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Chapter 2: Water Cosmologies

In east central Timor the rocks and soil of the Mundo Perdido[1] mountain range (also sometimes known as K: Wai Nete Watu Ba'i='rising water, sacred rock') are conceptualized as the skin beneath which water pools after rising up through the earth from the sea (see Map 2.1, Figure 2.1). As it rises, this salty water is transformed into fresh water. Whilst life giving, it does not yet have the necessary force to transform into life itself. Rather, life requires its activation by another element—the sun, or its associative force, fire (cf. Kehi & Palmer 2012). Emerging forth from the subterranean darkness into the light of the surface world, the life potential inherent in water is transformed into life itself by the power of fire. In this continual process of emergence and becoming a range of agencies, human and non-human, strive to balance darkness with light, night with day, 'nature' with culture.

Drawing on the work of Gaston Bachelard (1983), MacLeod (2013: 40) argues water is an important component of 'the material imagination'. If ideas are 'animated by the substance of the world' (MacLeod 2013: 48) then we might think of water as 'the ultimate medium for the conversations that continually create the world ... [a] substance [which] acts forever as a meeting place and medium' (2013: 49). Indeed, MacLeod writes that by communicating through water in myth and other 'literary' forms we invoke particular multi-generational 'relationships to time, to the past, to water and to one another' (2013: 57). In this chapter I also engage with these concepts of multi-generational and multi-time from the vantage point of a highly symbolic yet thoroughly material world of water. I am interested in the ways in which this 'world' enables me to understand the profound linkages between these thoroughly materialist ecologies and the ritual domains at the heart of eastern Timor's customary polities and cosmologies.

That the natural world, in this case water, fire and as we shall see, particular species of animal, should be connected with deep philosophical understandings of the world, that they should bring

the world into being and are connected in a variety of ways, is in the words of Wittgenstein (1979) 'obvious'. As he puts it:

> That a man's shadow, which looks like a man, or that his mirror image, or that rain, thunderstorms, the phases of the moon, the change of seasons, the likenesses and differences of animals to one another and to human beings, the phenomena of death, of birth and of sexual life, in short everything a man perceives year in, year out around him, connected together in a variety of ways—that all this should play a part in his thinking (his philosophy) and his practices, is obvious, or in other words this is what we really know and find interesting (Wittgenstein 1979: 6e).

Wittgenstein then continues by arguing that '[a]n historical explanation…is only *one* kind of summary of the data…We can equally well see the data in their relations to one another and make a summary of them in a general picture without putting it in the form of a hypothesis regarding the temporal development'. (1979: 8e). The key to this, he writes, is the 'depth of contemplation we understand through connections' where 'the depth lies in the idea….the overwhelming probability of this idea….what we get from the material'. Inspired by these musings, this chapter lays out such a 'perspicuous' view (Wittgenstein 1979: 9e) and the ideas I get from this data. By characterizing the relationships between people, their ancestors and their environments through the notion of 'inclusive sociality', I describe and analyse how differently configured inter-relations co-create and order the world in the cosmologies and spiritual ecologies of north-central Timor.

People and their *Dai*

To begin, I need to explore and unpack some quite opaque and esoteric beliefs about the nature of social relations between certain groups of people and certain other types of being, particularly animals. Firstly it is clear that sociality in the region is underpinned by more-than-human relations involving conscious co-operation and inter-subjectivity manifesting and transforming through different 'bodies' and 'things' across and through space and time. This I am calling

'inclusive sociality'. Elsewhere in Timor, Judith Bovensiepen has written that 'there is an ambiguity about the precise nature of the relationship between ancestors, *lulik* [by which I take she means spiritual energy or potency] and land [nature] spirits' (2011: 50). She concludes that 'although [these three] are conceptually separate, they are [in ritual] implicitly treated as transformations of each other and their combined presence in the land makes up its powerful potency' (Bovensiepen 2011: 50).

To say something more from this region of study about these types of relationships and what they collectively embody, I take as my starting point the cyclical movement of the world (both spatially, temporally, and simultaneously) from darkness to lightness, day to night. This movement is the core principle of local cosmologies. By way of shorthand we can think of the universe as divided into two cycles: *Mu'a Gamu* in Makasse or *Namu Degu* in Waima'a refers to the dark earth period or dimension and *Mu'a Usa* (Makasae) or *Namu Rema* (Waima'a) to the bright earth period or dimension. While this blurred and often messy division is neither wholly spatial nor temporal, it does in some contexts become historicized and may even at times refer to the era of 'nature' or *natureza* (where the dark earth is referred to in combination with terms for 'sacred earth', W: *ria luli* or M: *mu'a falun)* on the one hand, and on the other, the incremental arrival of Portuguese Catholicism some 500 years ago. It is also, however, always comparable to the earth spinning on it axis, with its halves forever switching between night and day and its whole pervaded by both.

From a historicized point of view, the era of *darkness* is understood as the transformative period when the world was created and shaped into being. At the beginning of this period people did not yet know fire or water nor did they know the differences between animals and themselves. Throughout the period, form or 'skin changing' between humans, animals and physical objects was commonplace. As the world evolved, this period of continual transformation solidified around cultivated relations between certain groups of human beings and certain other species of animal (most commonly we find special or totemic relationships between named groups of people and crocodiles, snakes, eels and other water based species, civet cats, rats, bees, bats,

monkeys, birds, and termites). These ancestral animal spirits are 'fed' in special ceremonies usually revolving around agricultural rites. Some origin groups have these same special relationships with ancestral fire and water. Eventually the earth moved into the period of lightness, 'culture' (customary norms and practices referred to as *lisan* in Makasae and Waima'a) emerged and the transformations between people, animals and physical objects became less common. As other power objects, like gold discs, swords, and books emerged these were also considered to give power to the particular clan houses they became associated with.

Over time then as people came to know about fire and water, they learnt the differences between people and animals and began to eat cooked foods. Eventually as the darkness truly receded into light people also learnt to write and from this they could live and rule in the manner required by the foreigners who had by then long been in the land. This period of lightness, or perhaps even enlightenment, really began when now immutable human bodies sought out objects and processes of cultural change, processes that are still in this era of lightness being perfected.

We can see then that it was with the emergence of 'culture' that respectful relations were instigated and solidified between clans and particular ancestral animal species or *dai* as they are referred to in the Makasae and Waima'a languages (or *malae* in the national language of Tetum)[2]. These *dai*, and their living animal counterparts, inhabit sacred waters, mountains, rocks and trees. Unlike people it is said they have no shame and no secrets to hide. While even in the era of lightness all of nature is considered to have agency, ancestral *dai* which are connected to particular peoples have particular significance as their powers have been 'tamed' and channeled via an ongoing relation to the 'culture' (*lisan*) or laws of a particular group.

What elucidated best for me this complicated relationships between people and their *dai* was the practices of house-based traditional healers who are routinely consulted when illness afflicts a household member[3] (see Figure 2.2). As is common in animism, these healers' perspectives on the spirit world embrace both the inter-human and the extra human. But what is most important

in their healing practice is the appeal to the relationship between them and their non-human and human ancestors through time (something more akin to totemism). Particular non-human as well as human ancestors share a genealogy to particular named groups of people. Within clan groups, these ancestral animal spirits or *dai* are believed to actively seek out human host bodies. These hosts are known as *kuda* (horses) and the *dai* sit down on their shoulders. It is these *dai*, or more specifically in Waima'a *bo'o dai* (ancestral *dai*), in their various forms, who give magical healing powers to house-based traditional healers (known as *dai kuda*). All *dai* have a propensity to 'wildness', they are unpredictable and easy to anger. While in some cases *bo'o dai* may also be named human ancestral spirits, the origins of these human *dai* will be traceable to an animal ancestor. Meanwhile truly wild *dai*, those not or no longer in a reciprocal relationship with humans, are believed to wander the landscape randomly at night. Referred to as wild animal spirits (Makasae: *itibi*, Waima'a: *kele ba'i*) they may sometimes appear in human form and they attach themselves to a person's soul causing sickness often resulting in death[4]. Some other types of traditional healers actively seek out and make sacred compacts with the healing the powers of these *dai*.

In their healing practice, house-based traditional healers will draw on the power of their own 'tamed' *dai* and use this power to carry out particular diagnostic processes, usually auguries of particular substances. Once the assistance of these *dai* has been garnered and the illness addressed, animal sacrifices are then carried out to 'feed' and placate them. If you do not reciprocate this sacred exchange your *dai* may leave you, take away your power, kill you or make you sick. It will then go to someone else, usually a close or even distant family member. Other more 'modern' Timorese healers with affinities to the Catholic faith may channel assistance and read the wishes of the spirit world through prayer and candle flame. Yet from within the 'traditional' sphere it is said that the origin or trunk of all these spirit manifestations can ultimately be traced to an original ancestral animal *dai*.

Alongside and interwoven with these complicated communicative and avoidance relationships between people and *dai* it is clear that at the cosmological level all beings (living humans, living

animals, and *dai*) comprise an organic unity which we might think of as conscious nature or a spirit collectivity. In this unity the categories of animal, human and spirit are 'continuous rather than discrete' (Brightman 1993:3). To explain how this tension between a greater unity and the discontinuity of named groups connected to particular ancestral spirits is reconciled I take my lead from Ingold (2011) and make recourse to the deployment of storied knowledge. What Ingold (2011) proposes is that it is through attention to the inter-related stories through which beings and things are 'alive' that we are able to transcend notions of unity and disunity or language preoccupations with networks and classification. For example in the secreted ancestral names and bodies invoked by healers and other ritual specialists the relations between people, animals, physical objects, and spirits simply 'happen, they carry on, they *are* their stories and their names…they are not nouns, but verbs' (Ingold 2011: 175). Narrating the movements and speaking these names, they are forever 'alive', continuously woven *together* into the fabric of the world: 'As [these beings] meet up with one another and go their various ways, their paths converge and diverge, to form an ever extending reticulate meshwork…..the meshwork of storied knowledge' (Ingold 2011:168). It is then by focusing on the fabric which is woven and rewoven through these inter-related stories that we can understand 'inclusive sociality'. It is to these stories, specifically about water, that I will now turn.

The hydrosocial cycle

To link the segregation of the world through homologous identification with the simultaneous process of analogous identification which connects all beings, I now need to introduce local conceptualizations of the hydrosocial cycle and pathways. Below I draw on one ritual narrative which weaves together the relations between people, animals, physical objects and the spirit world. It is a sacred or *lulik* story and revolves around the boundary crossing capabilities and spiritual energy of water where social agency is also ascribed to the non-human. It is commonly recited at major sacred house building ceremonies or at major spring rituals in Baucau.

Detailed knowledge of these ancestral connections and powers are closely held clan secrets, to which only certain ritual leaders and healers will be privy. To reveal these secrets is to risk angering the *dai* and to invite misfortune or death. It is said that the arrival of Portuguese into the region, triggered a process whereby the ritual leaders of many clans or house societies forfeited aspects of their leadership role entrusting political leadership to other houses whose leadership was not versed in the detail of these clan secrets. These new 'political houses' were asked to stand up alongside and speak to the foreigners, while the true knowledge holders retreated back into the darkness to keep their ancestral secrets and the powers of their *dai* safe and hidden.

Interestingly, outsiders, whether they are Portuguese or others, are also known as *dai*. They are referred to as *dai* for two reasons. Firstly, many (but as we will see not all) are considered wild like animals. Yet while they are thought to have no laws or cultural connection, they are powerful (as are nature spirits or *natureza* in general). Secondly, some are considered to have heightened powers by virtue of a specific cultural connection to their homeland but this source of power is hidden. They too can change their 'skins' and they are known to periodically return to their homelands to do so (the portals to these homelands are often natural locations within Timor itself). For example the most important site atop Mundo Perdido is a place, once a spring, called Wai Taka ('closed water') a powerful portal to the 'other world'. It was through this transitional space that Timorese lieutenants of the colonial Portuguese army were said to have been sent by their superiors to train in Macau. Entering this 'door' to the other world, some would later return to roam the peaks as men in animal costume, causing havoc for the gardens of the local population. Yet at some point the Portuguese closed 'the door', placing on the site a cemented mountain cairn.[5]

As we will see below in a narrative which records the creation of life and the cycle of life and death, the generative space of *dai* is premised on the interaction of three foundational cosmological elements—water, earth and the sun.[6] Together they create the hydrosocial cycle. At a general level, water is believed to be the blood or energy of the earth, the underground place from where spirits emerge as they are drawn up out of the ground and given life by the power of

the sun. These beings ultimately return in death to the ocean before rising up through the underground to begin again the cycle of life. The narrative I relay here begins in the ocean and traces the emergence, movements and names of successive generations of non-human *dai* which are connected to the agency and rule of the eastern Timorese ritual and political centre of Luca on the south coast. The ancestors of this dark world moved and indeed still move across the landscape until they reach the end, the ocean (and emerge once more into the light).

This hydrosocial cycle has been narrated to me in Makasae on several occasions by Major Ko'o Raku, the leading ritual specialist (M: *sobu dada*) and a well known healer in the Makasae and Waima'a speaking village of Bahu. He is by his own admission both extremely knowledgeable and brave and it is for this reason that in this telling he elaborates somewhat on the story's meaning (the square brackets are my own interpretations):

In the beginning all is ocean

[There arises]

Luka Bui, [*Bui*=a type of (civet) cat known to shape change with the eel]

Duka Woi Wa

Dai Duka Wai [*Dai*=ancestral animal spirit]

Duka Dai

Loi Ela [*Ela*=wild animal of the night]

Baru Ela

Ela Loi

Turns into

Loi Ofo [*Ofo*=python] the last ancestral name

Turns into

Ofo Bere [=large python]

Turns into

Bani Bere dae fitu [large seven headed bee]

This seven headed bee brings culture [knowledge of water, fire, clan houses, ritual objects and boundaries]

This is why today when we carry out rituals we always place seven of things

Bani Bere [large bee] caught hold of *Bere Watu* [large sun]

Bere Watu

Mau Watu

Solu Watu

Dara Watu

Lela Watu

Leki Watu

Watu [sun]

Ira [water]

Dara Ira [forest water]

Ira Ba [water goes to]

Meti [the sea]

While this period of darkness and transformation ends in death in the sea, the earth which has now been wholly made in consort with the sun also transforms from darkness into light and

following the pathway of water, life again emerges from the sea. Yet in this narrative of creation after seven generations or cycles, subsequent ancestral pathways and subsequent ancestral names are no longer called, the paths have been made and life in this hydrosocial cycle must simply renew and transform itself again.

While as we have seen above, Wai Taka is or was a major doorway or portal for movements between worlds, these doorways are also said to be connected to other spring complexes across the region. In Makasae these portals are known as *gituba ginana*, the 'places where the water pools and flows forth'[7]. *Gituba ginana* is associated with the beginning of life, the place from where the ancestors emerged (in Waima'a the term is *wai haba wai mata*). These springs are the doors through which the living are able to communicate with the ancestors (see Figure 2.3). As will be discussed below, central to ancestral movements to and from these *gituba ginana* is the agency of eels and other aquatic species, including pythons, which enable the underground water pathways between origin and 'child' springs to be forged.

This hydrosocial cycle is the foundational story of all life. At *oma lakasoru* [M: major origin house] reconstruction ceremonies in the Baucau region, Major Ko' o Raku will be present to narrate the cycle, to open up the power of the relevant *gituba ginana* (portal) and activate its particular pathways through the bodies of lineage members. Before returning to a discussion of the ritual political dimensions of this cycle, I first explain in more detail the spiritual ecologies connected to spring water in Baucau.

The spiritual ecology of spring water in Baucau

With the exception of some Makasae words (mainly adjectives like big/small), the names for most springs in the Baucau district are rendered in one or other of the dialects of the 'Kawamina' language group and begin with the word *Wai.* The name for a spring in Waima'a is *wai mata*, with *wai*=water and *mata*=eye (having in addition associations with 'navel', 'womb' and

'source', cf. Hicks 1978). The animal being custodians of important spring or cave water portals may live in these waters sources or be stationed at cave doors. A range of animals, but particularly snakes and eels (known collectively as *talibere*), are said to be embodiments of the ancestral rulers of the area[8]. These beings are also referred to as *wai buu* (W: custodians of the water or *ira gauhaa* in Makasae). Other manifestations of the *wai buu* are shrimps, crocodiles and fish, and, in at least one fresh water spring, octopus.[9] Eel manifestations of the *wai buu* are also said to change into the civet cat when they venture out of the springs at night, often in search of fresh palm wine (W: *tuo*). In some accounts, particular named eels and civet cats are the founding ancestors of particular sacred houses. Similarly, as we will see below both these eels and spring water are believed to have been able, at least in the distant past, to completely shift location by emerging from the ground and changing into human form. These newly transformed family groupings would then travel across the landscape to relocate to a new site before morphing back into the land as eels and spring water. Likewise even in the present period, spring water may be ritually moved by people and physically carried in bamboo containers from one location to another to create a new spring source (cf. Kehi & Palmer 2012, see also chapter 4).

Hicks (2004: 33) who worked with the Eastern Tetum in Viqueque places the *wai buu* (ET: *bee na'in*) in the same category as *ria buu* (ET: *rai na'in*=owners of the land, land spirits, custodians) and refers to them as (at times malevolent) free nature spirits and agents of mother earth. As we will see below the custodianship of both land and waters is clearly interrelated. Meanwhile Traube working with the Mambai in central Timor, also writes of a category of ancestor spirits which she calls 'shades': unnamed ancestors who are called to the threshold of the spring from the sea. She writes that 'the dead who depart overseas are transformed into various forms of marine life….the sacred eels who guard the entries of the springs are the leaders of this marine host. As mediators between the land and the sea and between below and above, their role is to negotiate cosmic exchange' (1986: 194). In Baucau's water sources all renderings of these beings are present and such beings may be called forth as (land or water) nature spirits or as named and unnamed ancestors. At water increase ceremonies carried out at Wai Lia Bere, a cave water source on the Baucau plateau, the (Makasae speaking) Ledatame ritual custodians of

the water communicate with the guardians of the cave door, in this case manifest as pythons, in the following way:

Nawa asi dada asi nanu Wai Lia Wai Lobi

Please receive this offering our ancestors from Wai Lia Wai Lobi

I ini mua gi gauhaa,

You are the owner/custodian of the land

I ini kuba ere gi gauhaa

You are the owner/custodian of this savanna

I mau do inai gunirai

We will hide your name

inai nama rai, inai guni bare

We will honour your name, we will hide your name

I ini kuba ere gi gauhaa

You are the owner/custodian of this savanna

iha i ini rata

and the ruler of this land

I ni ge'e naga ma rau gini

Come and we will give force to all that is ours (yours)

I ni ge'e naga ma rau gini

Come and give force what is yours (ours)

I noto nelu

We will not forget

Ini I noto ma isa nelu gini

We will never forget you

Naga isi I loki[10] *gene lolo*

We will always call your name

Naga isi ma I fa'ana

We will always 'feed you' (make offerings to you).

As is the case across much, if not all, of the Timor region, springs custodians have a further aspect to their identity as they are also living humans incorporating the spiritual essence of water custodianship concurrently in differentiated forms (human and non-human bodies) (Hicks 2004; Kehi & Palmer 2012; McWilliam 2011; Carvalho 2011). These living custodians of the water are in most cases also synonymous with the living *ria buu* (ET: *rai na'in*='custodians of the land') of the adjacent land. While spring water for example is usually shared collectively amongst a particular community there are particular people and 'houses' who are themselves known as the *wai buu* (or *ira gauhaa* in Makasae) who have particular custodianship rights and responsibilities for this water. Connected to ancestral *dai*, these living human water custodians obtain this designation through descent or as a sacred gift which is subsequently handed down through the lineage. As with knowledge of all ancestral *dai*, the details of their esoteric knowledge and ancestral corpus connected to springs are a closely guarded secret. These human water custodians are linked into broader land and social relations though their own sacred houses and affinal kin, they are also, like healers, in communication with their *dai*[11]. As the embodiment of the ancestors, traditionally around most springs, eels and snakes cannot be eaten. Meanwhile the human manifestations of the water custodians are the critical link to the 'dark' world and their 'bodies' ability to communicate with the various non-human manifestations of the *wai buu* or *dai* in the spring system is essential to the well-being of themselves, their clan and others dependent on those waters.

In the Baucau region, eels have another very important role in many spring related myths. In many tellings it is the eels (W: *thuno*, M: *wasu* also known in this context as *talibere*) who are

responsible for channeling water underground moving it across the landscape from spring to spring. Surface channels or openings may be said to be the domain of pythons (also known as *talibere*), terrestrial beings whose scales more obviously refract and capture the power of the sun. Meanwhile in the version of the hydrosocial cycle above it is Banibere, the seven headed bee, who is credited with bringing 'culture' to Timor and with it knowledge of water, fire, clan houses, ritual objects and boundaries[12]. At some time prior to this, however, this version of the cycle begins with Luka Bui an ancestral being from the great eastern ritual domain of Luca. This ritual domain, as we will see below, is prevalent in the stories of springs from across the region.

According to Major Ko'o Raku, at some undefined point after the emergence of mountain peaks and dry land from a world of water, the first people of what is now Baucau descended from the central peaks of the Mundo Perdido range (according to this account they descended at the same time as four other parties who founded settlements elsewhere in the north east region). The two people who arrived in Baucau were a husband and a wife and they found themselves in a stony dry land bereft of water. So that they might eek out a living in this place, the husband set off for seven days and seven nights and returned to his wife with a bamboo cylinder (W: *ae*) full of sacred water from the southern kingdom of Luca. He threw down the water between the gap in his wife legs and a spring spewed forth out of the ground. This man took on the name of Wai Lewa[13] and he became the founding father of Baucau, which was known then by the name of its spring Wai Lewa (W: *lewa*=garden). Similarly the Waima'a speaking custodians of the related spring complex of Wai Husu in nearby Teolale (see chapter 4) also record that their ancestors arrived from Luca, but in this case in the form of an eel which emerged from the spring and transformed into a woman. Ritual verse from the village of Wani Uma records the arrival of Luca in the spring grove of Teolale:

Viqueque Luca mai Luca Tirilolo	Viqueque Luca comes to Luca Tirilolo
Teolale Lumu Lumu	Teolale is all green
Koi Kota Daru	And the stone walls are made

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The hydrosocial cycle and the ritual centre of Luca

The people of Luca, the once great kingdom of the east, also record their relations to eels, water and the sea in narrative verse. The verse below recounts in Eastern Tetum the words of a long ago ruler of Luca who says:

Hau naran Lu Leki meti oan hau	I am Lu Leki, the son of the tides
Hau naran Lu Leki tasi oan hau	I am Lu Leki, the son of the sea
Hau katak ba tasi, tasi sei nakduka nuu lor ba	I command the sea to recede, it obeys me
Katak fali ba meti, meti sei nakduka nuu lor ba.	I command the tide to recede, it obeys me.

Luca's rule of the sea is then juxtaposed with that of We Hali, the once great kingdom of western Timor, whose ruler is said to be both the son of and the commander of the sun and the moon. Meanwhile the eastern kingdom of Luca is divided according to the parts of a buffalo:

Isin lolon Rai Luka	The main body is in the land of Luca
Dere too Wai Bobo	Its head extends to Wai Bobo[14]
Dikur balu We Masi, balu We Soru.	Its one horn is to We Masi, another is to We Soru.[15]

While historians and anthropologists have long written on the subject of the great western kingdom We Hali (Therik 1980; Francillon 1967; Schulte Nordholt 1971; Hägerdal 2012; Gunn 1999; Soares 2003) and its relation to other major ritual centres, here I want to give an account of Luca and explain its preeminent status in the hydrosocial cycle of eastern Timor. This account focuses on the nature of Luca as a pre-colonial centre of ritual power and cosmological force, its changing role and fate during the colonial era will be developed in subsequent chapters.

Across the eastern part of Timor Leste, Luca's central political and ritual power is continually encoded in myth and narrative, many of which are connected to springs. Yet as with its paired ritual counterpart We Biku We Hali, it is important to stress the fact that this domain is as much a ritual-political concept or symbol as it is an actual political realm (Francillon 1967: 113). Schulte Nordolt (1971) for instance argues in relation to We Hali's regional power that this relatively dynamic and open system of politico-ritual power was in fact held together by mythic accounts of the power of the centre (an immobile core of ritual power and skill (*matenek*)). It was the ensuing ritual connections of the immobile centre to surrounding emissary sub-kingdoms which held the domain together. While, as with We Hali (ET: 'banyan tree water'), the political importance of Luca has long since declined[16], its symbolic meanings and its encoding in ritual form remain central to many mythic narratives across the region. In many of these narratives it is Luca's power to communicate with the sea (and through this its capacity to access the wealth of the underworld) which remains a recurring theme.[17] As well as a once expansionary and pre-eminent political presence in the region (see chapter 5), by virtue of its power to tame the sea, Luca is the preeminent communicator with '*rai seluk*' (the other world)[18].

While there is much in the oral history record which links Luca to the expansion of the kingdom of We Biku We Hali (see for example Spillett 1999), David Amaral the *lia na'in* ('custodian of the words') of the apical house of Uma Kan Lor in Luca relayed to me a narrative concerning seven siblings who emerged from the earth (see Figure 2.4).[19] These seven siblings commenced tilling the land (ET: *fila rai*) around Luca which had until then neither fields nor water. As a consequence the youngest of the siblings was continually beaten and sent to fetch water from the far west and the far east of the island. One day as the youngest sibling sat exhausted under a banyan tree he sobbed out loud that it would be best if he took his own life. Yet as he spoke these words, water started to gush out from beneath his feet. Later after a dog ran off to find the older brothers, they arrived to see that their youngest brother had morphed into water from the chest down. The boy, whose name was Nai Leki, told his older siblings that he had now transformed into the sacred spring of We Lolo. His head then transformed into a water bowl (*we lolo*) and lodged in the banyan tree now called Nai Leki. The spring water then flowed from We Lolo to sea passing through the sacred tidal lagoon of Luca called We Liurai (ET: 'ruler's water') at the

coast. Luca became a kingdom of seven villages and a centre of power. Meanwhile these sacred origin waters of Luca are known metaphorically as *we ai balun* ('wooden safe water'[20]) as it is from these waters that the wealth of Luca has been distributed across the land.

In mythic narratives found across the region it is to Luca that people have long travelled to receive, or emerged from to decree, the power to rule. Following a ritual ceremony at the springs of Luca, emissaries would leave as the kingdom's 'arms and legs' (*ain liman*) and execute the authority of the ritual centre across the east. As a part of this process, as we have seen above, Luca's sacred waters would be carried across the region to create child or subsidiary springs.

Yet not all peoples are so concerned with the metaphor of Luca's ritual power. The people of Wai Riu (who we will encounter in chapter three) to some extent challenge the politico-ritual accounts of the pre-eminent rule of either Luca or We Biku We Hali across the east. In contrast to other houses in their region who did receive sacred objects such as the septre (*rota*), drum (*tamboor*) and dances (*tebe no bidu*) from Luca, the Wai Riu people of Mundo Perdido (Wai Nete Watu Ba'i) assert their sacra emerged from the waters under the earth, the very place from where they emerged. We Biku We Hali they say arrived by way of Luca some thirteen generations ago. It was they who brought with them a monarchical system, intermarried and ruled over the kingdoms of Luca and Viqueque. Others, like Timorese historian Antonio Vicente Marques Soares (who is also an elder from Lacluta in Viqueque), maintain that the ritual political centre of Luca emerged as the Tetum Terik speakers of We Biku We Hali arrived into a Waima'a speaking region which was then loyal to the inland domain of Ai Sahe (see also Spillett 1999: 348). As we will see in the conclusion, in other versions of the hydrosocial cycle which I have been told by Major Ko'o Raku, it is ancestral beings coming from across the sea (or alternatively from the 'other world') which travel across and populate the land (via but not beginning in Luca).

At whatever point it was that Luca's power expanded across the region it is also clear that the new houses and spring water sources its emissaries 'created' would become sites for rich agricultural groves including irrigated rice production (see chapter 4). Yet in these narratives it is not only the agency of humans which is stressed. Rather it is the agency and subjectivity of the spring water itself and its own alliance with the kingdom of Luca which is the recurring theme. Water is said to have its own needs and desires which includes the need for its interactions with humans to be grounded in respectful and mutually supporting relations. For example on the high southern slopes of Mundo Perdido at a place called Seu Baru (M: 'the cooked meat'), the Kairui and Makasae peoples of the area recount their story of a spring called Mau Lau (M: ' the place of the civet cat') which in distant times simply disappeared (see Figure 2.5). The custodian of Mau Lau, an eel from Luca, was tired of being abused by the local residents (who were capturing and eating eels from the spring) so one day it morphed into a family, led by a man called Wai Leki (who had transformed from an eel). This group of old men, women, children and their animals gathered up their magic basket and other belongings and walked off across mountains to the north. When they reached the northern eastern edge of the Baucau escarpment in a village known today as Wailili they met an old man and asked him for a place to rest. The old man kindly pointed them to a shady tree and they set down their belongings and made camp. When the old man returned the next day the entire family and their belongings had disappeared. Meanwhile a spring had now appeared in the ground beneath the tree where they had made camp. Mau Lau and his people never returned to Seu Baru and to this day the people of the Seu Baru region are fearful of the repercussions of bathing in the potentially hostile springs of Wailili.

In yet another often repeated story from the southern high slopes of Mundo Perdido, we find a spring Wai Lesu whose waters once drained back to its origins in Luca.[21] The spring takes its name from a *lesu* (K: a wooden rice husking implement). In its origin story the waters emerged from the ground following the fall of the *lesu* which was being pounded beneath the pillars of a sacred house located on a high precipice. Recovering the *lesu* from a newly emerged spring at the bottom of the precipice, the house of Wai Lesu began making ritual offerings to feed the custodians of the spring. But at some point in time these rituals ceased and as a result the spring water simply drained back down the mountain to its rightful home in Luca (indicating that the

rice husking implement was also connected to the ritual power of Luca). By the time the water arrived back in Luca it had metamorphosed into human form and had told the ruler of Luca that the people of Wai Lesu no longer respected the spring. Meanwhile the house of Wai Lesu, bereft at losing their water, sent out a messenger to Luca to negotiate the return of the spring water. The ruler of Luca gave this messenger sacralised betel leaves and told him to return to Wai Lesu and prepare sacrifices for a ritual at the spring. There when all the necessary sacrificial objects and animals had been readied, the messenger of the house 'called' the ruler of Luca using betel leaves which he placed to his ear. 'Are you [the water] coming yet or not he asks?' 'We are coming', was the reply. As the messenger recited a prayer the sacrificial buffalo fell to the ground dead (a sure indication of the power and correctness of the prayer). Suddenly the spring water re-emerged, gushing from the ground to swallow up all the things prepared as an offering.

Discussion

Most Timorese remain attentive to the diverse needs and wishes of the ancestral spirit world and much of this is believed to be communicated through signs in the behavior of living animals or physical elements. These people lay their belief and trust in the agency and power of their ritual specialists and traditional healers to carefully cultivate relationships, rapport and reciprocal exchange relations between the living (animals and humans) and the dead (objects, animals and humans). In common with other complex spiritual ecologies, in the interface of religion and ecology, nature and spirit are both multiple and inseparable (Sponsel 2012: 170-171). What unites them is their inclusive sociality, a process 'that weaves together persons of all sorts, be they humans, animals, or spirit entities' (Pederson 2001:416). This inclusive sociality configures and patterns the cosmos and is synonymous with a sense of the cosmos as a living being, as an 'aliveness' which is forever becoming, holding together in disparate ways and breathing life into storied land and water scapes (cf. Ingold 2011).

What is also clear from this material is the firm conviction that the prerequisite to harnessing the power of life and taming the wildness within *all* beings is careful attention to a meshwork of

cultivated and proscribed relations. 'Culture' or '*lisan*' in the local idioms correlates not so much to 'the tending of something' (Williams 1985: 87) as to the tending of affective socio-ecological relationships.

While Luca is a kingdom of great politico-ritual pre-eminence in many of the mythic narratives found across the east, it is also clear that in the existential realm, the realm of ultimate origin, the ritual relationships encoded through the narratives of the hydrosocial cycle link people, the spirit world and water in socio-ecological relationships which are both hierarchically horizontal and vertically circular (Hicks 1990; cf. Reuter 1996: 271). Hence while, as Mullin argues, we need in our analysis of human-non human relations to pay attention to 'social change, power, agency and the negotiation and instability of categories and meanings' (Mullin 1999: 219), we also need to pay attention to how some things, however inflected through time, always stay the same. This chapter has recounted stories of water, the sea, eels, snakes, and other animals with which many Timorese houses have an ancestral connection and which feature in accounts of the hydrosocial cycle, more recently it seems those connected to Luca. In such invocatory speech the flow of words or blessing has been likened to the flow of water (Waterson 2012; Schefold 2001) and indeed an argument could be made from this material that the link between the flow of words and the flow of water is not only poetic but instrumental, that it is the inextricable link between invocatory names and words, water and mobility which in fact enables all relations.

It is for this reason that we can also understand the relationship between Luca (ruler of the sea/water) and We Hali (ruler of the sun/fire) as symbolic of the mystical occult state or as politico-religious centres of the Timorese cosmos (Francillon 1967: 113; cf. Hicks 1990: 102). What is highlighted in the mythic narratives of Luca across the eastern part of Timor is its pre-eminent communicative relationship with the power of the sea. Elsewhere, Jones writes that tides[22] and other extra-terrestrial forces animate water into agency which are then 'folded into a range of ecosocial systems' (2011: 2287) all of which are characterised by an ecological temporality that 'has a great richness' tracing 'through assemblages and bodies and affective life (human and non-human)' (2011: 2289). Recognising the power of such temporal ecologies (their

change and rhythms) on ecosocial assemblages in eastern Timor, Luca's connection to the power of sea is indeed traced through to cosmological power. In this context it is the symbol of the ritual centre of Luca which enables nature's 'activity, unpredictability and unruliness' (Jones 2011: 2290) to be recognised, engaged and tamed. It is to this necessary relationship that '*lisan*' (customary norms and practices) focuses people's material arrangements.

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[1] Referred to as Mundo Perdido (literally 'lost world' in Portuguese) by the Portuguese in the early twentieth century, this mountain range is known by many local language names depending on your origin house, your language, and what part of the mountainous landscape you are referring to and why. In everyday conversation Timorese now also refer to this mountain as Mundo Perdido. Its other names are generally reserved for ritual use when many names referring to particular rocky peaks, features and springs are called out in succession.

[2] *Dai* may also be translated as the 'custodian of power'.

[3] Alternatively the other broad category of traditional healers in the region draw their power not from ancestral spirits but 'nature spirits' or '*natureza*' more broadly.

[4] They may be coloured white, red or black.

[5] Traube (2007) recounts a similar story told by Mambai speakers about the peaks of Timor's highest mountain Ramelau. Here a sacred spring is also understood to be a portal, a place where during the Indonesian occupation an American counter invasion was predicted to emerge. It was also believed by the Mambai that it was through this 'door' that their ancestors had once departed to Portugal before later returning to rule Timor (Traube 2007).

[6] As we will see in the conclusion, in other tellings, a fourth element wind is also central.

[7] *Gituba ginana* may also be translated as the the 'entry/exit' point. *Ginana* means umbilical cord.

[8] Detailed stories of eels, their characteristics and journeys, appear in many spring myths. The life cycle of freshwater eels was long a mystery to Western science. It is now understood that they are catadromous, living in freshwater but spawning in the deep sea (after which time they die). Land barriers in their long journey to and from their chosen freshwater habitats and the sea are negotiated by wriggling across land at night. Their bodies also change color from initially clear when spawned in the sea to a pigmented yellow or brown color after migrating to freshwater. Sexual maturity is indicated by a silver underbelly and even darker head and back at which time they return to spawn in the sea (which is always tropical). Adults settle to live in their freshwater habitats from between 5-20 years. It is believed their common ancestor probably appeared in Indo-Pacific close to present Indonesia between 30-50million years ago (Lecomte-Finiger 2003).

[9] In their biology all of these beings share two qualities: they refract colour in sunlight and metamorphise from eggs laid outside of the body. With the capacity to abruptly change in bodily form and their habitat, metamorphosing eels, pythons and other reptiles, fish, aquatic insects, and mollusks are *lulik* species for many clans across the region.

[10] M: *Loki*=basket and may be used to contain sacred items in sacred houses.

[11] The *dai* or ancestral beings connected to springs were usually discoverers or creators of these water sources and the founders of spring connected communities.

[12] A migratory species, worker bees produce honey in their tree hives by feeding raw nectar and pollen to the queen bee. Like the mixture of water with fire, these (social) exchanges transform the raw materials of life, into the golden sweetness of honey, the substance of life itself.

[13] On account of his posthumous baptism he is also known as Fransisco Wai Lewa.

[14] A neighbouring kingdom to Ossu and east of Mundo Perdido.

[15] The buffalo is being used here to explain, amongst other things, the territorial power of Luca as the main kingdom, whose head reaches (*dere*) Wai Bobo (symbolizing the East here), whose two horns symbolising the North and South. We Soru [ET: 'woven water'] is Vessoru and We Masi [ET: 'salty water'] is Vemasse.

[16] 'Between 1642 and 1645, Luca was evangelized by Father António de S. Domingos, OP, who baptized the queen of Luca, as well as her son, the nobles of the kingdom and innumerable commoners' (Belo 2011: 336). Luca also paid tribute to the Portuguese in Lifao (Belo 2011: 336). Hägerdal (2012) refers to a number of historical sources

which briefly mention the colonial significance and expansion of the kingdom of Luca suggesting it remained a significant kingdom into the nineteenth century. As a result of its alliance with the Portuguese monarchy, Luca's regional power peaked in the 1700s (Soares pers.comm. 2010) but began to decline after its first anti-Portuguese rebellions in the 1781 (Belo 2011: 336). See also chapter five.

[17] Luca's wealth (usually expressed as buffalo and gold) and power over the sea is also evident in the ethnography of the Viqueque region carried out by Hicks (2004) in the 1960s. Hicks notes that Luu Leki the ruler of Luca was said to own much gold (2004: 66). He also writes of one particular king from Luca who was sent by the Portuguese to jail on Atauro and in a show of preeminent power opened the sea and walked straight across from Dili to the island (Hicks 2004: 66-67). A large land south of the Eastern Archipelago and a kingdom, 'Lukak', rich in gold was reported in the 14th century accounts of Marco Polo (Francillon 1967: 474).

[18] See also conclusion.

[19] Hicks (1990: 107) recounts that the eel (ET: *tuna*) clan from Caraubalu (near to Viqueque town where he carried out his ethnography) were originally from Luca, a place where they still had rights to farm. Their clan origin history which he recorded in the 1960s correlates in many respects with the spring narrative told to me by the *lia na'in* of Uma Kan Lor.

[20] *Ai-balun* can also refer to a coffin.

[21] While in some tellings this is said to be a modern era story, others refer to it as a story of ancient times.

[22] There are seven day intervals between spring (maximum) and neap (minimum) tides. The wild 'male' south coast of Timor has on average double the tidal range of the calmer 'female' north coast.