possessive form of both singular and plural second person pronouns, as in the English possessive form 'ours'. The first person singular pronoun is *hau*. The I-Thou relation can thus be translated as Hau-Ita relation, but the latter is more inclusive and aspires to unity or oneness because the other meaning of *ita* is 'we'. The absence of the objectifying 'thing-ifying' pronoun 'it' in Koba Lima and other Tetun Terik-speaking areas is an indication that there is no separation between the subject

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and object, between human beings and their environment (land, water, plants, sea, mountains, animals), between human beings and deity or between the non-human beings (environment) and deity. This is a language of being, mutuality of participation (in nature, especially) rather than the language of observation, analysis, objectification and 'thing-ification', possessing and having. Instead of separation, it embodies a mystery that is beyond words, language and thought.

Table 1: Tetun Terik personal pronouns

Person		Singular	Plural
1	INC EXC	hau	Ita* ami
2	INC EXC	Ita* o	Ita* emi
3	FEM/MASC/NEUT	nia	sia

Table 2: Tetun Terik possessive pronouns

Person		Singular	Plural
1	INC EXC	Itakan** haukan	Itakan* amikan
2	INC EXC	Itakan* okan	Itakan* emikan
3	FEM/MASC/NEUT	niakan	siakan

*\*\*respectful form, used for human and non-human beings, regardless of gender*

In 2011 innumerable grasshoppers arrived at two rice field locations in Fatubaa, West Timor, and quickly consumed the newly planted rice across two hectares. (Fatubaa is still traditionally part of the kingdom of Lookeu and the majority of people living there are from Koba Lima.) The Indonesian Department of Agriculture was informed and immediately arrived with vehicles

carrying insecticides to kill the grasshoppers. The elders of the villages refused outright this plan of action by the government. Instead, they invoked their local traditional practices—*taek no kneter* ‘praise and respect’ and *lulik* ‘the sacred’—as means of dealing with such natural events. Rather than killing the grasshoppers, they held a special spiritual ceremony for peaceful negotiation wherein they respectfully addressed the grasshoppers as *ita* (second pronoun plural respectful form; first person plural inclusive) and humbly begged them to leave the rice fields. It worked. The grasshoppers continued their journey without destroying any other fields. According to the elders, had they followed the departmental plan to spray the grasshoppers with insecticides, the grasshoppers would have become more aggressive and destructive and their numbers would have increased. That course of action would have been against *taek no kneter* and *lulik* and in contravention of the expected human relations with nature. Rather than treating the grasshoppers as ‘it’, or addressing them as *emi* (second person plural, exclusive), they were treated respectfully and addressed inclusively as *ita* in an I-Thou relation. The elders said:

*Buat lulik , buat rakat nee ita la bele hoo*

These sacred beings,  
these angry beings should not be destroyed

*Hetak ita hoo sia, hetak sia rakat soru*

The more we try to destroy them,  
the more they become angry and aggressive

*Ita mesti haktaek, hakneter no halulik sia*

So we should deal with them harmoniously,  
with respect and dignity, and see them  
as part of the embodiment of the Most Sacred One  
and as parts of us

The elders were expressing a worldview bound up in the recognition that they are not the masters of other living beings, such as the grasshoppers. Rather, their view holds that both human and non-humans are participants in relations in an ever-changing world, and that this world is itself the manifestation of the sacred, and of the unified unchanging and indivisible *Nai Luli Waik, Nai Manas*

Waik (also called Nai Maromak or Nai Roman Waik), the One who illuminates all, the most illuminating One.

### *Borders: The Flow of Relations*

In the present world of separated dualities—earth and sky, life and death, male and female, visible and invisible realms of forms and formlessness—‘regulating’ the complex inter-relations of all beings through space and time requires careful frameworks and protocols for encounters and transgressions across boundaries, especially the boundaries between *leten no kraik* ‘above and below’. In Koba Lima, these frameworks are underpinned and enabled by the ideas and practices of *taek no kneter* ‘praise and respect’ and *lulik* ‘the sacred’. The observance of sacred rites enables the entrance into and exit from the realm of the mystery of unity. As we have seen above, to approach or enter this unity involves *loke oda matan* ‘opening the door to the realm of mystery’, something which must be twinned with the rite of *taka oda matan* ‘closing the door to the realm of mystery’ or, in poetical terms, *didin hikar, sara hikar* ‘putting back the wall, pulling down the curtain of the realm of mystery, the realm of the sacred and the forbidden’. These movements ensure the flow-of-life processes.

Examples of these processes can be found as well in the Koba Lima narrative epics of war and conflict—or of the averting of war and conflict. In these epic narratives, which take many hours to recite fully, the unfettered flow of relations between the various kingdoms and the movement of people relies on the skilful expression of *taek no kneter* and *lulik*. The following story offers a glimpse of this expression.

Two kings, or *nai*, of Lookeu, Tita Lorok and Daka Lorok, journey through an area now in present-day West Timor belonging to the sacred house of Uma Mahawar. Passing by a spring on their way to conquer the lands of others, they *hafulan* ‘furtively survey’ the area to ascertain if others are in the vicinity. They name the spring We Fulan (*we* ‘water’, *fulan* ‘moon’) in reference to their activity at the water place, *hafula(n) malu* ‘where they furtively survey’ (*ha* from *halo* ‘to make’, *fulan* ‘moon’, *malu* ‘each other’). Later, in the lands of the kingdom of Uma Klaran (*klaran* ‘middle’) they are outwitted by the poetry

of the local king who enforces peace, not war, and sends the Lookeu kings on their way further east to Balibo, Maubara and Liquica. The encounter between the kings of Lookeu and their entourage, and the king of Uma Klaran and his entourage, is narrated in highly subtle and poetic words invoking the manner of *taek no kneter* and *lulik*.

The kings of Lookeu greet the king of Uma Klaran with a poetically authoritative tone:

<i>Lao buka rai</i>	We travel to look for land
<i>Lao buka foho</i>	We travel to look for mountain
<i>Buka naan kelen</i>	To look for animal leg <sup>1</sup>
<i>Buka tua loi</i>	To look for palm wine

The king of Uma Klaran similarly responds:

<i>Taru lai malu</i>	Let us dice first with each other
<i>Sit lai malu</i>	Let us gamble first with each other
<i>Foho no nain</i>	As a mountain has its custodian
<i>Rai no nain</i>	Land has its custodian

The kings of Lookeu reply:

<i>Soin ba nia</i>	Agreeing with that
<i>Netan ba nia</i>	Going with that

They proceed to throw the dice over the land and the mountain. The king of Uma Klaran and his people win. The kings of Lookeu and their entourage appear defeated and unhappy. They are ready to start a fight. Reading this situation, the king of Uma Klaran mollifies them with gentle and fraternal manners and words expressing *taek no kneter* and *lulik*:

<i>Leten ida dei</i>	The same One above
<i>Aas ida dei</i>	The same One up in the highest
<i>Belu alin-maun</i>	Friends, younger brothers, older brothers

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<i>Belu maun-alin,</i>	Friends, older brothers, younger brothers
<i>Lolo liman lai,</i>	Do extend your hands
<i>Kaer liman lai.</i>	Do shake hands with us

These fraternal and poetic words and tone, and accompanying gesture, are integral to the practice and expression of *taek no kneter* and *lulik*. They calm the kings of Lookeu and their entourage who then shake hands with the king of Uma Klaran and his entourage. War is avoided. The kings of Lookeu and their entourage then continue their exploratory journey to three places further east which are today known as Balibo, Maubara and Likusaen (or by its later Portuguese variant, Liquica). Upon arrival in a place inhabited by human beings, the *nai* warn each other:

<i>Bali ibun, bali lia</i>	Guard your lips, guard your words
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This is a mutual reminder to be mindful of words and speech in dealing with the people whom they might newly encounter. Later they called this place Balibo, a name derived from the phrase *bali ibun, bali lia*.

### *I-Thou and I-It Relations in a Ruptured World*

Today, an international border runs through the middle of the kingdom of Koba Lima. The border is a legacy of the Portuguese and Dutch colonialism that violated and disrespected *taek no kneter* and *lulik*, the realm of the sacred and of communal meeting and union for the people of Koba Lima. That imposed border has transformed an I-Thou (or more inclusively and mutually implied *Hau-Ita*) world of relations with deity, ancestors, human beings and nature into an I-It world of actions. This process of bifurcation consequently turned a mode of being into a mode of having, possessing and controlling on the part of the colonisers who viewed Timor as their possession.<sup>2</sup> The border of these modern states, which was imported into the island by Europeans, has no moral, ecological and spiritual legitimacy for the people of Koba Lima or the other communities along both sides of the border of the island of Timor. It undermines, even destroys, the between-ness of *taek no kneter* 'praise and respect' and of *toos no kladik, uma no klotan* 'the boundary of the fields, the walls of the house'. The imposed border represents neither *toos niakan kladik* (the border

of the garden) nor *uma niakan lotan* (the wooden wall separating the male and female rooms within the sacred house). Without *taek no kneter* and *lulik*, the sacred realms of the other (inseparable from one's own sacred realm) are disrespected and turned into objects for I-It strategic action. *Matak malarin*, meaning 'cooling blessing', 'productive life energy', is a life-generating concept found across Timor. It is an indigenous ecological, cosmological and spiritual notion of blessing or grace based on harmonious and respectful relationships among the living and non-living, human beings and deity, and human beings and nature which should not treat the other as 'it' or object of possession and control (Kehi and Palmer 2012). Without *taek no kneter* and *lulik*, there can be no *matak malirin*.

Many people of Koba Lima are still committed to upholding this pre-colonial mode of being and relations. In October 2013, about two hundred people currently living in Lookeu, West Timor, crossed the international border to go to the origin place of the kingdom of Lookeu in Fatumean. They were joined by other people from Lookeu and Koba Lima in East Timor, coming together in the forest for one week to carry out rituals at the ancestral palace and its sacred springs. Similarly, in November 2013 many people from Lookeu and Koba Lima living in both East Timor and West Timor participated in a celebration of the reconstruction of the related house *uma lulik Makerek Badaen* (derived from the terms *makerek ibun*, *makerek lia*; *badaen ibun*, *badaen lia* which glosses as 'one who is artful in words, in symbolic, metaphorical and poetic verse'). There are many religious and ritual procedures that guide the construction of these sacred houses and the process can take many months, or years. Critical stages of construction—cutting trees, cutting grass for roofing, cutting and collecting fibres for ropes, digging the foundation poles, completing the roof—necessarily involve the whole community and require communal offerings following *taek no kneter* and *lulik* observances to the *Uma Metan* 'the black house' or *Uma Kukun* 'the dark house', terms describing the house of the invisible spirit of the ancestors and the immanent abode of *Nai Luli Waik*, *Nai Manas Waik*, *Nai Roman Waik*.

### *Being, Acting and Speaking in Koba Lima*

Traditionally, it is impolite, rude or arrogant in Koba Lima for a person to

## unity and division

individually lay claim to one's house, one's children, one's garden, one's forest, one's water or one's land, whether speaking to a guest, visitor, friend and relative, ancestor, let alone deity. The *taek no kneter* and *lulik* way of expression is *nee itakan uma/itakan oan sia/itakan toos/itakan rai* 'this is our house/our children/our garden/our forest, our water, our land'. This inclusiveness in being and having implies that we take part in the life of others and others in the life of us; that we are in partnership with each other; in partnership with nature, and with the animals, plants and natural phenomena that nourish us and sustain our lives. Those who over-assert their individuality, individual rights and individual possessions and their capacity as masters of themselves, and of others, are seen as disrespecting and undermining *taek no kneter* and *lulik*.

In Koba Lima, the former unity of all beings and the world is marked out by the concept of separation implicit in *leten no kraik* 'above and below'. Yet within and across this division, life practices are redolent with and continuously cultivated through an ecology of mindful, verbal and bodily expressions of *taek no kneter* and *lulik*. This is the *conditio sine qua non* of Hau-Ita (I-Thou) relations and the subject-to-subject relations encounters with Nai Luli Waik, Nai Manas Waik, Nai Roman Waik, between the living, the living and the dead, and the living and the natural environment, as well as between future generations. These spaces, bounded by the realm of *taek no kneter* and *lulik*, ensure the ongoing vitality of the world, allowing for a genuine encounter or meeting with and belief in the *lulik* 'the sacred, taboo, partly hidden and partly manifest realm of life's mystery'. Since all that is visible is connected with the partial-embodiment of the formless One, there is no personal pronoun 'it' for non-humans: the third person singular pronoun *nia* is signifier of human and the non-human, female, male or neuter. Being, acting and speaking are conditioned by the visible and invisible, the formed and the formless, the phenomenal and non-phenomenal realms.

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### *Notes*

<sup>1</sup> The cut of meat reserved for nobility.

<sup>2</sup> This attitude is reflected in the title of the 1867 book by Alfonso de Castro, the Colonial Governor of Portuguese Timor (de Castro 1867). De Castro oversaw the separation of Timor into Portuguese Timor and Dutch Timor in 1859.